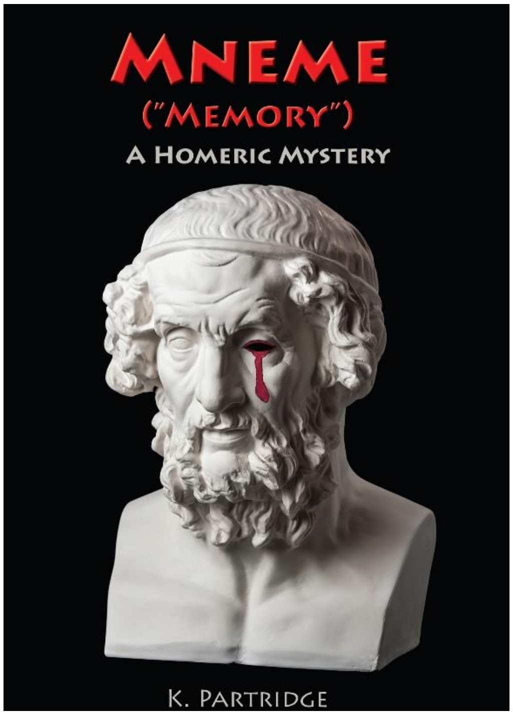
THE HISTORICITY OF THE TROJAN WAR AND HOMER

WHEN CITIES SINK
HOWLING IN RUIN
K. PARTRIDGE


MNEME
("MEMORY")
A HOMERIC MYSTERY
K. PARTRIDGE

When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin is a fact-based retelling of the *Iliad* that puts the destruction of Troy in the context of the historical collapse of the entire Eastern Mediterranean.

Mneme ("Memory") is a fictional tale in which Homer is struck down and left for dead right after he finishes the *Odyssey*.

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Kurt Partridge
Version 6, 5/23/22

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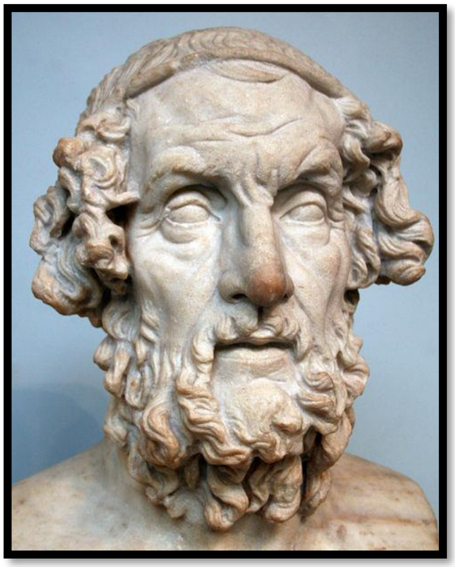
Introduction

Note that any quotes or references to the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* refer to the Richard Lattimore translations.

Homer the Man



We know nothing about him, including whether he really existed and whether he wrote the *Iliad* and/or *Odyssey*. The best quote on the subject that I've heard was by Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*: "My theory is that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* weren't really written by Homer, but by another person of the same name."

All we have are legends, none of them of "historical value" (i.e., trustworthy enough for an academic to cite them without being laughed off campus). He was supposedly born in Ionia (the west coast of modern Turkey and the nearby islands). The island of Chios and Smyrna on the Turkish coast are the most oft-cited locations. He was supposedly blind, probably because his name is similar to word for "blind" in one of the several Greek dialects. A more defensible translation of "Homer" is that his name means "hostage," though it is a mystery why that would be his name.

Not counting the opinions of the ancient Greeks, the earliest and latest dates cited for the life of Homer are 800 B.C. to 650 B.C. Herodotus said Homer lived 400 years before him, which would put him in the 9th century B.C. As time goes by, the scholarly tendency has been to move Homer later and later in time. Most scholars currently say he lived in the 725 - 650 B.C. range.

The earliest mention of a work of Homer was by Callinus, a poet who flourished about 650 B.C. The fact that Homer is cited so early in history gives credence to his existence as a real person. On the other hand, the ancient Greeks knew no more about him than we do. There was period of time when any work of epic poetry (i.e., any of the poems in the Epic Cycle) was attributed to Homer, i.e., "Homeric" didn't mean "by Homer" but rather "epic poetry." (See "The 'Epic Cycle' " below for information on the Epic Cycle.) It wasn't till the 4th century B.C. that it was assumed that Homer wrote the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and not the poems of the Epic Cycle.

Poem's Aren't History

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are poems. They're not first-person accounts. They're not historical documents. They're *poems*, composed in roughly the form we have them today a *minimum* of 400 to 450 years after the war they claim to describe—and attributed to a poet who may never have existed. As John Chadwick says, "We cannot therefore accept the Homeric story as historical…. To look for historical fact in Homer is as vain as to scan Mycenaean tablets in search of poetry; they belong to different universes."

(Chadwick, along with Michael Ventris, deciphered the Linear B script and proved that it was an ancient form of Greek.)

The truth behind both the Trojan War and Homer is debated by academics. Book after book by supposed experts insists on taking Homer's works at face value—which is somewhat akin to taking "Captain America: The First Avenger" as an accurate depiction of World War II. I'm trying to bring some evidence and logic to the subject. What follows is my synthesis of what I know about them. Of course, the historicity of Homer's depiction of the Trojan War hinges on the historical and archaeological facts of the war as we know them. Therefore, this document will discuss those facts in some detail.

Caveat: Ancient Greek authors estimated the fall of Troy variously from 1334 B.C. to 1150 B.C. The most typical modern estimate is within that range, 1200 B.C. But the subject of dates is complicated. The most reliable dates specified in the text below come from contemporary Hittite clay tablets and Egyptian records (stone wall carvings, steles, papyri). Such dates can be trusted, more or less.

Greek dates, however, are estimates based on alterations in ancient pottery styles over time. There are myriad reasons why such dates can only be considered approximate, including but not limited to the following:

- The pottery styles span long periods of time in most cases, so precision of dating is difficult.
- A given potter could keep working in an old style long after it had gone out of fashion—sort of like a Bronze Age Lawrence Welk.
- The pottery could have been found in an archaeological layer dated at 1000 B.C., but the pottery was a thousand years old at that time and was actually produced in 2000 B.C. (After all, if the Yellowstone super-volcano blew tomorrow, and 1000 years from now they excavated my condo, they might conclude that my Greek aryballos was from the third millennium A.D. rather than the seventh century B.C.)
- Due to geological, animal, or man-made forces, the pottery could have shifted from one geological stratum to another.

As far as I'm concerned, anyone who thinks such dating techniques allow an event to be dated within ten or twenty years is either fooling themselves or is trying to appear clever and get an article published, thereby retaining their untenured position.

The History

The Collapse of the Late Bronze Age

According to Robert Drews in his classic work *The End of the Bronze Age*:

> *"Within a period of forty or fifty years at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the twelfth century* [B.C.] *almost every significant city or palace in the eastern Mediterranean world was destroyed, many of them never to be occupied again."*

Troy was just one of dozens of cities in the eastern Mediterranean that were destroyed in a very brief period of time. Figure 1 shows destroyed cities in red:

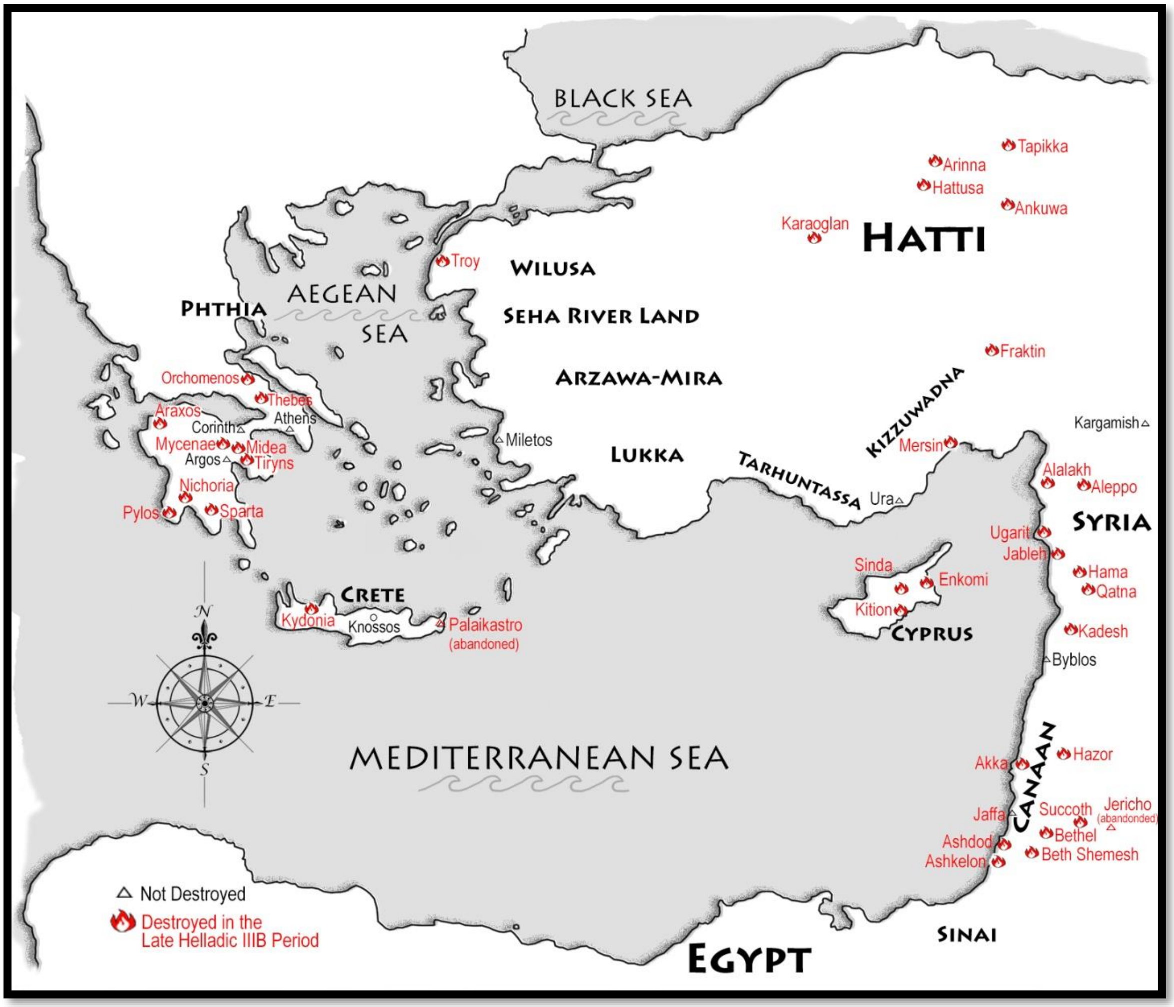

BLACK SEA
Tapikka
Arinna
Hattusa
Ankuwa
Karaoglan
HATTI
Troy
WILUSA
PHTHIA
AEGEAN SEA
SEHA RIVER LAND
Fraktin
ARZAWA-MIRA
KIZZUWADNA
Orchomenos
Thebes
Araxos
Athens
Corinth
Mycenae
Midea
Argos
Tiryns
Nichoria
Pylos
Sparta
Miletos
LUKKA
TARHUNTASSA
Mersin
Ura
Kargamish
Alalakh
Aleppo
SYRIA
Ugarit
Jableh
Hama
Qatna
Sinda
Enkomi
Kition
CYPRUS
Kadesh
Byblos
CRETE
Kydonia
Knossos
Palaikastro
(abandoned)
N
W
E
S
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Hazor
Akka
CANAAN
Jaffa
Succoth
Jericho
(abandonded)
Bethel
Ashdod
Ashkelon
Beth Shemesh
Not Destroyed
Destroyed in the Late Helladic IIIB Period
SINAI
EGYPT

Figure 1. Collapse of the Late Bronze Age

As the map shows, Troy, most of Greece, Crete, Cyprus, the Hittite empire, Syria, and Canaan were all destroyed in the same time period. Note that the map covers only the Greek Late Helladic IIIB Period (roughly 1300 - 1200 B.C.). Additional cities were destroyed in the IIIC Period (roughly 1200 - 1050 B.C.).

Note that not all cities on the map are discussed in the next section.

Relevant History

Below, note that the majority of the destruction in the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age occurred within spitting distance of 1200 B.C.—a very narrow time slice, historically speaking.

All dates are both approximate and in dispute. A hyphen in the first column indicates that the event in the second column could have taken place anywhere in that range.

3000 B.C. Approximate date of the founding of Troy I.

Greece was in the Early Helladic (Greek) Period. Metallurgy was rare, at best.

2500 B.C. Troy II established. (This was contemporaneous with the construction of the Great Pyramids.) This was the second-grandest of all the Troys, after Troy VI. Destroyed roughly 2300 B.C.

Another estimate puts the establishment as 2600 B.C. and destruction as 2400 B.C.

In Greece, bronze-working was not uncommon.

Troy II is the Troy in which Troy's discoverer, Heinrich Schliemann, found "The Jewels of Helen," here modeled by Schliemann's wife Sophie. Schliemann incorrectly thought Troy II was Homer's Troy.

(BTW: In 1945, the Jewels of Helen disappeared from the Berlin Museum, in which they had resided since Schliemann smuggled them out of Turkey. You may remember that there was a large Russian community in Berlin at the time. After being lost for many years, they are now displayed in Moscow's Pushkin Museum. Turkey is trying to get them repatriated. Good luck with that.)

2000 B.C. Possible/probable arrival of ethnic Greeks in Greece. They displaced, absorbed, and/or dominated the existing inhabitants. Other estimates put this as early as 2300 B.C. and as late as 1800 B.C.

This roughly corresponds to the end of the Early Helladic (Greek) Bronze Age and the beginning of the Middle Helladic Bronze Age.

1800 B.C. Troy VI established, the grandest of all the Troys and most similar to the lovely, rich, powerful city Homer describes. See Figure 2. Other possible dates include 1700 B.C.

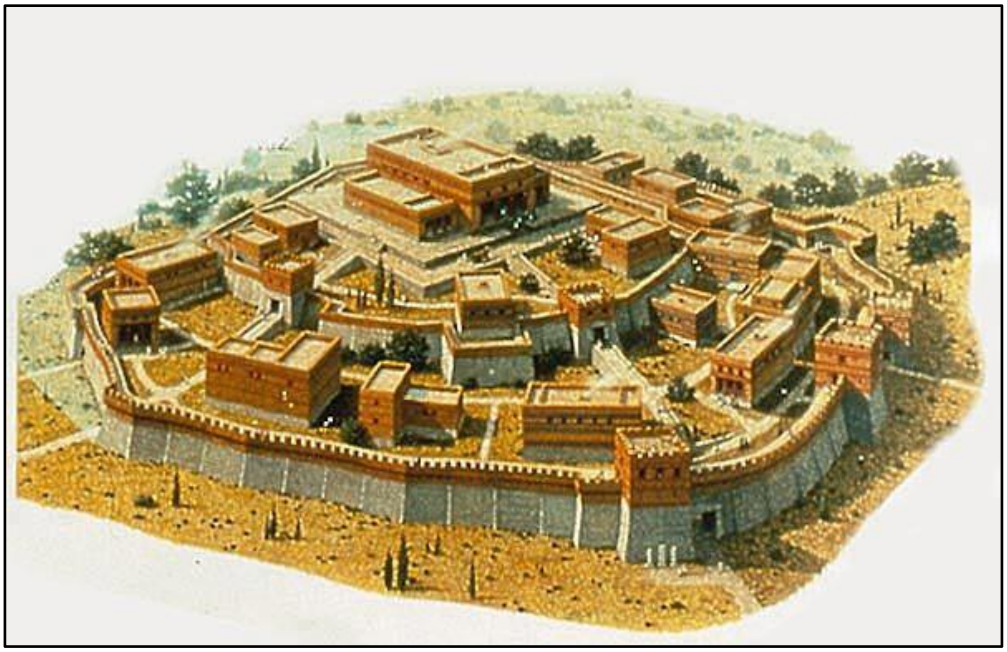
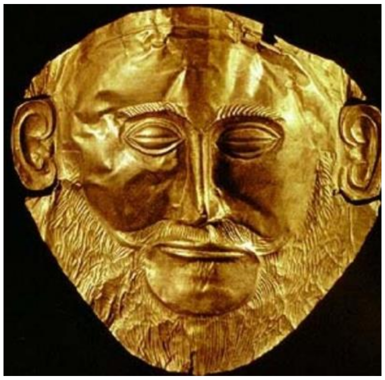


Figure 2. Troy VI Citadel by G. Dagli Orti

At this time, Greece was still in the Middle Helladic Bronze Age.



1600 B.C. Beginning of the Greek Homeric culture, known as "Mycenaean" after the city of Mycenae, apparently the richest, most powerful Greek city of the time—as well as the kingdom of Agamemnon, Homer's Greek king of kings.

The "Shaft Grave Era" occurred at the beginning of the Mycenaean Age and continued to around 1450 B.C. It was named after the discovery of Shaft Graves within Mycenae's wall by Heinrich Schliemann, which proved the existence of a Homeric warrior culture in Greece. The most famous grave good is the golden "Mask of Agamemnon" on the right. (However, Schliemann was wrong about chronology once again: this era preceded Agamemnon, if he existed at all, by some 250 years.)

"Mask of Agamemnon" photo by Xuan Che, 20 December 2010 , from Wikimedia Commons. Dimensions of image altered to fit available space.

This period corresponds to the start of the Late Helladic Bronze Age.

1540 B.C. Eruption of Mount Thera (the current Greek island of Santorini). Other dates posited include 1628, 1530, and 1520 B.C. The eruption produced the loudest sound human ears have ever heard. The resulting tsunami (and to a lesser extent, ash) dealt a deadly (but not fatal) blow to the non-Greek Cretan Keftiu culture, now known as "Minoan" after the Keftiu King Minos. Earthquakes around the same time didn't help the Minoans, either.

1450 B.C. The Mycenaean Greeks, formerly Minoan vassals, rose up and conquered their former masters and eventually the rest of the Aegean.

1400 - 1300 Earliest extant Greek writing, called "Linear B". All samples that we have today were preserved when temporary clay tablets were unintentionally baked hard by the fires of the Collapse of the Bronze Age. (Crete: 14th century B.C. Pylos: Start of the 12th century B.C.)

Photo by Sharon Mollerus, from Wikimedia Commons.
Dimensions of image altered to fit available space.

1400 B.C. *(date from Hittite tablet, but disputed)* In a clash known as the "Indictment of Madduwatta," substantial Greek land and sea forces under Attarsiya invaded southwest Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and later Cyprus. Hittites came to the aid of their Anatolian vassal King Madduwatta and repelled the Greeks. This began at least 160 years of periodic clashes between Greeks and Anatolians.

1375 - 1350 Tiryns, Mycenae, and other Greek cities were fortified, i.e., walled citadels were built—their citizens must have been worried about something. However, this marked the beginning of 100 years of peace and prosperity in Greece. Maybe Robert Frost was right: Good walls make good neighbors.

1320 B.C. *(date from Hittite tablet)* Greek peoples in western Anatolia and the offshore islands supported the Anatolian territory of Arzawa in unsuccessful rebellion against the Hittite Empire.

1295 B.C. *(date from Hittite tablet)* Only known armed conflict between Greeks and Trojans. Piyama-radu (probably an Arzawan king or rebel) attacked Wilusa/Troy. (Wilusa is an alternate name for Troy. See page 82.) The Hittites sent an army and defeated Piyama-radu and the Greeks. This is described in a Hittite tablet known as the "Manapa-Tarhunta letter."

1280 B.C. *(date from Hittite tablet)* Wilusan/Trojan King Alaksandu signed a treaty with Hittite King Muwatalli II.

1278 B.C. *(date from Egyptian record)* First mention of attacks by the "Sea Peoples," a Europeanized term for a phrase used by the Egyptians to refer to several nationalities of roving sea raiders. Per the Tanis and Aswan steles, Ramesses II defeated an attack on the Nile Delta by one of the Sea Peoples, the Sherden. The Sea Peoples are probably the most oft-cited cause of the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age. (See "One Cause of the Collapse: Attacks by the 'Sea Peoples' " below.)

1250 B.C. *(date from Hittite tablet)* As documented in a Hittite tablet known as the "Tawagalawa letter," Piyama-radu again caused trouble. The Hittite King Hattusili III chased him into Greek territory (Miletus), only to find that he had fled overseas.

Hattusili apologized to the Greek “great king” (i.e., king of kings) for crossing his frontier but demanded the extradition of Piyama-radu. No dice.

1250 - 1180	Collapse of the entire eastern Mediterranean: Troy, Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Canaan, Syria, and Hatti (land of the Hittites). Of the major nations, only Egypt survived, though weakened.

1250 - 1230	Troy VI destroyed—the majority of scholars think by earthquake. 1250 B.C. is the most commonly cited date. Other dates include 1300, 1258, and 1225 B.C. Troy VI corresponds to Homer’s description of a large, rich, grand city. End of the 100-year golden age of Mycenaean civilization. First wave of destruction of Mycenaean cities: Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, Iolkos, etc. Definite signs of earthquake at some locations and some signs of warfare as well. Citadels were rebuilt and expanded. Some estimates put the date as late as 1200 B.C.
1240 B.C.	*(date from Hittite tablet)* Hittites and their allies conquered Greek Miletus. The end of significant Greek influence in Anatolia (modern day Turkey) soon followed.
1230 B.C.	Initial attack on Cyprus, probably by sea raiders.
1208 B.C.	*(date from Egyptian record)* Battle of Periri: Per a Karnak inscription, Pharaoh Merneptah defeated a coalition of Sea Peoples known as “The Nine Bows,” comprising Libyans, Meshwesh (they’re also Libyans), Lukka, Sherden, Shekelesh, Akwash, and Teresh, referring to them as “Northerners coming from all lands.”
1200 B.C.	In Crete, Kydonia was destroyed. Minoans/Keftiu on Crete literally headed for the hills (“refuge settlements”). Minoan culture died out over the next 100 years.
1200 - 1180	Second wave of destruction of Mycenae and Tiryns. Midea, Iolkos, Thebes, Orchomenos, Menelaion (Sparta) also destroyed. No rebuilding this time. This marks the end of the Late Helladic Bronze Age. In Syria/Canaan, destruction of Ashdod and Ashkelon. Destruction of Troy VIIa, almost certainly by warfare. Other dates proposed for its destruction include 1300, 1258, 1250, 1200, 1190, and 1165 B.C. Troy VIIa was a shabby, poverty-stricken city not at all similar to what Homer describes. Note that there is no evidence that the attackers were Greek. And as cited above and below, Greek civilization was itself collapsing at the time—so would they have had time, money, and inclination for an overseas adventure?
1190 - 1180	Earliest and latest dates for the collapse of the Hittite empire. Destructions of Hattusa, Alaca Hoyuk, Masat, Fraktin, Karaoglan. In Greece, the destruction of Pylos.

	In Syria, the destruction of Ugarit.
	In Canaan, the destruction of Succoth, Lachish, and Akka.
	On Crete, the destruction of Palaeokastro.
	On Cyprus, the destruction of Enkomi, Kition, and Sinda.
1182 B.C.	*(date from Egyptian record)* Ramesses III fought Libyans, Meshwesh, and maybe Philistines and TJekker.
1177 B.C.	*(date from Egyptian record)* Battle of Djahi (in Canaan): Ramesses III fought the Sea Peoples on land and sea, as described at Medinet Habu. Sea Peoples cited were Philistines, Tjekker, Shekelesh, Denyen, Weshesh; papyrus sources say Sherden too. Other inscriptions say Tersha too.
1176 B.C.	*(date from Egyptian record)* Ramesses III fought the Nine Bows again, including Peleset, Tjekker, Shekelesh, Denyen, and Weshesh.
1100 - 800	Greek Dark Age that followed the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age. Writing lost. Commerce devastated. Fine art ceased. Greece was depopulated by up to 50%, many Greeks migrating to the west coast of Anatolia and the offshore islands—including Homer's forebears.
1100 - 1000	Dorian Greeks migrated from the north into the Peloponnese, replacing the Ionian (Mycenaean) Greeks that migrated across the sea. Some Ionian pockets remained, though, e.g., Athens.
	(Dorian Greeks and Ionian Greeks were different ethnic subpopulations. They spoke different dialects—both of which, interestingly, were used in Homer's works. If you remember your junior high school social studies, Dorian architecture had "Doric" columns, Ionian architecture had "Ionic" columns, and Corinthian architecture had "Corinthian" columns. The Spartans of the Archaic and Classical Periods were Dorians; Athenians were Ionians. This ethnic divide was one of the causes of the Peloponnesian War.)
800 B.C.	Earliest extant example of writing in the new Greek alphabet, which was based on the Phoenician alphabet. (The ancient Greeks referred to their alphabet as "Phoenician letters.")
	However, the scholar Joseph Naveh argues that for technical reasons too boring even for me (e.g., the style of Greek letters compared to their Phoenician originals), adoption of the alphabet was much earlier, as early as 1100 B.C. To my knowledge there has not been much support for his ideas.
	This timeframe is generally considered the end of the Greek Dark Age and the beginning of the Greek Archaic Age. Greece began to flourish again, culturally and economically. Oligarchies were established in most of Greece, replacing monarchies.

800 - 650	In the opinion of modern scholars, these are the earliest and latest dates for the adult lifetime of Homer. That means the Trojan War was 400 - 550 years before his lifetime.
800 - 600	Greek Archaic Age.
500 - 338	Greek Classical Age. The Persian Wars and Peloponnesian War took place. Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Socrates, Plato, Hippocrates, Herodotus, Thucydides (and on and on) revolutionized culture. The Classical Age ended with the subjugation of Greek states by Macedonian King Philip, father of Alexander the Great.

One Cause of the Collapse: Attacks by the “Sea Peoples”

The earliest explanation for the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age and still a very popular one is attacks by the “Sea Peoples”. Technically, the term applies only to attacks on Egypt. A stele from Pharaoh Merneptah’s time refers to attacks by (what is translated as) “the foreign countries of the sea” or “peoples of the sea.” But in practice, the term has been widened to mean any raiding peoples during the period.

(I dislike the term “Sea Peoples” for the following reasons:

- The names of the “Sea Peoples” come to us from the Egyptians. The Egyptians probably had only the vaguest idea—if any at all—about where those peoples hailed from and what they called themselves.
- Many of the “Sea Peoples” who attacked/invaded the Egyptians came by land, e.g., at the Battle of Djahi (see page 12).
- The French coined the term “Sea Peoples” in the late 19th century, as well as popularizing depredations by them as the chief cause of the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age. Lumping disparate peoples under the label “Sea Peoples” implies some relationship between them in time, space, and ethnicity, and this is usually not the case. Unfortunately, the term took hold, and anyone who reads or researches the Late Bronze Age will bump into it time and again.)

Not surprisingly, arguing about who the various peoples were is a cottage industry among Classics scholars. Some of the more accepted possibilities:

• Akwash	Achaeans (Greeks).
• Denyen	Danaans (Greeks). Other candidates of note: Dorians (Greeks), Daunians (people of southeast Italy).
• Lukkans	Lycians (people of southwest Anatolia).
• Peleset	Philistines. Other candidates of note: Pelasgians (a pre-Greek and/or Anatolian people).

Shekelesh	Sicilians. Other candidates of note: People of Sagalassos (southwest Anatolia).
Sherden	Sardinians. Other candidates of note: People of Sardis (west-central Anatolia).
Teresh	Tyrrhenians.
Tjekker	Teucrians (Trojans).
Weshesh	(No consensus.)

Myself, I'm suspicious that these proposals seem to be based largely on similarities in the initial sound (phoneme) of:

- 12th century B.C. Egyptian names (rendered in hieroglyphs, mind you), and
- 19th century European names.

That to me is not a good rationale for assigning identity.

Other Proposed Causes for the Collapse

Raiding by mysterious "Sea Peoples" is the "sexiest" proposed cause for the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, and it has a storied history in the field. Other proposed causes include the following:

- Crop failure and famine

  This was almost certainly the case in Hatti, the land of the Hittites. In the 13th century B.C., Hittite Queen Puduhepa wrote Ramses II: "I have no grain in my land." Ramesses' son Pharaoh Merneptah wrote that he "caused grain to be taken in ships, to keep alive the land of Hatti." However, evidence for famine in other regions is lacking.

- Earthquake

  Greece, Crete, and Anatolia are very prone to earthquakes, and there is clear evidence that they occurred. However, there is also clear evidence that affected cities were rebuilt after the earthquakes. Moreover, earthquakes cannot account for the destructions in Egypt and Syria/Canaan.

- Cheap iron weapons

  The theory is that as societies learned to work iron, weapons became cheap and thus widespread, enabling massed armies of untrained peasants to overthrow the elite chariot armies of the time. But to my knowledge, during the period in question, ironworking had not yet arisen—at least outside Anatolia and Cyprus. In Greece, at any rate, weapons discovered via archaeology remain bronze in this period.

- Collapse of the international trade in tin

  As its name implies, the Bronze Age ran on bronze, which is an alloy of nine parts copper, one part tin. So no tin, no bronze.

Much or most tin came from far-off Afghanistan. Evidence shows that the trade network that supplied tin was interrupted in the Late Bronze Age. As a result, Pylian tablets, for one, indicate that production of bronze was drastically curtailed.

- Interruption of trading networks due to piratical attacks by Sea Peoples

  This theory says that piracy and sea raiding made it too dangerous and expensive to conduct international trade. As a result, tin became scarce and the international economy collapsed.

  But, to quote from *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin*:

  > "The King of Mycenae absently drummed his fingertips against his chin. Finally he spoke. 'Does the son of Deukalion also think that destroying the raiders will bring back the tin?'
  >
  > Aithon rose. 'Do I think destroying the raiders will bring back the tin?'
  >
  > 'That is what I asked, yes. You are a trader. Your thoughts are of value.'
  >
  > Aithon was clearly caught off guard. After breathing deeply, he replied, 'My Lord, I do not know.'
  >
  > 'I don't ask what you know; I ask what you *think*.'
  >
  > Nodding to himself, Aithon considered. 'My Lord, it's possible that there is less tin because there are more raiders. But it's also possible that there are more raiders because there is less tin: desperate men taking to the sea to steal wealth, because there's no other way to acquire it.' "

- "Systems collapse" brought on by economic over-specialization and bureaucratic inflexibility

  In the last quarter of the 20th century, this became the most popular explanation—although as far as I know, it can't be applied to cultures other than Greece. It's essentially a Marxist interpretation and goes like this:

  - The Pylian tablets prove that the Greek economy at the time was a highly regulated, bureaucratic system. Everything was kept track of: levels of bronze production; size of sheep, pig, and cattle herds; amount of grain produced; and so forth.
  - In Greece, the cash cows of the day were wine and olive oil. In order to make money, the Greek aristocratic landowners devoted farmland to grapes and olives instead of to grain. This led to overproduction of the cash cows and an inability for Greece to feed itself.
  - As conditions went bad—e.g., raiding interrupted international trade, tin became scarce, and peasants grew hungry—the inflexible, overly bureaucratic system collapsed like a house of cards.

- Mass migration of less civilized peoples

  Migrations of Phrygians, Thracians, Macedonians, Aramaeans, and Dorians have been posited. However, this theory has largely been discounted: For example, scholars now agree that the Dorian migration, for one, occurred around 100 years after the Collapse. Dorians didn't *cause* the collapse, they *took advantage* of it.

