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Not much is known about Homer, or if he even existed, but he is culturally conjured as a blind Greek oral poet who lived in either 9th or 8th century BCE and is considered to be the author of the epic poems the Iliad and the Odyssey. Whether these two books were written by one genius or the product of many bards contributing to and reworking an oral tradition over generations, the Iliad and the Odyssey are considered two of the most influential works in the history of Western Civilization. They provided the basis of ancient Greek education and culture, became the template for storytelling in the form of the epic poem for two millennia, and then served as the central text for classical humanities education through the Roman Empire and the spread of Christianity all the way through the 19th century. Traditional author of the Iliad and Odyssey Several terms redirect here. For other uses, see Homer (disambiguation), Homerus (disambiguation), and Homeric (disambiguation). Homer'sMarble terminal bust of Homer. Roman copy of a lost 2nd-century BCE Hellenistic originalNative nameὍμηροςBomc. 8th century BCEPossibly Ionia[1]Diedlost[2]LanguageHomeric Greek (literary)Ionic GreekGeneralSubjectEpic CycleNotable work(s)IliadOdysseyHomer (/ˈhoʊmər/; Ancient Greek: Ὅμηρος [hóm̥ːros], Hóm̥ros; possibly born c. 8th century BCE) was an Ancient Greek poet who is credited as the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey, two epic poems that are foundational works of ancient Greek literature. Despite doubts about his authorship, Homer is considered one of the most revered and influential authors in history.[1] The Iliad centers on a quarrel between King Agamemnon and the warrior Achilles during the last year of the Trojan War. The Odyssey chronicles the ten-year journey of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, back to his home after the fall of Troy. The epics depict man's struggle, the Odyssey especially so, as Odysseus perseveres through the punishment of the gods.[3] The poems are in Homeric Greek, also known as Epic Greek, a literary language that shows a mixture of features of the Ionic and Aeolic dialects from different centers; the predominant influence is Eastern Ionic.[4][5] Most researchers believe that the poem were originally transmitted orally.[6] Despite being predominantly known for their tragic and serious themes, the Homeric poems also contain instances of comedy and laughter.[7] The Homeric poems shaped aspects of ancient Greek culture and education, fostering ideals of heroism, glory, and honor.[8] To Plato, Homer was simply the one who "has taught Greece" (τῷ Ἑλλάδα παιδείευκε, tōi Helláda paidēiuekon),[9][10] In Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, Virgil refers to Homer as "Poet sovereign", king of all poets.[11] In the preface to his translation of the Iliad, Alexander Pope acknowledges that Homer has always been considered the "greatest of poets".[12] From antiquity to the present day, Homeric epics have inspired many famous works of literature, music, art, and film.[13] The question of by whom, when, where, and under what circumstances the Iliad and Odyssey were composed continues to be debated. Scholars generally regard the two poems as the works of separate authors. It is thought that the poems were composed at some point around the late eighth or early seventh century BCE.[14] Many accounts of Homer's life circulated in classical antiquity, the most widespread that he was a blind bard from Ionia, a region of central coastal Anatolia in present-day Turkey.[15] Modern scholars consider these accounts legendary.[16] Homer and His Guide (1874) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau Today, only the Iliad and the Odyssey are associated with the name "Homer". In antiquity, a large number of other works were sometimes attributed to him, including the Homeric Hymns, the Contest of Homer and Hesiod, several epigrams, the Little Iliad, the Nostoi, the Thebaid, the Cypris, the Epigoni, the comic mini-epic Batrachomyomachia ("The Frog-Mouse War"), the Margites, the Capture of Oechalia, and the Phocais. These claims are not considered authentic today and were not universally accepted in the ancient world. As with the multitude of legends surrounding Homer's life, they indicate little more than the centrality of Homer to ancient Greek culture.[17][18][19] Main article: Ancient accounts of Homer Some ancient accounts about Homer were established early and repeated often. They include that Homer was blind (taking as self-referential passage describing the blind poet Democles),[20][21] that he resided at Chios, that he was the son of the river Meles and the nymph Critheis, that he wrote the rite roles and the nymph Critheis, that he composed a varying list of other works (the "Homeric"), that he died either in his lost or after failing to solve a riddle set by fishermen.[22] and various explanations for the name "Homer" (Ὅμηρος, Hóm̥ros).[23] Another tradition from the time of the Roman emperor Hadrian says Epicaste (daughter of Nestor) and Telemachus (son of Odysseus) were the parents of Homer.[23][24] The two best-known ancient biographies of Homer are the Life of Homer by the Pseudo-Herodotus and the Contest of Homer and Hesiod.[2][25] In the early fourth century BC Alcidas composed a fictional account of a poetry contest at Chalcis with both Homer and Hesiod. Homer was expected to win and answered all of Hesiod's questions and puzzles with ease. Then, each of the poets was invited to recite the best passage from their work. Hesiod selected the beginning of Works and Days: "When the Pleiades born of Atlas [...] all in due season". Homer chose a description of Greek warriors in formation, facing the foe, taken from the Iliad. Though the crowd acclaimed Homer victor, the judge awarded Hesiod the prize; the poet who praised humans, he said, was greater than the one who told tales of battles and slaughter.