

**THE COMPOSTION OF THE  
ILIAD: AN  
ESSAY ON A NUMERICAL  
LAW IN ITS STRUCTURE**

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The composition of the Iliad: an essay on a numerical law in its structure by Austin Smyth

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**AUSTIN SMYTH**

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ILIAD: AN  
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LAW IN ITS STRUCTURE**



# THE COMPOSITION OF THE ILIAD

AN ESSAY ON  
A NUMERICAL LAW IN ITS STRUCTURE

BY

AUSTIN SMYTH, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
LIBRARIAN OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Οὔτοι γὰρ τὴν Ὀμήρου ποίησιν σκεδασθεύσαν ἐμνημόνεον  
καὶ ἐπήγγελλον· ἐλυμήνυντο δὲ αὐτὴν πάνυ.

*Schol. Pind. Nem. II. 1*

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TO THE  
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## PREFACE

THE object of this essay is to demonstrate that the Iliad of Homer at one time consisted of 13,500 lines, neither more nor less, divided into 45 sections of 300 verses each, with major divisions after the 15th and 30th of these; from which it follows that the remaining 2193 verses, which appear in our present texts, are more recent additions and ought to be removed.

The importance of this proposition, if established, will be evident to lovers of the poem. I will not dilate on it, but endeavour to establish it, after saying one thing more.

I profoundly dissent from that general view of the poem which regards its constitution as a secular growth, and of which, no doubt, the foremost exponent in our country is Dr. Leaf. And I am obliged to controvert his views at particular points, while heartily agreeing at others. It is possible that, in the ardour of discussion, I may have used some words which seem to disparage this eminent scholar,

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though I cannot think it the case. But should any such impression arise, I desire to efface it by saying the truth, that his edition of the Iliad commands my deepest admiration, and that without it, as the reader will shortly perceive, I could hardly have proceeded at all.



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THE COMPOSITION OF THE  
ILIAD

## CHAPTER I

## BOOK THE FIRST TO BOOK THE EIGHTH

As the use of writing appears to have been but little known to the Greeks of Homer's age, it seemed to me a natural thing to inquire whether there might not be found in the Homeric poems some artificial aid to their preservation in the memory of man. The simplest of such aids is that of number. I therefore started an inquiry into the numerical length of any distinct group of incidents in the structure of the Iliad. For if it was known that each such group was exactly comprehended in a certain number of lines, then the several persons to whose memory it was committed could test the accuracy of their knowledge from time to time, and, if it was found to be at fault, could easily repair the defect by communication amongst themselves. In the course of this inquiry I could not help being struck by the fact that the incidents which fall between two important moments in the poem are often comprised