- In Hatti, imperial overreach

  Like a baited bear, Hatti was beset by enemies on all sides: To the north, their traditional enemy, the Kaskans. To the east, the rising superpower of the day, the Assyrians. To the west, the Seha River Landers. To the southwest, the Lukkans. And to the south, the Kizzuwadnans and Tarhuntassans.

  The Hittites had too many enemies attacking and/or rebelling all at the same time. They should have let their vassal states go and retrenched their empire. But they didn't.

- In Greece, one of the main factors was war between Greek cities—a Greek tradition since time immemorial.

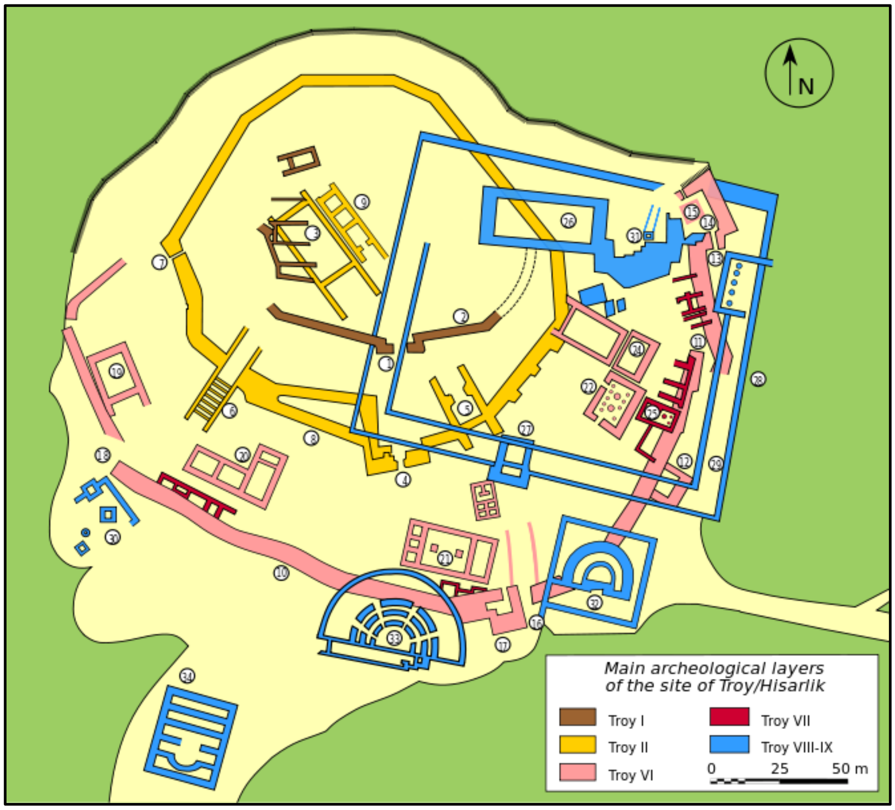
Which Troy Was Homer's Troy? The Excavations.

There wasn't just one Troy, there were ten of them (give or take). Troy's location was continuously occupied for 4000 years, one of the longest durations in human history. As each instantiation of "Troy" was founded, flourished, and then destroyed (by fire, earthquake, war, rebellion, or any combination thereof), another was built on the ruins of the previous one. So the site of Troy consists of a series of layers going ever deeper into the city's "tell" (rubble mound)—and thus ever deeper back into history. Layers are identified by Roman numerals; sublayers are identified by lowercase letters such as "a."

Traditionally, nine major layers were identified. But layer VII was differentiated into VIIa and VIIb; and in 2019, a new, lowest layer was discovered, identified as Troy 0. (Do not take the dates below as gospel—all of them are disputed.)

Layer	Start	End	Description
Troy 0	3600 - 3500 B.C.	3000 B.C.	A minor village.
Troy I	3000 B.C.	2550 B.C.	Still a village, but with stone walls.
Troy II	2500 B.C.	2300 B.C.	The second-grandest Troy. Heinrich Schliemann, one of the first archaeologists and (starting in 1873) Troy's initial excavator, assumed that Homeric Troy was exceedingly ancient and had to be at the bottom of the excavation layers. Like a bull in a China shop, he dug a deep trench down to Troy II and proclaimed it Homer's Troy. But in so doing, he destroyed much of the very layer he was searching for: Troy VI.
Troy III	2300 B.C.	2200 B.C.	Little is known about it, but it appears to have been shabby.
Troy IV	2200 B.C.	2000 B.C.	Ditto.
Troy V	2000 B.C.	1750 B.C.	Ditto.

Troy VI	1750 B.C.	1250 B.C.	The grandest Troy, the only one corresponding to Homer’s description of a large, rich, beautiful city. After Schliemann’s death in 1890, Schliemann’s right-hand man Wilhelm Dörpfeld excavated Troy in a much more systematic manner than his predecessor and more or less proved that Troy VI corresponded in time and place to Homer’s description.
Troy VIIa	1250 B.C.	1180 B.C.	A shabby rebuilding upon the ruins of Troy VI. The American Carl Blegen excavated Troy in 1932 - 1938 and showed that whereas the citadel of Troy VI had wide streets and grand buildings, VIIa largely comprised small shanties. It was almost certainly destroyed by warfare. These days, some scholars conflate VI and VIIa into a single city.
Troy VIIb	1180 B.C.	950 B.C.	Still shabby.
Troy VIII	950 B.C.	85 B.C.	Classical and Hellenistic Troy. City was rebuilt by Greek immigrants starting around 700 B.C.
Troy IX	85 B.C.	500 A.D.	Roman Troy.



In addition, beginning in 1988, a team led by Manfred Korfmann performed additional excavations. Probably their most important discovery was the lower city associated with the Troy VI and VII citadels, which demonstrated that the cities were much larger and more populous and thus more important than previously thought.

Greek Culture and Society in Homer's Time

The Greek Dark Age

As described in "Relevant History" above, in the Late Bronze Age, Mycenaean Greece collapsed, along with most of the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean; and from approximately 1100 - 800 B.C., Greece entered a Dark Age. With a vacuum in social control, insecurity increased, and villages that formerly communicated with their neighbors became isolated from one another.

Writing was lost. Commerce was devastated. Fine art ceased. Greece was depopulated by up to 50%, many Greeks migrating to the west coast of Anatolia and the offshore islands—including Homer's forebears.

The Source Problem

Archaeology provides excellent, objective information about architecture, pottery, and art. But other topics by their nature require contemporary written sources: for example, religion, society, politics, and literature. Which is a problem, because in Homer's time, Greece had recently emerged from an illiterate Dark Age. Writing was in the very earliest stages of adoption.

This leaves me with a problem when it comes to sources, because it limits me to the following three kinds:

- Homer

  The problem with using Homer as a source is that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that we have today were built up bit by bit from before the time of the Trojan War, right up to the Classical Age—a period of some eight hundred years or more. (See "*Iliad* and *Odyssey:* The 4 Stages of Composition" below.) So there are challenges in using Homer as the source for information about his own time period.

- Hesiod (see "Literature" below)

  Hesiod was more or less a contemporary of Homer. One of his two works, *Works and Days*, provides information about daily life at the time. But it's primarily about farming—although it does provide sound advice on other topics, such as the following:

  > "Do not urinate standing turned towards the sun; and after sunset and until sunrise, bear in mind, do not urinate either on the road or off the road walking, nor uncovered: the nights belong to the blessed ones. The godly man of sound sense does it squatting, or going to the wall of the courtyard enclosure."

  Diverting, yes, but of limited relevance to this document.

- Modern historical sources

  The problem with modern sources is that for the whole course of Greek history, from prehistory to the Hellenistic Age, written sources available to historians are—depending on which part of Greece you're talking about—either nonexistent or rare. This leaves said historians to rely on the only set of sources that are not rare; and these are: (1) Athenian. (2) Limited to the Classical Age. And (3) Male.

I will try to avoid these limitations. Below, I will endeavor to only employ sources that have a good chance of truly applying to Homer's time, the Early Iron Age.

The Early Iron Age in Greece

Assuming that a credible date for Homer's lifetime was somewhere around 750 B.C., Greece was, according to one method of chronology, in the latter stages of the Early Iron Age.

Compared to 750 B.C., then, the Greek Dark Age was some fifty years in the past. Living conditions in the Early Iron Age were improving. Trade was expanding to regions further afield, sometimes even to overseas nations as far away as Sardinia and the Balkans. Most overseas trade, though, involved Phoenician sailors plying their trade in Greek waters, rather than vice versa.

As a sign of improved times, the population was increasing—so much so that Greeks were once again relieving overpopulation pressures by founding overseas colonies, as they had at the end of the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, when Aeolians and Ionians emigrated to Anatolia. The period from 750 - 580 B.C. has been called the "Colonization Period"—only this time, the main thrust of emigration was to southern Italy and Sicily.

Though still impoverished compared to the rich and prosperous Mycenaean Age, the Early Iron Age had one great advancement: the ability to forge iron, resulting in cheaper household and agricultural implements—not to mention, weapons.

The earliest appearance of ironworking in Europe and the Middle East seems to have taken place in Anatolia. The island of Cyprus was the other hotbed of ironworking, its efforts going back to the 13th century B.C. and even earlier. Cyprus was almost certainly the conduit for spreading ironworking to Greece—probably via itinerant ironworkers who traveled from village to village practicing their craft. Nevertheless, it wasn't until the 9th century B.C. that iron implements became commonplace in the Aegean region.

Bronze continued to be forged. It had certain advantages over iron—for one thing, it didn't rust. But bronze was typically an alloy of nine parts copper and one part tin—and tin was ruinously expensive. As discussed above, the increasing scarcity of tin was one of the main reasons for the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age.

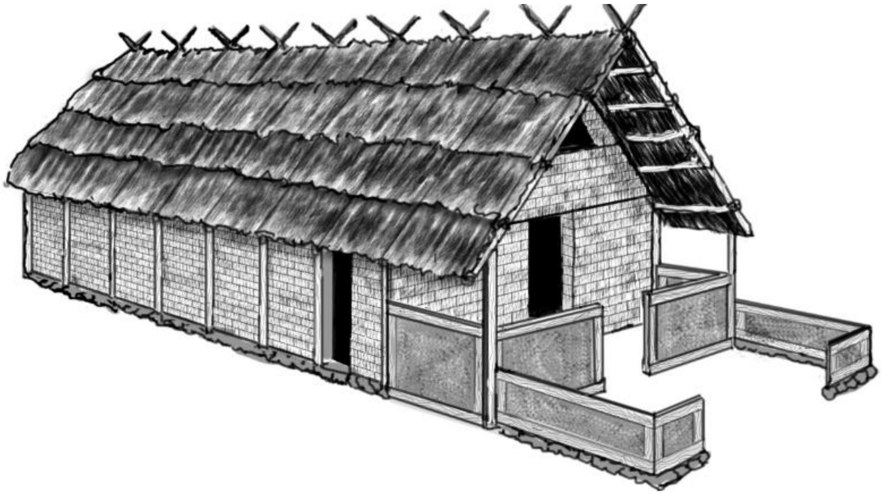
Highlights of Iron Age History

- In the 9th century B.C., aristocratic rule replaced monarchic rule in most of Greece. (Sparta was one exception.)
- "Around 800 BCE there occurred a resurgence in cultural activity of such intensity that it is appropriate to speak of a renaissance." (Robert Garland, *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*)
- "… large estates appear to have emerged in many parts of Greece in the eighth and seventh centuries…." (Carol Thomas and Craig Conant, *Citadel to City-State*)
- In 776 B.C., the first Olympic Games were held. (This happens to be the earliest recorded date in all Greek history that we have a record of today.)
- By 750 - 650 B.C., written materials would have been fairly common, though practiced by a small percentage of the overall population.

Architecture

In general, there was little difference in the construction of Greek temples and large homes versus average size homes—indicating that society was not highly stratified, i.e., there was not a huge gap between the rich and the average person. A temple or home for a well-off individual would have been a single storey high, some 40 feet long and 20 feet wide, with a stone foundation, mud brick walls, and a steeply angled thatched roof. The rear wall was a curved half-circle, a style called *apsidal*.

The front entrance was gained by passing through a small courtyard partitioned into two segments by a waist-high wattle wall. A couple head of stock were normally kept there for the convenience of slaughtering—not for the convenience of breathing.



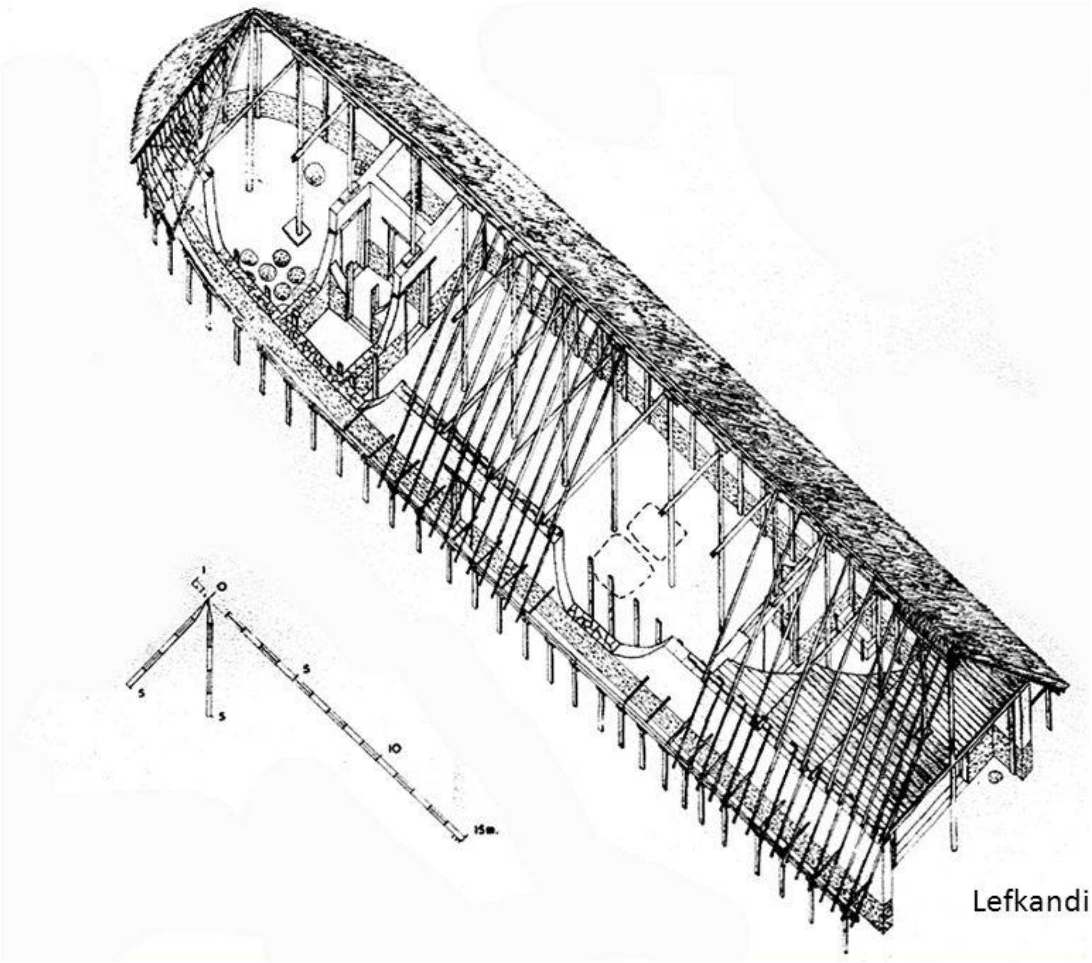
Archaeological reconstruction found in The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age *by Oliver Dickinson (Routledge, 2006), provided to Dickinson courtesy of the University of Minnesota Press.*

There were three rooms, each spanning the full width of the building. Passing through the front door, you entered a wide but shallow room barely two paces deep. Meat from the sacrifice could be hung there to age, and in the worst of weather it could even serve as the setting for the slaughter.

From there you passed into the main room. The walls of temples and houses for the elites would be lined with mud plaster, which sealed off any gaps between the mud bricks. The main room comprised two-thirds of the entire interior and had its own entranceway set in one side of the dwelling. The third and last room, the one delimited by the hemispherical apsidal wall, was normally used for storage. Houses for less prosperous individuals were built on the same principles but comprised only one or two rooms.

Dwelling places for the very poor, though, were one-room hovels, probably constructed with walls of wattle and daub (i.e., a lattice of sticks and/or wooden slats woven together, with gaps between them plugged by mud, clay, or less elegantly, dung).

The largest known building in Greece was the Lefkandi Heroön on the island of Euboea. It was a tomb for heroes from the late Dark Age or Early Iron Age:



Lefkandi

It was constructed in the same manner as the temple/house described above but was 50 meters long. But even this largest of Early Iron Age Greek buildings was dwarfed by Mycenaean palaces and monumental structures such as the Treasury of Atreus (aka, the Tomb of Agamemnon).

It was only later in history when buildings were again constructed of stone (see “Temples” below).

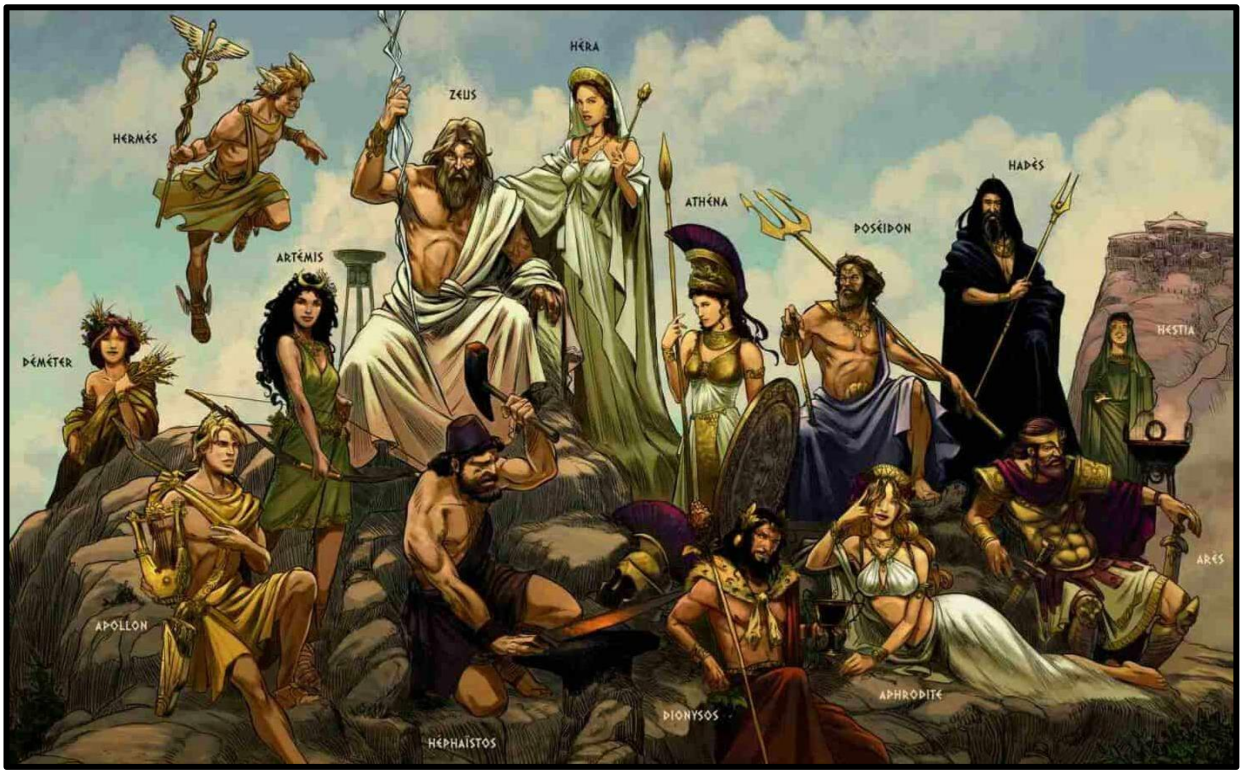
Religion

Religion in ancient Greece was not particularly about living a virtuous life. To the contrary:

> “What mattered to the Greeks was securing the goodwill of their gods, and what mattered to their gods were the respect and gifts that they received from mortals…. The main objective behind religion was to secure advancement in this life.” (Robert Garland, *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*)

Olympian Gods and Goddesses

The ancient Greeks had more gods and goddesses than you could shake a trident at. Foremost among them were the Olympian gods and goddesses, i.e., the ones who dwelt on Mount Olympus. These were the main deities worshipped by Greeks in their day-to-day lives for almost two millennia, as well as celebrated in their literature and art.



Source after source speaks of the “Twelve Canonical Olympians,” as follows.

Zeus	Undisputed king of the gods. A sky god, specializing in lighting and thunder. Fond of the ladies, both divine and mortal.
Hera	Goddess of women and marriage. Wife/consort/sister of Zeus. Hates Zeus' illegitimate children. Don't get on her bad side.
Poseidon	God of the sea, horses, and earthquakes. Zeus' brother. Father of the Cyclops Polyphemos. Hates Odysseus.
Hades	God of the Underworld. Zeus's brother.
Ares	God of war. Son of Zeus and Hera. Supposedly savage, but Athena kicks his butt in the *Iliad.*
Athena	Virgin goddess of wisdom, handicraft, and defensive war (i.e., war that is morally justified). Sprang full-grown from the head of Zeus. Patroness of Odysseus and patron goddess of Athens. Tough.
Aphrodite	Goddess of uncontrollable lust—no moon and June for her. Sprung from sea foam when Kronos cast his father Uranus' severed testicles into the water.
Apollo	God of more things than any of us will remember: archery, music and dance, prophecy, healing, the sun (kind of), poetry, yada yada yada. Son of Zeus and the Titan Leto. Represents culture and rationalism, and so is the most Greek of all the gods.
Artemis	Aggressively virgin goddess of the hunt, wild animals, the moon, and chastity. Twin sister of Apollo. An archer, like her brother.
Hermes	Messenger of the gods. Son of Zeus and the nymph Maia. Patron deity of heralds, travelers, thieves, merchants, and orators.
Hephaestos	Lame smith of the gods. Forges Zeus' thunderbolts. Son of Zeus and Hera. Husband of Aphrodite(!).
Dionysos	God of grapes, wine, religious ecstasy, and the theater. "Bacchus" to the Romans. Son of Zeus and the mortal Semele.
Demeter	Goddess of agriculture, grain, and fertility of the earth. A classic earth goddess. Sister of Zeus.
Hestia	Underachieving Olympian. Virgin goddess of hearth and home. Sister of Zeus.

Imagine my surprise when I counted them up and found that there were fourteen of them, not twelve. While sources agree that there are twelve, they disagree on which deities comprise the twelve. Hestia is by far the deity most frequently left off the list. Hades is the second most frequently left off the list.

Continuity of the Olympian Gods Over Time

There was great continuity from the Late Bronze Age, to Homer and the Iron Age, to the Archaic and Classical Ages, about who the Olympian gods and goddesses were.

The 1200 B.C. Mycenaean Linear B tablets list all of the Canonical Olympians except Hestia, Hades, and Aphrodite. Keeping in mind:

(a) That the tablets were only preserved by chance because they were accidentally baked in the fires of the Collapse, and

(b) That the tablets were economic documents, not religious ones, and

(c) That absence of proof is not proof of absence,

then we can say that 11 of 14 of the gods and goddesses being listed in the Late Bronze Age tablets is not a paltry percentage.

Likewise, in Homer's works of the 8th century B.C., he identifies all but Hestia, who always remained the odd girl out and eventually lost her place in the pantheon.

Generations of Deities

The following information can almost certainly be traced back to Hesiod's *Theogony* (see "Hesiod" below).

If you take a macro view of Greek deities, you could say that there were four principal generations of deities:

- The Primordial Deities, born of Chaos

  These were Gaia (the Earth), Eros (sexual desire), Erebus (darkness), Nyx (night), and Tartarus (the abyss, situated even below the Underworld). The primordial deities were not significant factors in Greek religious practice; rather, they explained "what came before the current universe."

- Deities brought forth by Gaia

  Gaia was mother (with no father involved) of Uranus (the sky), Pontus (the sea), and a couple others. Together, she and her son Uranus in turn engendered the Titans, Cyclopes, Muses, Hecatoncheires, and others. She and her son Pontus engendered the primordial sea gods. According to which tradition you believe, she also mated with Poseidon, Oceanus, Tartarus, and others.

  Like the Primordial Deities, these deities were also not a significant focus of Greek religious practice.

- The Titans

  These were the twelve children of Uranus and Gaia. Most famous of them:

  - Kronos and Rhea, who gave birth to the Olympians
  - Themis, goddess of justice (her image appears in most courtrooms, blindfolded and holding the scales of justice)
  - Mnemosyne, goddess of memory and mother of the nine Muses (from her comes the word “mnemonic”)

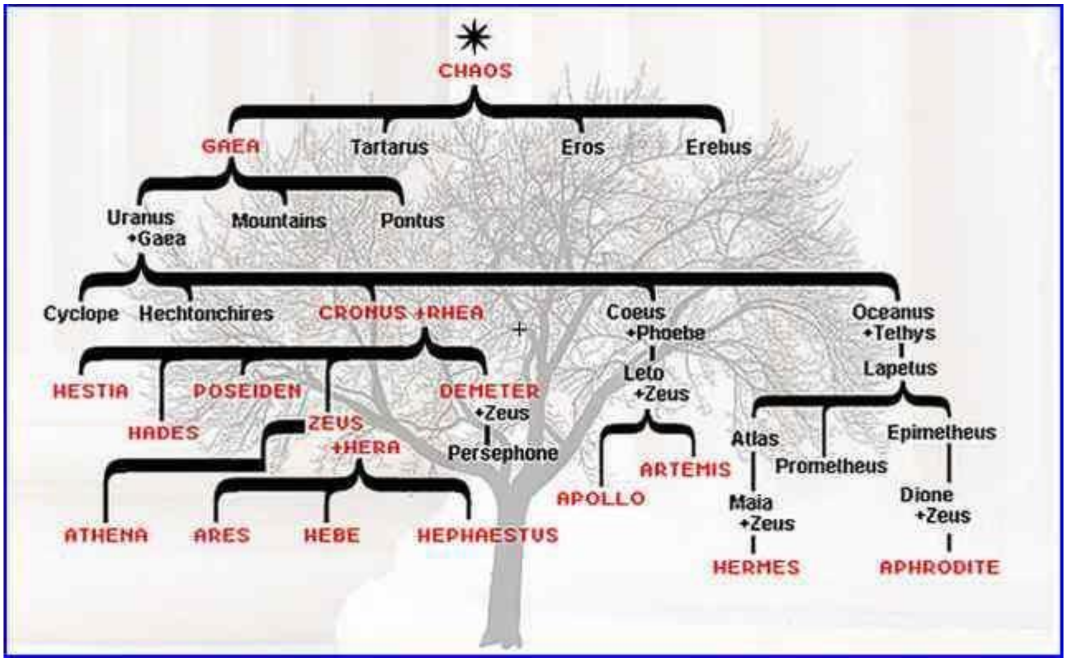
The Titans and their parents were the original dysfunctional family. Uranus imprisoned Gaia’s youngest children in Tartarus. So she shaped a great flint-bladed sickle and asked her sons to castrate him. Only Kronos was willing. He ambushed his father and castrated him, casting the severed testicles into the sea. From the blood that spilled onto the earth came forth the Giants, the Furies, and others. From the genitals in the sea came forth Aphrodite. Having overthrown his father Uranus, Kronos and his sister/consort Rhea ruled the universe.

Later Greeks did acknowledge the Titans, especially Kronos—but mostly in relation to the Olympians that they engendered.

- The Olympians

What goes around, comes around: the Olympians overthrew the Titans, just as the Titans overthrew Uranus. Fearing that they would overthrow him, the Titan Kronos devoured his children. Rhea tricked Kronos by pretending a stone was her newly born son Zeus, which Kronos duly swallowed. When grown, Zeus forced Kronos to disgorge his siblings. The regurgitated Olympians banded together, defeated the Titans in a 10-year war called the Titanomachy, and locked them away in Tartarus.

The following figure is an abbreviated representation of the ancient Greek pantheon. (Per usual with Greek translations, spellings are prone to variation.)


CHAOS
GAEA
Tartarus
Eros
Erebus
Uranus +Gaea
Mountains
Pontus
Cyclope
Hechtonchires
CRONUS +RHEA
Coeus +Phoebe
Oceanus +Tethys
Leto +Zeus
Lapetus
HESTIA
POSEIDEN
DEMETER +Zeus
HADES
ZEUS +HERA
Persephone
Atlas
Epimetheus
Prometheus
ARTEMIS
APOLLO
Maia +Zeus
Dione +Zeus
ATHENA
ARES
HEBE
HEPHAESTUS
HERMES
APHRODITE

Non-Olympian Deities in the Mycenaean Tablets

The clay tablets from Pylos and Knossos (on Crete) cite a couple dozen other deities in addition to the Olympians, for example:

- Hyperion, god of the sun
- The *Erinyes* (Furies)
- Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth
- Posidaeia, apparently a female counterpart to Poseidon
- Wanax, literally “the King” (it could be another name for Zeus, though)
- Diwia, possibly a female counterpart to Zeus
- Mater Theia, possibly translated as “Mother of the Gods”
- And many more that are unidentifiable, such as Preswa, Pipituna, Manasa, Pade, Drimios ….

Of these, Hyperion, the *Erinyes,* and Eileithyia remained part of the Greek pantheon over time, whereas the others passed from memory.

Of special significance is another goddess cited, Potnia. “Potnia” is used both:

- Unmodified, as the name of a goddess, translated as “Our Lady” or “Our Mistress.”
- As a modification (epithet) for other goddesses, e.g., “Potnia Theron” (“Mistress of the Animals”, who over time was conflated with Artemis) or “Potnia Athana” (“Our Lady Athena”). There are almost a dozen such epithets for Potnia in the tablets.

Throughout the Eastern Mediterranean in prehistoric (i.e., pre-writing) times, religion appears to have been primarily matriarchal. For example, dozens of artifacts from the pre-Greek Cretan (Minoan) civilization depict goddesses and priestesses; but there are no clear-cut depictions of male gods or priests. Some scholars believe Potnia, whose name has Indo-European roots, was the original Mother Goddess of the region.

Non-Olympian Deities in Homer

Homer cites the following non-Olympian gods and goddesses:

- Hyperion/Helios
- The *Erinyes*
- Eileithyia
- Kalypso and Circe
- The Old Man of the Sea
- Ino/Leucothea
- Thetis
- And many others

Chthonic Deities

To quote the source of all wisdom (*Wikipedia*):

> "The word chthonic is derived from the Ancient Greek word χθών, "khthon", meaning earth or soil. It translates more directly from χθόνιος or "in, under, or beneath the earth"…. In Greek, chthonic is a descriptive word for things relating to the underworld and can be used in the context of chthonic gods, chthonic rituals, chthonic cults, and more…. Olympic gods are understood to reference that which exists above the earth, particularly in the sky….
>
> "Chthonic and ouranic, or olympic, are not completely opposite descriptors. They do not cleanly differentiate types of gods and worship into distinct categories …. These terms communicate associations with the underworld and/or agriculture. This makes some deities such as Hades, Persephone, and *Erinyes* more likely to be considered chthonic due to their proximity to the underworld."

