

The *Iliad*, The *Odyssey*, & Greek Mythology



About 330 B.C.
Volute Krater with
Dionysos Visiting Hades
and Persephone



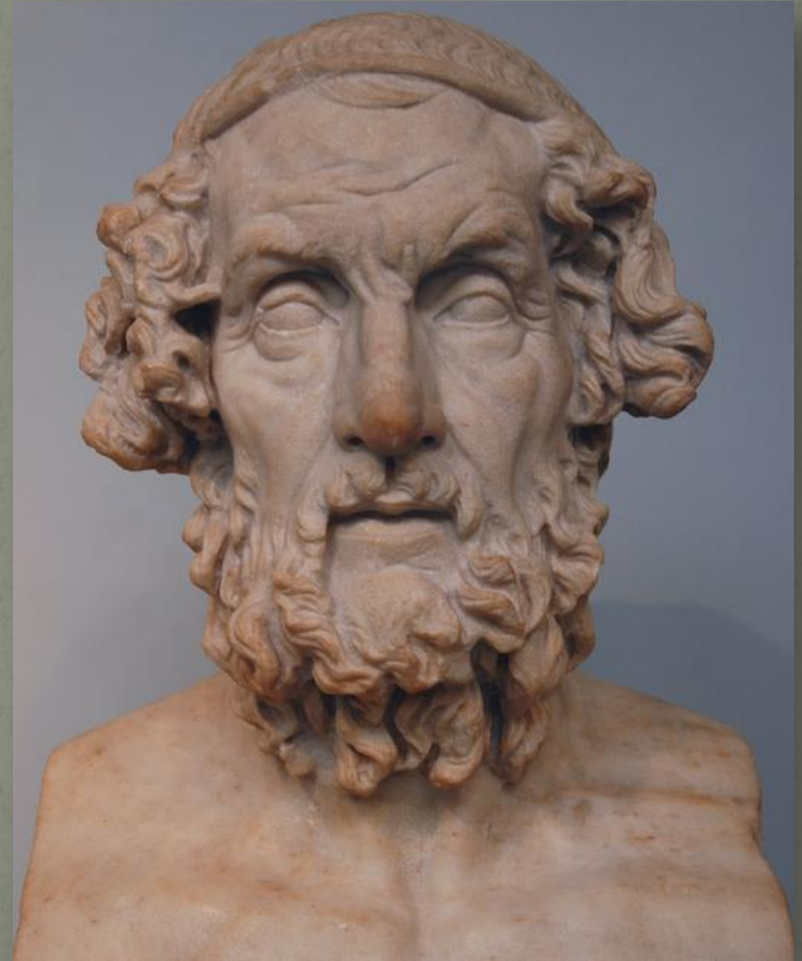
550-530 B.C.
Amphora with
Chariot Race



500-450 B.C.
Corinthian-style
Helmet

Homer: a storyteller

- Lived circa 800 B.C.
- Blind poet (AKA **Bard**, meaning a **professional poet**)
- Composed the **epics** the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*
- Little known of him
 - there are even disputes over whether or not he was the sole composer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*



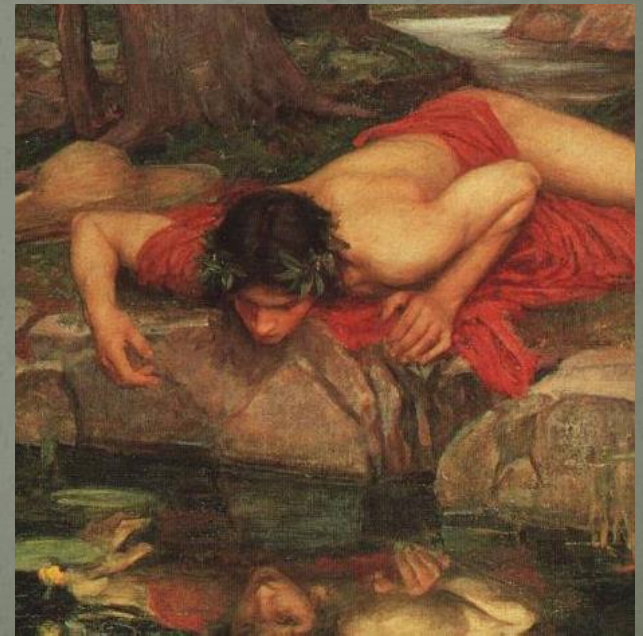
Homer: a storyteller

- Came from Ionia in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)
- Much of historians' knowledge of Greek mythology comes from Homer's poems
- We use Homer's name as the **eponym** "*Homeric*" (meaning large-scale, massive, enormous)
 - **Eponym**: person or character from whose name a word or title is derived, or a name that has become synonymous with some general characteristic or idea



