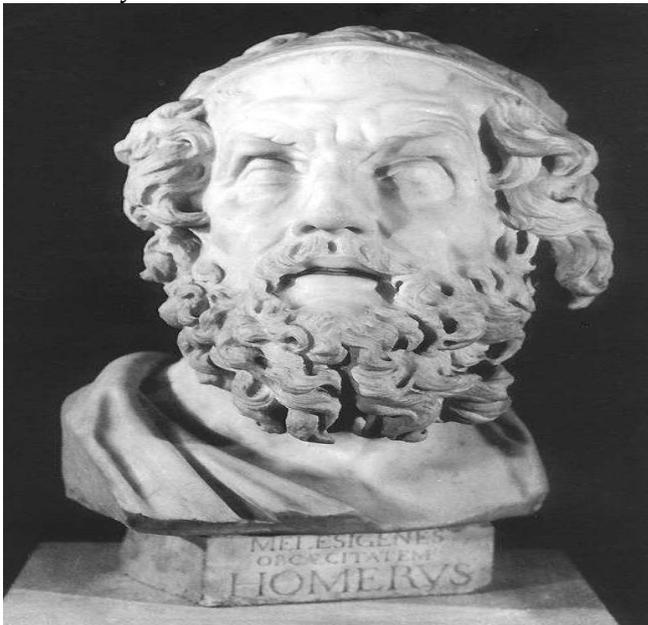


Lecture 1: **Homer - the Singer of Tales**

**1. Introduction**

- Aeschylus: his plays are ‘slices from Homer’s banquet’
- Alexander Pope (from the preface to his translation of the Iliad 1715): “Homer is universally allow'd to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever”.
- The language of Ionic 8th century inscriptions is significantly different. Other dialects that are used for poetic genres are also different from their ‘originals’ but not so much.
- Very little information about Homer the man



Pierre Puget, c. 1693



Rembrandt, 1663

- All we know is that he wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey. Do we know that?

**2. Previous descriptions**

- Alexandrians: archaic Ionic
- Pope: a poetic mix of elements. “He was not satisfy'd with his Language as he found it settled in any one Part of Greece, but searched thro' its differing Dialects... What he most affected was the Ionic ...With this he mingled the Attic Contractions, the broader Doric, and the feebler Æolic.”
- Thematic inconsistencies (Abbé d'Aubignac *Conjectures* 1715; Friedrich Augustus Wolf *Prolegomena* 1795). For example: Il. 5.576 cf Il. 13.653
- These inconsistencies had previously been noticed, but ignored. For example, Horace (*Ars Poetica* 359):

Indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus, I am aggrieved when sometimes even worthy Homer nods,  
 Verum operi longo fas est obrepere somnum” but in so long a work it is allowable if drowsiness comes on

- The problems led to the great ‘Homeric Question’: Analysts vs Unitarians

### 3. Aside – why Homeric Studies are different today.

- Heinrich Schliemann discovers Troy in 1871.
- Michael Ventris deciphers Linear B, the oldest form of Greek in 1952.

ἀμφιφορέυς	a-pi-po-re-u
κορύς	ko-ru
ξίφος	qi-si-pe-e
φάσγανον	pa-ka-na

### 4. Parry and Lord's Oral theory

- Meister in 1920s: *Kunstsprache* a detailed study of different elements
- Parry notes that epithets are 'traditional' not individual
- Further: concludes that Iliad and Odyssey are oral poetry

- Always thought that Homer was a bard – cf first line of the Iliad

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος  
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρῖ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηγε,

Rage – Goddess sing the rage of Peleus' son, Achilles,  
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses.

translation Robert Fagles

- Plenty of references in Iliad to bards (ἄοιδοι) e.g. 3.267; 4.17; 8.83; 8.521; 11.368
- Bards (with lyre) generally tell stories of warriors and gods at feasts e.g. Od. 8.62
- Parry and Lord went to Bosnia to research a culture where bards still perform.
- Oral poetry has very different constraints to written poetry.
  1. No concept of a fixed text
  2. As well as themes, language is passed down from bard to bard, so foreign and archaic elements enter the formulae.
  3. Main constraint that affects the language is the metre.
- Applied to Homer

#### i. Modification of texts is praised:

τὸν δ' αὖτ' Ἀλκίνοος ἀπαμείβετο φώνησέν τε·  
“ὦ Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὸ μὲν οὐ τίς ἑίσκομεν εἰσορόωντες,  
ἠπεροπῆά τ' ἔμεν καὶ ἐπίκλοπον, οἷά τε πολλοὺς  
βόσκει γαῖα μέλαινα πολυσπερέας ἀνθρώπους,  
ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτύνοντας ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο  
;σοὶ δ' ἔπι μὲν μορφῇ ἐπέων, ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἔσθλαί.  
μῦθον δ' ὡς ὄτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας,  
πάντων τ' Ἀργείων σέο τ' αὐτοῦ κήδεα λυγρὰ.