In other words, "chthonic" doesn't identify a race, lineage, or generation of gods—it merely identifies where they hang out, frequently or infrequently. That said, most people familiar with the term would *not* identify Persephone as a chthonic goddess and *would* identify the *Erinyes* as ones. Other deities considered chthonics include:

- Cerberus
- Eurynomos
- Typhon and Echidna
- According to some, the *Moirai* (Fates)
- Gorgons (at least in Homer)

What Determines Whether You're a God/Goddess?

Simple: If you're immortal, you're a god/goddess, be ye ne'er so humble a one. So Nereids, Oceanids, Nymphs, the Muses, the Fates, the Hecatoncheires, and on and on and on—they're all minor gods/goddesses.

Being engendered by a god—even an Olympian—is no guarantee that you're a god/goddess too, though. For example, Theseus was the son of Poseidon and a mortal woman but remained mortal. On the other hand, Dionysus was the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele, and he *was* immortal.

To paraphrase the Bard (no, not Homer, the other one), you can become a god/goddess in the following ways:

- Some are born immortal, such as Zeus.
- Some achieve immortality because of their earthly accomplishments, such as Herakles (Hercules) and Asclepios.

- And some, like poor Ganymede, have immortality thrust upon them. (Enraptured with his beauty, Zeus in the form of an eagle carried Ganymede off to Olympus to serve as his cup-bearer—and there, according to some myths, raped him. Ganymede was the only one of Zeus's mortal lovers/victims to whom he granted immortality.)

Temples

In Homer's age, unlike in Mycenaean times, Greeks built temples to their gods. By the 8th century B.C., temples evolved to become quite large by the standards of the day:

> "During the 8th century evidence appears at several leading sites for the erection of temple structures that were clearly intended to impress, either by their size or their material and features…." (Oliver Dickinson, *The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age*)

The first Greek building largely constructed of stone (but probably with wooden pillars) is thought to be the 8th century version of the temple of Artemis at Ephesus—which centuries and several versions later would become one of the Seven Wonders of the World. There were still only a few stone temples by 700 B.C., though.

It should be kept in mind that much religious practice took place outside of the temple: in the open air at the sacrificial altar, and in the home, presided over by the male head of the household.

Priests and Priestesses

Both priests and priestesses served the gods in the Mycenaean Age, Homer's Early Iron Age, and the Archaic and Classical Ages. In Athens in the Classical Age, priests and priestesses served part-time and received a modest remuneration, but it's unknown whether this was the case in earlier ages.

The Afterlife

Greeks were of many minds on the subject. To Homer, the dead were mindless shades, able to communicate with mortals that visited the Underworld only by first drinking sacrificial blood. Later beliefs held that the dead dwelt in the Fields of Asphodel, feeding on the flowers but still almost bereft of consciousness. Some believed that the most exceptional heroes such as Achilleus (the correct rendering of "Achilles") lived a life of ease on a faraway island. Others believed that the worst of the worst, such as Tantalus and Sisyphus, suffered eternal torment in Tartarus.

Politics

Rule

Greek society in the Mycenaean Age was centralized and bureaucratic. Hereditary kings ruled the land. They and their administrators regulated most aspects of the economy, and they used Linear B writing to specify their dictates and track how well they were being carried out. All clay tablets that we possess today do just that. They're lists of sheep to shear; lists of grain sacks to trade; lists of cows to tax.

The Collapse of the Late Bronze Age did away with all that. Most monarchies disappeared, and rule devolved to local village leaders. Urban centers were destroyed or abandoned, and in the subsequent Dark Age, people emigrated to the eastern Aegean or huddled together in small villages or defensible "refuge settlements" (such as the Mount Kastri settlement in Crete). With no centralized economy to administer, writing wasn't needed and was eventually lost.

By Homer's time, the Early Iron Age, political rule in Greece became intermediate between its Dark Age predecessor and its Classical Age successor, the *polis*—the city state, such as Athens, Sparta, or Corinth. Throughout Greece in the Early Iron Age, most remaining monarchies were replaced by clan-based aristocracies/oligarchies. (Sparta was an exception.) One of these clan members served as *prytanis* for a year and was then replaced. In Mycenaean times, *prytanis* meant king. Now it meant an oligarchic administrator: Greece was taking it first steps toward democracy.

Political Organization

Several of my sources maintain that the standard political unit of the Mycenean Age was a comparatively large, centrally-administered region comprising a "capital city," smaller cities and/or towns, and surrounding rural areas, for example, farmland.

The Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, these sources maintain, returned Greece to a pre-Mycenaean, local, village-based social and political organization. In the Dark Age, villages were isolated one from another. Of necessity, they had to be self-sufficient—though always dependent on outside sources for metals. "The 11th century, then, is a time of collapse back to the usual form of community in ancient Greece, the village." (Carol Thomas and Craig Conant, *Citadel to City-State*)

Paradoxically, these sources maintain, the city-states of the later Archaic and Classical Ages were in most ways a return, not to the large, centrally-administered regions of the Mycenean Age, but to the fragmented, village-based Dark Age:

> "There is very little in the political, social, and psychological order of the *polis* [city-state] which can be traced to Mycenaean times; a great deal was bequeathed by the Dark Age. The elements of singularity, solidarity, and self-sufficiency which ideally characterized the *polis* developed out of the forced isolation, poverty, and insecurity of the centuries following the Mycenaean collapse." (Carol Thomas and Craig Conant, *Citadel to City-State*)

This troubled me. Though this theory of political organization was held by multiple scholars, I wondered what physical or documentary sources it was based on:

- Considering the *polis*/city-state of the Archaic and Classical Ages to be a locally-based structure analogous to the village and in contrast to Mycenaean regionalism seems unfounded to me. While no expert on the Archaic and Classical Ages, the two city-states that I'm most familiar with—Athens and Sparta—were not small political units consisting of a single urban area. To the contrary, Athens was the "capital" of the region of Attica. Sparta was the "capital" not only of the region of Laconia but of the region of Messenia as well. They seem to me to be exact counterparts of "Mycenaean regionalism."

- Why did these sources maintain that Mycenaean Greece comprised relatively large regions in the first place?

And then I read Rodney Castelden's, *The Attack on Troy*.

Castleden agrees with the regionalism theory, referring to the regions as "kingdoms." Contrary to other sources, he identifies the regions/kingdoms, as well as his sources for identifying them as such:

> "Three sources enable us to assemble a picture of the political geography of the Mycenaean heartland: the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad*, other references in the Epic Cycle poems, and archaeological evidence."

Based on his description, I can't help but conclude that of the three, the Catalog of Ships is by far the most important source to him. Of the 29 military contingents that Homer lists in the Catalog of Ships, Castleden cites 25 of them as the kingdoms/regions of Mycenaean Greece. (The ones in the Catalog that he leaves out are Phokis, Lokris, Doulichion & Echinai, and Argissa/Gyrtone.) With each kingdom he even specifies the kingdom's leader—and these are the exact names cited in the Catalog as the leaders of the military contingents.

Two observations:

- If these kingdoms/regions had any validity outside of the *Iliad*, it would make no sense to cite their leaders, since over time their leaders would change (for example, a leader would die).
- To beat the horse to death, the *Iliad* is a *poem*, composed a minimum of 400 - 450 years after the Trojan War. To use it as the source for describing the political organization of the Mycenaean Age is … okay, I'll bite my tongue and say "dubious."

I have a sinking feeling that the other scholars cited in this subsection are using the same dubious source for the entire Mycenaean "regionalism" hypothesis. And as I described, considering Athens/Attica and Sparta/Laconia-Messenia to be similar to a village-based structure is, well, "dubious" as well.

This entire subject seems very ill-founded to me.

Slavery

Throughout ancient Greek history, slavery was considered part of the natural order. At the time of the Trojan War, Pylian tablets document large numbers of "women of Asia" working as industrial slaves manufacturing textiles. ("Asia" was the Greek Bronze Age term for Anatolia.) In *The World of Odysseus,* M.I. Finley underscores enslavement of women, saying:

> "Mostly, to be precise, there were slave *women* [italics mine], for wars and raids were the main source of supply: there was little ground, economic or moral, for sparing and enslaving the defeated men. The heroes as a rule killed (or sometimes ransomed) the males and carried off the females…."

Seven hundred years later in the Classical Age, slavery was entrenched in Athenian law.

In between those two time periods, though, it's difficult to make generalizations about the institution of slavery:

- Finley points out that Homer uses the same word *drester* to mean both "slave" and a free "servant." The "*drester*" Eumaios even has a "*drester*" of his own.
- In Homer, "slaves" are indeed acquired by piracy, kidnapping, or war. But contrary to the remarks above, the *Odyssey* has many male "slaves," not just female.
- The "slave" Eumaios lives independently and at his own discretion may butcher swine for meals. Furthermore, he's clearly devoted to Telemachos and Odysseus.
- When Odysseus recruits the "slaves" Eumaios and Philoitios to help him slay the suiters, he entices them with the following promise:

  > "… I shall get wives for you both, and grant you possessions
  > and houses built next to mine, and think of you in the future
  > always as companions of Telemachos, and his brothers."

  But he says nothing about freeing them. Does this mean that he's not willing to do that, or that they're not slaves but servants?
- In *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*, Robert Garland says, "… slavery was not an absolute condition but one that admitted many different statuses." At one end of the spectrum were slaves who worked the silver or copper mines, toiling away in the worst possible conditions and likely to die very soon. At the other end of the spectrum were slaves "… who lived independently and remitted a part of their income to their masters."

The safest generality you can make about Homeric slavery is that it appears to be significantly more humane than slavery in the American Ante-Bellum South, which was one of the crueler instantiations of slavery.

The Status of Women

Women's status certainly wasn't enviable; but it might not have been as bad as we'd automatically assume. In Classical Athens, women had no political rights. Essentially, they were permanent minors: No matter what their age or wealth or marital status was, they were subject to some male authority, e.g., a father, son, cousin—whatever. I'm not aware of any reason to think that Iron Age women had it any better. Certainly, Telemachos orders his mother about with hardly a thought.

Marriages were arranged—but that's still the custom in much of the world today. In Classical Athens, the normal marrying age for a girl was 14—an age at which in those days a girl was barely pubescent. Contrarily, in *Works and Days,* Hesiod (Homer's rough contemporary) said a bride should be in the fifth year past puberty—which would in those days have made it around 18 years old. Even today, such a marriage would cause little more than a raised eyebrow and a tsk-tsk.

A bride's father provided a dowry—but its purpose was not to get her off the father's hands nor to enrich the groom. It was a surety that guaranteed that the bride had something to live on, should the marriage dissolve. If it did dissolve, the dowry had to be returned to her father, who was then once more responsible for caring for his daughter—and he still had the dowry to employ for the next suitor. In this vein, Telemachos, the son of Odysseus, agonizes over whether he should declare the missing Odysseus dead, assume responsibility for the household, and send Penelope back to her father.

Though women undoubtedly lived very restricted lives, there is reason to think that those restrictions were not as onerous as you'd think. Even in Classical Athens, when well-off women were supposedly expected to remain within the house, pottery scenes nevertheless depict them out and about and in the company of other women. And the restriction was certainly class-based. Wealthy women had female slaves who could buy food, fetch water, communicate with contractors, *et cetera*. Poor women had no such assistance and obviously had to perform such tasks themselves.

So such restrictions may have been more ideals of behavior rather than enforced realities, and relations between the sexes may have been more equal than we think. Classical tragedies, for example, are full of strong, morally unassailable women who defy men, such as Antigone and Iphigenia. And Odysseus, powerful though he may be, finds himself time and again at the mercy of women, for example:

- Kalypso, who keeps him as a boy-toy sex slave for seven years
- Circe, who captures his men and turns them into pigs—and would have done the same to Odysseus if she could have
- Nausi'kaa, who rescues him when he's washed up on the beach, naked and entirely helpless
- Queen Arete, Nausi'kaa's mother, whose knees Odysseus clasps in supplication, and then proceeds to sit in the ashes of her hearth as a sign of humility

Literature

The Theban Cycle

In addition to epic poems about the Trojan War (see "The Epic Cycle" below), there were four additional epic poems that didn't deal with the Trojan War, collectively referred to as the Theban Cycle:

- The *Oedipodea,* about Oedipus
- The *Thebaid*, about the war involving the sons of Oedipus, referred to as The Seven Against Thebes
- The *Epigoni*, a sequel to the *Thebaid*
- The *Alcmeonis*, which tells how Alcmaeon killed his mother Eriphyle to avenge his father's murder

Chronology of these epics compared to Homer's is uncertain, but it's assumed that they mostly post-dated him to some unknown extent. Authorial attribution is also uncertain.

Hesiod

The only other poet contemporary with Homer whose work we have today is Hesiod. He wrote an agricultural how-to poem called *Works and Days*; but more importantly, a description of Greek gods and goddesses and related myths called *Theogony*.

If you read a piece on "Greek mythology," probably half of the non-Homeric parts would trace back to Hesiod. Compared to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* Hesiod's works are miniscule—yet jam-packed with gods, goddesses, and mortals. Hesiod seems the ultimate name-dropper—*Theogony* is a laundry list of deities, with little fleshing out of the myths associated with them. Some of the deities, both famous and obscure, are:

- The Olympians
- The Giants
- The *Erinyes* (Furies)
- Aphrodite's birth
- Typhon and Echidna
- Hecate, the goddess of magic
- Cerberus
- Prometheus
- The Titans
- Nymphs, Nereids, and Oceanids
- Perseus, Medusa, and Pegasus
- The Harpies
- Several of the Hercules myths
- Demeter and Persephone
- Pandora, the first woman
- Jason and Medea
- The Muses
- The Fates (*Moirai*)
- The Hecatoncheires
- Iris, messenger of the gods
- The Old Man of the Sea
- Eileithyia
- Atlas
- Circe
- The primordial deities arisen from Chaos, such as Tartarus, Eros, Gaia, Erebus, and Nyx
- Personifications of human experience, such as Death, Sleep, Dreams, Misery, Deceit, Strife …

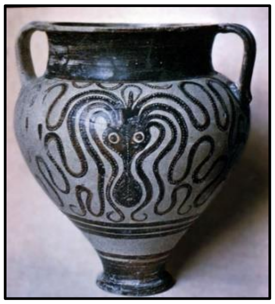
And dozens more. Trust me: dozens.

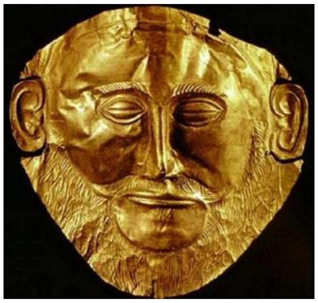
Together, the works of Homer and Hesiod codified Greek religious beliefs for more than a millennium.

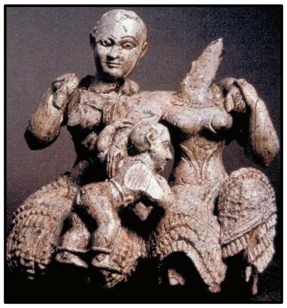
Art

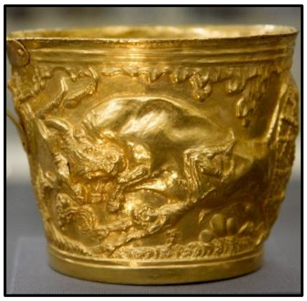
Time	Historical Age	Artistic Styles
1100 B.C. - 1001 B.C.	Dark Age	1125 - 1050 B.C. Sub-Mycenaean
1000 B.C. - 901 B.C.		1050 - 900 B.C. Proto-geometric
900 B.C. - 801 B.C.		900 - 700 B.C. Geometric
800 B.C. - 701 B.C.	Archaic Age	
700 B.C. - 601 B.C.		700 - 610 B.C. Orientalizing

Though not up to Egyptian, Minoan, or Mesopotamian standards, Mycenaean art could at its best be pretty darn good. They especially excelled at goldsmithing and pottery:

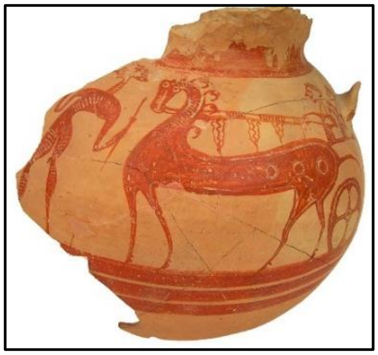


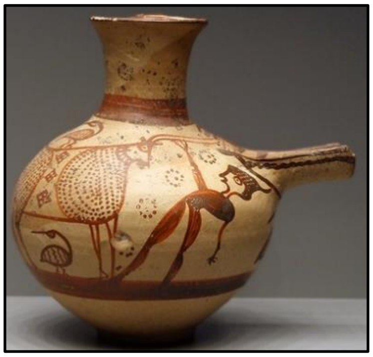


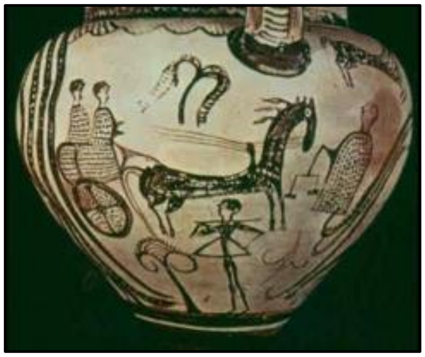




However, in the latter days of the Mycenaean Age, artistic standards declined, as the following examples show. This crude painting style is known as Pictorial Style:

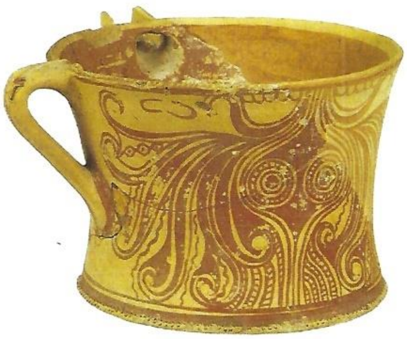
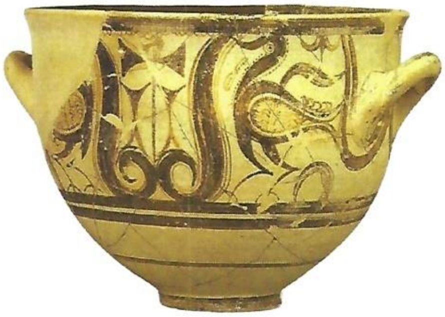
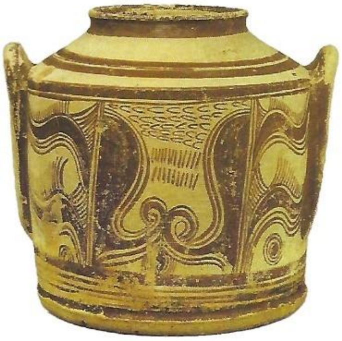




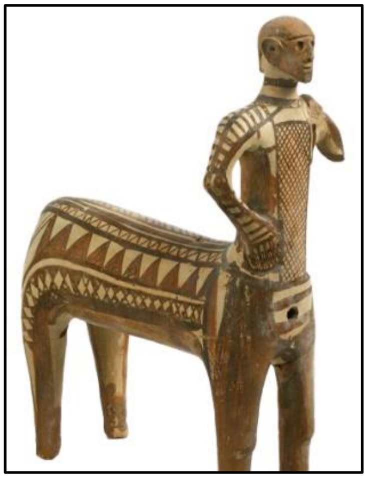


With the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, Greece entered a Dark Age that lasted from roughly 1100 - 800 B.C. Artistic standards continued to degrade, as did just about every other aspect of society. People were too busy trying to survive to invest time and effort in art.

The initial art style of this period is known as "Sub-Mycenaean." Note that there was no longer any attempt to be naturalistic—figures were heavily stylized. For example, in the cup on the left below, did you recognize that the figure was an octopus? Or that in the *krater* in the middle, that the figure on the right was a bird?

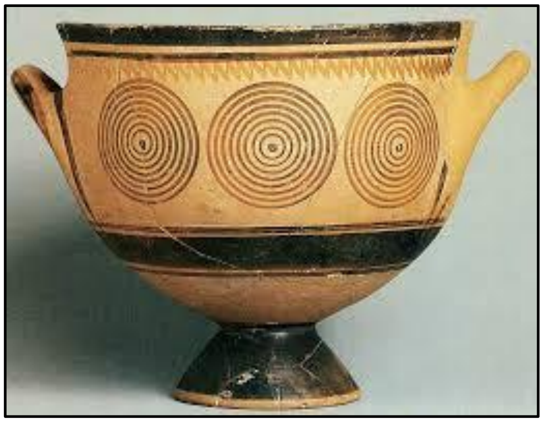
As the Dark Age progressed, artistic quality bottomed out. The style of this period is known as "Protogeometric" or simply "Dark Age". The ceramic sculpture on the left below—the "Lefkandi Centaur"—is considered the masterpiece of Dark Age art. Sad.



By the Early and Middle Iron Ages—Homer's time—artistic standards were recovering. In terms of art history, Homer lived toward the end of the "Geometric Period." In this period, art was primarily expressed in painted pottery, mainly produced in Athens and the surrounding region of Attica.

As the name of this period implies, vases were decorated with intricate, closely packed lines and simple shapes. One innovation was use of the compass (no, not the directional compass, the other kind) to make concentric circles and semi-circles, as on this *bell krater* on the right.

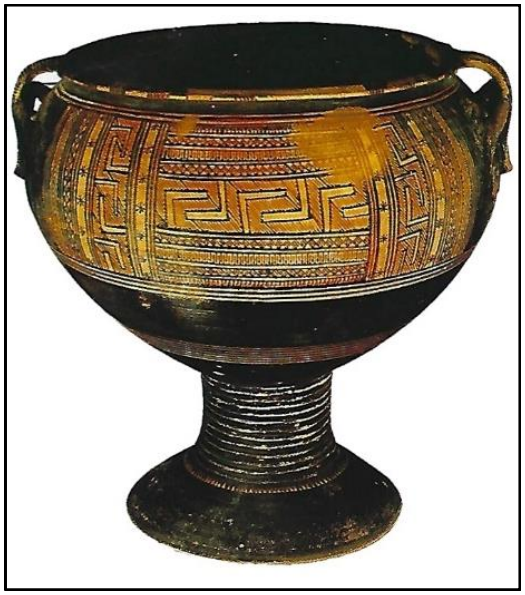
Athenian pottery became the most popular, employing glossy black paint, a 3-stage firing process, and a multiple-brush device attached to a compass to more easily make concentric circles.



The *krater* on the right is from the 9th century B.C. As you can see, designs are rectilinear.

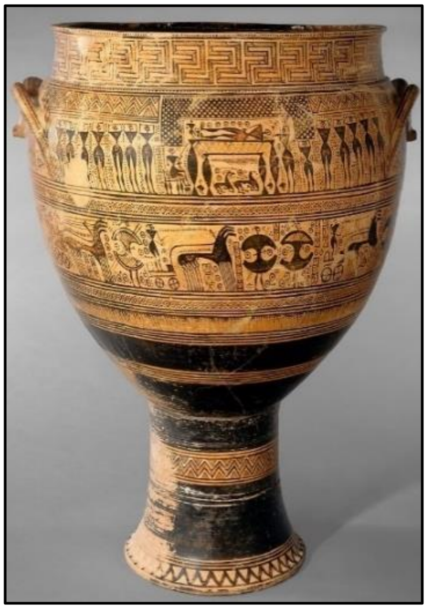
And it was in this age that the ubiquitous "meander" pattern was introduced. This is "… a decorative border constructed from a continuous line, shaped into a repeated motif. Such a design is also called the Greek fret or Greek key design…." (*Wikipedia*)

The meander pattern is the one dead in the middle of the *krater.*

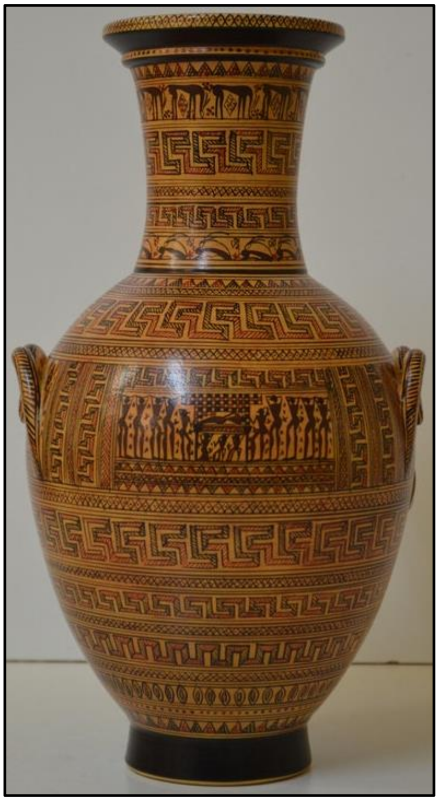


"In the eighth century the essentially abstract style of decoration began to be enlivened with stylized plant motifs, posed animals …, and scenes of human action." (Oliver Dickinson, *The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age*)

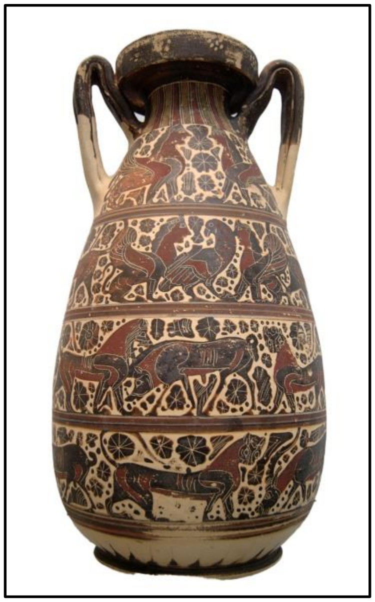
But those plant, human, and animal figures retained simple, stylized geometric shapes, as shown in this *krater* from 750 - 735 B.C.



The masterpiece of the Geometric Period was the monumental “*Amphora* of Dipylon,” more than one and a half meters high, from 760 - 750 B.C.



In the 8th century B.C., Greece began emerging from the Dark Age. The population grew and the economy improved. Trade contacts with the Mideast expanded, resulting in an influx of exotic “Oriental” motifs: griffins, sphinxes, sirens, and lions (which had been extinct in Greece for some time). By the end of Homer’s lifetime, Greek art would be in the Orientalizing Period, with pottery production centered in Corinth:



Ships

Warships

Unless otherwise noted, the remarks in this section apply to both the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age.

The characteristics you want in a warship, and those you don't really care about, are as follows:

- You want speed, speed, and more speed

  At sea you need to run down adversaries that are weaker than you and escape adversaries that are stronger. Therefore, you want:

  - A long, thin shape to minimize hull resistance to the water. Greeks called their warships "long vessels" (νῆες μακραί, nḗes makraí).
  - Lots of rowers. In other words, you want to maximize space for the crew while minimizing space for cargo or unnecessary ship fixtures. For example, an overhead deck serves no purpose and in fact is a fine platform for enemies to use to board your ship.

    Pottery shards displaying warships almost always show additional armed men aboard who aren't rowing. This makes sense: You wouldn't want to have to defend your ship by depleting the number of rowers.

- Stability in rough seas is not a primary goal: If the weather's bad, you simply put off your attack till it's good.

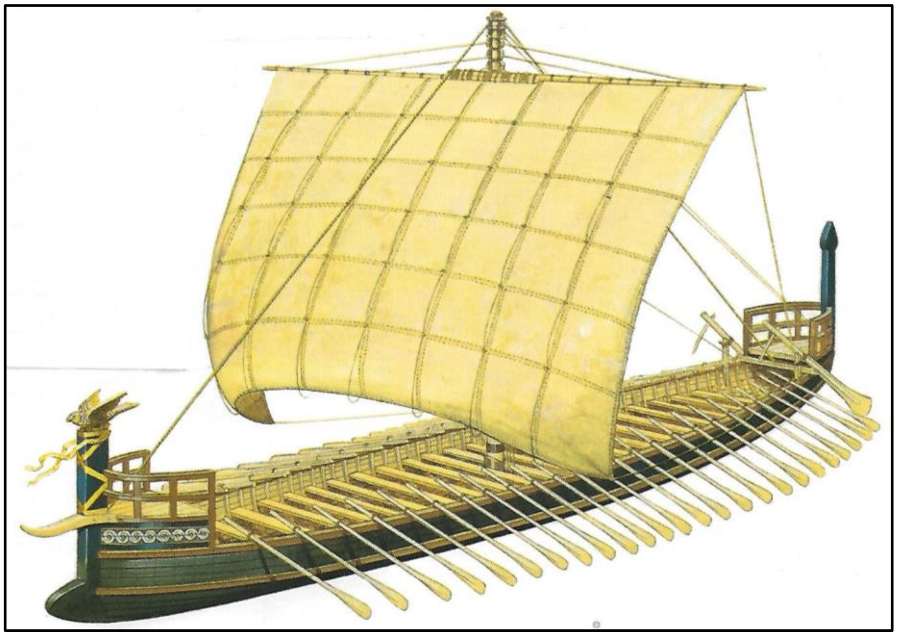
General Description

The typical Mycenaean warship is called a penteconter. According to Shelley Wachsmann in *Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant,* a penteconter is "an ancient Greek warship rowed by fifty men, arranged in twenty-five pairs on a single level." The number of crewman aboard Homer's ships is only specified twice: 50 for the ships of Thaumakia and Methone and 120 for those of Boiotia. Agamemnon provides the most ships: 100 … Nireus of Syme the least: 3.

According to the source of all wisdom (*Wikipedia*):

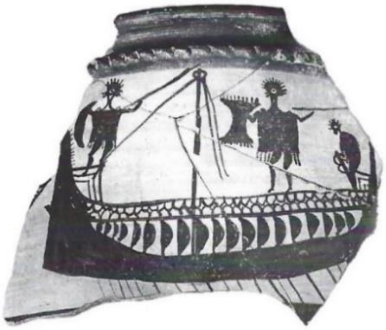
> "According to some contemporary calculations, penteconters are believed to have been between 28 and 33 m (92 and 108 ft) long, approximately 4 m wide, and capable of reaching a top speed of 9 knots (17 km/h; 10 mph)."

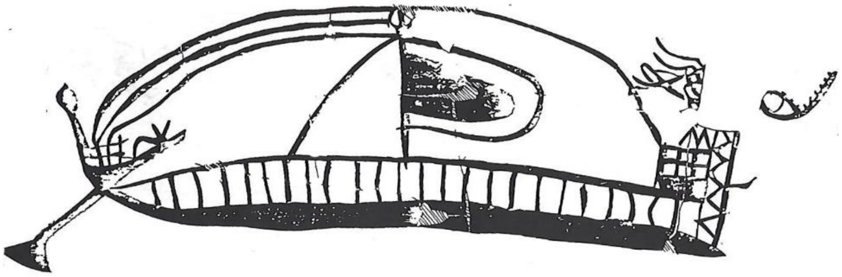
The following illustration by Peter Connolly is his reconstruction of a Homeric/Mycenaean penteconter. It's an open boat, i.e., no upper deck (i.e., "on a single level," as Wachsmann says). It has a raised forecastle in the bow and a raised stern castle in the stern. In the stern are two steering oars, one on each side of the ship, for steering. There is a single mast and square sail.



Though Connolly doesn't show one, other reconstructions have a narrow walkway called a gangway running down the middle of the ship.