Aphrodite (above)

Narcissus (below)



The Epic

- Long narrative poem involving heroes and gods
- Elevated in style and usually follows certain patterns
- Provides a portrait of an entire culture
 - legends, beliefs, values, laws, arts, ways of life
- Actions of hero reflect the ideals and values of a nation or race
- Addresses universal concerns (e.g. *good and evil, life and death, sin and redemption*)

The Craft of the Epic

- Not a story that one sits down and reads
- A *performance* by a master storyteller!
- Makes use of
 - **epic simile**
 - **epithets**



Epic Simile AKA Homeric Simile

- A long simile that continues for several lines
 - Elaborate
 - More involved
 - Used for emphasis

And Odysseus
Let the bright molten tears run down his cheeks,
weeping [like] the way a wife mourns for her lord
on the lost field where he has gone down fighting
the day of wrath that came upon his children.
At sight of the man panting and dying there,
she slips down to enfold him, crying out;
then feels the spears, prodding her back and
shoulders,
and goes bound into slavery and grief.
Piteous weeping wears away her cheeks:
but no more piteous than Odysseus' tears,
cloaked as they were, now, from the company.
--Book 8, lines 560-571

Epithet AKA Homeric Epithet

- Brief, descriptive phrases that helped to characterize a particular person or thing
- Contained the right meter or number of syllables to fill out a line
 - Odysseus is called “master mariner” or “old contender”
 - Achilles often called “swift-footed” Achilles

*“Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
you shall not stay here longer against your will;
but home you may not go
unless you take a strange way round and come
to the cold homes of Death and pale
Persephone.
You shall hear prophecy from the rapt shade
of blind Tiresias of Thebes, forever
charged with reason even among the dead;
to him alone, of all the flitting ghosts,
Persephone has given a mind undarkened.”*

--Book 10, lines 200-210

The *Iliad*

- **Heroic Epic**, written by Homer, c. 800 B.C.
 - **Heroic Epic**: epic that has the main purpose of telling the life story of a great hero
- Set in Troy (AKA *Ilium*)
- Recounts the events that occurred during the last year of the **Trojan War**
- Focuses on Achilles, Patroclus, Agamemnon, Menelaus (of Sparta), Priam, Hector, Paris, Helen, Odysseus (Latin, *Ulysses*), Trojans, Greeks, gods



The *Iliad*: in brief

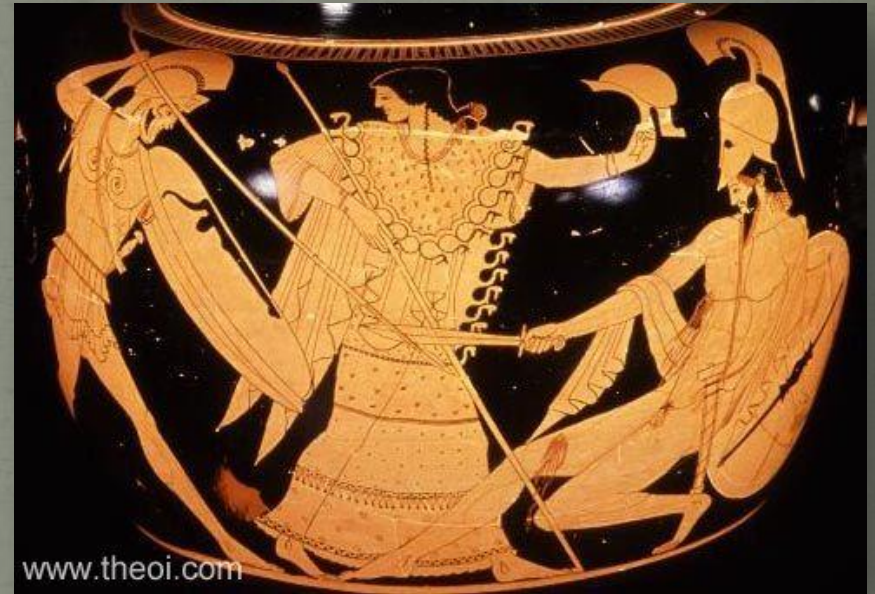
The war began to go badly for the Greeks after Achilles, their bravest warrior, left the battlefield. Achilles refused to fight because Agamemnon, the Greek commander, had insulted him. The Trojans, led by Hector, drove the Greeks back to their ships. Achilles finally returned to combat after his best friend, Patroclus, had been slain by the Trojan champion, Hector, son of Priam. Achilles killed Hector to avenge Patroclus' death. The *Iliad* ends with Hector's burial and Greek legends relate events that followed.