[26] Main articles: Homeric scholarship and Homeric Question Part of an eleventh-century manuscript, "The Townley Homer". The writings on the top and right side are scholia. The study of Homer is one of the oldest topics in scholarship, dating back to antiquity.[27][28][29] Nonetheless, the aims of Homeric studies have changed throughout the millennia.[27] The earliest preserved comments on Homer concern his treatment of the gods, which hostile critics such as the poet Xenophanes of Colophon denounced as immoral.[29] The allegorist Theagenes of Rhegium is said to have defended Homer by arguing that the Homeric poems are allegories.[29] The Iliad and the Odyssey were widely used as school texts in ancient Greek and Hellenistic cultures.[27][29][30] They were the first literary works taught to students.[30] The Iliad, particularly the first few books, was far more thoroughly studied than the Odyssey during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[30] As a result of the poems' prominence in classical Greek education, the Iliad and the Odyssey were the most linguistically difficult.[27][29] During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, many Hellenic poets, especially the Roman poet Virgil, who believed the Homeric poems to be the source of his own poetry, contained hidden wisdom, which was partially because of the Homeric poems' extensive use in education, many authors believed that Homer's original purpose had been to educate.[29] Homer's wisdom became so widely praised that he began to acquire the image of almost a prototypical philosopher.[29] Byzantine scholars such as Eustathius of Thessalonica and John Tzetzes produced commentaries, extensions and scholia to Homer, especially in the twelfth century.[31][29] Eustathius's commentary on the Iliad alone is massive, sprawling over nearly 4,000 oversized pages in a 21st-century printed version and his commentary on the Odyssey an additional nearly 2,000.[29] Page from the first printed edition (editio princeps) of collected works by Homer edited by Demetrios Chalkondyles, Florence, 1489. Bibliothèque Nationale de France In 1488, the Greek scholar Demetrios Chalkondyles published in Florence the editio princeps of the Homeric poems.[29][32] The earliest modern Homeric scholars started with the same basic approaches towards the Homeric poems as scholars in antiquity.[29][28][27] The allegorical interpretation of the Homeric poems that had been so prevalent in antiquity returned to become the prevailing view of the Renaissance.[29] Renaissance humanists praised Homer as the archetypically wise poet, whose writings contain hidden wisdom, disguised through allegory.[29] In Western Europe during the Renaissance, Virgil was more widely read than Homer and Homer was often seen through a Virgilian lens.[33] In 1664, contradicting the widespread praise of Homer as the epitome of wisdom, François Hélinat, abbé d'Aubnac wrote a scathing attack on the Homeric poems, declaring that they were incoherent, immoral, tasteless, and unworthy of study.[34] The poet's name, however, continued to be used in English and in many languages, and the word "Homeric" came to mean "epic" or "heroic".[35][36]28] By the late 18th century, the study of Homer had become a major field of research, and the "Homeric Question" (the question of whether the Iliad and the Odyssey were composed by the same author) began to fall out of favor among Homeric scholars.[28] It did not die out entirely, but it came to be increasingly seen as a discredited dead end.[28] Starting in around 1928, Milman Parry and Albert Lord, after they studied folk bards in the Balkans, developed "the Oral-Formulaic Theory" that the Homeric poems were originally composed through improvised oral performances, which relied on traditional epithets and poetic formulae.[38][37][28] This theory found very wide scholarly acceptance.[38][37][28] and explained many previously puzzling features of the Homeric poems, including their unusually archaic language, their extensive use of stock epithets, and their other "repetitive" features.[37] Many scholars concluded that the "Homeric Question" had finally been answered.[28] Meanwhile, the "Neoanalysts" sought to bridge the gap between the "Analysts" and "Unitarians".[39][40] The Neoanalysts sought to trace the relationships between the Homeric poems and other epic poems, which have now been lost, but of which modern scholars do possess some patchy knowledge.[28] Neoanalysts hold that knowledge of earlier versions of the epics can be derived from anomalies of structure and detail in the surviving versions of the Iliad and Odyssey. These anomalies point to earlier versions of the Iliad in which Ajax played a more prominent role, in which the Achaean embassy to Achilles comprised different characters, and in which Patroclus was mistaken for Achilles by the Trojans. They point to earlier versions of the Odyssey in which Telemachus went in search of news of his father not to Menelaus in Sparta but to Idomeneus in Crete, in which Telemachus met up with his father in Crete and conspired with him to return to Ithaca disguised as the sootysayer Theoclymenus, and in which Penelope recognized Odysseus much earlier in the narrative and conspired with him in the destruction of the suitors.[44] Neoanalysts have traditionally reconstructed specific lost poems as sources for the Iliad and Odyssey, but this theory has been largely discredited.[35][36]28] By the late 19th century, the study of Homer had become a major field of research, and the "Homeric Question" (the question of whether the Iliad and the Odyssey were composed by the same author), based on "the many differences of narrative manner, theology, ethics, vocabulary, and geographical perspective, and by the imitative character of certain passages of the Odyssey about the Iliad".