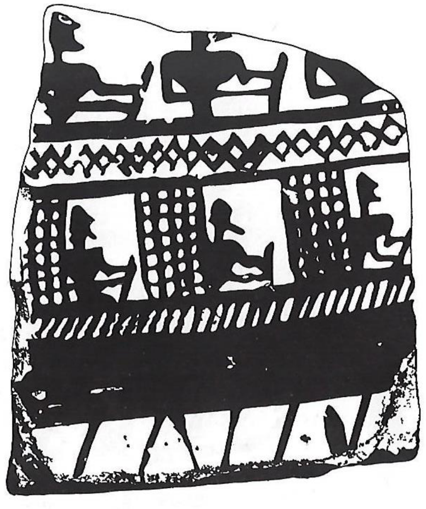
The following two illustrations taken from pottery shards are considered the best—repeat, *best*—representations we have of Mycenaean warships. Both figures are from the Late Helladic IIIC period (i.e., 1210 - 1040 B.C.).





Though Connolly's reconstruction lacks it, almost every depiction of the time includes the odd horizontal ladder-like construction in the figure on the right. (It is thought that the band of two rows of circles in the ship on the left is another representation of this component.) The leading theory is that the ladder-like component represents a screen (perhaps made of leather) for protecting the rowers; or perhaps a wooden lattice-work for the same purpose.

By the end of Homer's lifetime, i.e., the Iron Age, some warships had a second level of rowers. Such a ship is called a *bireme, dieres,* or *dikrotos.* The following pottery shard is from 710 - 700 B.C.



Mortise-and-Tenon vs. “Sewing”

In *Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant,* Shelley Wachsmann says:

> “We remain woefully ill-informed, however, concerning the manner in which these [Mycenaean] ships were constructed. We do not even know whether they employed mortise-and-tenon joinery or whether they were sewn.”

Ship timbers in the ancient Mediterranean were in the main not nailed together—they were connected using one or both of the following methods:

- Mortise-and-tenon (shown in the figure on the left below)

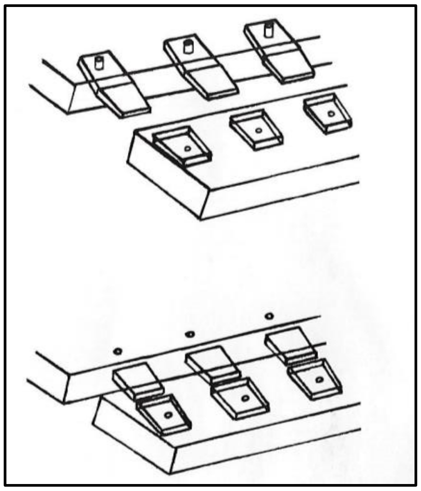
  To quote *Wikipedia*:

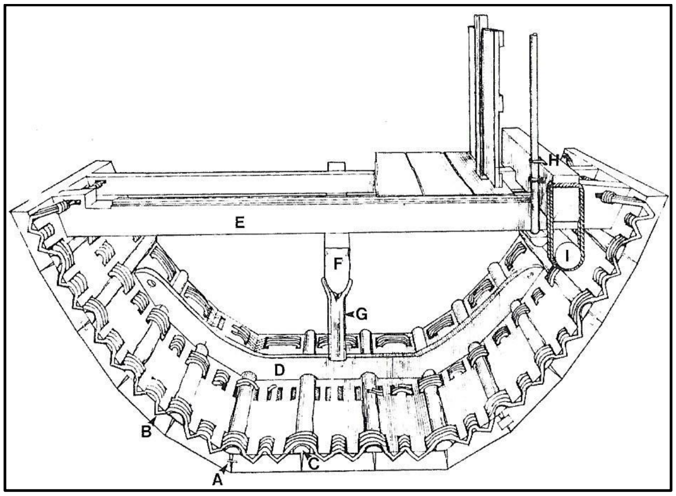
  > “In its most basic form, a mortise and tenon joint is both simple and strong. There are many variations of this type of joint, and the basic mortise and tenon has two components:
  >
  > a) the mortise hole, and
  >
  > b) the tenon tongue.”

  (A peg is sometimes used to lock the mortice to the tenon.)

- “Sewing” (shown on the right)

  Yes, it’s true: The Egyptians, for one, tied their ships together with ropes ! (Such ships usually employed mortise-and-tenon as well, however.)





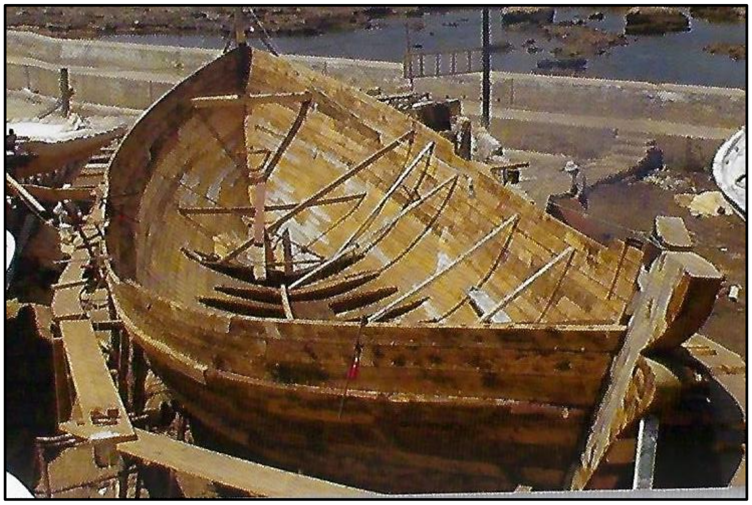
Fortunately for sea travelers, sewing ships together was over time replaced by more dependable modes of construction.

Shell-First vs. Skelton-First Construction

In the ancient Mediterranean, ship hulls were constructed either shell-first or skeleton-first:

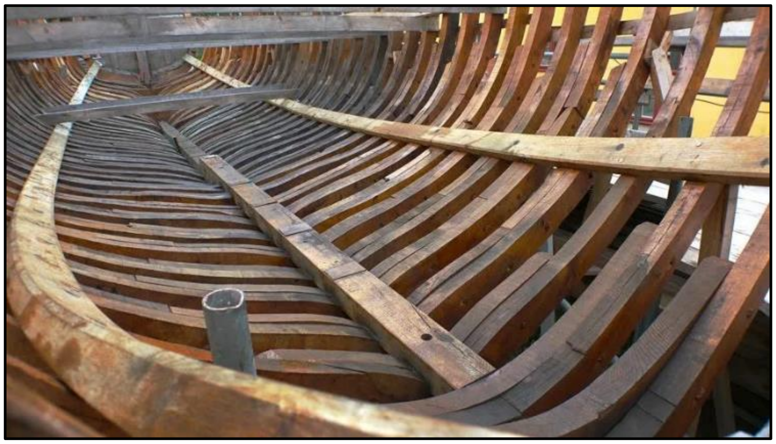
- Shell-first

  In this method, there is only a rudimentary keel and no transverse "frames." Rather, each bow-to-stern plank of the hull is a relatively massive timber individually cut to mate with the planks above it, below it, in front of it, and in back of it. Since the hull curves from fore to aft and top to bottom, each hull plank must be curved top to bottom and fore to aft as well. Therefore, each plank has to be cut out like an individual puzzle piece. This method is very time consuming and is no longer employed, apart from historical reconstructions as in the following photo:



- Skelton-first

  In this method, a structurally-strong keel is laid down, transverse "frames" like the ribs on a fish skeleton are attached to the keel, and finally relatively thin planks running bow to stern are attached to the frames. This method has every advantage over shell-first construction and over time replaced it.



Cutwaters and Rams

In Connolly's illustration above, the small projection in the bow at the waterline is NOT a ram. Ships were far too fragile in the Bronze Age to ram another ship—it would have been suicide. Rather, the projection is a "cutwater." *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin* explains its function:

> "What's a cutwater for?" I asked Uncle Aithon.
>
> He stared back at me. I tried to wait him out, but he remained silent.
>
> "I guess you win. It cuts through the water. For what purpose?"
>
> My uncle had apparently taken a vow of silence. I had to think it through.
>
> "A blunt poker will fail to puncture an oxhide shield," I reasoned. "But hammer that same poker into a sword with a sharp point, and it will. The narrow cutwater parts the sea to clear a passage for the blunt hull."
>
> "Very good," he replied.

It wasn't until the 9th century B.C. at the earliest that ships were redesigned such that the shock upon the ram was redistributed to other parts of the ship, thus enabling the ship to survive the ramming.

Bird Stems

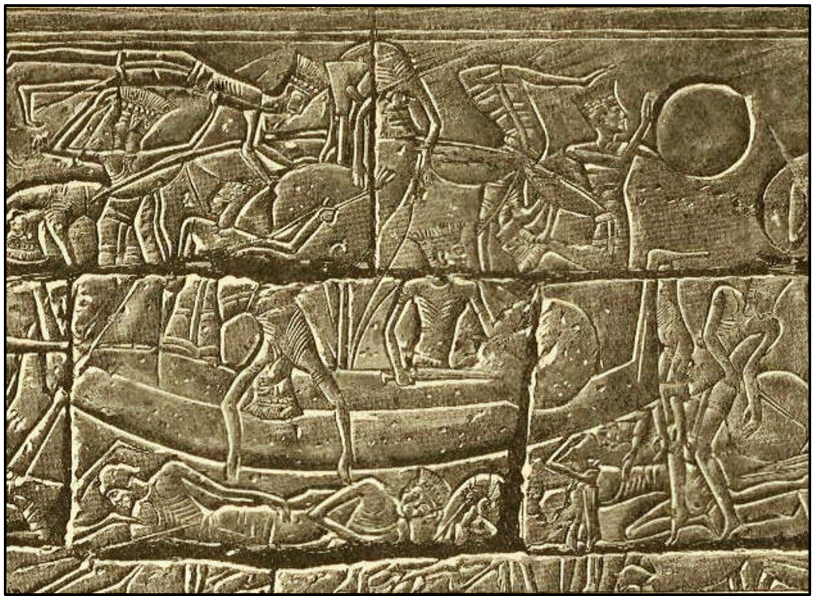
One of ***the*** most consistent features of both Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age warships was bird shapes on the stempost, sternpost, or both. These are analogous to the "figureheads" on ships of the

Age of Sail. I'm not aware of any explanation for them; perhaps the ancients thought of their ships as flying through the waves. Who knows?

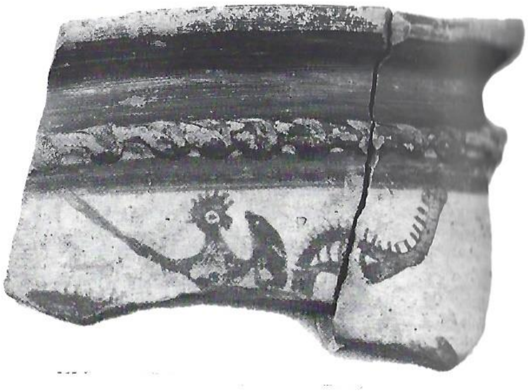
The bird shapes were of two main types:

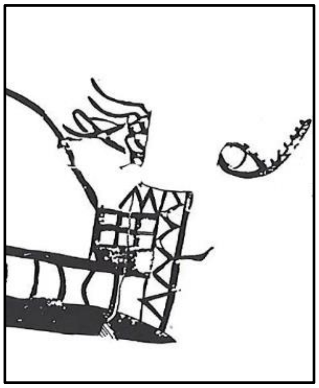
- The head of a waterfowl, either realistic or stylized
- The entire body of a waterfowl or non-waterfowl

The figure below is an Egyptian wall carving depicting the 1177 B.C. sea Battle of Djahi. It shows a Sea Peoples ship with waterbird heads carved on both the stem and stern. By the "feather helmets," these warriors can be identified as Peleset—translated as "Philistines," who were probably originally Greeks from Crete.

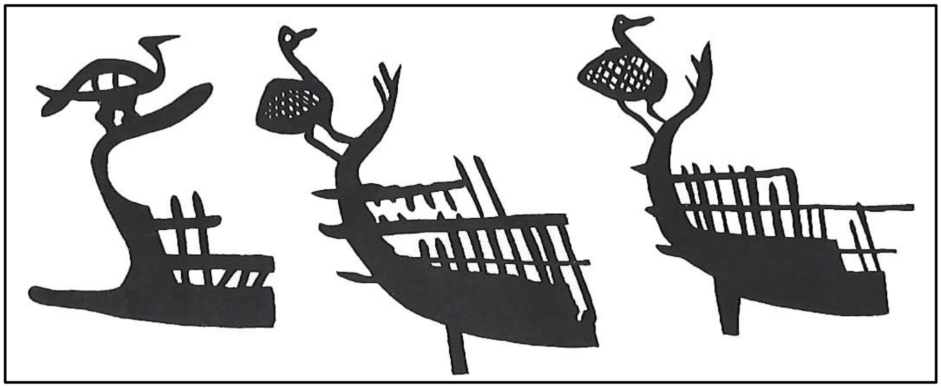


The figures below are from Greek shards of the Late Helladic IIIC period (i.e., 1210 - 1040 B.C.). The waterfowl heads are stylized. The one on the right is a detail from the full-ship image above. It includes the entire body of the bird (though the middle is missing due to damage to the shard).





The three figures below, likewise from 1210 - 1040 B.C, show the entire waterfowl. The one on the left certainly depicts the bow of the ship. I suspect the other two depict the stern.



Cargo Ships

In a cargo ship, you pretty much want features opposite to those of a warship:

- A short, squat shape to maximize stability in rough seas, so you don't endanger your precious cargo—and so you're able to keep to your own trading schedule, rather than the weather's.
- Space that's maximized for your cargo, rather than for the crew. On the down side, that means you end up with a smaller crew, and thus fewer rowers.

Cargo ships aren't as sexy as warships, so things such as pottery shards include few images of them. We need to rely more on archaeology for an understanding of them.

Bronze Age

Marine archaeology has provided an excellent example of a Bronze Age cargo ship: the spectacular Uluburun shipwreck, off the coast of south-central Turkey, dated to the last quarter of the 14th century B.C. Some timbers were still partially intact, allowing insight into construction techniques. According to *Wikipedia*:

> "… the ship was between 15 and 16 metres (49 and 52 ft) long. It was constructed by the shell-first method, with mortise-and-tenon joints similar to those of the Graeco-Roman ships of later centuries…. Even though there has been a detailed examination of Uluburun's hull, there is no evidence of framing. The keel appears to be rudimentary, perhaps more of a keel-plank than a keel in the traditional sense. The ship was built with planks and keel of Lebanese cedar and oak tenons."

The ship had an upper deck, allowing cargo to be stored in the hull. A reconstructed model of the ship is shown here:

Again quoting *Wikipedia:*

> "The origins of the objects aboard the ship range geographically from northern Europe to Africa, as far west as Sicily and Sardinia, and as far east as Mesopotamia. They appear to be the products of nine or ten cultures…. According to a reconstruction by various scholars, the Uluburun shipwreck illustrates a thriving commercial sea network of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean."

The rich cargo included copper, tin, and glass ingots; jewelry of gold, silver, and bronze; weapons; food; and much more.

Iron Age

A handful of Iron Age shipwrecks have been excavated. One of major importance is the Ashkelon deep water shipwrecks off Israel, two Phoenician cargo ships from the 8th century B.C. According to the authors, Robert Ballard and Lawrence Stager:

> "The cargo of *Tanit* [an arbitrary designator for one of the two ships] measures 4.50 m. wide by 11.50 m. long, for which we would estimate an overall width of ca. 6.50 m. and a length ca. 14.00 m. The cargo of *Elissa* [the other ship] is 5.00 m. wide and 12.00 m. long for an estimated size of the ship of ca. 7.00 m. wide and ca. 14.50 m. long….
>
> "The *Tanit* and *Elissa* were wide at the beam, about three times as long as they were wide. They are not as slim as Phoenician ships depicted in relief with horse head prows (and sometimes sterns) and known in Greek sources as *hippoi* ("horses") but more like what the Greeks called *gauloi*, or "tubs." "

The sizes of these two cargo ships are therefore quite similar to the Uluburun cargo ship.

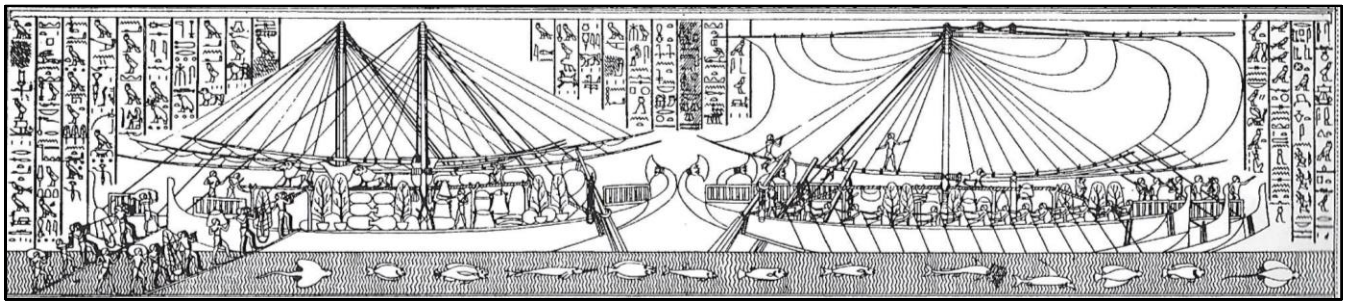
Marine organisms had consumed the wooden ships, so no precise description of their design is possible.

The cargo of the ships was wine stored in amphorae: more than ten tons per ship.

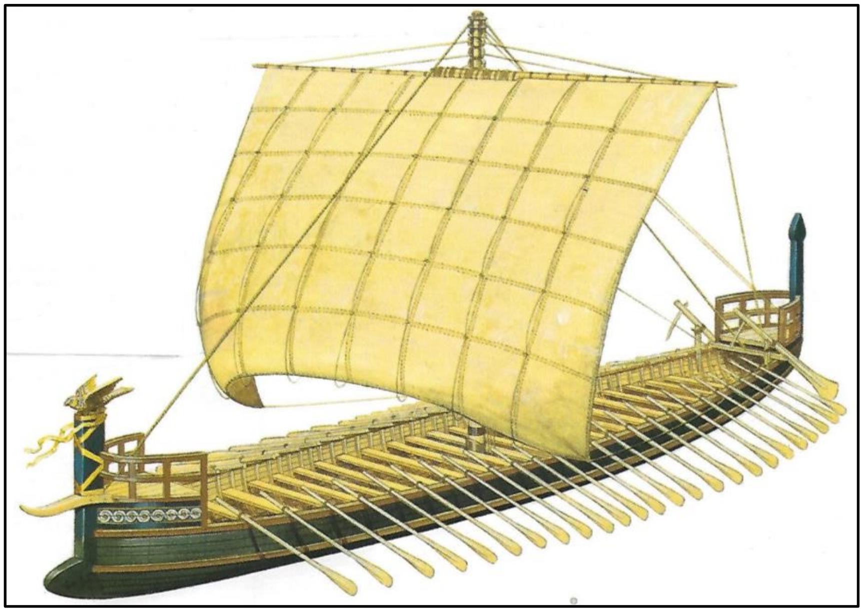
Ships' Rigging

Right at the time of the Trojan War, *circa* 1200 B.C., a revolution in sailing ship design occurred whose importance cannot be overestimated.

Throughout the Mediterranean prior to this time, a ship's sail was attached both to a yard at the top of the mast and a boom at the bottom. To deploy the sail, you had to raise the heavy yard up and then bind it to the top of the mast. This is called "boom-footed rigging" and is shown in the following illustration from Pharaoh Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt of the 15th century B.C. The ship on the right has the sail deployed; the ship on the left does not.



By 1200 B.C., this design was replaced by brail rigging, which eliminated the boom, as shown in the following illustration by Peter Connolly. The yard is always at the top of the mast. To deploy the sail, you merely tug on some ropes, and the sail unfurls downward:



The advantages to the latter design are described in *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin*:

> "Which do you think is easier," asked Uncle Aithon. "Letting linen unravel down, or hauling a yard up?"
>
> I didn't bother to answer. "Why don't we need it—the one on the bottom?"
>
> "*Boom,*" Uncle repeated. "On other ships, the wind pushes on the sail; the sail's fastened to the yard and boom; the yard and boom are lashed to the mast; the mast is fastened to the hull. That's how the wind moves that kind of ship. It's more efficient to remove the yard, boom, and mast from the transfer of wind power, and instead, tie the sail right to the ship. More speed."
>
> I shrugged.
>
> Frowning, Uncle continued. "We're able to make the same speed with less sail. See how the yard is shorter that it was before, and the sail narrower— short and square rather than wide and rectangular? That makes the ship more stable, because you don't have the weight of the long, long yard and boom hanging out to starboard and port. The ship won't rock from side to side as much. It also means we don't need two sizes of sails. If bad weather comes, and you're showing too much sail, the wind can rip the sail to pieces and even shear off the mast. If your ship has a boom, and you've deployed your large sail, but then the wind comes up, you have to climb aloft in a high sea, unlash the yard from the mast, lower the yard and sail, replace the large sail with your small sail, raise the yard back up, climb back aloft, and re-lash the yard to the mast. On this ship, you merely pull on the brail lines and shorten the sail, making it smaller."
>
> "What are brail lines?"
>
> Aithon pointed. "See those bronze rings sewn into the sails?"
>
> "You mean the ones with the ropes through them?"
>
> "No, I mean the ones with the *lines* through them. Those rings are called brails. The brail lines going through them are tied to the bottom of the sail, right?" He pointed at the path the ropes took. "The lines go up, through the brails, over the yard, and back down to the stern, where we can alter the amount of sail we're showing just by pulling on the lines or letting them out."
>
> "Less rigging, too," said my cousin Eurylochos, jumping at the opportunity to avoid productive toil. "Remember the fittings we removed from the mast head yesterday?"
>
> "You mean the two bronze fixtures running up and down, the ones with the flanges and all the fist-sized holes?"
>
> Eurylochos nodded. "All those holes were for all the rigging required. Ships with booms need almost half again as many lines as us."
>
> "Less work to raise and lower the sail," said Uncle. "Less line to make or trade for. Less sail cloth…"
>
> "And linen ain't cheap," said my cousin.
>
> "And less timber. We don't need the boom anymore and can trade it for a small fortune in Egypt, where they're starving for wood. Or keep it as a spare yard."
>
> I looked around at the warship's remodeled rigging. Yes, it was no longer a spider's web of rope. Again I shrugged.

"But the real advantage," said Uncle, lowering his voice, "is that the yard no longer has to be lashed to the mast, because it's not transferring wind power to the mast. Instead, the sail is transferring wind power directly to the hull. That leaves the yard free to pivot, since it's not lashed down. That means we can adjust it much finer to the wind."

"So?"

"So, it means we can sail much nearer to the wind than a ship that has a boom and a yard lashed to the mast."

"What does that mean: *sail nearer to the wind*?"

Uncle rolled his eyes. "You *have* noticed, I hope, that a ship can't sail directly into the wind?" (I refused to dignify the question with an answer.) "But a ship can sail *somewhat* into the wind. Sailing closer to the direction that the wind is coming from is called *sailing nearer to the wind*. Because of our freely pivoting yard, we can adjust the sail much finer to the wind, and as a result our two ships can sail nearer to the wind than any vessel on the Mediterranean. That means we can sail in directions that other ships can't."

Ship Components in Homer and Homeric Epithets for Ships

Components:

- Hawsers
- Fiber cable
- Anchor stones
- Stern deck
- Slipped the cable free from its hole in the stone post
- Stern cables
- Forestays, backstays
- Steersman
- Oarlocks
- … raising the mast pole made of fir, they set it upright in the hollow hole in the box, and made it fast with forestays, and with halyards strongly twisted of leather pulled up the white sails
- Cutwater
- Steering oar
- Leather slings of the oarlocks
- Gunwales

Epithets:

- Black ship (it's thought that the blackness is from the hull being sealed with pitch)
- Ships with cheeks of vermillion (presumably meaning part of the bow is painted bright red)
- Ships whose cheeks are painted purple (ditto)

- Well-benched vessels
- Dark-prowed ship
- Balanced ship
- Hollow ships

Bronze Age Warfare vs. Homeric

“In no single passage of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* can we be certain whether the poet is describing, accurately or otherwise, the arms and practices of that earlier period [the Trojan War] or those of his own day [the Iron Age] ….” (A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms & Armor of the Greeks*)

Warfare in the *Iliad* is laced with absurdities such as the following:

- A warrior’s armor is sometimes made of invaluable gold, silver, or tin.
- The ditch and towering stone wall protecting the Greek ships were built in a single day.
- Fighters take time to strip armor off a fallen enemy in the middle of a battle; and then they fight over his body. (Men fighting for their lives, hand-to-hand in the midst of thousands of enemies armed with sword and spear, have better things to do.)
- Prior to dueling, heroes brag to their opponent about their prowess and/or describe their lineage. For example, Glaukos and Diomedes go on and on for 88 lines (before deciding to skip the whole thing).
- Sometimes without being told, a warrior knows the name of the fighter they’re about to duel.
- Champions easily heft boulders that it would take two men just to lift into a wagon; and then toss them at an adversary.

We know little about Mycenaean warfare, apart from archaeological finds of weapons interred as grave goods. This section compares what little we know to Homer’s portrayal of war in the *Iliad.*

Promachoi, Mass Formations, and Brad Pitt

I only came to the following conclusion on the last day of the last draft. It’s pretty much a 180° turnaround on my part.

Previously, I agreed with most scholars and casual readers that in the *Iliad*, virtually the entire war is portrayed as a duel between aristocratic champions, whom Homer calls “promachoi” ("front fighters”). Most experts agree that this term refers to those aristocratic champions who venture into no-man’s land to duel with champions from the other side; and then if need be, retreat “back into the mass of men.”

Homer says that the war involved tens of thousands on each side; yet the text makes it seem as if the armies comprised just a couple dozen elite warriors.

Joachim Latacz and Hans Van Wees reject this view. They both maintain that a close reading reveals that both sides fight in mass formations. (Van Wees even maintains that it’s the mass formations that win the encounters, not the prowess of individual heroes. That is nonsense. When the Trojans have the upper hand in one of the late clashes, Achilleus makes them turn tail and run just by showing himself and uttering his war cry.)

Specifically, Latacz proposes that the formation is essentially a Classical Age phalanx, with soldiers packed in dense formations. Van Wees says no, it's merely a gigantic "loose formation," where soldiers fight *en masse*, but with space between individuals or clumps of individuals.

They're both missing the point. Rather than picking through the text to find evidence of whether the pinhead angels dance in a phalanx or in an open formation, they should have just watched the movie *Troy*.

In the movie, there is only one major depiction of mass battle that is relatively devoid of a focus on individual champions. The day after the Greeks take the beach, thousands of Greeks charge in a disorganized mass, smashing into the lines of thousands of Trojans like a tsunami smashing into the Fukushima nuclear plant; then there's a confused melee with everyone intermixed together; and lastly a chaotic retreat of the Greeks under a Trojan bombardment of arrows. But even here, the spotlight shines for a moment on the individual dual between Hektor/Eric Bana and Ajax/Joe Cannon-Fodder.

In all the other scenes of mass battle, the focus is not on the armies but the champions:

- There's comparatively minor skirmishing when the Greeks take the beach—but the overwhelming emphasis is on Achilleus/Brad Pitt slaughtering hapless Trojans and then allowing captive Hektor/Eric to go free instead of killing him.
- There's a night attack with rolling fireballs by the Trojans—but the two armies never actually come to grips. Dawn comes almost immediately; then Patroklos pretends to be Achilleus, duels briefly with Hektor/Eric, and is quickly killed. Both armies agree to call it a day.
- And after the ruse of the Trojan Horse has allowed them to enter the city, there's confused night fighting as Greeks slaughter the sleeping Trojans. But even though Troy is burning to the ground, the focus is on Achilleus/Brad saving Briseis and immediately being killed by Paris/Orlando Bloom.

The Iliad *takes the exact same approach !*

As stated above, the overwhelming sense of warfare in the *Iliad* is of individual duels between champions. But Homer does sprinkle the story with descriptions—hints, really—of clashes between massed armies. Here are five examples:

> "It was around his ship that now Achaians and Trojans
> cut each other down at close quarters, nor any longer
> had patience for the volleys exchanged from bows and javelins
> but stood up close against each other, matching their fury,
> and fought their battle with sharp hatchets and axes, with great
> swords and with leaf-headed pikes, and many magnificent

swords were scattered along the ground, black-thonged, heavy-hilted,
sometimes dropping from the hands, some glancing from shoulders
of men as they fought, so the ground ran black with blood.”

“These flung about them with great stones torn from the strong-founded
bastions, as they fought in defense of themselves, and the shelters,
and the fast-running vessels, so that the flung stones dropped to the ground
like snowflakes which the winds’ blast whirling the shadowy clouds
drifts in their abundance along the prospering earth. So
the missiles flung from the hands of Achaians, and Trojans also,
went showering, and the helms and shields massive in the middle
crashed hollow underneath the impact of rocks like millstones.”

“So urging them on, the earth-encircler stirred up the Achaians,
and their battalions formed in strength about the two Aiantes,
battalions the war god could not find fault with, coming among them,
nor Athene lady of storming armies, since there the bravest
formed apart and stood against the Trojans and brilliant Hektor
locking spear by spear, shield against shield at the base, so buckler
leaned on buckler, helmet on helmet, man against man,
and the horse-hair crests along the horns of their shining helmets
touched as they bent their heads, so dense were they formed on each other,
and the spears shaken from their daring hands made a jagged battle line.”

“But even so he [Hektor] could not break them, for all his fury,
for they closed into a wall and held him, like some towering
huge sea-cliff that lies close along the gray salt water
and stands up against the screaming winds and their sudden directions
and against the waves that grow to bigness and burst up against it.
So the Danaäns stood steady against the Trojans, nor gave way.”

“And as a man builds solid a wall with stones set close together
for the rampart of a high house keeping out the force of the winds, so
close together were the helms and shields massive in the middle.
For shield leaned on shield, helmet on helmet, man against man,
and the horse-hair crests along the horns of the shining helmets
touched as they bent their heads, so dense were they formed on each other.”

My point

Nobody buys their movie ticket in order to see Jacob Smith, Ken Bones, and Mark Lewis Jones. (Yes, they have walk-on parts in the movie.) They pay to see buff Brad Pitt, earnest Eric Bana, and heart-throb Orlando Bloom. Likewise, Homer's audience didn't pay to hear about Bias, Dolops, and Medon. They paid to hear about rampaging Achilleus, noble Hektor, and skirt-chasing Paris.

Homer and the movie makers faced the same challenge: keeping the paying customers satisfied. You do this with stars, not nobodies. But to impress the audience with the magnitude of events—not to mention, to conform to the expected plot—you've got to at least hint at the larger conflict.

Modes of Fighting in the *Iliad*

The following table gives a quantitative description of the weapon with which one warrior carried out an attack on another in the *Iliad.* My data is in black. The red data is from "The Homeric Way of War: The 'Iliad' and the Hoplite Phalanx" by Hans Van Wees. Note that:

- Individual cases of "Mode of Attack" are often ambiguous, so "Number of Cases" may vary slightly, depending on your interpretation of a given line of verse.
- I arrived at these data merely by counting cases. Do not bet your mortgage on my exact results.
- If multiple references to a given weapon refer to a single attack, only one case is logged.
- The data include only attacks, not general references to weapons, such as "across his shoulders he slung the sword with the nails of silver and took up the ash spear."

