

1. What is West's evidence for the Indo-European layer of Greek epic? the Mycenaean layer? the Aeolic/Thessalian layer? How might his theory about the genesis of epic change the way we analyze the *Iliad* as a work of literature?

West, M. L. "Rise of the Greek Epic" *Journal of Hellenic Studies* cviii (1988) 151-172.

Whereas the *Iliad* is usually seen as seminal, in many respects, to subsequent epic tradition, we may now see it, if we accept the evidence such far-ranging contributions, as itself a fantastically variable pastiche of traditional epic elements from Indo-European, Mycenaean, Aeolic, and possibly even Levantine literature that has been creatively reworked but still shows layers of both directly and indirectly borrowed material. Seeing the *Iliad* in this way shows it in a favorable relief to all such contributing literature. West's evidence for the Indo-European layer of evidence is linguistic, typological, stylistic, and thematic: it shows signs of word/concept consistency, similar verse types (invocations, incantations, and paid verse making to kings and nobles), and the convention of "three-name" lines with a concluding epithet. Distinguishing between early and late Mycenaean, West refers initially to the "appearance in the tablets of elements of Homeric vocabulary and morphology" and later more strenuously to those "features of the epic that belong to an earlier stage of Greek than [that] of the Linear B tablets," such as freedom in placing preverbs and phrases and words that appear un-metrical but would have been metrical in "an earlier stage of Greek." He generally suggests that occurrences of "phantom consonants" and more archaic rules of meter than in Homer illustrate this. The Late Mycenaean/Aeolic/Thessalian contribution appears to be thematic. West suggests that the idea of a city besieged and sacked is not novel but that five of the most "organic" characters—by which he means "most bound up with cardinal events, or make a decisive contribution..."—in the *Iliad* are geographically coherent with Thessaly. Further, Aeolisms appear to be repleat in the Homeric corpus. Most of West's evidence for influence is based on quick laundry that are germinal in nature and which the promised book would likely further explain. The thematic evidence is hardest to prove beyond some universally common human experience and therefore is weakest. After all, we can only imagine how many societies—Indo-European, Levantine, Egyptian—held such themes loosely in common. The Levantine influences fall squarely in this category. Funny that I should find them more interesting.