Alcinous gave him an answer and spoke to him:  
“Odysseus, as we look on you we would not think you  
To be a deceiver and cheat the way many men are  
Who the black earth nourishes, and are widely dispersed,  
Fashioning falsehoods out of what no-one could see;  
There is grace in your words and your thoughts are noble.  
As a singer would, you have skilfully told the tale  
Of all the Argives' sad troubles and of your own.

translation Albert Cooke

#### ii. Epithets all different metrical shapes

[Homer written in dactylic hexameters = 6 x — ∪ ∪

Typical line: — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — —]

δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς	— ∪ ∪ — —
πολυμήτις Ὀδυσσεύς	∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — —
πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς	∪ — — — ∪ ∪ — —

- iii. Metrical constraints also explains dialectal variants:
 

Ionic ἡμεῖς	— —
Aeolic ἄμμες	— ∪
[ἄμμες pre-consonant	— —: not found]
  - iv. Formulae therefore can be used to trace where and when dactylic epic hexameters were sung: earlier even than the Trojan War itself
  - v. Orality helps to explain the thematic inconsistencies.
- Problem – how was it written down?

#### 4. Homer to the Alexandrians

- Linguistically fixed by 700 B.C. – later changes are essentially orthographical
- Texts compiled by the Alexandrians in 250-150 B.C.

#### Metacharacterism

- Euclidean adoption of Ionic alphabet in 403 B.C.
- First texts would therefore have been written in Old Attic or Old Ionic.
- Both these scripts have the following characteristics:
  1. No convention of capital letters or accents
  2. Punctuation and word-division rare or non-existent  
e.g. 16.756 δηρινθήτην for δηριν θητην
  3. Words written unelided (scriptio plena)  
e.g. ἐτύνοντο ἄριστον (\*ἀFέριστον) – should be ἐτυνοντ' ἄριστον
  4. Inherited ě + ǝ with compensatory lengthening were written E and O  
e.g. εἰς < \*ἐνς written ΕΣ  
τούς < τόνς written ΤΟΣ

Contracted products of ě + ě and ǝ + ǝ also written E and O

e.g. infinitives in εἰν ( written E) or o-stem genitives in ου (written O)

New spellings εἰ and ου for these sounds (spurious diphthongs) appeared c. 400 B.C. The transcription of the original script posed no problems if the word was in the transcriber's dialect, but some evidence of Atticisation here  
e.g. κρείσσων and μείζων Attic from ΚΡΕΣΣΩΝ and ΜΕΖΩΝ  
(cf Ionic κρέσσων and μέζων)

5. Geminate consonants rarely written out. This explains confusion between two forms ὀφειλω (Attic) vs. ὀφελλω (Aeolic)  
Also cf εἶσον should be ἔσσον from ΕΣΩΝ

- Alexandrians claimed that original had been written in Old Attic which, in addition to the above, did not distinguish E and O from H and Ω.  
Iliad 1.598: οἶνοχόει for ῥνοχόει from OINOXOEI

- Problem for Old Attic theory - βῶν.  
At 7.238 Didymus writes a scholion on a word that means 'ox-hide shield'.

βῶν could have arisen from a mis-reading of a script that wrote O to stand for o, ou, or ω but it is also the expected accusative form of the word βοῦς cf. Sanskrit gām. Scholars suggest that this could only have survived if the alphabet did distinguish between o and ω.

- Homer was written in both Old Attic and Old Ionic scripts?

### **Peisistratean recension**

- All sources for the epic poems are remarkably similar: derive from one original?
- Ancient testimonial: some kind of standardisation in 5th century Athens

Aristotle (Rhet. 1.1375b30): Solon or Peisistratus interpolates a line in Homer in order to substantiate a claim about ownership of Salamis

Lycurgus (330 B.C.): the Athenian 'fathers' instituted a rule that only Homer's poems be recited at the Great Panathenaea

Cicero: Peisistratus (c. 600-c.527 B.C.) first collected together the Homeric poems

- Although we have some evidence for the pre-Alexandrian transmission of the text, we still cannot answer why or how it was written down in the first place.

### **Reading list**

A. B. Lord, 2000 (1960)	<i>The Singer of Tales</i> (second edition)
W. J. Woodhouse, 1969	<i>The Composition of Homer's Odyssey</i>
R. Janko, 1985	<i>The Iliad: A Commentary</i> (vol. 4 introduction)
G. S. Kirk, 1985	<i>The Iliad: A Commentary</i> (vol. 1 introduction)
L. R. Palmer, 1980	<i>The Greek Language</i> , pp. 93-97