Mode of Attack	Number of Cases	Remark
Spear, either thrust or cast	167 **166**	To Homer, the *Iliad* warriors were overwhelmingly spearmen. I don't differentiate between thrusting a spear (i.e., stabbing with it) or casting it (i.e., throwing it)—but Van Wees did and found the two forms of attack just about equal.
Sword	29 **19**	Does not include general references to use of swords in battles, such as "fought their battle with sharp hatchets and axes, with great swords and with leaf-headed pikes…."
Bow and arrow	19 **21**	Does include attacks on or by deities. Whereas virtually every fighter wields a spear and sword, bows are wielded only by a handful of specialists.
Large stone/boulder hefted and thrown	19 **12**	One wonders why so many huge stones were lying about the battlefield within easy reach; and why heroes resorted to hefting and throwing them almost as much as they resorted to their swords.
Javelin	12	Almost always described as "shining;" sometimes as "slender."

Mode of Attack	Number of Cases	Remark
Stone, apparently flung from a sling	3	For example, “numerous and incessant were the stones volleyed from both sides….” Specific use of a sling is only mentioned once. Some cases that I logged as “Large stone/boulder” may actually be stones from slingers. Note that unlike attacks by “Large stone/boulder,” no one dies as a result of a stone from a sling.
Axe or hatchet	2	Obviously, very rarely wielded in the *Iliad.* The Hittites were into them, though.

The Warriors

Close examination of the text of the *Iliad* reveals some surprises relative to which Greeks and Trojans were objectively the best fighters. But three caveats:

- The data here show slayings explicitly specified in the text. Other slayings are implied, for example by Achilleus and perhaps by Aias—but we have what we have.
- There were many other slayings by minor characters, and some of them might total enough to warrant such characters appearing in this data. The warriors cited below are just the ones that I figured I ought to keep track of. But I'm certain that if other characters that I *didn't* keep track of have respectable totals, they nevertheless wouldn't rank high in the pecking order shown below.
- I did my best to be accurate, but it's easy in such efforts to be off by one or two.

Warrior	Number of Kills	Remark
Greeks		
Patroklos	36 or 54	Frankly, I don't buy it—not the total, but the fact that Homer “wrote” it that way. All of Patroklos' kills occur in a single rampage on a single afternoon in a single Book, XVI. To me, it's very unconvincing. Given that Achilleus has a son of fighting age, and that Patroklos partly raised Achilleus, Patroklos must be middle-aged. Up to Book XVI, he's merely been Achilleus' lap dog. As an example, at the start Book XVI, Achilleus chides him, saying: “Why then are you crying like some poor little girl, Patroklos, who runs after her mother and begs to be picked up and carried, and clings to her dress….”

Warrior	Number of Kills	Remark
		Then suddenly Patroklos becomes a Phthian superman? I don't buy it. The poet puffed him up to underscore his tragic *hubris* and make his loss more affecting. (The total of 36 or 54 depends on how you interpret the following line in Book XVI: "…and three times he cut down nine men…." Does this mean "3 x 9 = 27" or "3 x 3 = 9" ? The former is probably the correct reading—meaning that, when added to kills specifically cited, he killed 54 Greeks total.)
Odysseus	25	Though scholars often refer to him as a fighter of the second rank, the datum puts the lie to that. He fights bravely, with expertise, and constantly, from Book IV to XI—at which point he's badly wounded and can fight no more. He's as much a champion on the battlefield as he is in the council chamber. Odysseus is the *Iliad's* most complete man: as good a fighter as Diomedes or Aias, a wiser counselor than supercilious old Nestor, the most persuasive and diplomatic negotiator of the Greeks, and their most crafty tactician.
Diomedes	25	A mirror image of Odysseus' performance in battle. The two of them are the great Greek champions of the first half of the *Iliad.* He even gets the better of Hektor once, whacking him on the head with his spear and forcing the Trojan to retreat. Like Odysseus, Diomedes is wounded in Book XI and can fight no more. (The total does not include 13 Thracians that he kills in their sleep while Odysseus acts as a look-out.)
Achilleus	24	Very low total, considering. Who would have thought he'd have half as many victims as Patroklos? (Other kills are implied, though.) All kills occur in Books XX - XXII.
Teukros	24	Surprisingly high total. He's Aias' bastard half-brother and henchman. Most kills are by bow and arrow.
Agamemnon	10	Proving he's not just an oppressive, short-tempered, weak-willed king. Like Odysseus and Diomedes, he's wounded in Book XI and can fight no more.
Aias	9	Very surprising that the total is this low. By near-universal consent of *Iliad* characters and scholars alike (but not me), he's considered the second-best fighter after Achilleus. I'm gratified that the data bear me out. Aias' real claim to fame, besides his near-single-handed defense of the Greek ships, is that he fights Hektor exactly as many times as Sugar Ray Robinson fought Jack LaMotta: six times. Three clashes are minor, inconclusive ones. In the other three, Aias gets the better of Hektor each time.
Menelaos	8	Total includes 1 captive later executed by Agamemnon. Menelaos fights continuously, but his kill total isn't that impressive.

Warrior	Number of Kills	Remark
Idomeneus	7	In the early parts of the *Iliad*, Homer built up the King of Crete as one of the leading Greek warriors, but he doesn't end up doing that much.
Trojans		
Euphorbos	20	Euphorbos? Who the heck is Euphorbos? The first time he's mentioned is in Book XVI, with the cryptic remark: "He had already brought down twenty men…." His only role is to hit Patroklos in the back with a javelin and then fight over his body.
Hektor	18	Pretty low total, given his role.
Aineias (Aeneus)	6	Unimpressive, but he ups his total in the *Aeneid*.
Paris	3	All the things people said about him are apparently true. On the other hand, with Apollo's help he slays Achilleus in the *Aethiopis* (see "The Epic Cycle" below).
Sarpedon	2	So much for "godlike Sarpedon," the son of Zeus, who supposedly ravages the Greeks "like a lion among horn-curved cattle."

Chariot Warfare

Almost all scholars note the odd way in which Homer shows chariots being employed in the *Iliad*. They're not used as platforms from which to wage war but rather as so-called "battle taxis."

1. A chariot driver—typically a champion's "henchman"—conveys a champion (chariot warrior) to the field of battle in a chariot.
2. The champion dismounts and fights on foot, while the henchman and chariot wait patiently in the background.
3. When the champion is wounded, exhausted, or threatened with capture—or when the battle is over—the champion remounts the chariot and is conveyed elsewhere.

The Function of Chariots in War

The function of a chariot is the same as later mounted cavalry and similar to the function of a modern tank:

- To be more mobile than foot soldiers: Among other advantages, mobility enables you to strike at unexpected times and unexpected places and then withdraw before you can be counter-attacked. Mobility also allows you to react quickly to changes in battle—for example, exploiting a momentary advantage or plugging a dangerous gap in your defense.
- To terrorize the enemy and make him abandon his defensive posture: The sight and sound of a hundred chariots bearing down on you is horrifying. Many men will break and run.

- To slaughter a routed enemy: When you've got them on the run, you can run them down in your chariot and slaughter them with impunity.
- To engage the enemy's chariots: Just as with cavalry or tanks, the best way to nullify the advantages of your enemy's chariots is to fight fire with fire.

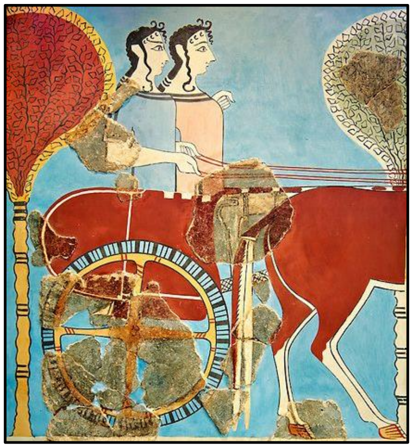
(Two functions that chariots definitely do NOT provide:

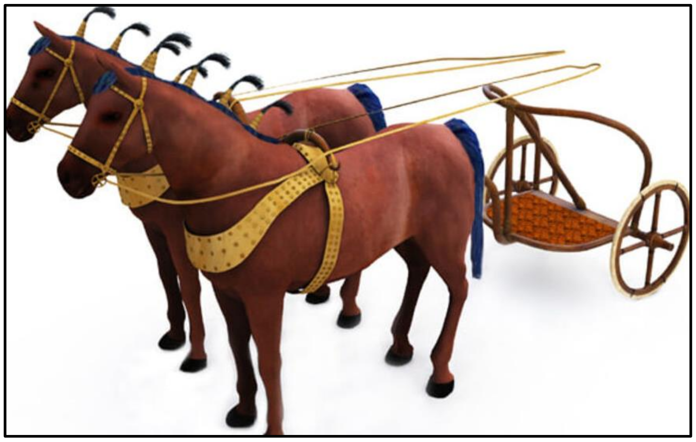
- Cost-effective military power: Chariots—and even more so, the horses that pull them—are ruinously expensive to acquire and maintain.
- Destruction of an enemy who is in a strong defensive position: Regardless of the historical period, horses will not charge into massed infantry. The inability of the superb French cavalry to break up the English infantry squares was a key factor that cost Napoleon the Battle of Waterloo.)

Mycenaean Chariots

Based on depictions on steles, pottery, and so forth, there were two main types of Mycenaean chariots:

- From 1550 - 1300 B.C., the rugged, solid-sided box chariot (shown in the fresco on the left).
- From 1300 - 1200 B.C., the light, open-sided rail chariot (on the right). (This modern representation is based on crude vase paintings and is thus subject to question.)





Scholarly Opinions on Homer's Depiction of Chariots in War

- One set of scholars believes his depiction is just plain wrong: chariots couldn't have just been "battle taxis," there had to have been massed chariot attacks during the Mycenaean Age:

  > "Chariots—a taxi service? The chariots in the *Iliad* were not used for massed charges but merely for carrying the heroes to the front line where they got down and fought on foot. It is difficult to believe that chariots were used in this way such a short time after the great chariot battle of Kadesh c1285 BC." (Peter Connolly, *The Legend of Odysseus*)

> “… [in Knossos clay tablets,] the large number of chariots listed (400-plus at any one time) suggests that they were used *en masse*.” (Nicolas Grguric, *The Mycenaeans c. 1650 - 1100 BC*)

> “Homer had heard of them [battle chariots], but he did not really visualize what one did with chariots in a war.” (M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*)

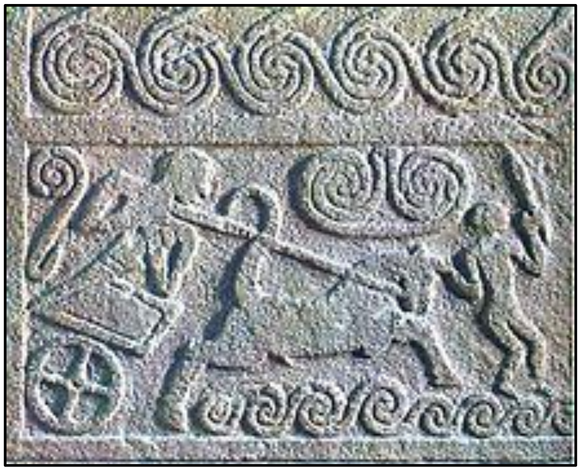
- Another set of scholars believes Homer’s depiction is right on:

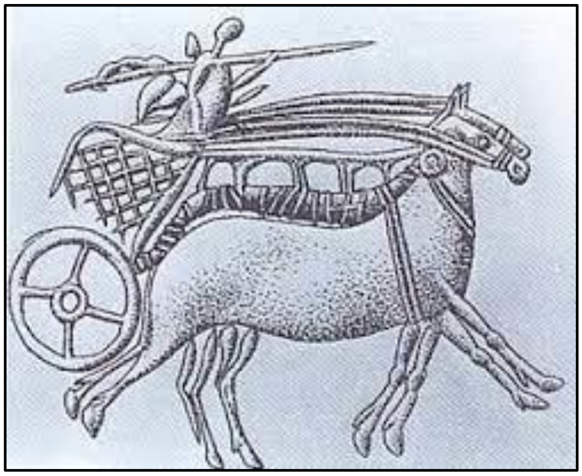
> “Around the 14th century BC, the ‘rail chariot’ appeared. … it was likely used mainly as a battlefield transport rather than as a mobile fighting vehicle.” (R. D’Amato & A. Salimbeti, *Bronze Age Greek Warrior 1600 – 1100 BC*)

> “The shift from box-chariot to rail-chariot marks the transition from a purely mobile fighting vehicle to a battlefield transport ….” (Nic Fields, *Bronze Age War Chariots*)

The Chariot Warrior’s Weapon

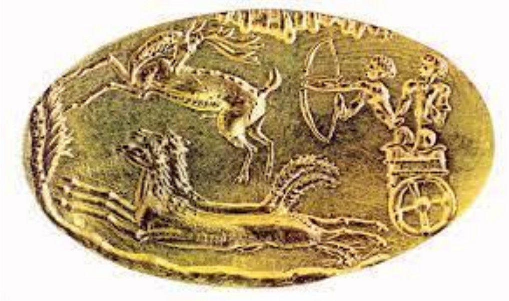
All depictions that we have from both the Mycenaean Age and the Dark Age, limited though they may be, show the Greek chariot warrior wielding a javelin, spear, or lance. The picture on the left below is from a tomb stele in one of the Mycenaean Shaft Graves from around 1600 B.C. It shows the chariot warrior wielding a huge lance/sarissa. The picture on the right is from a carnelian seal stone from the 15th century B.C. It shows the chariot warrior wielding a moderate-sized thrusting spear.

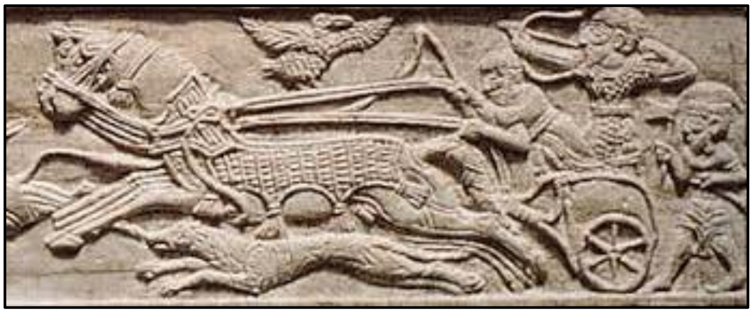




No depiction of the time shows a Greek chariot warrior wielding a bow: “… there is no credible evidence for Mycenaean chariots being crewed with bowmen for warfare….” (Nicolas Grguric, *The Mycenaeans c. 1650 - 1100 BC*)

Still, chariot bowmen are shown in two hunting scenes. The picture on the left below is a Minoan signet ring from 1600 - 1550 B.C. The picture on the right below is from an ivory gaming box from a Mycenaean enclave in Cyprus from the 12th century B.C.





Homer’s Dim Cultural Memory of Massed Chariot Warfare

In spite of his depiction of chariots as “battle taxis,” Homer does seem to display a dim cultural memory of a time when they were used in mass formations in battle. In Book IV, old Nestor tells his compatriots:

> “When a man from his own car encounters the enemy chariots
> let him stab with his spear, since this is the stronger fighting.
> So the men before your time sacked tower and city….”

In other words, “Engage enemy chariots from your own chariot.” And in Book XI, recalling (yet again) the feats of his youth, Nestor boasts:

> “… whereupon I springing into his chariot …
> charged upon them like a black whirlwind, and overtook
> fifty chariots, and for each of the chariots two men
> caught the dirt in their teeth beaten down under my spear.”

My Analysis

“Battle taxis”?

No, they’re more than that. Homer’s depiction of the use of chariots is right on, at least for the Greeks. But scholars have misjudged the text:

- On the Greek side, there would be no massed chariot attacks—defined as, say, twenty or more chariots—because the Greeks were engaged in an expeditionary war. Transporting across the Aegean Sea that many chariots and the horses to pull them was far beyond the capabilities of the time. What the Mycenaeans *could* manage—arguably—would be a limited number of chariots and horses for the army’s leaders. And that’s precisely what we see in the *Iliad*.

  Of course, this would not apply to the home team—whose horses and chariots were just down the block, who dwelt in open grasslands perfect for chariot warfare, who were famous for raising horses—and whose allies, the Hittites, fielded the greatest chariot army in the world. Regardless of Homer’s portrayal, the Trojans would have been masters at massed chariot warfare.

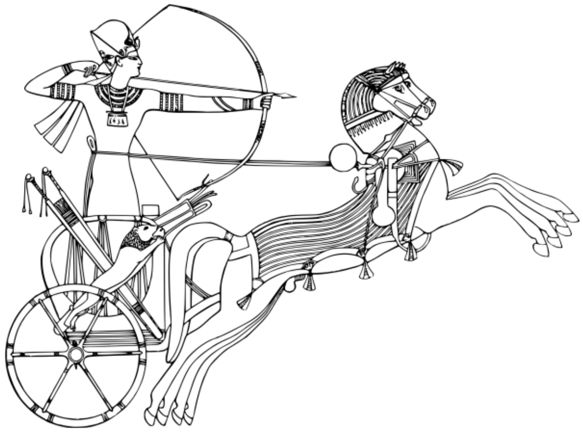
For an accurate portrayal of Late Bronze Age chariot warfare, see Chapters 19 and 20 of *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin.*

- Though Homer doesn't show quote "massed chariot attacks" unquote, the poem is full of warriors fighting from their chariots—but on the minor scale described in the previous bullet. And several of these are chariot vs. chariot clashes:
  - Book V, Lattimore line 13.
  - Book VIII, Lattimore line 118 (chariot vs. chariot).
  - Book VIII, Lattimore line 257 (chariot vs. chariot).
  - Book VIII, Lattimore line 340 – 349.
  - Book XI, Lattimore line 151 (chariot vs. chariot).
  - Books XI and XII: Most of the fighting is from chariots.
  - Book XVI: Until the end, Patroklos is fighting from a chariot. However, in middle of the text, without having dismounted, he kills someone with a "great stone." Only 17 lines later, he belatedly "leapt down from his chariot," so he'd been in it all this time. One wonders how he hefted a "great stone" while riding in a chariot.

    However he managed it, Patroklos repeats this feat five pages later.
  - Book 17: Automedon fights from his chariot.

Can't fight from a rail chariot?

- Who says? Egyptian war chariots had large oval cut-outs in the cab and were thus nearly open-sided, as shown in the picture on the right—and they seemed to have done just fine: In 1274 B.C., they fielded 2000 chariots at the Battle of Kadesh.
- And besides, absence of proof is not proof of absence. Just because it became more trendy for pottery artists to depict rail chariots, that doesn't mean that all box chariot owners suddenly decided to trash-can their perfectly good box chariots.



Javelins, lances, and spears?

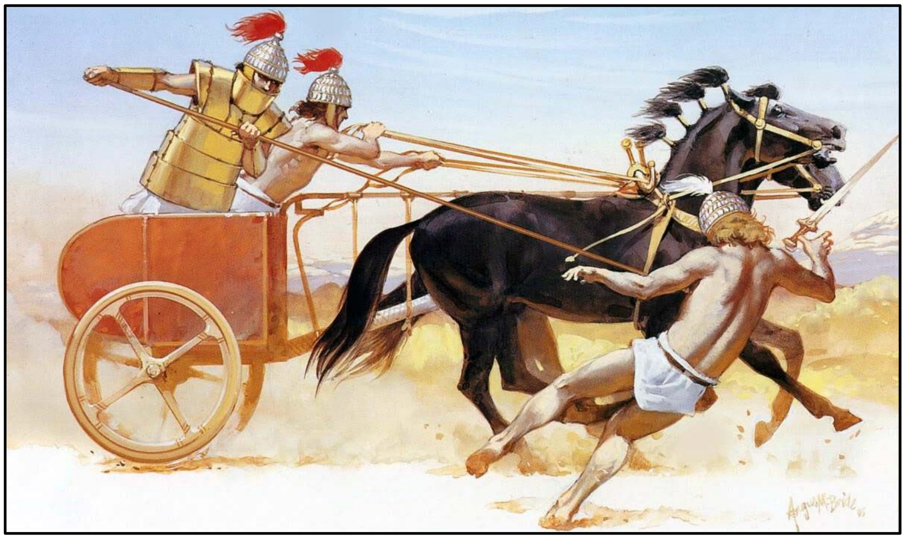
I'm sorry, but it's absolutely preposterous to think that, unlike the Egyptians, the Greeks never figured out that the bow was as good a weapon for hunting men from a chariot, as it was for hunting deer:

- Javelins: I defy anyone to, from a moving chariot, cast a javelin and hit a target (especially one that doesn't want to be hit), unless you're right next to him—which would put you just as much in jeopardy as the man you're trying to kill. The physics just isn't there. If your chariot is travelling 15 mph, by the time three seconds have elapsed while you cock your arm and cast, you have moved 66 feet—and if he knows what's good for him, your target has moved too. And while you're aiming, you're bouncing up and down and side to side. The relatively low speed of a javelin acts against you, too, since the longer it takes for the projectile to arrive, the more time the target has to get out of the way.

An arrow travels much faster than a cast javelin, minimizing the time in which angles and distances can change between when you choose your target and when the projectile arrives. Moreover, it's quick and easy to sight your target down the shaft of the arrow. The throwing motion of a javelin provides no such sighting aid: Judging the path from your hand to the target is all gut feel.

- Lances: Impossible. 19th century cavalry men found that as they charged, they didn't need to swing their sabers at the target nor follow-through—a simple lazy swipe that ended at the point of contact sufficed to slice off a head or arm, because the speed and momentum of the horse was added to the blow.

  Consider this fanciful representation by Angus McBride that recreates the grave stele carving shown above:

  What would be the result of such an attack? The lance would go clean through the body, the shaft would snap in two, and if the lance holder held on to the shaft even momentarily, the sudden deceleration caused by the impact would leave him hanging in mid-air as the chariot sped away. The only way such an attack would work would be if the lancer immediately let go at the moment of contact—leaving him without a weapon.

  I'm afraid this is a case of a humanities scholar not leaning into his physics courses hard enough.

- Spear: It's possible—but only if you either: (a) Throw the spear. (b) Thrust and immediately let go of the spear, as described above for a lance. Or: (c) Make a very, very quick thrust and withdraw it, before you're wrenched out of the chariot cab.

Mounted Cavalry

Nope. Didn't exist then. It would be another two hundred years before the Mediterranean saw true mounted cavalry.

Homer uses the word "cavalry" (or rather, the Greek word translated by Lattimore as "cavalry") just once. Apollo is trying to rouse Hektor, who has been battered by a boulder:

> "So come now, and urge on your cavalry in their numbers
> to drive on their horses against the hollow ships."

Since Hektor has been tooling around in a chariot, this is probably just an unfortunate choice of words. It's probably a bad post-Homeric edit. (Editors throughout history are famous for that sort of thing.) At any rate, at that time in history, horses in that part of the world were not big enough to carry an armed warrior in battle:

> "There is very little evidence indeed that the Mycenaeans or Minoans ever actually rode horses, in battle or elsewhere…. The earliest depiction of an armed man on horseback is from Crete of the eleventh or tenth century." (A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms & Armor of the Greeks*)

It's possible, though, that a boy or small man could ride bareback and serve as a messenger or scout.

Light Infantry

In ancient Greece, light infantry were fighters who couldn't afford costly arms and armor and hence were non-aristocrats. In classical Greece, they were known as "peltasts." Homer cared about well-armored aristocratic champions, not common fighters.

In Homer, light infantry fight with bows and slings:

- Bowmen:

  > "…in Mycenaean representations [the bow] is almost always of the plain European type, the 'self' bow made from a single stave of wood…. Homer seems to not understand construction of the composite bow, which was foreign to Greece proper." (A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms & Armor of the Greeks*)

  Some bowmen, for example Paris the Trojan and Teukros the Greek, fight as heavy infantry as well as bowmen—so they get lots of "screen time." But full-time bowmen or part-time, the Greeks despised them as cowards who shun the line of battle and instead fight from afar. When Paris strikes Diomedes in the foot with an arrow, the Greek responds:

  > "You archer, foul fighter, lovely in your locks, eyer of young girls.
  > If you were to make trial of me in strong combat with weapons
  > your bow would do you no good at all, nor your close-showered arrows."

- Slingers: Homer doesn't think much of them, either:

> "But no Lokrians [a region of Greece] went with the great-hearted son of Oïleus.
> The heart was not in them to endure close-standing combat,
> for they did not have the brazen helmets crested with horse-hair,
> they did not have the strong-circled shields and the ash spears,
> but rather these had followed to Ilion with all their confidence
> in their bows and slings strong-twisted of wool…."

Arms and Armor at Two Different Points in Ancient History

The purpose of this subsection is to grease the skids for subsections to come.

Depictions Prior to the Trojan War

First, let's look at ancient depictions of arms and armor in the centuries before the Trojan War. Figure 3 shows a Minoan fresco from around 1600 B.C.

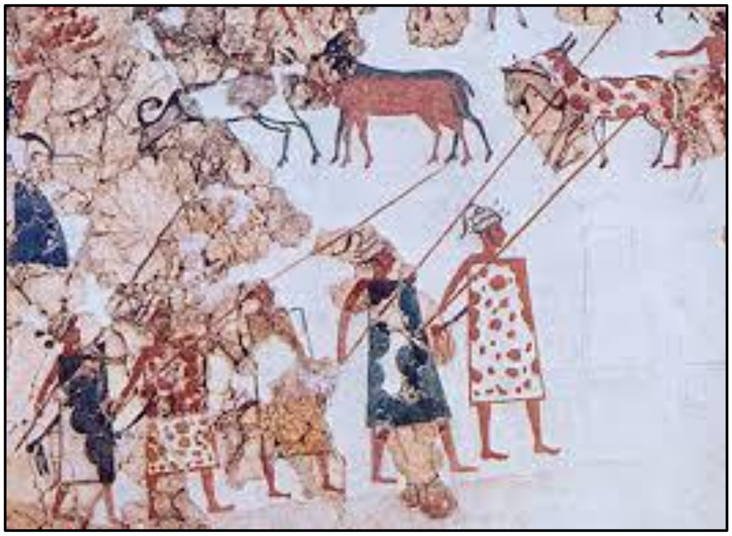


Photo by W. Sheppard Baird.

Figure 3. Fresco from 1600 B.C.

Figure 4 shows a gold signet ring from 16th century B.C. Mycenae.

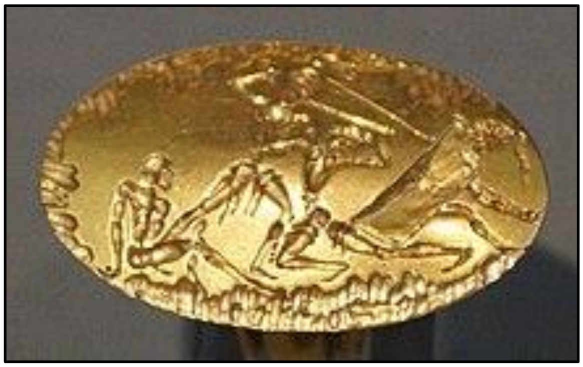


Figure 4. Gold Signet Ring from 16th Century B.C.

Figure 5 is the famous “Lion Hunt Dagger,” found in the Mycenaean Shaft Graves of the same timeframe.

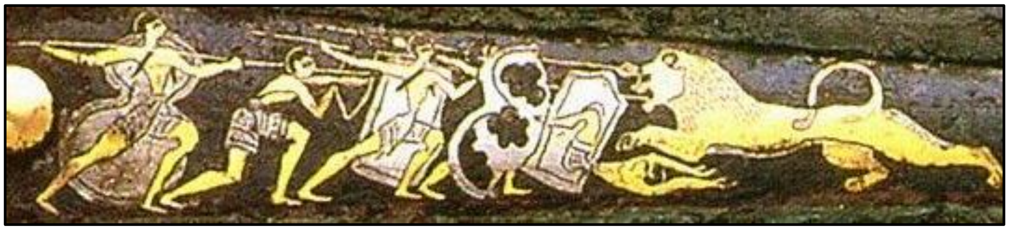


Figure 5. Lion Hunt Dagger from 16th Century B.C.

A Depiction Exactly at the Time of the Trojan War

Figure 6 is the Mycenaean “Warrior Vase” from 1300 - 1200 B.C.—exactly at the time of the Trojan War.

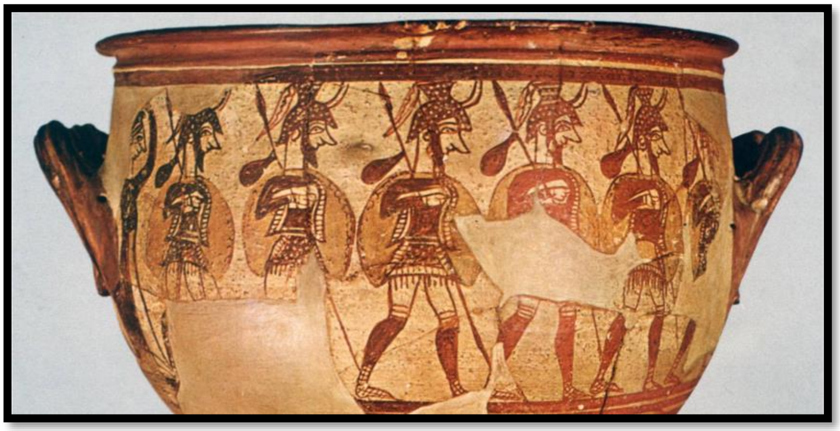


Photo by Sharon Mollerus.

Figure 6. Warrior Vase from 1300 - 1200 B.C.

Observations

	Helmets	Spears	Shields	Corselet	Greaves
Pre-Trojan War **(Figures 3-5)**	Boars-tusk (only shown in Figure 3).	Very long lance (~12 - 15 feet?).	Tall: known today as "tower shield" (rectangular) or "figure-eight" shield (the one on the left of Figure 5. Leather.	No	No
Trojan War **(Warrior Vase)**	Bronze with bronze crest and dangling horse-hair plume. 2 horns. Nose guard.	~6-foot-long thrusting spear.	~2.5- to 3-foot diameter. Probably leather. Round, with a moon-shaped cutout, called a "pelta" design.	Yes, probably leather, with bronze appliques.	Yes

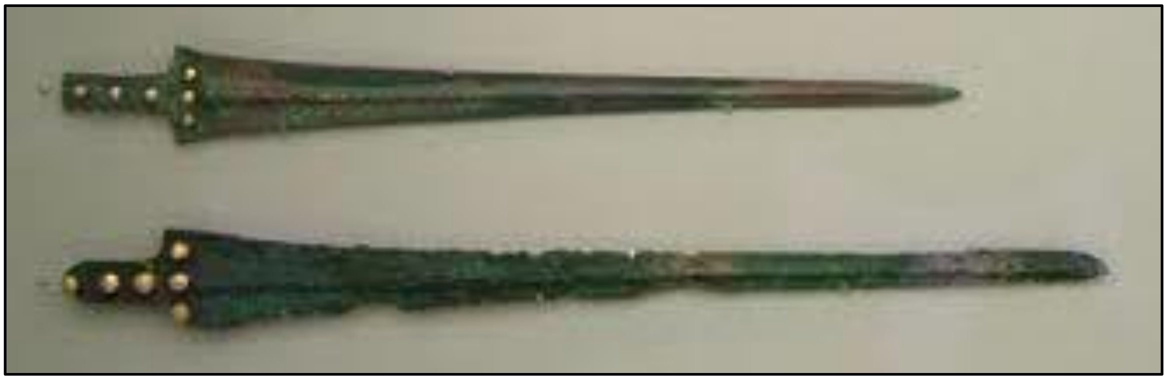
In *Arms and Armor of the Greeks,* A.M. Snodgrass describes the Warrior Vase as follows:

> "This vase shows the soldiers wearing stiff jerkins or corslets, which stand well out from the body but are almost certainly non-metallic, with decorated borders…. These are worn with fringed skirts or kilts, which also have an outlined border and are in some cases dotted with white circles, probably representing metal disks of a type of armour….
>
> "The only likely relic of one of these corslets comes from a grave of the twelfth century at Kallithea in Achaea; here were found long thin strips of embossed bronze, suitable for attachment to a leather corslet, and perhaps represented by the outlined border of the Warrior Vase corslets."