[44][45][46][28] Nearly all scholars agree that the Iliad and the Odyssey are united poems, in that each poem shows a clear overall design and that they are not merely strung together from unrelated songs.[28] It is also generally agreed that each poem was composed mostly by a single author, who probably relied heavily on older oral traditions.[28] Nearly all scholars agree that the Doloneia in Book X of the Iliad is not part of the original poem, but rather a later insertion by a different poet.[28] Some ancient scholars believed Homer to have been an eyewitness to the Trojan War; others thought he had lived up to 500 years afterwards.[47] Contemporary scholars continue to debate the date of the poems.[48][49][28] A long history of oral transmission lies behind the composition of the poems, complicating the search for a precise date.[50] At one extreme, Richard Janko has proposed a date for both poems to the eighth century BC based on linguistic analysis and statistics.[48][49] Barry B. 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cities, and there is evidence of a shrine devoted to him in Alexandria by Ptolemy IV Philopator in the late 3rd Century BCE. Literature Poetry Poets A-K Homer (flourished 9th or 8th century bce?, Ionia? [now in Turkey]) was the presumed author of the Iliad and the Odyssey.Although these two great epic poems of ancient Greece and Classical antiquity have always been attributed to the shadowy figure of Homer, little is known of him beyond the fact that his was the name attached in antiquity by the Greeks themselves to the poems. That there was an epic poet called Homer and that he played the primary part in shaping the Iliad and the Odyssey—so much may be said to be probable. If this assumption is accepted, then Homer must assuredly be one of the greatest of the world’s literary artists.He is also one of the most influential authors in the widest sense, for the two epics provided the basis of Greek education and culture throughout the Classical age and formed the backbone of humane education down to the time of the Roman Empire and the spread of Christianity. Indirectly through the medium of Virgil’s Aeneid (which was loosely molded after the patterns of the Iliad and the Odyssey), directly through their revival under Byzantine culture from the late 8th century ce onward, and subsequently through their passage into Italy with the Greek scholars who fled westward from the Ottomans, the Homeric epics had a profound impact on the Renaissance culture of Italy. Since then the proliferation of translations has helped to make them the most important poems of the Classical European tradition.It was probably through their impact on Classical Greek culture itself that the Iliad and the Odyssey most subtly affected Western standards and ideas. The Greeks regarded the great epics as something more than works of literature; they knew much of them by heart, and they valued them not only as a symbol of Hellenic unity and heroism but also as an ancient source of moral and even practical instruction. Implicit references to Homer and quotations from the poems date to the middle of the 7th century bce. Archilochus, Alcman, Tyrtaeus, and Callinus in the 7th century and Sappho and others in the early 6th adapted Homeric phraseology and metre to their own purposes and rhythms. At the same time scenes from the epics became popular in works of art. The pseudo-Homeric “Hymn to Apollo of Delos,” probably of late 7th-century composition, claimed to be the work of “a blind man who dwells in rugged Chios,” a reference to a tradition about Homer himself. The idea that Homer had descendants known as “Homeridae,” and that they had taken over the preservation and propagation of his poetry, goes back at least to the early 6th century bce. Indeed, it was not long before a kind of Homeric scholarship began: Theagenes of Rhegium in southern Italy toward the end of the same century wrote the first of many allegorizing interpretations. By the 5th century biographical fictions were well under way; the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus made use of a trivial legend of Homer’s death—that it was caused by chagrin at not being able to solve some boys’ riddle about catching lice—and the concept of a contest of quotations between Homer and Hesiod (after Homer the most ancient of Greek poets) may have been initiated in the Sophistic tradition. The historian Herodotus assigned the formulation of Greek theology to Homer and Hesiod and claimed that they could have lived no more than 400 years before his own time, the 5th century bce. This should be contrasted with the superficial assumption, popular in many circles throughout antiquity, that Homer must have lived not much later than the Trojan War about which he sang. An Odyssey of Grecian Literature The general belief that Homer was a native of Ionia (the central part of the western seaboard of Asia Minor) seems a reasonable conjecture for the poems themselves are in predominantly Ionic dialect. Although Smyrna and Chios early began competing for the honour (the poet Pindar, early in the 5th century bce, associated Homer with both), and others joined in, no authenticated local memory survived anywhere of someone who, oral poet or not, must have been remarkable in his time. The absence of hard facts puzzled but did not deter the Greeks; the fictions that had begun even before the 5th century bce were developed in the Alexandrian era in the 3rd and 2nd centuries bce (when false scholarship as well as true abounded) into fantastic pseudobiographies, and these were further refined by derivative scholars under the Roman Empire. The longest to have survived purports to be by Herodotus himself; but it is quite devoid of objective truth.