

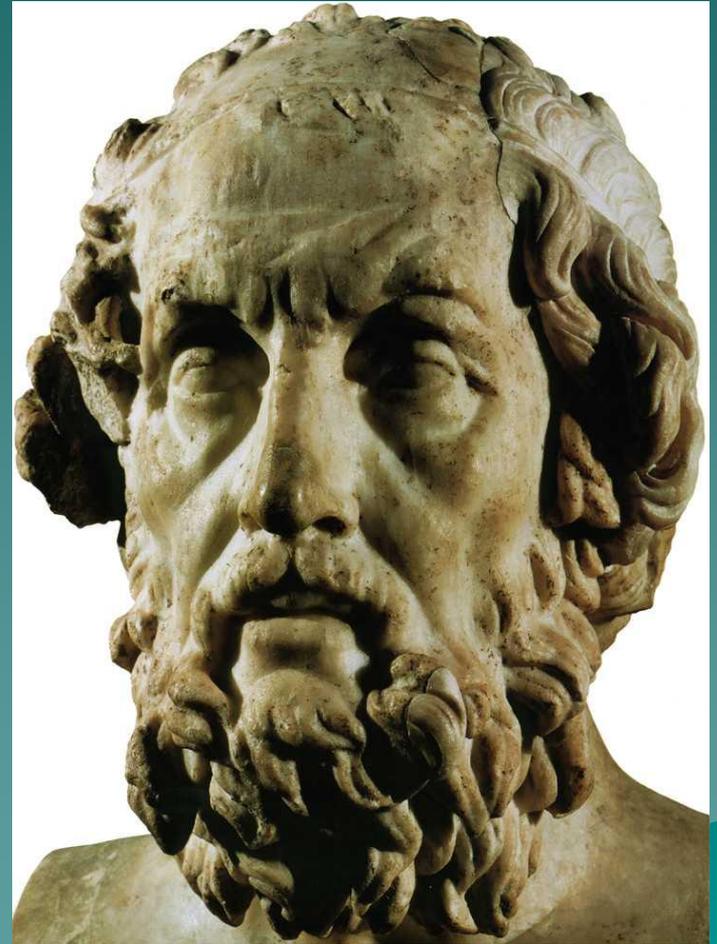
# The Homeric Question

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- ◆ Who was Homer?
- ◆ Was he a real person?
- ◆ When did he live?
- ◆ Where did he live?
- ◆ How did he write these long poems?
- ◆ Are the stories "True"?
- ◆ What historic period, if any, do the poems reflect?



# Traditional Answers

- ◆ Seven cities from Asia Minor coast and nearby Island claimed him in ancient times: Chios and Smyrna: <http://0.tqn.com/d/ancienthistory/1/0/B/9/2/The-Beginnings-of-Historic-Greece-700-BC-600-BC-.jpg>
- ◆ Poems are mostly in Ionic dialect
- ◆ Homeridae were his descendents; sang on Chios
- ◆ Dated originally to Bronze Age (1200 B.C.); later to Dark Ages (900 B.C.);
- ◆ Recitation Competitions were part of Pan-Athenaic Festival under Peisistratus and Hipparchus (6<sup>th</sup> century)

# Was Homer Blind?

- ◆ This traditional belief arises because of Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo:
- ◆ O maidens, when an unknown man who has seen and suffered much comes here and asks you “who is the sweetest singer that comes here and in whom do you most delight? “He is a blind man, and dwells in rocky Chios: his songs are the best of all time.”
- ◆ A 7<sup>th</sup> century text that is at least 100 years after Homer
- ◆ Demodokos in the *Odyssey* is blind

# Odyssey, Book 8

- ◆ “The crier soon came, leading that man of song whom the Muse cherished; by her gift he knew the good of life, and evil—

For she who lent him sweetness made him blind.

Pontonoos fixed a studded chair for him hard by a pillar amid the banqueters, hanging the taut harp from a peg above him, and guided up his hands upon the strings; placed a bread basket at his side, and poured wine in a cup, that he might drink his fill. Now each man's hand went out upon the banquet.”



