



# Historically Speaking

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## Other epics...

The Iliad and the Odyssey are but two stories that revolve about the long Trojan War. We know of other epics that fill out the story from the judgment of Paris to the tale of Telegonus, a song of Odysseus. Our main source for these epics is Proclus, a writer of the second century A.D., who summarized their plots in his *Chrestomathy*. These stories form the Epic Cycle and are as follows:

1. Cypria (named after Cypris, another name for Aphrodite). This poem starts with Paris' awarding Aphrodite the GOLDEN APPLE inscribed "For the Fairest", thus offending Hera and Athena. As a reward, Aphrodite, goddess of love, promises Paris the most beautiful woman in the world. That woman is Helen, wife of Menelaus. Paris and Helen escape to Troy. Menelaus calls on the Greek kings to assemble to go to war. Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus is chosen to lead the armies. Odysseus, however, has no wish to fight for Helen's return. When the brothers come to enroll him in their cause against Paris and Troy, Odysseus pretends insanity by plowing a field and sowing salt. Palamedes, a friend of Agamemnon, suspects a trick and, taking Odysseus' infant son Telemachus, says that he will punish him. Odysseus stops his mad tricks at this point, as only a sane man would. Later, Odysseus, with the aid of his friend Diomedes, revenges himself upon Palamedes by causing his death on a fishing trip. The events of the Cypria continue up to the beginning of the *Illiad*.

2. Iliad. The Iliad revolves about Achilles, the mightiest of the Greek warriors. He withdrew from the battle after he was insulted by Agamemnon, who took away his mistress. It is only after the death of his best friend, Patroclus, at the hands of the Trojan enemy, that Achilles returns to do battle and kills Hector, the chief defender of Troy. Odysseus is the same daring and crafty person we see in the Odyssey. Although he objected to going to Troy, once there he devoted himself to its utter defeat.

3. Ethiopis, by Arctinus of Miletus. The action of the Trojan War is here continued up to the death of Achilles. Odysseus and Aias, another Greek warrior, fight over Achilles' armor.

4. Little Iliad, by Lesches of Mitylene. In this work Achilles' armor is awarded to Odysseus. Aias goes mad and commits suicide. Odysseus then disguises himself as a beggar so that he may enter Troy unde-

tected and plot with Helen for the downfall of Troy (this episode is told by Helen in Bk. 4 of the Odyssey). This epic ends with the Trojans taking the wooden horse into Troy.

5. Sack of Troy, by Arctinus of Miletus. The trick of the wooden horse succeeds. Troy is taken, and the long war ends. Odysseus kills Hector's son Astyanax by hurling him from the city wall.

6. Returns, by Agias of Troezen. This epic relates the return home of all the major Greek generals, except Odysseus, whose return is thoroughly detailed in the Odyssey.

7. Odyssey. This is the story of Odysseus' voyage home.

8. Telegony, by Eugammon of Cyrene. This is a continuation of the Odyssey, wherein Odysseus has many adventures and even marries again, although Penelope is still living. Telegonus, his son by the enchantress, Circe, comes to Ithaca to look for Odysseus and unwittingly kills him. Telegonus, discovering that he has killed his father, takes Penelope and Telemachus to Circe's island, where Telegonus marries Penelope and Telemachus marries Circe.

### Homer - The Man

*Seven cities claimed the Homer dead*

*In which the living Homer begged his bread*

The coming of the Dorian Greeks in their colonization caused a number of mainland Greeks to leave their homeland and move to the islands off Asia Minor or to the Asia Minor mainland itself. It is here then in Asia Minor, which the Greeks called Ionia, that epic began.

We do not possess complete epics earlier than Homer's. When we come across the epics of the Iliad and the Odyssey, they are already in a perfected literary state. Some less developed form surely preceded them.

Without trying to avoid the problems surrounding the person of Homer, let us assume that sometime around 850 BCE. the greatest epic poet ever was born. If he did not write the Iliad and Odyssey, we must assume then that another man with the same name did. We may suggest that he was born in Ionia, probably either in Smyrna or on the island of Chios. Five other localities also claimed Homer as a son: Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Argos, and Athens.