The *Aeneid*: in brief

The fall of Troy is described in the *Aeneid*. The Greeks built a huge wooden horse, which has become known as the Trojan Horse, and placed it outside the walls of Troy. Odysseus and some other warriors hid inside the horse while the rest of the Greek army sailed away. The Trojans pulled the horse into Troy. That night, they fell asleep after celebrating their apparent victory. Odysseus and his companions then crept out of the horse and opened the city gates for the rest of their warriors who had returned from a nearby island. The Greeks took back Helen, slaughtered almost all the Trojans, and burned Troy.

The Trojan War

- No *real* written record exists of the Trojan War
- *Probably* took place mid-1200s B.C.
- Historical evidence in ruins of Troy and other cities
- Most knowledge from epics of Homer and Virgil
- Conflict in which Ancient Greece defeated the city of Troy
- Lasted approx. 10 years
- Refer to notes: *The Trojan War (video)*



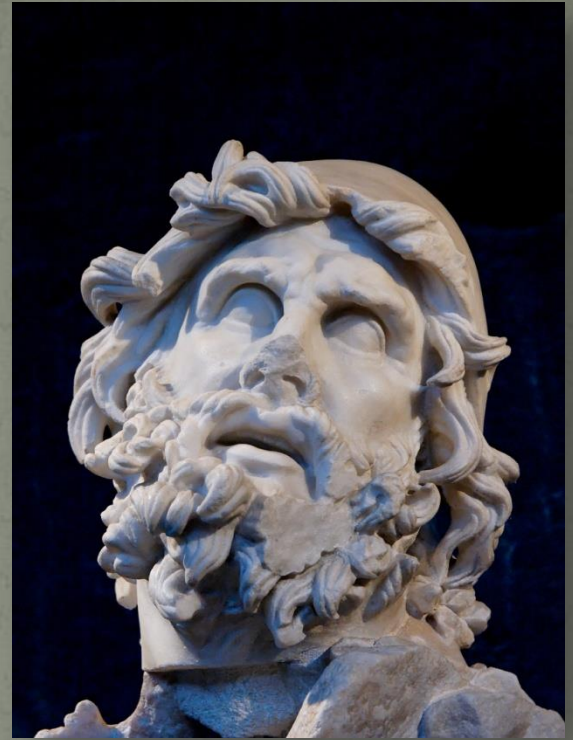
The *Odyssey*

- **Heroic Epic**, written by Homer, c. 800 B.C.
- Documents the encounters and adventures of the Greek hero **Odysseus**, king of Ithaca, on his 20-year voyage to return home after the Trojan War
- Combines realistic elements of historical events with wildly imagined scenes of fantastic places and creatures



The *Odyssey*: in brief

Recounts the wanderings and adventures of Odysseus in the course of his return to Ithaca after the capture of Troy, and of what had meanwhile gone on in his house, where Penelope, his wife, was besieged by suitors. Finally, it relates how Odysseus and his son Telemachus, whom he had left an infant when he set out for Troy, encountered and slew the suitors, and how husband and wife are reunited.