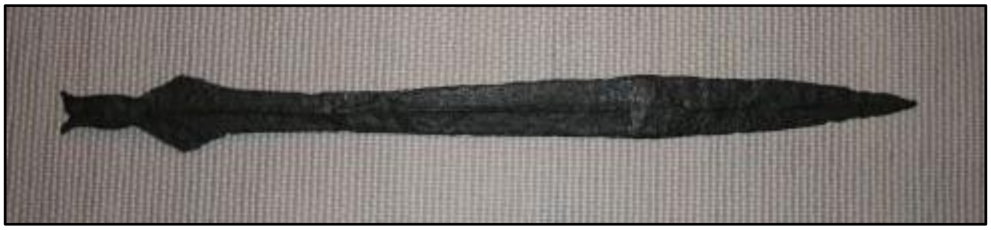
Swords

The most important thing to note about swords of the Mycenaean Age is that at the exact time of the Trojan War, a new type of sword was introduced that was to dominate the Mediterranean into the Roman era.

Prior to this time, the dominant swords were similar to modern rapiers. Long, thin, and somewhat delicate, they were designed for thrusting (stabbing), in the manner of modern Olympic fencing. (One shouldn't take the analogy too literally. The point is, in this type of sword fighting, you're basically trying to poke a hole in your enemy.) Such swords were discovered in the Mycenaean Shaft Graves of around 1600 B.C. and could be up to three feet long, even without the hilt. The following are from Grave V of the Shaft Graves:



But around 1200 B.C., a new type of sword appeared, today called the Naue Type II sword or Griffzungenschwert sword. This sword is thought to have come from the north (Central Europe). It's a shorter, heavier, more robust sword meant not for thrusting but for slashing. It was weighted toward the tip, where the blow would fall. It was roughly two and a half feet long, though some were shorter than that, some longer. The following is an example, shown roughly to scale with the rapiers above (assuming that the longer of the rapiers is three feet long):



Homer says such a sword could sever an arm:

> "This man Eurypylos, the shining son of Euaimon
> running in chase as he fled before him, struck in the shoulder
> with a blow swept from the sword and cut the arm's weight from him,
> so that the arm dropped bleeding to the ground…."

However, one scholar—not to mention a chief stuntman from the movie *Troy*—says that this is impossible, because bronze cannot be sharpened to a degree sufficient to cut off a limb. I'm afraid this is another case of a liberal arts major ditching physics class. The force in any collision is computed using Newton's second law of motion: $F = ma$, or force equals mass times acceleration. That means a very-low-mass body moving very fast can deliver more force than a very-high-mass body moving slowly.

That's why tiny pebbles in space and tiny fragments of space junk are so dangerous—because they and a space vehicle are moving very, very fast. It's also the reason an asteroid the size of Mount Everest killed off not only the dinosaurs but the majority of Earth's plants and land and marine animals as well. As a more earthly example, every few months the newspapers will reveal how a car crash victim lost a limb or was decapitated, without any sharp edge being involved at all.

The key factor is not sharpness so much as force, measured in pounds per square inch. If the force is great enough, i.e., the sword is swung with sufficient velocity, a comparatively unsharp bronze sword will do the job just fine, thank you.

Spears vs. Javelins

Homer uses the term “dory” (also known as “doru”) to mean “spear.”

When I started this section, I firmly believed that Homer had gotten it all wrong. I thought he falsely showed Greeks throwing spears, when he should have said they were throwing javelins. In other words, “spears” are for thrusting, “javelins” for throwing. Period.

Okay, I admit I was wrong. Grudgingly. I accept now that Homeric warriors, and possibly Mycenaean as well, both thrust and cast “spears.” In, “Won by the Spear: the importance of the Dory to the Ancient Greek warrior,” for example, Steven Ross Murray says, “… the dory, too, could be used as a missile weapon…”

Regardless, it’s often unclear whether a source is discussing spears of the Trojan War period, or of Homer’s Iron Age, or of the Classical Period (e.g., the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War). They weren’t the same. One has to be wary of what a source says.

Historical Facts

- We do know that Greeks of the Trojan War era used both spears and javelins. The Linear B translations by Michael Ventris and John Chadwick determined that the word “pa-ta-ja” meant “javelin” and “enkhos” meant “spear.” (Unlike pa-ta-ja, enkhos kept its meaning into the Classical Age. I don’t know how “enkhos” relates to “dory,” which also survived into the Classical Age.)
- As quoted in Wikipedia, according to Barbantani Silvia in, "The glory of the spear—A powerful symbol in Hellenistic poetry and art. The case of Neoptolemus 'of Tlos' (and other Ptolemaic epigrams)":

> “The dory or doru (/ˈdɒruː/; Greek: δόρυ) is a spear that was the chief spear of hoplites (heavy infantry) in Ancient Greece. The word "dory" was first attested by Homer with the meanings of "wood" and "spear". Homeric heroes hold two dorata (Greek: δόρατα, plural of δόρυ).”

- According to Steven Ross Murray: “The dory, and it athletic kin, the javelin, or akon or akonition, were fixtures in ancient Greece, and often Greek soldiers would carry two spears into battle.”
- Relative to a spear’s length, Murray says that, based on vase paintings, an estimate of 200 cm, give or take 10% to 20%, would be correct. That would make it 5.25 feet to almost 8—which is a pretty wide range. And his statement depends on exactly which vases are being examined. The

spears depicted on the Warrior Vase appear to be about 6 feet. On the Classical Age vase that shows Achilleus slaying Penthesilea, the spears appear to be a good 7 to 8 feet long. I have no problem concluding that over time, the dory grew longer and heavier.

- As far back as Mycenaean times, the rear of the dory was on occasion capped with a spike called a "sauroter" (Greek for "lizard killer").

  > "Tomb B from Kallithea [1300 - 1200 B.C.] was also provided with a butt spike of bronze to protect the other end of the spear, and possibly for use as a secondary weapon should the spearhead break off." (Papadopoulos, in Laffineur 1999, p. 269 and plate LVIIb)."

  The sauroter also enabled the spearman to stick his dory into the ground, making it stand straight up, where it could easily be grabbed.

A Couple of Homer's Remarks on the Subject

- Homer says Hektor's spear was 11 cubits long—over 16 feet. This would make it a "lance" ("sarissa," in the Macedonian parlance of Alexander the Great's army). This would be consistent with the pre-Trojan War images in Figures 3 - 5 above. Obviously, such a spear cannot be thrown, even by the he-men of Homer's poem. But when Hector throws a spear, Homer never specifically says he's throwing the 11-cubit one, so there's no cause for questioning the 11-cubit length. Yet. (See "*Iliad* and *Odyssey*: The 4 Stages of Composition" below.)
- There are 9 cases in the *Iliad* of "two spears" or "two sharp spears" or "two powerful spears". There is 1 case of "two javelins." This accords with Silvia's and Murray's remarks above, as well as various Classical Age vase paintings.
- The "Modes of Fighting" table above specifies that there are 167 cases of a spear attack in the *Iliad*. You'd have to roughly double that figure to include all the cases where the spear is not being used in an attack (e.g., "across his shoulders he slung the sword and took up the ash spear"). So there are a few hundred cases where a warrior is bearing a spear or javelin—but only 10 cases where he's carrying two of them. Therefore, one cannot at all conclude that, according to Homer, at least, carrying two spears was standard.
- By the Classical Age, javelinists would become effective, even deadly, light infantry fighters (peltasts), who in one battle routed a phalanx of heavily armed and armored Spartiates. Suffice it to say that, though at times Homer says that the air was full of javelins, I could not find any instances in the *Iliad* of troops who were identified as exclusively javelinists.

Problems that I Can't Resolve, only Complain About

- In the following discussion, I use colorizing to make my point clear.

  At times, Homer seems to use "**spear**" and "**javelin**"—or rather, the Greek words for them—imprecisely and interchangeably. That is—in these cases, at least—if you throw a "**spear**," you call it a "**javelin**."

Book IV:

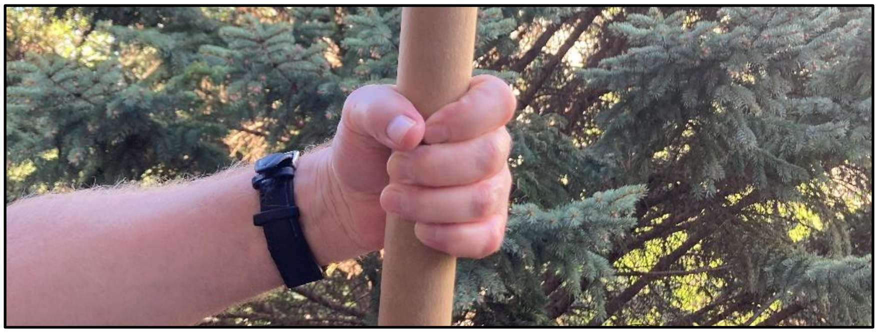
> “[Odysseus] strode out among the champions, helmed in bright bronze,
> and stood close to the enemy hefting the shining **javelin**,
> glaring round about him; and the Trojans gave way in the face
> of the man throwing with the **spear**.”
>
> Book XIII:
>
> “… and both let fly at each other together, one with a sharp **spear**
> in a **javelin** cast, and one with the arrow….”
>
> Book XIII:
>
> “As he came on, Hektor threw at him with the shining **javelin**,
> but Teukros with his eyes straight on him avoided the bronze **spear**”

- As quoted in Wikipedia, according to the April 2007 newsletter of *The Academy of European Swordsmanship*:

  > “The primary weapon of the hoplite, the dory spear was 7 to 9 feet in length, weighing 1 to 2 kilograms, having a ***two inch*** [emphasis mine] diameter wooden handle, and tipped with an iron spearhead on one end and another iron tip [the sauroter] on the other.”

  Use of the term “hoplite” clearly indicates that this remark is about the Classical Age dory or perhaps the Archaic Age dory.

  Be that as it may…. I’m afraid there’s no way anyone except Wilt Chamberlain and his pals can in one hand hold two spears having two-inch diameter handles (shafts). The following photo shows me holding a handle with a diameter of a mere 1.5 inches, and the handle is all I can handle:



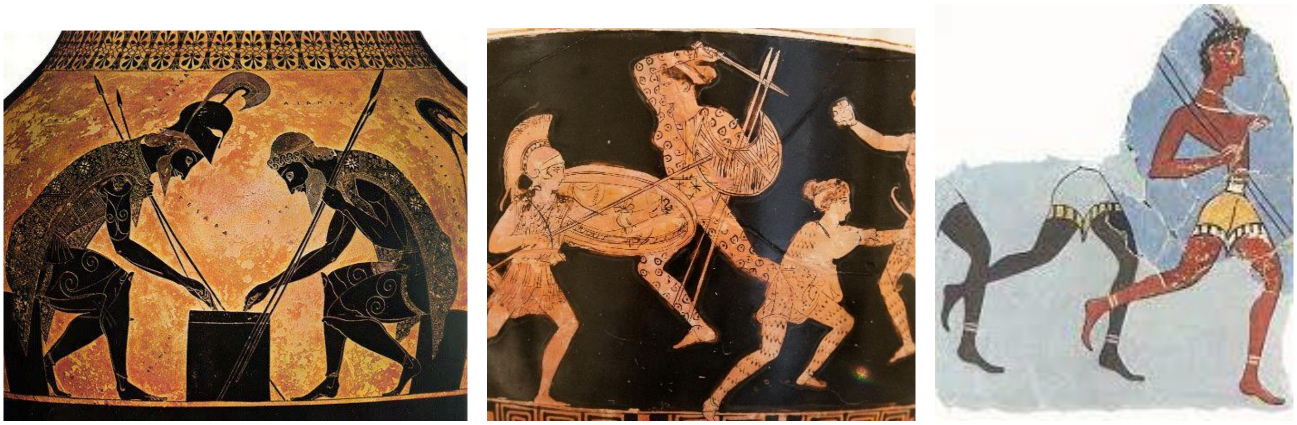
  So, one of the following is the case:

  - I’ve got really small hands. This can be ruled out, because I’m larger than the average Late Bronze Age male.
  - Or the two-inch figure is incorrect.

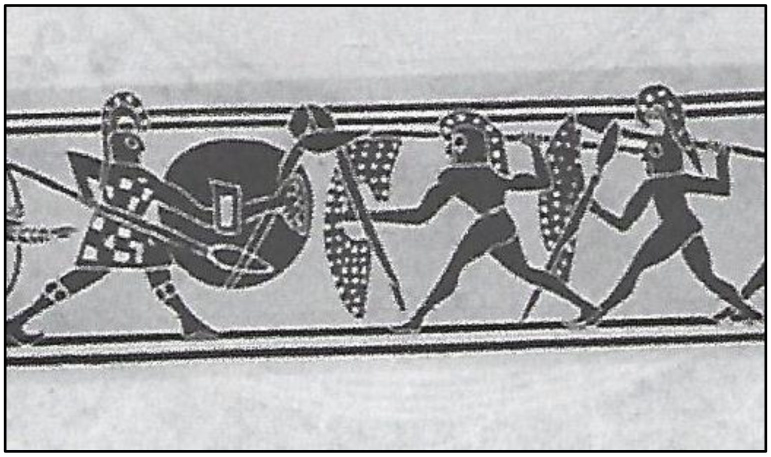
- Or the two-inch diameter applies to Classical Age spears, not Bronze Age spears—which, as I opined above, might very well have been smaller.

  I suspect this is indeed the case. In all the Classical Age sources that I'm aware of—honestly, not an overwhelming number—the spear is never thrown, only thrust.

- Or the warrior is really carrying two *javelins*, not two *spears*. At least in some of the representations where a Greek warrior is carrying two spears/javelins, they're very short, slender, delicate weapons, and thus almost certainly depictions of javelins, not spears:



- My daughter Emma suggested a possible explanation: The shaft could be 2 inches in diameter, if you carried one in each hand, and one of the hands also carried the shield. I even found a vase painting that suggested that this was the case:



This would be feasible if, when you arrived at the scene of battle, you stuck the second spear in the ground, using its sauroter. Then you could cast the first spear, remaining a safe distance away from the enemy, and retain the second for thrusting when the two battle lines came together.

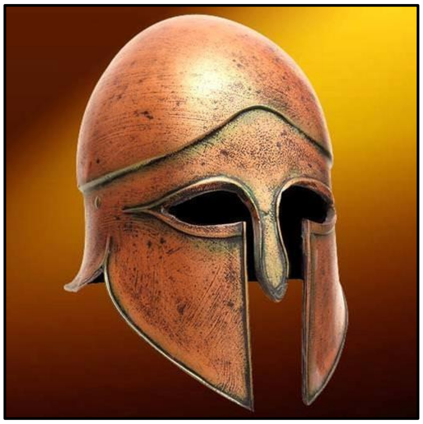
Murray says: "A warrior having two spears, with one being shorter and perhaps lighter, would be a sound tactic in battle." I suspect that is the answer. Once spears grew too large to cast efficiently, a warrior bore, in addition to his thrusting spear, a javelin or small javelin-like, sauroter-less spear for casting.

- According to Steven Ross Murray: If you're casting a dory, "The butt-spike [sauroter] would weight down the tail of the spear, meaning it would fly awkwardly, with its tail much lower than its spearhead." Contrarily, another source said the sauroter served as a counterweight when the dory was cast, so it would fly correctly.

  As Abe Lincoln said: Both may be, but one must be, wrong.

Helmets

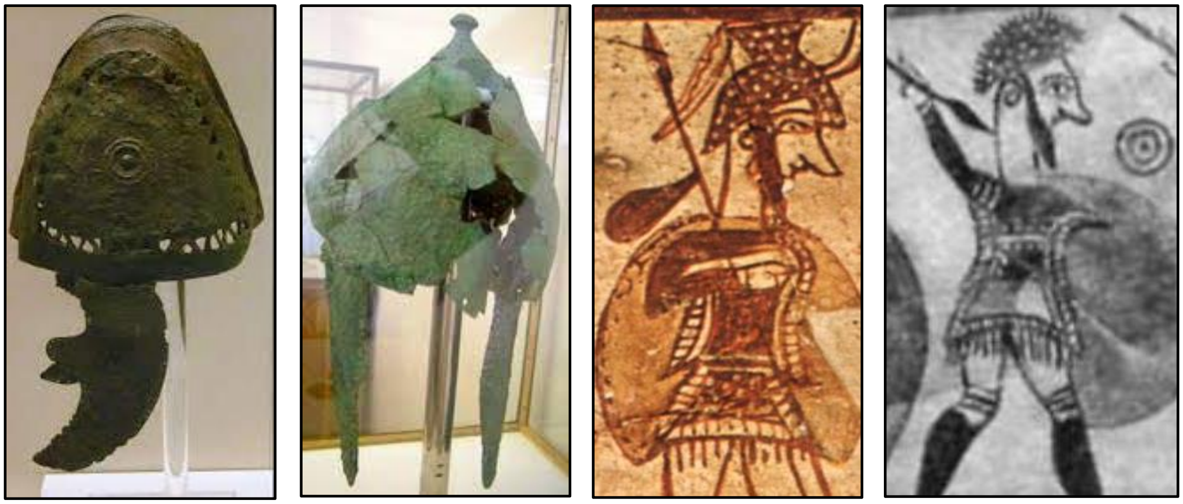
To me, the three most aesthetically beautiful items of military equipment in all of history are the *Scharnhorst* battlecruiser, the P-51 Mustang fighter plane, and the Corinthian helmet:



None of them was used in the Trojan War.

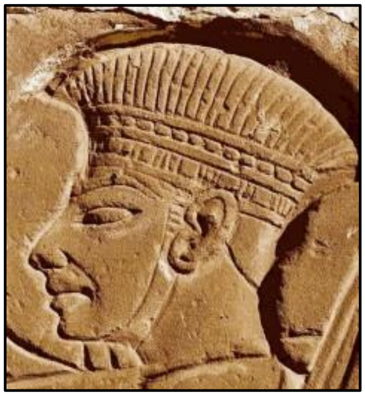
The *Scharnhorst* and Mustang were over 3100 years in the future. In spite of what Hollywood, Attic vase painters of the Classical Age, modern book cover designers, and everyone else in the civilized world think, the Corinthian helmet (in the configuration shown above) was 700 years in the future.

The two examples below on the left are about the only examples of Mycenaean bronze helmets extant today. (There were certainly leather helmets as well, but leather rots away over time, so we have no examples.) The third painting from the left is of course a detail from the Warrior Vase.



Which, umm, leaves the painting on the right. This is actually the “flip side” of the Warrior Vase, which is hardly ever shown (which is why I had to use a black-and-white example). This warrior is wearing the so-called “hedgehog helmet.” No one really knows what to make of it, but it is far from uncommon. Theories about its construction include:

- Its outer skin is indeed the hide of a hedgehog.
- The painting is a crude representation of the so-called “feather helmet” shown in Egyptian carvings that depict Philistine Sea People:



The leading theory about this helmet’s “feathers” is that they’re the ends of the leather thongs that make up the internal body of the helmet. Truth be told, the feather helmet puzzles scholars almost as much as the hedgehog helmet.

Be that as it may … when you envision a Greek fighter in the Trojan War, you should picture him in one of the four sorts of helmets shown abreast above.

Homer's Description of Helmets in the *Iliad*

Homer describes helmets in the *Iliad* as follows:

- The vast majority are described as being "brazen" (i.e., made of bronze).
- A couple are made of leather:

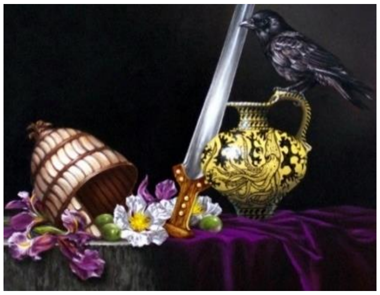
> "… he put over his head a helmet
> of bull's hide, with neither horn nor crest, which is known as
> the skull cap, and guards the heads of strong men in battle…."

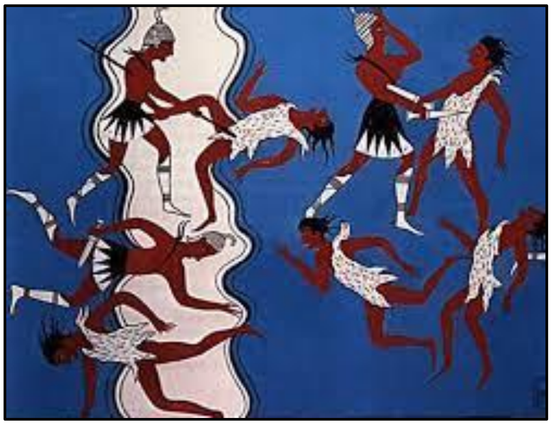
- Many are topped with a horse-hair plume.
- Many have 2 horns, and a couple have 4. Several seem to have just 1, for example: "Peisandros chopped at the horn of the helmet crested with horse-hair." However, I wonder if such references may actually be referring not to a horn but to the conical peak of the helmet.
- Some helmets have "cheeks," no doubt meaning the projections at the bottom that protect the cheeks, jaws, and neck.
- Several helmets are described as "hollow-eyed." This would be an excellent epithet for Corinthian helmets—which, again, didn't exist yet. Nor is this the sort of context that one could convincingly claim was a later addition to the poem. I don't have a good explanation for this.

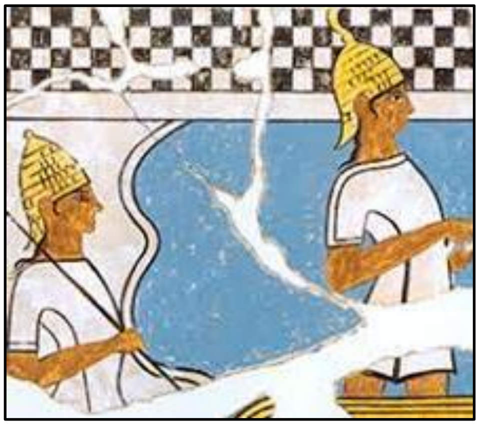
And then there's the Boars-Tusk Helmet

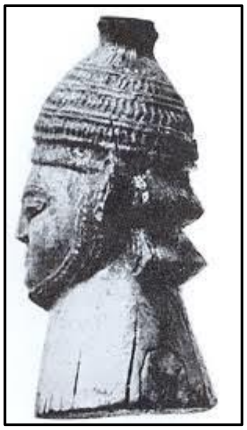
Homer says that Odysseus wore a boars-tusk helmet—the type featured in Rebecca Korth's commissioned cover for *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin* and in Figure 3 above.

The boar-tusk helmet is the second most frequently depicted helmet of the ancient Greek world, after the Corinthian helmet. A mere hint of cases is as follows:









As I said, in the *Iliad,* Odysseus wears a boars-tusk helment. The problem is, the frescoes and carvings immediately above were all produced between the 16th and 14th centuries B.C, i.e., long before the Trojan War:

> "This type of helmet is fully described by Homer, although it had gone out of use long before his day…." (Nicolas Grguric, *The Mycenaeans c. 1650-1100.*)

Another problem is the very frequency with which ancient Greek artists depicted boars-tusk helmets. For example, the 3 Pylians in the fresco on the left above wear them; yet at least 2 of them must be common soldiers, because in a group of only 3, there wouldn't be 2 leaders (officers). It took thirty to forty boars to make such a helmet, so one would expect them to be reserved for leaders. Somethings doesn't compute. I suspect Bronze Age artists were just so enamored with the boars-tusk helmet, as artists are today with the Corinthian helmet, that they represented it out of all proportion to its acutal frequency.

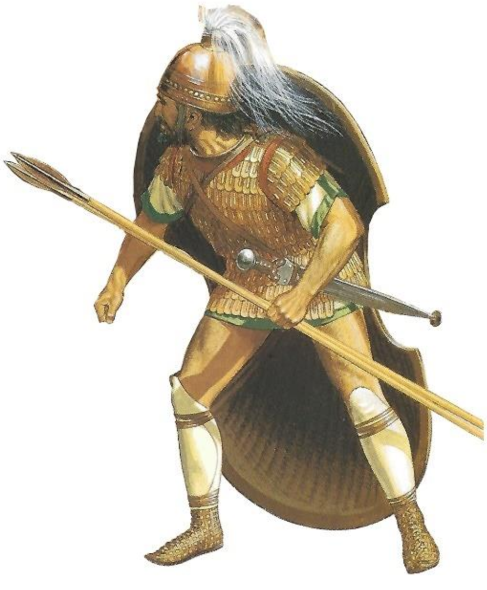
Body Armor

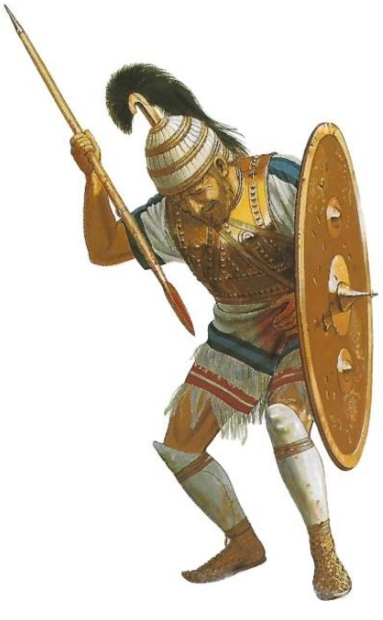
Shields

Homer says Aias carried what scholars agree we would today call a tower shield: "Now Aias came near him, carrying like a wall / his shield…." These are shown in Figures 3 - 5 above. Hektor too carries an over-sized shield, one so large that it reaches from his neck to his ankles:

> "So spoke Hektor of the shining helm, and departed;
> and against his ankles as against his neck clashed the dark ox-hide,
> the rim running round the edge of the great shield massive in the middle."

On the left below, Peter Connolly depicts Hektor bearing another kind of large shield: a figure-eight shield, the kind shown on the left in Figure 5.





These huge tower and figure-eight shields would have been very unwieldy, especially when used with the two-handed lance of the day. And unlike Connolly's depiction, it's unlikely that a warrior would have borne such a huge shield while also wearing a corselet, as the illustration of Hektor shows. Together, they would have been too heavy; and for protection, they would have been overkill. (In Connolly's defense, Homer likewise has Hektor both wearing a corselet and bearing a figure-eight shield.) None of Figures 3 - 5 show such shields with corselets.

The bard describes the vast majority of shields as round ("circles")—at least 24 instances. These could be said to roughly correspond to the shields on the Warrior Vase (Figure 6)—so Homer's description is consistent with actual Trojan War shields.

Homer's shields are constructed of multiple layers of oxhide. A couple also have a bronze layer and a bronze boss (protruding knob) and rim. Peter Connolly's illustration on the right above depicts a wounded Odysseus bearing a round shield with a bronze boss and rimmed with bronze.

Corselets

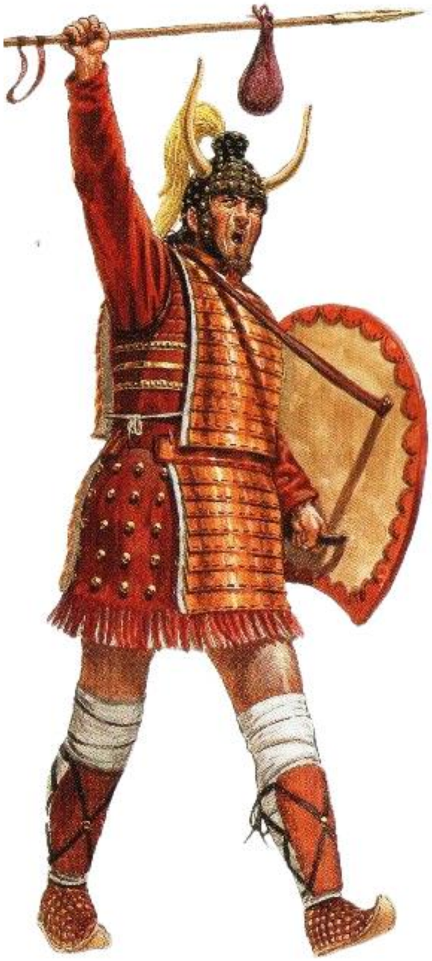
Corselets protect the trunk of the body and are standard equipment for Homeric champions.

"… corselets were introduced for Mycenaean warriors from c. 1200 BC…. These corselets appear to have been made of leather with copper or bronze scales sewn on." (Nicolas Grguric, *The Mycenaeans c. 1650-1100*).

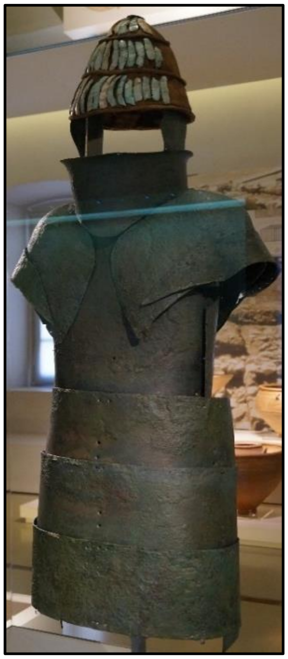
Corselets are mentioned dozens of times in the *Iliad*, but the only detailed description is that they consist of two halves joined by "belt buckles." No examples survive, because leather rots away over time. The soldiers on the Warrior Vase (Figure 6 above) are thought to be wearing the best representation we have of corselets from the time of the Trojan War.

The illustration on the right by Giuseppe Rava is one possible configuration of a corselet. Plates of bronze that slightly curve around the trunk are sewn onto a leather lining. This correponds to (and was probably inspired by) Snodgrass' observation about archaelogical finds in Kallithea that correspond to the Warrior Vase: "here were found long thin strips of embossed bronze, suitable for attachment to a leather corslet."

Mycenaeans did have true scale armor—though based on the few archaeological examples we have, it was probably uncommon. Scales were about the length and width of two fingers and were stitched onto a leather lining. In the picture of Hektor above, he's wearing scale armor.



Cuirasses



"Cuirass" and "corselet" are used interchangeably in both modern usage and in translations of Homer. My observation is that if the armor in question is all-leather, as with Classical Age Athenian armor, it's a corselet. If it's all or overwhelmingly metal, it's a cuirass: An example is the "French cuirassiers" cavalry of the early 19th century. Proportions of leather vs. metal are shades of grade, in which case the author picks his favorite term. That's my observation, anyway.

In his translation, Lattimore always says "corselet," never "cuirass." His translation does say that a Trojan named Othryoneus had "a corselet of bronze," which according to my logic would make it a cuirass. Other translators freely use the term "cuirass."

