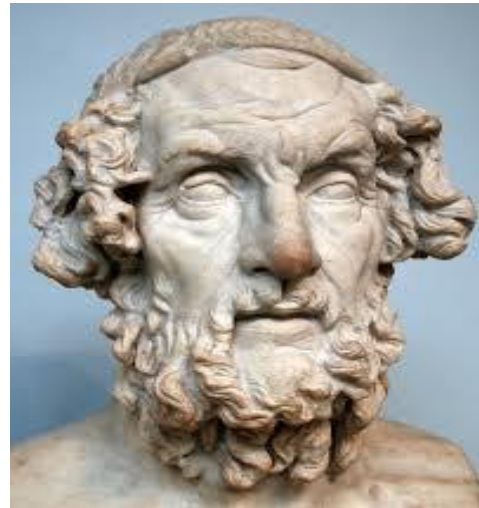


Author Biography: Homer

Homer, one of the earliest and greatest known poets of the classical period, is generally regarded as the creator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Exactly when he was born or died, and the details of his life are generally unknown. Tradition and ancient legends have it that he was a blind poet and rhapsode (an ancient actor) who lived in the late eighth and early seventh centuries B.C.E. on an island called Chios off the western coast of Asia Minor (what is now Turkey).



While there is no complete agreement on the details of Homer's life, some have said that he was born to Menes and Cretheis the nymph, his given name was Melisigenes, he worked in Chios, and died on Ios, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. But this information is suspect at best and is part of what has become the *Homeric Question*—the doubts and consequent debates over the existence and identity of Homer, and the real story of who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Though the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are set in the Greek Bronze Age in about the twelfth century B.C.E., most scholars, analyzing the linguistic (language) and other historical evidence, claim that the poems were composed between 750 and 650 B.C.E., when rather than telling stories orally, people started writing things down. Other scholars argue that the poems were written later, perhaps in the sixth century B.C.E. in Athens, when the first written versions of the poems appeared. Many scholars believe that these epics represent the work of many generations of poets, with Homer acting as organizer and editor.

While the *Iliad*, which was written first, is packed with relentless slaughter and tragedy, the *Odyssey* is a tale of wandering and homecoming, and some argue that these differences reveal the possibility of more than one author. Others argue that the *Iliad* is a work of a young, mischievous, and adventuresome Homer, while the *Odyssey* is the work of a wiser, more mature Homer.