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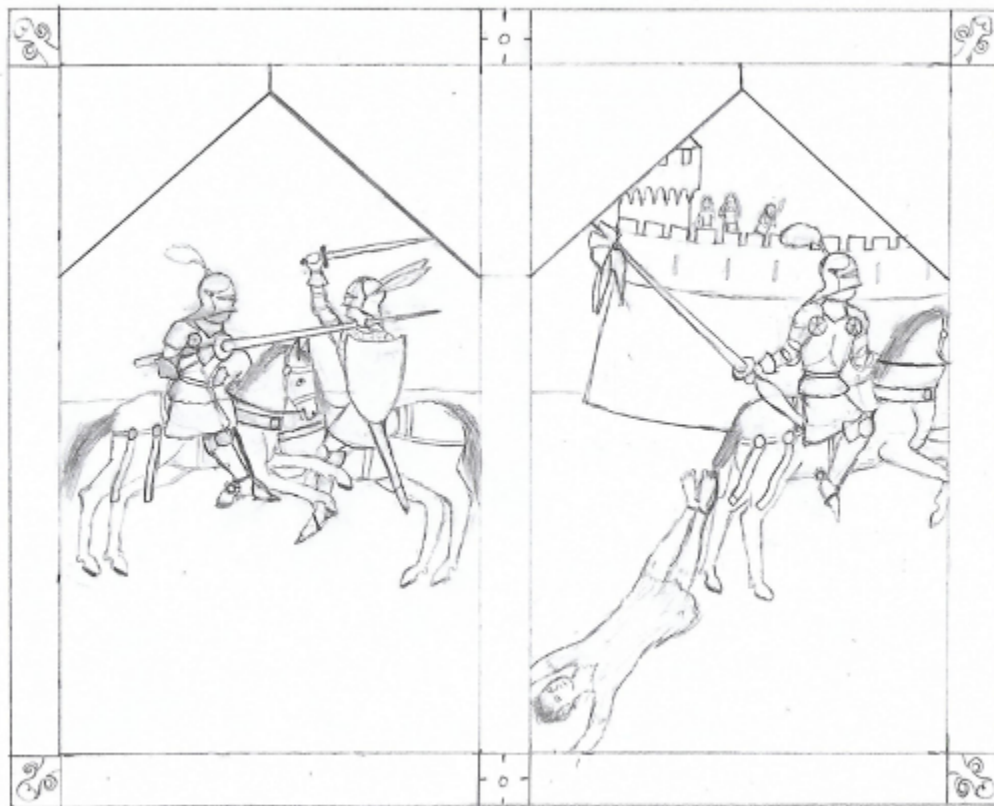
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How the Homeric Age looked in the Medieval Age

Stephen Pittman '23



I have attempted to depict two scenes from the *Iliad* contained roughly between lines 247 and 515 of book 22. One is when Hector is finally engaging in combat with Achilles and the second is when Achilles drags Hector's corpse around the walls of Troy. The scenes are drawn in a style mimicking the illustrations seen in medieval European manuscripts from the 15th century, or roughly thereabout. I chose to stylishly depict these scenes in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the narrative even when it is removed from our best scholarly understanding of the rough historical setting in which the story could have taken place. Of course, the stories occupy a place in myth and not history strictly, thus allowing this change in setting to work excellently. After all, the *Iliad* does not even seem to depict consistently a particular time in history, and surely ancient listeners and readers of the epic imagined the scenes in many varied ways. But why this stylistic approach then?

The first and simplest reason for my choice of this style is that it is perhaps the best style of drawing which I myself can reproduce, primarily because I have long admired manuscript illustrations. Second, I have always been intrigued by the reception of ancient stories in pre-modern times, as the images produced often depict scenes that appear to represent the world at the time of the illustrators despite the artists knowing the stories occurred long before them in other parts of the world among different cultures. The illustrations in medieval European manuscripts of classical stories, such as the *Iliad*, often show very clearly medieval soldiers in a medieval landscape and not ancient bronze-clad warriors assembled according to ancient tactics in a clearly ancient landscape, even to the point where the depictions contradict parts of the text. It is exciting to speculate why this is the case. It is reasonable

to believe that the common person, and even the educated who would be making these manuscripts, within the medieval European society would be unfamiliar with the exact appearance of people and places from the ancient Mediterranean. Even if the educated scribes and illustrators of the medieval era did have a sense of what that environment would have looked like, placing the stories firmly in history is made even more difficult through inconsistencies in the text themselves concerning their setting in time. After all, the oral tradition whence came the epics stretches long after the time when a historical Trojan war would have been actually fought, thus making it prone to change according to later customs and perceptions. Even different styles and materials of armor and weaponry are described and anachronistically mixed amongst each other throughout the epics.

Further, attempted “historically accurate” depictions might not have been recognizable or enjoyed by whomever was intended to see the illustrations themselves, which would weaken the ability to perceive and relate to the events in the story.

The medieval illustrators, presumably aware of the timelessness of the myths and epics, seem to have even sacrificed fidelity to the texts themselves for the use of an intelligible visual language. For example, it is stated clearly in Book 22: 398-399 that Hector is strapped to a chariot, but medieval illustrations often depicted Hector tied to the tail of a horse and dragged. This is probably simply because riding on a horse’s back in war was a familiar practice during the illustrators’ time, and chariots, being so long obsolete, were perhaps too foreign or unfamiliar to display the themes of the story ideally to the audience. Perhaps this specific deviation from the text is not intended by the illustrator at all, but because they might be illustrating based off a mere summary of the *Iliad* text in which the fact Achilles uses a chariot is not specified.