The famous Dendra panoply, shown on the right, is a clear-cut example of a cuirass. But this is from the 15th century B.C. and thus beyond the scope of this book. So I won't mention it.

Bronze "bell cuirasses" were in use in Greece by the 8th century B.C. For a time, Spartiates of the Classical Age wore them too, before switching to lighter armor. But again, this is beyond the scope of this book, so I won't mention it.

Greaves

Greaves protect the shins and are made of either linen, leather, or bronze (or a linen liner under outer bronze greaves).

Homer includes dozens of references to greaves, and in fact one of the epithets for the Greeks is "strong-greaved Achaians." One description of greaves is as follows:

> "First he placed along his legs the beautiful greaves,
>
> linked with silver fastenings to hold the greaves at the ankles."

Some bronze Mycenaean greaves just protect the shin, while others cover the knee as well.

In the pictures of Odysseus and Hektor above, they're both wearing greaves. So is the Rava warrior above.

The War Belt—You May Want to Skip This

No one really knows what Homer's "war belt" is. He mentions it in ten passages. The most detailed description is as follows, describing a wound Menelaos suffers. (Keep in mind, this is Lattimore's translation. I have used bolding and colorizing to aid the discussion.)

> “The bitter arrow was driven against the joining of the war belt
> and passed clean through the war belt elaborately woven;
> into the elaborately wrought corselet the shaft was driven
> and the guard which he wore to protect his skin and keep the spears off,
> which guarded him best, yet the arrow plunged even through this also
> and with the very tip of its point it grazed the man’s skin
> and straightway from the cut there gushed a cloud of dark blood.”

In his end notes, Lattimore says: “The combination of corselet, war belt, and skin guard (possibly a metallic piece to protect the lower abdomen) is unusual, and may owe more to poetic elaboration (or even misunderstanding) than actual defense wear.”

In “Weapons and Warfare: The Late Mycenaean Period, the Dark Age and Homer, 1300–900 bc,” Mitch Williamson says:

> “Menelaos says that the arrow was stopped by [what s in Greek] his zoster, his zoma and his mitra, which was either made by the bronzesmiths or had bronze put on it [the mitra, that is]. Either translation is possible. [Again, I assume he’s still talking about the mitra.] The first passage gives us clearly enough the order in which the armour was worn. The word zoster means a belt in later times and that seems a reasonable translation here. [In other words, the zoster is the “war belt.”] It is described as well-wrought and shining, which tells us that it is metal, or perhaps metal plates on a leather belt…. It is worn over the cuirass, and the mitra [what Lattimore calls the “skin guard”] was worn under the cuirass….
>
> “The word zoma is also used by Homer as something worn by boxers, and it is clear that it must be a loincloth. The zoster [war belt] was a belt worn over the cuirass, whether it was bronze or linen…. The mitra remains a problem. It was a visible part of the armour and perhaps attached to it, as seems likely from the epithet amitrachitones (literally ‘mitra-corsletted’ or mitra-tuniced’) (Iliad XVI, 419), and its use as a last defence against missiles suggests to me something more substantial than a waist belt…. I think the word [mitra] is most likely describing an armoured kilt such as is worn on the Mycenaean Warrior Vase. This would allow for the three layers of armour in the region of the waist for Menelaos’s arrow to penetrate, and fits well with the phrase ‘with the bronze they put on it’, since these kilts are generally agreed to have been leather with bronze studs.”

So Lattimore mentions three layers—in order from outside the body to inside: war belt, corselet, and skin guard. Not knowing Greek, I don’t know if he’s translating zoma as corselet. (For that matter, I don’t know if Homer even says “zoma,” as Williamson says Homer does.) Today, both “cuirass” and “corselet” translate into Greek as “thórakas”. On rare occasions, English writers will use the term “thorax” for an ancient Greek corselet/cuirass. (Linear B clay tablets call it a “to-ra-ka.”)

Contrary to Lattimore, Williamson says there are four layers: zoster/war belt, zoma/loincloth, mitra/armored kilt—with also a corselet/cuirass implied. But a loincloth isn't going to stop anything, so that's an odd translation.

Van Wees doesn't clear things up much:

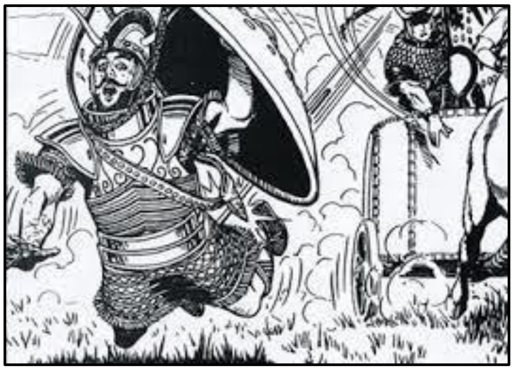
> "Difficulties arise in trying to work out the relation between the corslet (*sic*) and the 'belts' (zoster or mitre) of which we hear…. The zostir (*sic*) is a substantial piece of armour in its own right…, valuable enough to serve as a gift of friendship…. While the cover of the corslet does not extend further down than the 'middle belly,' the zoster covers the 'lower belly'…. Evidently, the zoster is a broad metal belt worn around the upper hips, protecting the parts the thorax cannot reach…. the arrow smashed thru the zoster, then the cuirass, and finally thru a miter (*sic*), which is made of bronze…. Clearly, the zoster [war belt] here is a belt worn around the waist rather than the upper hips, and on top of, not under, the corslet. …. I suggest the mitre is simply another word for the 'belt' worn under the cuirass, and that the term is used here to distinguish it from a second belt, a zoster worn around the waist of the cuirass to help keep the front- and back-plates together."

So here, Van Wees seems to be saying that the zoma is the thorax/corselet/cuirass. Which doesn't strike me as likely. Or else Williamson is just plain wrong about Homer mentioning a zoma at all.

Homer's description of the war belt further confuses the issue:

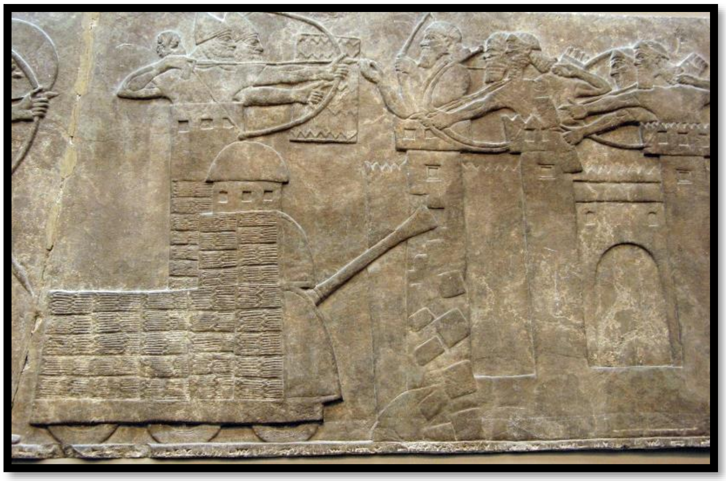
- He describes Menelaos' war belt as "finely woven." A bronze war belt would not be "woven."
- He describes Oineus' war belt as being dyed red, and Diomedes' as being dyed purple. A bronze war belt could not be "dyed."
- Contrary to what Williamson and Van Wees say, Homer's description of the war belt as "shining" might not mean that it's metal at all. Use of "shining" might merely be another case of Homer's use of the term as meaning "excellent," "neat," "ginormous," "groovy," "above average"—as in his epithets "shining ransom," "shining gifts," "shining Olympos," "shining feet," "shining son of Euaimon," "shining horses," dot dot dot.

The obscurity about "war belt" is reflected in the fact that my typical due-diligence internet search found no discussion dedicated to "war belt." And the only picture I could come up with was the following cartoon from Eric Shanower's graphic novel series, "*Age of Bronze: The story of the Trojan War*." Examine the waist-area of the figure on the left.



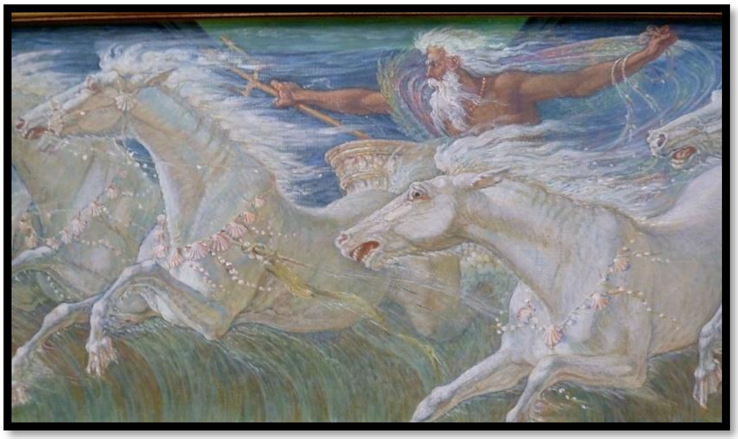
Frequently Asked Questions

Did the Trojan War really happen?	Depends. If we define “Trojan War” as “any documented (as opposed to legendary) armed conflict between ancient Greeks and Trojans,” the answer is: Yes. As described above, the 1295 B.C. Hittite tablet referring to the depredations of Piyama-radu proves that Greeks and Trojans (with their Hittite allies) did fight a war. But if we define “Trojan War” as “a war where Greeks destroy Troy in the approximate timeframe of 1200 B.C., and the city of Troy corresponds to Homer’s description,” the answer is: No. • The 1295 B.C. Piyama-radu conflict doesn’t qualify, because: (a) It didn’t destroy Troy, and (b) It took place too early in history. • Troy VI was destroyed in the right timeframe; and it was the large, beautiful city that Homer describes. But most scholars believe the destruction was due to earthquake, not war. (This was the opinion of Troy’s third major excavator, Carl Blegen.) And there is certainly no evidence of an attack by Greeks. • Troy VIIa was likewise destroyed in the right timeframe, and the evidence is that it was destroyed by warfare. But there is no evidence that the attackers were Greeks; nor does the shabby state of the city match Homer’s description of Troy as the most beautiful, rich city in the eastern Mediterranean.
Did the ruse of the Trojan Horse really occur?	There are two types of Bronze Age scholars in the world: • “Homerists,” scholars that tend to take Homer at face value and argue that the episode of the Trojan Horse is plausible. For example, there was a 2015 PBS program called “The Real Trojan Horse,” in which engineers designed one and argued for its plausibility. • Scholars who dwell on planet earth. The entire idea is absurd. It’s inconceivable that any defenders would be stupid enough to fall for it, and thus inconceivable that any attackers would be stupid enough to take the time, effort, and money to build it. Why wouldn’t the Trojans just hoist a ladder and look for a trap door? I’ll repeat my earlier remarks: This is a *poem*, people. There is one theory that the Trojan Horse is an ancient cultural memory of what was really a battering ram, as for example the following Assyrian battering ram of several hundred years later …



… and over time the memory of the battering ram morphed into a giant wooden horse. As far back as Pliny the Elder in the 1st century A.D. and Pausanias in the 2nd, some thinkers took it for granted that the Trojan Horse was some kind of siege engine.

Michael Wood advances another theory. Poseidon is the god not only of the sea but of horses as well, as imagined in this painting:



Poseidon also happens to be the god of earthquakes and was known as the Earth Shaker. Troy being destroyed by the Trojan Horse, so the theory goes, is a transmogrification of the cultural memory of Troy being destroyed by an earthquake—horses and earthquakes both being associated with Poseidon.

These theories are clever but beside the point. The question is not, "Did something inspire someone to come up with the story of the Trojan Horse?" Clearly, something must have, because we have the story. The real question is, "Did a giant wooden horse, in which soldiers hid so the enemy would be tricked into letting them into the city, really exist?" And the answer is: "Be serious."

What about the scope of the war—10 years, 1000 ships, 75,000 - 130,000 Greeks? Is such a scope plausible?	Again, the answer is: Homerists versus earth dwellers. There is no way Greek economies of the time, divided as they were among small commonwealths (be they city-states or regions/kingdoms) could have transported that many men halfway across the known world and kept them supplied for that many years. Some scholars agree with my position—for example, M.I. Finley in *The World of Odysseus.* Others don't. Moreover, men don't fight for ten years. Frontline soldiers have to be replaced regularly. They fight for a handful of years and then either find ways to avoid the fighting or go crazy. As an example, in World War I, after fighting for four years, the armies of France, Britain, Russia, and Germany all mutinied and refused to fight anymore. Modern conflicts of long duration, such as Viet Nam or Afghanistan, are possible only because troops are continuously rotated out of the fighting. As one American officer of the Viet Nam conflict put it: "We didn't fight in Viet Nam for ten years; we fought for one year, ten times." Ancient Greece simply hadn't the population or wealth to do that. Not to mention the impossibility of convincing 75,000 to 130,000 irregular non-professionals to give up ten years of their lives—their peak sexual years at that—in what would have been by year four or five clearly an unwinnable conflict. By the way: When he composed his immortal line, "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?", Christopher Marlowe, undoubtedly at university an English major, was guilty of rounding error. The actual number is 1186. I counted.
Did Achilleus really exist?	Absolutely (though he pre-dated the Trojan War). See page 92.
Did Hektor really exist?	Well, no, not the Hektor of the *Iliad*. The name is found in the Linear B tablets dating from the time of the Trojan War—meaning, it was a common Greek name at the time. There's evidence that Thebes venerated a Greek hero named Hektor prior to the Trojan War.
Did Paris really exist?	Kind of (though he would have pre-dated the Trojan War). Homer uses two names for Paris—Paris and Alexandros. Alexandros would have been the Greek rendering for the Trojan/Luwian name "Alaksandu." As described on page 10, there was a historical Trojan king named Alaksandu that signed a treaty with Hittite King Muwatalli II.
Did Agamemnon really exist?	Maybe. Just maybe (though he would have pre-dated the Trojan War). As page 10 says, according to a Hittite tablet, Greek land and sea forces under "Attarsiya" invaded southwest Anatolia in 1400 B.C. Some scholars believe that the name "Attarsiya" is the Hittite rendering of "Atreus." Given other Hittite names with which I am familiar, I find this credible.

	Atreus was the father of Agamemnon (and Menelaos). Did Attarsiya / Atreus have a son named Agamemnon that took over the family business and attacked Anatolia? Possibly. But he would have lived 200 years before the Trojan War.
What about Odysseus?	Sorry, there's no evidence for such a person. Even the etymology of the name is unknown—which means there is no hint about where the name even originated.
Why does Homer have multiple names for things? • Achaeans, Argives, Danaans • Paris, Alexandros • Troy, Ilion	Possible explanations are as follows. (That's *possible.* Take your pick.) • Perhaps the mythical tradition that Homer inherited had multiple names. A modern analogy for the many names Homer uses for the Greeks (Achaeans, Argives, Danaans) would be how we had the following names for the same peoples: Russians, Soviets, Communists, Bolsheviks. • Perhaps multiple names gave him more flexibility with the meter. He was writing in dactylic hexameter, and the more choices he had to fit the metrical context of the moment, the better. • Though to my knowledge there's no evidence for it, it occurs to me that Homer may have merged a mythical tradition about a hero named Paris with a mythical tradition about a hero named Alexandros. • As for the use of both "Troy" and "Ilion", there is a more compelling (not to mention more interesting) explanation. The following is generally accepted as true. It's based on the research of Manuel Robbins, John Chadwick, Emil Forrer, Trevor Bryce, and Manfred Korfmann. It appears from Hittite tablets that there were two regions of northwest Anatolia that were either next door to each other, or were the same region referred to by two different names, or perhaps one was a subset of the other (e.g., one was a city and the other was the region in which that city was located). These two regions were: o *Taruiša*, which is generally believed to be the Hittite term for the region around Troy called "the Troad." Presumably, the Hittites and Trojans both spoke Luwian (this is likely but not certain), so this would have been the Trojan term as well. It's likely that when Greeks encountered Trojans and/or Hittites, they morphed "Taruiša" into "Troy" and used it to represent the city. o *Wilusa* or *Wilusiya*. This was almost certainly the Hittite term for what the Greeks rendered as "Wilios." Note that before the Classical Period—i.e., in roughly the time of Homer—the "W" sound (the Greek letter digamma) was lost in Greek, and the pronunciation became "Ilios." Lattimore says that by the 7th century B.C., Greek settlers (re-)founded a city in Troy's location and called it "Ilion." This is what (Lattimore's translation of) the *Iliad* uses, using it as another name for "Troy."

	Wikipedia agrees, saying, “Ilion (Ἴλιον) … [was] an Archaic name for the pre-classical city of Troy….” Eventually, the Romans took over the city “Ilion” and rendered the name as “Ilium,” as in Christopher Marlowe’s “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” Over time, Troy and Ilios/Ilion/Ilium became synonymous. By the bye: By my count, the Lattimore translation of the *Iliad* uses “Ilion” 100 times, “Troy” 86 times, and “the Troad” 8 times. It never uses “Ilium” or “Ilios.” In *The Attack on Troy*, Rodney Castleden maintains that it’s 106 times for “Ilios”, 53 times for “Troia.” He’s clearly using a different translation than I am—perhaps his own, I don’t know.
Book II of the *Iliad* lists all the Trojan allies. Why did Homer omit the most powerful ally of all, the Hittites?	Homer may have known of the existence of the Hittites. Pockets of Hittite culture would still have existed in Homer’s time. For example, in the *Bible*, David contrives to kill Bathsheba’s husband “Uriah the Hittite.” The best answer I am aware of comes from Hittite scholar Trevor Bryce: “We cannot rule out the possibility that Homer himself knew about the Hittites but deliberately kept them out of his epic, so that they would not diminish the status of his Trojans and consequently that of their opponents [i.e., the Greeks] and the epic conflict in which they were engaged.” As an analogy, if you’re trying to glorify America’s victory over the Nazis, you don’t spoil your argument by admitting that it was actually the Russians who defeated the Nazis, not the Americans.

Homer's Epics

Pre-Homeric Trojan War Mythical Tradition

With something that goes back 3000 years, there's little we can be absolutely sure of. But one of the things we *can* be sure of is this: Homer did not "invent" the Trojan War in a historical sense. As we have seen, Greeks and Anatolians clashed off and on for 160 years, one occurrence of which definitely pitted Greeks against Trojans (see page 10).

Another thing we can be sure of is that Homer did not invent the Trojan War in a literary sense either. How can we be sure? Because both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* include references to mythical elements that are outside of the scope of the works themselves. These mythical elements include myths both related to and unrelated to the Trojan War. A smattering of examples is as follows:

- Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia
- Agamemnon's murder by his wife and her lover
- Orestes' revenge upon Agamemnon's murderers
- *Odyssey's* list of famous and infamous women
- Sisyphus
- The Trojan Horse
- The elopement of Paris and Helen
- Teiresias the prophet
- Oedipus
- Hercules

That is, though these mythical elements played no direct role in his stories, Homer assumed that the audience already knew about these mythical elements, and he could allude to them without explanation. That means that there must have been a mythical tradition that predated Homer and was familiar to his audience. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Homer drew upon this mythical tradition.

What form would this mythical tradition have taken? Because it pre-dated writing, there can be no physical evidence now. But logically: songs, prose stories, and poems. Some of those poems may even have been small epic poems in their own right. They may have even established dactylic hexameter as the meter of epic poetry, which then passed down through the ages to Homer. (See "Dactylic Hexameter" below.)

Creating Epics in a Non-Literate Age

Though in Homer's lifetime, Greece was in the earliest stages of adopting the Phoenician alphabet, it is accepted wisdom that Homer was not literate himself. Rather, he was part of a centuries-old or even millennium-old oral tradition, in which the poems were both composed and delivered orally. So Homer (assuming he existed) had no pen, paper, or papyrus to aid his composing, i.e., to do initial drafts and then revise them. Nor could he read from a written version of his poems when reciting to an audience.

The *Odyssey* is 12,110 lines. 134,560 English words. Roughly 300 pages of a standard book. The *Iliad*, 15,693 lines, 176,000 words, 500 pages. With no writing system to rely on, composing the poems and delivering them to an audience could only be accomplished by memorizing an average of nearly 14,000 lines per poem. *(Irony alert:)* That's not as easy as it sounds.

Over hundreds and hundreds of years, bards developed a system to meet this challenge—that is, to aid memorization.

Meter

Perhaps the most effective factor in memorization is the inherent mnemonic capability of metered language. We remember language in a metric form much better than we do unmetrical prose. For example, as I write this, I can recall the words to the following nursery rhyme, though I probably haven't heard it for sixty years:

> "Goosey, goosey, gander
> whither shall I wander?
> Upstairs and downstairs,
> and in my lady's chamber."

(I purposefully chose this rhyme because it doesn't—*rhyme,* that is. Rhyming is also a mnemonic aid, so I ruled it out in my example, because Homeric epics don't rhyme either—unless you commit the unforgiveable sin of reading the Chapman or Pope translations.)

For the specifics on Homeric metrics, see "Dactylic Hexameter" below.

Music

To this day, when I have to spell "encyclopedia" (as I do below), I sing the Mickey Mouse Club song:

> *" ♫ Eee en-see ♫ why-see ♫ el-oh ♫ pee ee-dee-eye-ay ♫"*

When in his poems Homer tells of a bard reciting poetry, the Greek word he uses is translated as "sing." Furthermore, Greek bards, Homer included, accompanied their recitation by playing the lyre.

Now, it's uncertain just how melodic such performances were. But regardless of how melodic they were, music is another aid to memory. Evolution has hard-wired the brain to recognize and remember patterns among the clutter of instant-by-instant existence. For example, it's evolutionarily advantageous to be able to recognize the underlying visual pattern of a tiger, even though it's only partially visible crouched immobile among thick jungle grass.

Musical systems (such as the Blues) are just such a pattern. Knowing the pattern of Blues aids the musician's memory. As Daniel J. Levitin says in his fascinating book, *This is Your Brain on Music:*

> "Expert musicians excel at remembering chord sequences that are "legal" or make sense within the harmonic systems that they have experience with, but they do no better than anyone else at learning sequences of random chords.
>
> "When musicians memorize songs, then, they are relying on a structure for their memory, and the details fit into that structure. This is an efficient and parsimonious way for the brain to function."

Homeric Formulae

A Homeric formula is a canned expression that can be used over and over again. Since it's "canned," it has a specific, unchanging meaning and metrical cadence. Having canned expressions makes it easier to compose, because you can just take one "off the shelf" and plug it in wherever the logical and metrical contexts call for it. And it makes it easier to memorize and recite, both because it *is* metrical and because you've used it over and over again. Some formulae from the poems:

- "Put away their desire for eating and drinking." (*Odyssey.* 14 instances.)
- "And all the journeying ways were darkened." (*Odyssey*. 7 instances.)
- "Adding many good things to it, generous with her provisions." (*Odyssey.* 6 instances.)
- "Stayed stricken to silence." (*Odyssey.* 6 instances.)
- "He fell, thunderously." (*Iliad.* 19 instances.)
- "A mist of darkness clouded both eyes" or "a mist of darkness closed over both eyes." (*Iliad*. 9 instances.)

Homeric Epithets

A Homeric epithet is a special kind of formula that consists of an adjective/noun combination. A Homeric epithet has all the mnemonic advantages of formulae. The following are from the Odyssey:

- "Resourceful Odysseus." (86 instances.)
- "Circumspect Penelope." (56 instances.)
- "Rosy fingered dawn" or "dawn showed again with her rosy fingers." (22 instances.)
- "Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus." (16 instances.)
- "Odysseus of the many designs." (5 instances.)

Repetition

Of course, the ultimate aid to memory is if you just repeat entire blocks of text in multiple places. The most extreme example that I'm aware of is the three failed attacks in the *Odyssey*. The first is the attack on Ismaros, the first event of the Great Wanderings. Homer goes on to use this text as the basis of two tall tales about attacking Egypt—once in Book XIV and then again in Book XVII.

Other Features of Homer's Craft

Epic Similes

Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia defines a "simile" as "a comparison between two things of a different kind or quality, usually introduced by 'like' or 'as'." For example:

> "My love is like a red, red rose." (Robert Burns)
>
> "Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail." (Charles Dickens)

An "epic simile" is a long one, and Homer is famous for them. Epic similes enable a poet to verbally paint a rich, compelling scene out of nothing but words. While Homer probably inherited specific formulae from his predecessors, his epic similes are undoubtedly his alone.

Here are two examples:

> "As a woman weeps, lying over the body
> of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people
> as he tried to beat off the pitiless day from city and children;
> she sees him dying and gasping for breath, and winding her body
> about him she cries high and shrill, while the men behind her,
> hitting her with the spear butts on the back and the shoulders,
> force her up and lead her away into slavery, to have
> hard work and sorrow, and her cheeks are wracked with pitiful weeping.
> Such were the pitiful tears Odysseus shed from under his brows…."
>
> "And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming,
> after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open
> water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy
> seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward
> by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them,
> and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;
> so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,
> and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms."

Dactylic Hexameter

"Dactylic hexameter" is the technical term for the meter in which Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and others worked.

The meter of most English—and indeed, most Western—poetry is based on stressed versus unstressed syllables. For example, here is an example of stressed and unstressed syllables in the poetical form known as the limerick:

> “There **ONCE** was a **MAN** from East **DAL**-las
> who **LIVED** in a **CRUM**-bl-ing **PAL**-ace.”

The most common metrical unit used for elevated writing in English is the “iamb”—a poetic “foot” comprising one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, for example: dis-**CRETE**.

When presenting courtly scenes, Shakespeare typically uses a meter called “iambic pentameter”—a line consisting of five iambs (“penta” being the Greek term for five, as in “the Pentagon”):

> “But **SOFT**! What **LIGHT** through **YON**-der **WIN**-dow **BREAKS**?”

> “And **GEN**-tle-**MEN** in **ENG**-land **NOW** a-**BED**
> Shall **THINK** them-**SELVES** a-**CCURS’D** they **WERE** not **HERE**….”

Homeric meter, though, is not based on stressed versus unstressed syllables, but rather on long versus short syllables. To quote the source of all wisdom (*Wikipedia*):

> “… *dactylic hexameter* has six [poetic] feet. In strict dactylic hexameter, each foot would be a *dactyl* (a long and two short syllables), but classical meter allows for the substitution of a *spondee* (two long syllables) in place of a dactyl in most positions. Specifically, the first four feet can either be dactyls or spondees more or less freely. The fifth foot is usually a dactyl…. The sixth foot can be filled by either a *trochee* (a long then short syllable) or a spondee. Thus the dactylic line most normally is scanned as follows:”

—˘˘ | —˘˘ | —˘˘ | —˘˘ | —˘˘ | — —

where — is a long syllable, ˘ is a short syllable, and | separates the six feet. The first line of the *Iliad,* translated as, “Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus’ son Achilleus” is in the Greek language:

> μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

which corresponds to:

> dactyl dactyl spondee dactyl dactyl spondee

Singing to His Audience

We can only speculate about how Homer recited to an audience. But the following is believed to be the case:

- Assuming that he wasn’t in fact blind, Homer, like his peers, would have been a wandering bard, called a “rhapsode,” earning his bread by travelling from aristocrat to aristocrat and being paid in bits of metal to entertain the lord and his household.

- We don’t know if women were allowed to hear the performance. No doubt it depended on local customs.
- It takes about an hour to recite each Book—meaning, if told in its entirety, the performance would have taken 24 hours. The literature says it would have been performed over three days—but that would mean 8-hour days straining the vocal cords. I’m skeptical.

  (The division into Books was done by later editors, not Homer. The thinking is that Book boundaries were determined by the practical length of a papyrus scroll.)

The “Epic Cycle”

The *Iliad* spans only a few weeks in the tenth year of a 10-year war. That is, it depicts a tiny slice of the overall Trojan War. Other epic poets covered the rest of the war, drawing on the same mythical tradition as Homer. Together, these epic poems are known as the “Epic Cycle.” Like Homer’s works, some of these epic poems were probably composed orally and only later written down. But it’s probable that some of the later ones were composed in written form.

All of these epic poems have been lost. We know of them only from papyrus fragments, quotes in the works of other writers, and a synopsis of all of them written by a guy named Proclus. I’ve read it, it’s only about seven pages.

Interestingly, in *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer & the Epic Cycle*, Jonathan Burgess analyzed depictions of the Trojan War on Greek pottery over the span of hundreds of years, categorizing them into: (a) Based on the *Odyssey* or *Iliad*, versus (b) Based on non-Homeric events contained in the poems of the Epic Cycle. He concluded that:

> “… [representations] of the Homeric poems in art are surprisingly late and infrequent. A completely different picture emerges when we look for images about “Cyclic” Trojan War themes. No matter how one judges the number of Homeric scenes in early art, it must be admitted that non-Homeric images of the Trojan War preceded Homeric images and remained far more popular throughout the seventh century and into the sixth century.”

In other words, for hundreds of years, the non-Homeric poems of the Epic Cycle were apparently more popular than Homer’s.

The following table lists these poems, *in order of the sequence of the events of the war—not in the order of dates of composition.* Who authored them is a matter of debate (isn’t everything?), as are dates of composition—so I won’t burden you with the possibilities. Most scholars would agree that, except for one or two that are possibly from the early 6th century B.C., they probably were composed in the 7th century B.C., i.e., a bit after Homer. They are all smaller than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—some of them much, much smaller.

Poem	Plot
Cypria	First 9 years of the war: Origins of the war. Judgment of Paris. Elopement of Helen and Paris. Odysseus pretends to be insane. Attack on Teuthrania, mistaken for Troy. Marriage of Achilleus. Sacrifice of Iphigenia. Start of the war. Laying waste to the Trojan countryside. Achilleus captures Briseis.
Iliad	Year 10, the "wrath of Achilleus": Agamemnon takes Briseis, so Achilleus goes AWOL. Hektor kills Patroclus, so Achilleus returns the favor.
Aethiopis	Year 10: Achilleus kills the Amazon queen Penthesileia and the Ethiopian king Memnon. Paris kills Achilleus. Odysseus and Ajax (Aias) argue over who should get Achilleus' armor.
Illias Mikra	Year 10: Denied Achilleus' armor, Ajax goes mad and kills himself. Philoctetes the master bowman kills Paris. Odysseus fetches Achilleus' teenage son Neoptolomus from Greece. Helen helps Odysseus when he infiltrates Troy.
Iliupersis	Year 10: Ruse of the Trojan Horse. Cassandra and Laocoön warn about the Horse. Sack of the city. Neoptolomus kills Priam and takes Hektor's wife Andromache as his concubine. Murder of Hektor's infant son Astyanax.
Nostoi	Returns of Diomedes, Nestor, Menelaos, and Agamemnon to Greece. Includes the murder of Agamemnon and revenge killing of his murderers by his son Orestes.
Odyssey	10-year wanderings of Odysseus and his return to Ithaka.
Telegonia	Fathered by Odysseus, Telegonus is born to Circe. Odysseus marries Callidice, queen of the Thesprotians. (Penelope is still alive and kicking.) Callidice conveniently dies. Odysseus and Telegonus travel to Ithaka. Telegonus unwittingly kills his father Odysseus. Telegonus marries Penelope (his step-mother, who must be pretty long in the tooth by now), and Telemachos marries Circe (more or less his step-mother).

(There were also four other epic poems based on the mythical tradition that were not related to the Trojan War. See the "Literature" subsection above.)

