From Greece to Rome: Homer, Vergil and the Trojan War


Prof. Dr. Silvio Bär
(silvio.baer@ifikk.uio.no)
Universitetet i Oslo
Homer (8th/7th cent. B.C.)

Idealized portrayal of Homer, 4th/3rd cent. B.C. (British Museum)

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/db/Homeros_Caetani_Louvre_Ma440_n2.jpg
The Story of the Trojan War (I)

• Wedding of Peleus and Thetis
• Eris and the apple of discord: τῇ καλλίστῃ
• The judgement of Paris (Hera, Athena, Aphrodite)
• Helena (the most beautiful woman in the world, and wife of Menelaos) is given to Paris → abduction to Troy
• Trojan War = Greek enterprise to bring Helena back to Sparta
The Story of the Trojan War (II)

• Siege of Troy: ten years
• Achilles (the greatest Greek hero) kills Hector (the greatest Trojan hero) (↩ Homer’s *Iliad*)
• Achilles is killed (↩ Achilles’ heel)
• Odysseus has the brilliant idea of taking Troy not by force, but by trickery → Trojan Horse
• Sack of Troy
• Greeks return home (↩ Homer’s *Odyssey*)
The Judgement of Paris

Black-figure vase from Athens, c. 510 B.C.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9d/Judgement_of_Paris_Staatliche_Antikensammlungen_1722.jpg
Paris and Helena


Source: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/3d/42/bd/3d42bdf4d568dd8da5596628adcb5269.jpg
Troy and Sparta

Source: http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~kmh35/class/images/sparta-to-troy-map.jpg
The City of Troy

Excavations at Troy around 1900

Source: http://www.zeit.de/wissen/geschichte/2010-12/ausgrabung-schliemann/bitblt-820x462-0fcff7964edd7515b84ad3a4440e26ae9ceb93e/ausgrabung-schliemann-540x304.jpg
The Trojan Horse

So-called “Mykonos Vase”, c. 670 B.C.

Source: http://res.cloudinary.com/dk-find-out/image/upload/q_80,w_1440/A-AKG132692_qccxn3.jpg
Homer’s *Odyssey* (I)

- After the destruction of Troy: Odysseus and his crew set sail home (to the isle of Ithaca).
- On their way home, they encounter lots of adventures.
  - Odysseus enrages Poseidon by blinding his son Polyphemus → Poseidon swears revenge.
  - All of Odysseus’ crew get gradually lost/killed. → The last survivors are killed in a seastorm sent by Zeus because they had eaten the holy cattle of the solar god Helios.
Homer’s *Odyssey* (II)

- Odysseus reaches the isle of Ogygia as the sole survivor of Zeus’ seastorm.
  - Odysseus is held captive by the nymph Calypso on Ogygia for 7 years.
  - Is released by command of Athena and Zeus.
- Odysseus at the court of the Phaeacians (isle of Scheria; king Alcinous)
- Odysseus reaches Ithaca → kills Penelope’s suitors and reunites with Penelope.
Polyphemus

Proto-Attic amphora, Athens, c. 650 B.C.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fb/Polyphemus_Eleusis_2630.jpg
The Route of Odysseus: Attempts at Reconstruction (I)

Source: http://www.classics.upenn.edu/myth/content/homer/media/odysmall.jpg
The Route of Odysseus: Attempts at Reconstruction (II)

The Isle of Ithaca

http://www.esys.org/rev_info/Griechenland/Ithaka_Locationmap_(wiki)-hq.jpg
Reading Assignment (I)

- **Homer, The Odyssey: Book 8, Verses 482–556:**
  Read the text and discuss with your neighbour these questions:
  - Why does Odysseus ask Demodocus to sing about the Trojan Horse? What is ‘odd’ about this request from the perspective of us as readers?
  - Why does Odysseus cry?
  - How is Alcinous’ reaction to Odysseus’ tears to be understood?
Demodocus, Alcinous, Odysseus

John Flaxman, Illustrations of the *Odyssey* (c. 1800)

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cb/OdysseyDemodokos.png
Vergil (70–19 B.C.)

Bust of Vergil, undated (Naples)

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f7/Publius_Vergilius_Maro1.jpg
The Romans and the Greeks (I)

• Livius Andronicus (c. 284 – c. 204 B.C.): Greek slave in Rome: translated the *Odyssey* into Latin (➔ *Odusia*)

• Greece under the Roman Empire (“Roman Greece”: 146 B.C. – 395 A.D.)
  – 146 B.C.: all mainland Greece becomes Roman
  – 395 A.D.: partition of the Roman Empire
The Romans and the Greeks (II)

• Augustan poetry: poetry under the reign of Emperor Augustus (27 B.C. – 14 A.D.)
  – Main goal: the creation of Roman literary ‘classics’
  – Greek literature serves as a model, but is no longer regarded as superior
  – Main representatives:
    • Vergil
    • Horace
    • Ovid
Vergil’s *Aeneid* (I)

- Common ground with Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*:
  - Same background story: the Trojan War
  - *Iliad* and *Odyssey* = the main literary models
  - Same starting point as the *Odyssey*: the destruction of Troy through the Greeks
    - Like the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* is concerned with something that happens after the Trojan War
Vergil’s *Aeneid* (II)

• Main differences to Homer’s *Odyssey*:
  – Aeneas (the hero of the *Aeneid*) ≠ a Greek, but = a Trojan!
  – Aeneas does not return home, but he goes elsewhere in order to settle in a new country (Italy)
  – Aeneas loses his first wife (Creusa) and marries again (Lavinia) in Italy
  – *Odyssey*: restoration of sth old
    <-> *Aeneid*: establishment of sth new
The Route of Aeneas: Reconstruction

Source: http://faculty.gvsu.edu/websterm/Aeneas.gif
Reading Assignment (II)

• Vergil, *The Aeneid*: Book 2, Verses 634–804: Read the text and discuss with your neighbour these questions:
  – What is it that makes Aeneas finally leave his house behind and flee from Troy? Why is this important with regard to Aeneas’ journey that is to come?
  – Think about the role of Aeneas’ family during the flight from Troy: his father Anchises, his son Ascanius, his wife Creusa, his ancestors!
Aeneas, Anchises and the Penates

Sculpture by Filippo Parodi (1630–1702)

The Roman Penates

Reconstruction of a typically Roman Penates shrine

Source: http://www.novaroma.org/religio_romana/Penates.jpg