The *Odyssey*

- First told orally, perhaps even sung
- After several generations, the story was written down
 - Oral Tradition: stories that are told through speaking
 - Written Tradition: stories that are told through writing



The Heroism of Odysseus

- The **Heroic Tradition** set standards on the value of man's **honor** and **courage**.
- In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is an **epic hero**
- **Epic Hero**: main character of an epic; a larger-than-life figure from history or legend; undertakes a dangerous voyage, demonstrating traits that are valued by the society in which the epic originates; often have human flaws mixed with heroic traits



Greek Mythology

- A **myth** is a traditional story, usually concerning some superhuman being or unlikely event that was once widely believed to be true
 - Often attempt to explain natural phenomena
 - Considered both a science and a religion
 - Served as literature and entertainment
- **Greek Mythology** forms a background for real events, such as the Trojan War
 - The Judgment of Paris



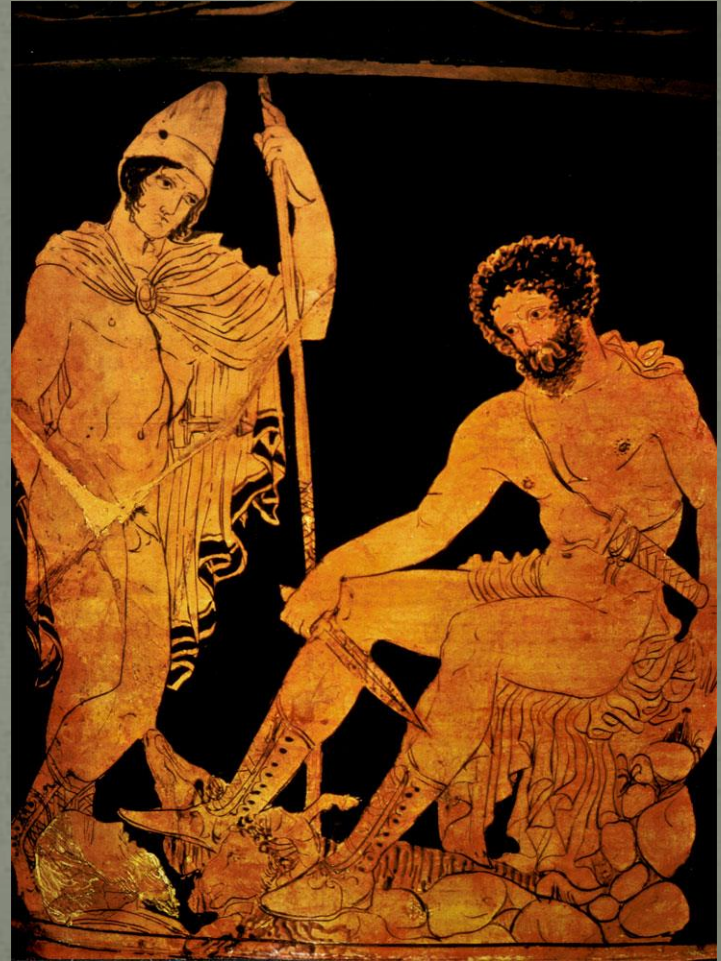
Greek Mythology

- Made up of gods, creatures, fantastic places, stories
- Gods were interested in affairs of humans
- Behaved in recognizably human ways
 - Trivial quarrels
 - Petty jealousies
- Compare to today's science fiction
 - Creatures could be imagined in Ancient Greece just as aliens can be imagined in today's world
 - Little knowledge of the existence of life beyond the known world