Notice how the 6 epics "fit" around the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* so precisely? That fact is usually cited as proof that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* preceded composition of these epics; and that the Epic Cycle authors, awed by Homer's stature, literarily tip-toed around his work when fleshing out the rest of the war.

In *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer & the Epic Cycle*, Jonathon Burgess says this is bunk. As mentioned previously, he cites artistic evidence to show that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were originally *less* popular than the poems of the Epic Cycle, and only over time—say, the 5th century B.C.—were they appreciated for their genius. At that time, he argues, editors went in and whittled away at all the Epic Cycle poems, snipping off beginnings and endings so they would:

- Cleanly fit around Homer.
- Not duplicate each other's content.

Eventually the superiority of Homer's poems overshadowed the other poems of the Epic Cycle. Over time, the other poems faded away and were swept into the dustbin of history.

Iliad and *Odyssey:* The 4 Stages of Composition

(To my knowledge, the following is my own original synthesis of the known facts.)

Another of those things we can be sure about is that the versions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that we have now cannot be solely attributed to Homer. Rather, they were created in 4 stages; and some unknown set of persons contributed to them.

1. **Pre-Trojan War stage**

   Assuming the Trojan War occurred around the commonly accepted date of 1200 B.C., some elements in Homeric poetry actually pre-date that period. For example, as stated above, Homer says Hektor used a huge shield that today we would call a figure-eight shield; and that he bore a spear 5 meters long, which today we would call a lance. (Macedonians called theirs a *sarissa*.) And he says that Odysseus wore a boars-tusk helmet. All three of these are shown in a Minoan fresco of 1600 B.C., repeated here as Figure 3 again:

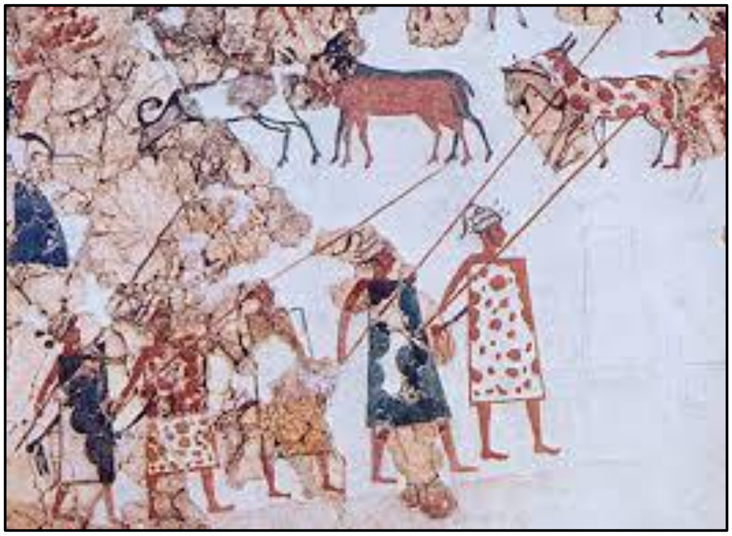


Photo by W. Sheppard Baird.

Figure 3. Fresco from 1600 B.C.

Regarding the boars-tusk helmet, in *The Attack on Troy,* Rodney Castleden says:

> "Nothing like it [the boars-tusk helmet] had ever been seen by anyone living when the *Iliad* was written down in the eighth century; it was a genuine bronze age artefact, described in the Iliad just as it would have looked in the bronze age, yet no longer available for the poet to see for himself. The description of the helmet must therefore have been handed down by oral tradition from the bronze age. It was made principally between 1570 and 1430 BC, but was still in use up to a hundred years later."

The same is true for the figure-eight shield and the lance. This equipment would have been obsolete by the time of the Trojan War. Homer almost certainly inherited these details from tales, poems, or songs from the mythical tradition that preceded the 1200 B.C. Trojan War.

Another Homeric element that precedes the time of the Trojan War is the hero Achilleus. The name "Achilleus" appears multiple times in the Greek Linear B tablets found in Pylos, which:

- Date from around 1200 B.C.—precisely the time of the Trojan War, and …
- … were in fact preserved by the fires that destroyed Pylos—one of the many cities destroyed in the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age.

In the tablets, these instances of "Achilleus" are being used as the names of actual individuals. As hypothetical examples, the tablets might say, "Achilleus of Nichoria was taxed for three sheep." "Achilleus of Pylos took a ship of ten souls to guard Sphakteria." "Achilleus of Lacedaemon sold a pig."

Now, think it through: If a future archaeologist was researching the 20th century and came across the names George Washington Carver, George Washington Williams, George Washington Jones, and so on, he would rightly assume that there must have been an earlier hero named George Washington, after whom these people were named. So it is with "Achilleus." The Linear B tablets prove that the name Achilleus was common at the time of the 1200 B.C. Trojan War; and therefore, there must have been an earlier hero of that name, whom later baby boys were named after.

2. Trojan War stage

There's no reason to doubt that a good share of the details in Homer's work descended from the Late Bronze Age, i.e., the purported time in which the Trojan War took place, rather than from Homer's own time. Given Homer's dependence on the prior mythical tradition, it was inevitable that many details from the Bronze Age—as opposed to Homer's own time, the Iron Age—would filter down into the poem.

There is proof that some details in the *Iliad* were indeed accurate depictions of the Late Bronze Age:

- In Homer’s works, the metal used in the vast majority of cases is bronze, which by Homer’s time had been supplanted by iron as the fundamental technology of society. Homer inherited the use of bronze helmets, swords, spear points, etc., from an earlier age.
- Archaeology has determined that some of the cities cited in the *Iliad* were indeed robust, powerful cities in the Late Bronze Age; but by Homer’s time they had crumbled to ruin, and he could have known nothing about them personally. The knowledge must have been handed down to him through history via the mythical tradition.

In the rare cases where Homer the poet-narrator steps forward and addresses the audience directly, he explicitly says that his poem is looking back on an earlier era of history, a golden age of heroes long gone by, when men were men. For example:

> “But the son of Tydeus caught up a mighty stone, so huge and great
> that as men now are it would take two to lift it.”

3. Homeric stage

We have proof that Homer added details from his own time. Homer lived in the Early Iron Age, when iron had supplanted bronze as the technical foundation of material society. In the Bronze Age, humans did not know how to extract iron from iron ore. Therefore, iron was a precious metal that could only be obtained from iron meteorites or pure deposits of iron, both of which are exceedingly rare. But the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have many anachronistic references to iron that must have been added during Homer’s own time, when extracting iron from ore and forging it into useful implements was common:

> “I've come, / as you surmise, with comrades on a ship, / sailing across the wine-dark sea to men / whose style of speech is very different, / on my way to Temese for copper, / and carrying a freight of shining iron.”
>
> “When a blacksmith / plunges a great axe or adze in frigid water / with a loud hissing sound, to temper it / and make the iron strong ….”
>
> “When she'd said this, / she then told Eumaeus, the loyal swineherd, / to set the bow and gray iron axes for the suitors.”

Homer either failed to see that he was being anachronistic, or else he didn’t care. Or these were post-Homeric additions.

Homer also refers to Phoenicia, which didn’t exist in the Bronze Age. It was then called Canaan.

Another example is Homer’s multiple references to Greek temples. In the Bronze Age, Greeks did not build temples to their gods or goddesses.

Yet another case where Homer’s poem shows obvious differences to the era of the Trojan War is the fascinating passage from *Iliad* Book VI in which the narrative stumbles awkwardly over the concept of writing (Linear B), which had been lost by Homer’s time:

> "Protios shrank from killing Bellerophontes, since his heart was awed by such action,
> but sent him away to Lykia, and handed him murderous symbols,
> which he inscribed in a folding tablet, enough to destroy life,
> and told him to show it to his wife's father, that he [Bellerophontes] might perish."

This is what's going on in this tale: Protios wants to kill Bellerophontes, because Protios' wife said (falsely) that Bellerophontes had raped her. But killing him would be a grave sin against *xenia* (the sacred guest/host relationship), because Bellerophontes was his guest. So he has Bellerophontes carry a message to Protios' father-in-law, saying in essence: "Kill the bearer of this message."

Writing existed till about 1100 B.C. but was then lost in Greece. So Homer is aware of dim cultural memories of writing ("murderous symbols"), but really doesn't understand how the whole literacy thing worked. Hence this murky passage.

4. Post-Homeric stage

Homer was an oral poet. He composed and performed his works orally. In his lifetime, Greece was in only the earliest stage of rediscovering writing.

Therefore, the fact that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* survived the poet's death proves that students/apprentices must have memorized his poems and either immediately committed them to writing—very unlikely—or passed them on orally to others in a chain that eventually committed them to writing.

After that, written versions would have to be passed down from one century to the next, as papyrus copies disintegrated.

Both processes—oral transmission and written transcription—would inevitably have included both errors and conscious alterations by "editors," which would have altered the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. What is known, suspected, or assumed about this process is as follows. (Yes, some of the points conflict with other ones.)

- An initial stage of oral transmission probably lasted a hundred years or so after Homer's death.
- The date at which scholars say the texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were fixed, producing canonical versions, ranges from the 6th century B.C. (600 - 501 B.C.) to 150 B.C.
- In the mid-6th century B.C., the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus supposedly arranged to have the texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* finalized as we now have them. Supposedly.
- Elites could have possessed written copies (not necessarily canonical) by the Classical Age—say, from around 500 - 400 B.C.
- In the 3rd century B.C., Zenodotus tried to assemble canonical versions of Homer's works. In the 2nd century B.C., Aristarchus did likewise. There were a lot of cooks editing the broth.

- Papyri fragments that survive to this day suggest that relatively uniform texts existed after the mid-2nd century B.C.
- The earliest Homeric papyri fragments that still exist today are from the third century B.C. The earliest surviving complete copy of a work by Homer (the *Iliad)* dates from the 10th century A.D.

Homer's Relationship to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

When considering Homer's relationship to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, scholars have come up with as many theories as Baskin-Robbins has flavors of ice cream. The main ones are as follows:

1. The no-Homer theory

This theory maintains that there was no Homer, nor any other single poet, that was responsible for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The two poems merely comprise pre-existing folk tales, songs, and poems. Over time, they were stitched together in ever-larger pieces, as planetary bodies accrete over time from collisions between smaller bodies.

The main arguments against this theory are:

- The stunning quality of the language in the two poems, especially the *Iliad*. Such beauty does not come from a bunch of shit-kicking yokels, but only from one of the greatest poets of all time.
- Their nearly identical construction. The same meter is used for both, as are the same epithets and the same sort of similes.
- Their artistic unity. By "artistic unity," I mean that each one focuses on a single central theme throughout, as a modern work of literature would, rather than merely narrating a series of unrelated events—as, for example, Quintus of Smyrna's 4th century A.D epic poem *The War at Troy* (aka, *Posthomerica*) does. Because it's just one battle scene after another with no unifying theme, *The War at Troy* is boring as all get-out. (Trust me, I've read it.)

  The two central themes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are of course:

  - The theme of the anger of Achilleus, which starts in Book I and persists till the end.
  - The yearning of Odysseus to return to his homeland, which likewise is introduced in Book I and persists till the end.

2. The solitary genius theory

This theory maintains that the poems were written almost exclusively by a single poet of genius whom we call Homer.

The main arguments against this theory are:

- As described above, large segments of the poems contain elements from pre-Trojan War times, Trojan War times, and post-Homeric times that Homer could not personally have known about. Other persons must have been responsible for them.
- The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are so different in tone and content. (See "How Do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* Differ?" below.)
- The language of the poems is not one that was ever spoken by human beings. It's a combination of two east-Aegean dialects: Ionian and Aeolian. To my knowledge, no one has a good explanation for why this is the case, apart from the explanation that segments of different dialects were written by different individuals.
- The poems use multiple names for the same things, such as Argives, Achaeans, and Danaans. (See "Frequently Asked Questions" above.)

3. The poet-integrator theory

This theory maintains that there was a single poet of genius who took existing folk tales, songs, and poems and wove them into narratives of his own making, to which he contributed a vast amount of brilliant original poetry.

This is the most commonly accepted theory today. The only fault I can find with it is that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are so different in tone and content. (See "How Do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* Differ?" below.) It's hard to imagine a single personality taking such opposite views about moral and poetic norms.

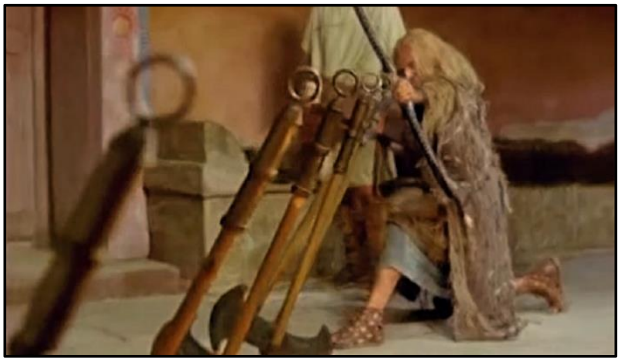
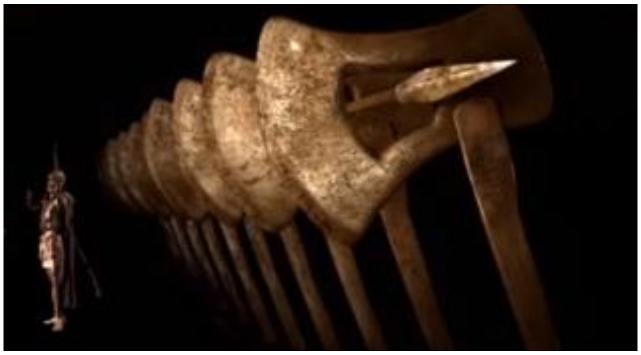
4. The apprentice theory

This theory maintains that there was a single poet of genius who took existing folk tales, songs, and poems and wove them into the *Iliad*, to which he contributed a vast amount of brilliant original poetry—but he had a helper/apprentice who was responsible for much or most or all of the *Odyssey.* As Homeric translator and my-main-man Richard Lattimore puts it:

> "I can think of an old master, called Homer, mainly responsible for the *Iliad*; and a young master, favored apprentice and poetic heir; perhaps a nephew or son-in-law; also going by the name, or assuming the name, of Homer; and mainly responsible for the *Odyssey*."

This is the theory I support.

More Frequently Asked Questions

What's this business in the *Odyssey* about "shooting an arrow through the axes?"	At the climax of the *Odyssey*, Penelope addresses the suitors: "I shall bring you the great bow of godlike Odysseus. And the one who takes the bow in his hands, Strings it with the greatest ease, And sends an arrow clean through all the twelve axes, Shall be the one I go away with." This had me and many others stumped for the longest time. Some suggestions of what it meant included the following: • Shooting between rows of axes. • Shooting through the cylinder hole in the ax head where the handle goes. • Shooting through circular adornments attached to the axes. For example:  Finally, the TSG Entertainment logo made it clear to me:  There really were Bronze Age axes of similar construction, variously called eye axes, fenestrated axes, or duckbill axes.

If you do the math, according to Homer, while Telemachos and the herdsmen are arming themselves, leaving Odysseus facing the suitors alone, he slays 94 suitors while locked in a room with them. Is this credible?	No, not in the least.
Which is better: the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*?	In my opinion, the *Iliad* is the better poem, the *Odyssey* the better story. Many modern readers of the *Iliad* will be bored by the gods' constant intrusions into the affairs of mortals. (I'm one of them.) In my opinion, the intrusion of the gods eliminates the "fourth wall." As Jordan Schroeder explains: "… the fourth wall is the imaginary barrier between a narrative with its own characters and moving along its own narrative timeline, and the audience." Taken from the theater experience, the "fourth wall" is like an imaginary glass wall, through which you're watching a real room with real people taking real actions. It acts to "suspend your disbelief," i.e., you're affected by the events on stage as if they're real life. By constantly beating the 21st century reader over the head with the gods, Homer constantly reminds him or her that this isn't real life—it's a poem composed thousands of years ago, when people believed in such absurdities. In so doing, it: • Strips the experience of emotional impact. • Undercuts the heroism of the human characters, who are constantly being inspired, strengthened, or bailed out of trouble by the gods. Many readers will also find the *Iliad* long and repetitive. It can come off as just one unrelated killing after another. It took me probably four readings before I recognized that it did have the Beginning-Middle-Ending structure

that a good work of literature ought to. Still, Homer would have benefitted from the old saying: *λιγότερο είναι περισσότερο.* ("Less is more.")

But the *Iliad's* poetry far exceeds the *Odyssey's.*

Contrarily, the *Odyssey* more obviously follows what today we would consider a classic Beginning-Middle-Ending story progression (albeit one with a flashback comprising 1/6th of the entire poem). And it's more fanciful than the *Iliad*, which will please many readers. It's also shorter, which will please many others.

The *Odyssey's* main flaws are ones of literary craftsmanship:

- The delay in introducing Odysseus until Book V.

  Homerists have several reasons why this was a stroke of genius; but certainly according to modern tenets, it's a horrible idea. (My first novel got a rejection letter for doing exactly this sort of thing.) And it confuses the chronology and plot structure.

- Unlike the *Iliad,* it seems patched together from independent pieces. Without going into this oft-debated topics, I'll just cite the Telemachy (Books I – IV), the pointless and repetitive final Book, and the unnecessary and unrelated digressions such as the Old Man of the Sea, the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite, and the catalog of famous and infamous women, to name but a few.

By modern standards, both poems do share a common flaw: boring, anti-climactic dénouements:

- The *Iliad* should have skipped Book XXIII, the funeral games for Patroklos, and significantly reduced Book XXIV.
- The *Odyssey* should have ended after the following lines in Book XXIII:

> "And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming,
> after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open
> water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy
> seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward
> by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them
> and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;
> so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,
> and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms."

At these points, the story questions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have been resolved, the plots are resolved, and it's time to end on an emotional high note.

But, hey: These epics were composed some 2700 years ago. Artistic expectations were different then.

My Synthesis

Early History

We know that after conquering the Cretan Minoan people around 1450 B.C., Greeks took over their trade colonies and trade routes in the central and eastern Aegean. This would have brought them into contact with Anatolian peoples, including Trojans and Hittites.

We know that Greek peoples clashed with Anatolian peoples on the coast of Asia Minor and the offshore islands at least five times over a period of 160 years: 1400, 1320, 1295, 1250, and 1240 B.C. (See "Relevant History" above.) The 1295 B.C. clash was definitely a war between Greeks and their Anatolian ally Piyama-radu versus Trojans and their Hittite ally. The war must have been inconclusive, because nothing really changed—certainly, Troy was not destroyed.

In 1250 B.C., the Hittite King Hattusili III sent a letter to the King of "Ahhiyawa"—pretty much accepted these days as Hittite for "Achaia", i.e., Greece—in which he described clashing with Piyama-Radu once again. This time, Hattusili was pursuing Piyama-Radu into Miletus, then under that Greek king (see page 10). In it, Hattusili says:

> "Now as we have come to an agreement on Wilusa over which we went to war...."

Michael Wood firmly believes that Troy VI was Homer's Troy; and that its destruction around 1250 B.C. was due to warfare, not an earthquake. As proof, he argues—disingenuously, in my opinion—as follows:

- MAJOR PREMISE: In 1250 B.C., Troy was destroyed.
- MINOR PREMISE: In 1250 B.C., Hattusili referred to a war between Hittites and Greeks over Troy.
- Conclusion: These are one and the same, QED.

But there's no conclusive evidence for a 1250 B.C. war. It's clear to me that Hattusili was referring not to a recent 1250 B.C. war, but to Piyama-Radu's shenanigans of 1295 B.C. (see page 10)—for which we ***do*** have evidence of a war between Greeks and Troy (and their Hittite allies).

We also know that at the end of the 160 years of conflict (1240 B.C.), the Greeks were expelled—at least as a political force—from much of their eastern Aegean possessions. However, they did retain some offshore islands such as Rhodes and Kos.

160 years is a long time. Greeks had all that time to think about their clashes in Anatolia, compose folk tales and poems about them, and pass them down through history as a mythical tradition. The legend of Achilleus probably developed in this timeframe, so that by the mid-13th century B.C. (1300 - 1201 B.C.), baby boys could have been named after him; and later, those boys, now men, could have been listed in the 1200 B.C. Linear B tablets of Pylos.

The cultural memory of the 1280 B.C. Trojan King Alaksandu could likewise have entered the Greek national consciousness during that period and been absorbed into the pre-Homeric mythical tradition as Alexandros, also called Paris.

Troy VI

The majority of scholars say the cause of the destruction of Troy VI was an earthquake. But the problem is, both earthquakes and wars can topple walls and start fires. Three thousand years later, it's hard to decide which occurred.

To me, the clincher is this: There is no evidence that armies could successfully breach the sturdy walls of a well-defended city until the Assyrians invented battering rams several centuries later—and Troy VI had very sturdy walls indeed. The walls of Troy VI would have been impregnable to attack. That leaves the following possibilities for an attacker:

- A protracted siege that starved the Trojans into submission
- Employing an enemy within, who helped open the gates to the attackers, as happened several times in the Greek Peloponnesian War

But neither of these possibilities would have toppled the walls. Hence, I conclude that Troy VI was indeed destroyed by an earthquake.

Troy VIIa

After being partially toppled by an earthquake in the time of Troy VI, the walls of VIIa would have been vulnerable to attack. And the archaeological evidence indicates that the city was sacked by invaders around 1190 B.C. There is no record of who sacked it—at the time, the Hittite civilization was itself collapsing, and the citizens of Hatti had more pressing things to do than record far-off conflicts, as they had in the past.

While acknowledging that there is no proof, I conclude that Troy VIIa was indeed sacked by Greeks. This destruction of Troy was so important to the ancient Greeks that they created an entire mythical tradition around it; and later in time, eight epic poems. It's more logical to assume that the war did occur, than that the mythical tradition and the Epic Cycle were fabrications on the part of an entire culture.

A Greek Mainland Agamemnon?

We know that there was a Greek presence in western Anatolia and the offshore islands in the 14th and 13th centuries B.C. But to me, it is not credible that at this stage of history a mainland Greek king could have administered territory halfway across the known world in Miletus and the offshore islands. Nor, despite Homer's tale, is there evidence that there was a single hegemonic leader of Greece at the time—a "Great King" or "king of kings"—who was powerful enough to bend other

Greek kings to his will and mount an expeditionary army of a thousand ships to attack Anatolia. I conclude that:

- The political administration of the Greek presence on the west coast of Anatolia and the offshore islands must have been in the hands of local Greeks.
- It was these local Greeks that were involved in most of the clashes with Anatolians—it was not an all-powerful Great King / king of kings from across the Aegean, i.e., someone like Agamemnon.
- The king of one of these local Greek political entities might possibly have established hegemony over the other local Greek kings, thereby becoming a "Great King" / king of kings.
- And it may have been this "Great King" that Hattusili III apologized to for crossing his frontier in search of Piyama-radu in 1250 B.C. (see page 10). What I'm saying is, a Hittite tablet mentioning a Greek "Great King" does not prove that a mainland Agamemnon (or other mainland king of kings) existed.

On the other hand, a mainland Greek king of a single city-state, or in league with other Greek kings of other city-states, *could* have made a limited attack on Troy VIIa and destroyed it. After all, it would not have taken a thousand ships to do so: During the latter stages of the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, Ugarit (in Syria), larger and richer than Troy, was successfully attacked by a mere seven ships of raiders, as described in this message from the King of Ugarit to the King of Alasia (probably Cyprus):

> "May my father know that the enemy ships came. My cities were burned and evil things were done in my country…. Seven ships of the enemy have come here and did us much damage. Be on the lookout for other enemy ships, and send me warning."

The Forever War

(I was certain that this section was an entirely brilliant original theory on my part. A few years later, I found out that someone else had thought of it too. Imagine my disappointment.)

Documented clashes between Greeks and Anatolians took place for 160 years: 1400 - 1240 B.C. (see "Relevant History" above). If you ascribe the destruction of Troy VIIa to Greeks, as I do, that makes it 215 years. Seven generations. Never-ending war.

Some 700 years passed between the first instance of such conflicts (Attarsiya's invasion of 1400 B.C.) and the time of Homer and the other Epic Cycle poets (call it roughly 700 B.C.).

Over those 700 years, the national memory percolated and bubbled away and consciously and unconsciously recast the 215-year history of Greek/Anatolian warfare into what we call the mythical tradition. That mythical tradition transmogrified those 215 years of never-ending war in two ways:

- Rather than a series of six separate conflicts over 215 years, the mythical tradition—i.e., the “national memory”—consciously and unconsciously recast it into one interminable ten-year siege of Troy.
- The mythical tradition also recast it into not one but *three* Greek wars against Troy. In addition to Homer’s war, there were two additional ones:
    - As referred to in the *Iliad*, a generation before Homer’s Trojan War, Hercules and his army sacked Troy because Priam’s father, Laomedon, welched on his promise to give Hercules his immortal horses if he would slay a sea serpent to whom Laomedon’s daughter was to be sacrificed.
    - In the *Cypria*, the Greek army first landed at Teuthrania, south of Troy, mistaking it for the city of Priam. They fought an inconclusive battle there, realized their mistake, and headed back to Aulis in Greece.

By 400+ years after the final conflict between Greeks and Anatolians—i.e., the destruction of Troy VIIa—all that the Greeks of Homer’s age had were ancient legends of long-forgotten wars. They wouldn’t have known the difference between the destruction of Troy VI by earthquake versus the destruction of Troy VIIa by Greek invasion. The national memory would have conflated them into a single destruction of a rich, beautiful, powerful city by Greek warriors—into the *Iliad* and the other pic Cycle poems, in other words.

The *Iliad* and Its Author

I am troubled by the scholarly tendency to place Homer later and later in time, i.e., nearer and nearer our own age. A late Homer is not a Homer operating fully in the oral tradition. The later in time you place Homer, the more likely it is that he would have composed his poems in written form or dictated them to someone else who wrote them down. I think 750 B.C. is the likely timeframe.

The brilliance and unity of the *Iliad* make me certain that one single poetic genius, whom we call Homer, was responsible for the vast bulk of the poem, in spite of the following:

- It’s almost certain that he occasionally stitched together earlier stories, songs, and poems from the mythical tradition. But to end up with a single unified whole like the *Iliad*, he must have largely polished them into his own words.
- It was inevitable that after his death, oral poets keeping his work alive, as well as transcribers writing it down, would have mucked with his work.

How Do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* Differ?

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are very different in their tone. The *Iliad* is all about the nobility of bravely fighting for your wife, your children, your parents, and your homeland. Everyone is brave and noble and heroic—even the Trojans. Enemies respect each other. After dueling for the length of a day, Hektor and Aias are so impressed with each other that they stop fighting and exchange gifts. Hektor is probably the most honorable character in the poem. At the end, he goes out to fight Achilleus alone, knowing that he hasn't a chance.

But in the *Odyssey*, except for Penelope, everyone's despicable, and it's hard to see much difference between the heroes and the villains.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are also very different in terms of content. In its depiction of the violence of battle, the *Iliad* is hyper-realistic. Its graphic depiction of wounds incurred in battle has probably never been surpassed.

Contrarily, the *Odyssey* contains a vast amount of supernatural elements absent from the hyper-realistic *Iliad*: magical Circe, the monsters Skylla and Charybdis, the brass island and bag of winds, Laestrygonian giants, the land of the dead, and the Sirens.

On the other hand, the gods are relatively—that's *relatively*—absent in the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*, though, the gods are ever-present: A hero can't take a crap without first being inspired to do so by a god or goddess, who then rushes to Mount Olympus with the speed of thought and returns with toilet paper. Humans are mere puppets manipulated by the gods both emotionally and physically. On many occasions, the gods insert themselves into the action and save their favorite hero who is on the point of death. In Book V, Ares the god of war even slays one of the Greek warriors.

Odysseus Is Not Your Classic Good Guy

Let's face it: In spite of him being both the hero and the protagonist of the *Odyssey*, this is not a dude you'd want your daughter to date:

- He's an inveterate liar.
- Instead of rushing home to his wife in Ithaka, he spends a year making love to Circe and one or more years voluntarily making love to Kalypso.
- He slaughters 108 suitors.
- He tortures the unfaithful servant Melanthios.

Is Odysseus One of the Sea Peoples?

(This is another case where I thought I had devised an entirely original theory—only to have the rug pulled out from under me later.)

One of the ways in which Odysseus is not a nice guy has to do with how he conducts his wanderings at sea:

- He makes an unprovoked attack on the city of Ismaros.
- He steals what he wants from the Cyclops.
- He says he raided Egypt—a story that he tells twice (Books XIV and XVII).
- In Book XXIII, he says he can "restore his flocks by raiding."

In addition, both he and the swineherd Eumaios tell how they were captured by Phoenician sea raiders and sold into slavery. And there are four additional references to pirates and piracy.

It would not be a stretch to say that the *Odyssey* is practically a how-to manual for Sea Peoples.

So, What Do We Have So Far?

- The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are very different in tone and content.
- Troy was actually just one of dozens of cities across the eastern Mediterranean that were destroyed between 1250 and 1180 B.C.—and some cities underwent multiple rounds of destruction.
- One of the causes of the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age was raiders from the sea who attacked Greece, Troy, Crete, Egypt, the Levant, Cyprus, and the Anatolian coast.
- Odysseus is not a nice guy. In fact, if you subjected him to the duck test, it would be impossible to differentiate him from your average Sea Peoples raider.

Why the Poems Differ, and Why Odysseus Seems Bad

(Finally, original and unique scholarship on my part?)

Interpreting Odysseus as a Sea Peoples raider explains why the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are so different in tone and content—and this explanation holds true even if the two poems were composed by the same man.

The two poems are so different because they represent entirely different phases of history (though closely linked in time):

- The *Iliad* depicts the proud and flourishing Mycenaean Age, whose greatest triumph was the conquering of Troy. Hence, the essence of the *Iliad* is the nobility of heroism.
- The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, is not about the Trojan War—it's about the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, which immediately followed. The essence of the *Odyssey* is: Things have gone to shit, and you have to do whatever it takes to survive and make your way home.

Odysseus' experience in the Underworld portrays the evolution from noble heroism to unbridled chaos. He hears the tales of Greek heroes of the Trojan War, now dead and miserable, their glory a thing of the past. Indeed, both Agamemnon's murder and Odysseus' struggle with the suitors can be seen as microcosms of the Collapse of the Late Bronze Age, when the stability of the old order had passed away, ushering in a new age of violence; when kings were overthrown, lawlessness and anarchy prevailed, and it was every man for himself.

The *Odyssey* is about a time when—very soon after the Hellenes' finest moment, the conquest of Troy—their own lands met Troy's fate too: A time when the world went mad. When cities and croplands were put to the torch. When towns were abandoned. Riches lost. The old order passed away, ushering in a new age of ignorance and savagery and raiding.

Over the eons, ancient memories of those brutal times morphed into stories of monsters and witches and cannibalistic giants: Cyclopes. Laestrygonians. Six-headed Skylla. Charybdis. Sirens. And just as bad: your fellow man, out to consume your substance, murder your son, and steal your wife and crown.

In those chaotic times, everyone and everything was out to kill you. In such a world, a hero had to do whatever it took to survive and make his way back home. Nobility and honor would do you little good when everyone was waiting for you to turn your back, so they could stick a dagger in it. In times like those, you needed a hero who possessed not big-hearted nobility, but cunning and clear-eyed ruthlessness. You needed a man like Odysseus.

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