# Mycenaean, Bronze Age Artifacts

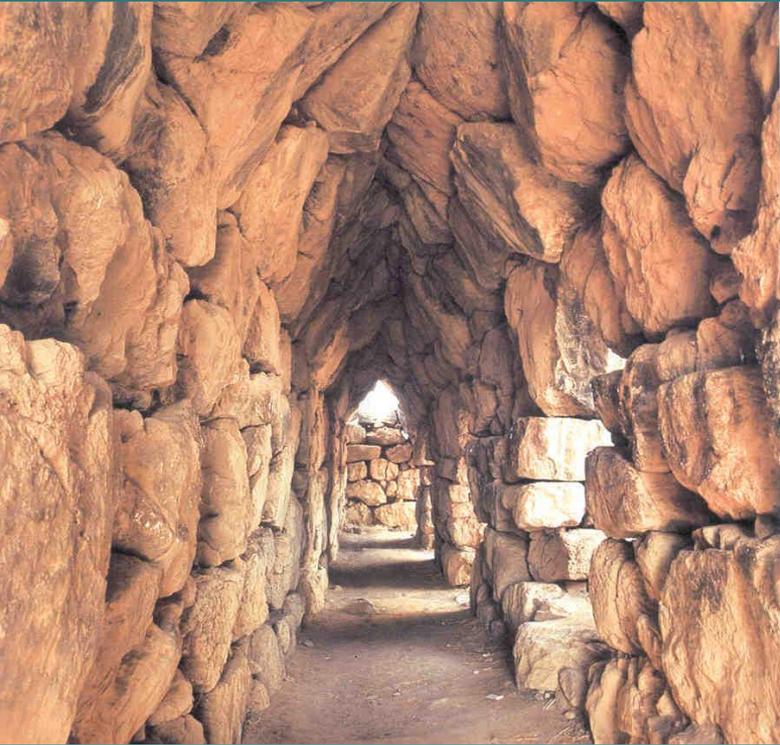
- ◆ Objects that are from Bronze Age:
- ◆ Bronze armor
- ◆ Boar's Tusk Helmet
- ◆ Man-covering shield of Ajax
- ◆ Metal Inlay on Shield of Achilles



# Mycenaean Boar's Tusk Helmet



# Massive Walled Cities: Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, Troy



# But Other Homeric Descriptions seemed Later

- ◆ Iron is mentioned as a gift to Achilles from the Embassy in Iliad 9
- ◆ Phalanx Fighting style described in a couple of places
- ◆ Aristocratic assemblies, with more democratic decision-making, rather than powerful Kings

# Epic Distance

- ◆ Homer uses Bronze age items and setting to create “distance” between his own era and the setting of the poem to create a sense of Epic Grandeur
- ◆ But can this explain everything?
- ◆ Mixed dialect in Homeric Language is another problem
- ◆ Other “poetic” problems

# Poetic Problems

- ◆ Repetition: Embassy Scene to Achilles
- ◆ Parallel Stories: Circe and Calpso
- ◆ Stories that don't seem to belong—long side stories—Bellerophon in book VI
- ◆ Writers usually don't write like this. But oral story tellers do. Could a poet have memorized and told such a long story?

# Milman Parry and Albert Lord

- ◆ Milman-Parry Theory: Homer was an oral poet singing a traditional song that originally had roots in Bronze Age
- ◆ Homer lived in Dark Ages, probably 8<sup>th</sup> century
- ◆ Someone else who knew writing wrote Homer down. When? Why? How?

# Oral Composition Method

- ◆ Dactylic Hexameter: six feet of short, short, long
- ◆ Formulas: groups of words that appear in the same order often, and fit a particular metrical place in a line of verse
- ◆ Epithets: Swift-footed Achilles; Strong Achilles; Godlike Achilles
- ◆ Themes: arming; hospitality; supplication
- ◆ Creativity and originality is achieved through the embellishment of themes, arrangement, and the ability to weave various songs together

# When did our “TEXT” come to be?

- ◆ The earliest text that we have was written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and was associated with the tyrant Peisistratus and the Athenian festival; some think that Athens was added to the catalogue of ships in Iliad III at this time; no major Athenian hero and Bronze Age Athens was unimportant

# City Texts and Hellenistic Texts

- ◆ The main texts can be traced back to Hellenistic Alexandria, 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to 1<sup>st</sup> century
- ◆ Also, city texts; fragments associated with various other cities; dates unknown; minor differences

# Summary

- ◆ Bronze Age artifacts point to Bronze Age origins of story
- ◆ Dark Age social qualities mark the 8<sup>th</sup> century as the time Homer sang the authoritative version
- ◆ Oral Story Telling Techniques are evident and Oral poets COULD tell long stories, but not by memorizing every detail.
- ◆ Use of epithets, formulas, and themes enable faithful transmission of story, while allowing for poetic embellishment.