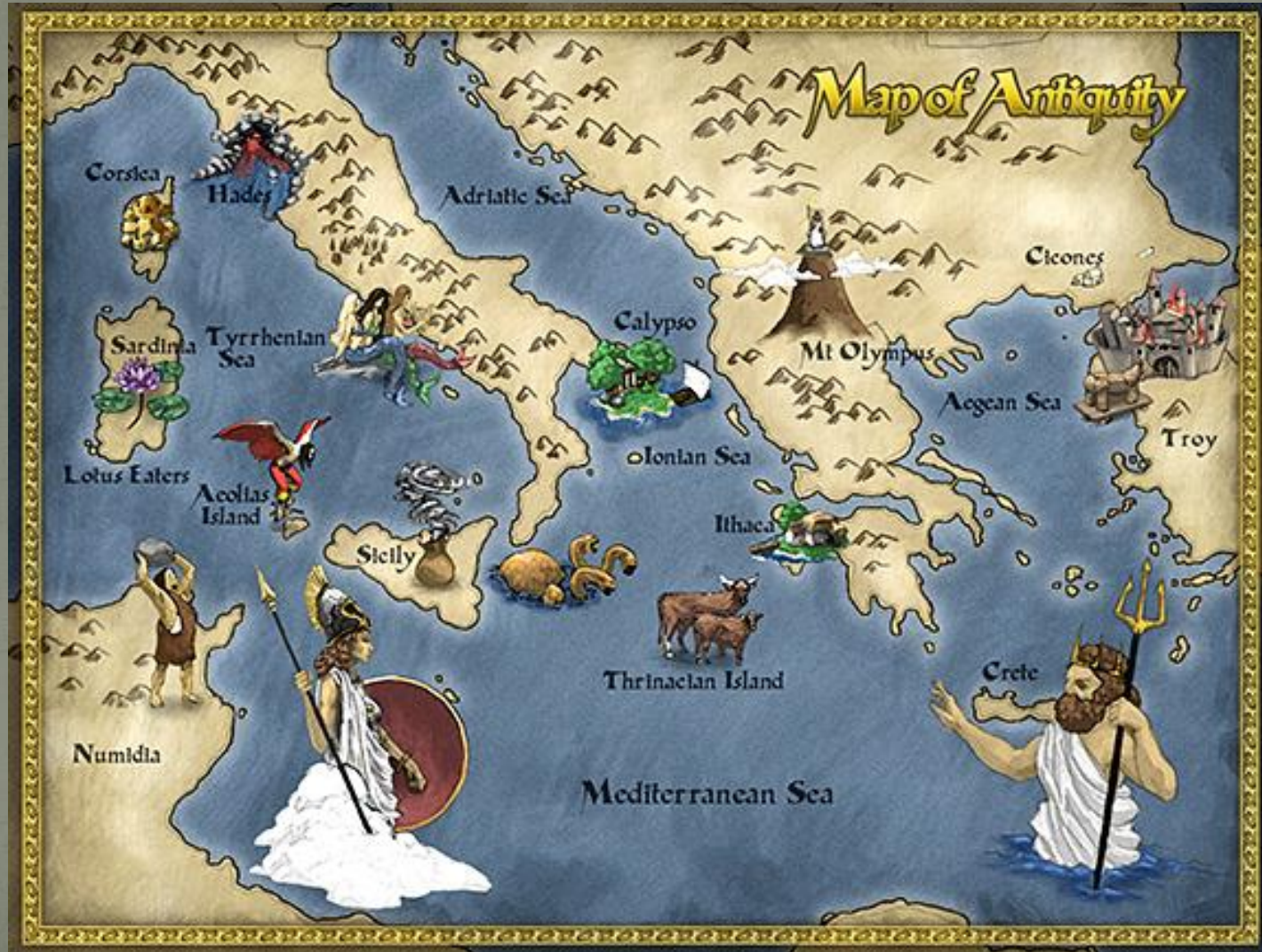


Greek Mythology in the *Odyssey*

- The conflicts among gods / goddesses on Mount Olympus affects the travels of Odysseus
- Athena is on Odysseus' side (Greeks)
- Aphrodite and gods who supported the Trojans are displeased with Odysseus
- Odysseus upsets other gods throughout his journey



Places in the *Odyssey*



Places in the *Odyssey*

- Location: The Mediterranean
- Troy, Sparta, and Ithaca were **real places** mentioned in the *Odyssey*
- Imaginary lands include Aeaëa, Ogygia, islands of Aeolus and the Sirens

Epic Vocabulary

1. Bard
2. Epic
3. Heroic Epic
4. Epic Hero
5. Epic Simile / Homeric Simile
6. Epithet / Homeric Epithet
7. Eponym
8. Written Tradition
9. Oral Tradition
10. Myth