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Supporting the Professional
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Oide Classics

Spreagadh JC Classics and LC Classical Studies Online PLE

February 2026

Exploring the Homeric Code in the Iliad
Voices, Values and Narrative Structures





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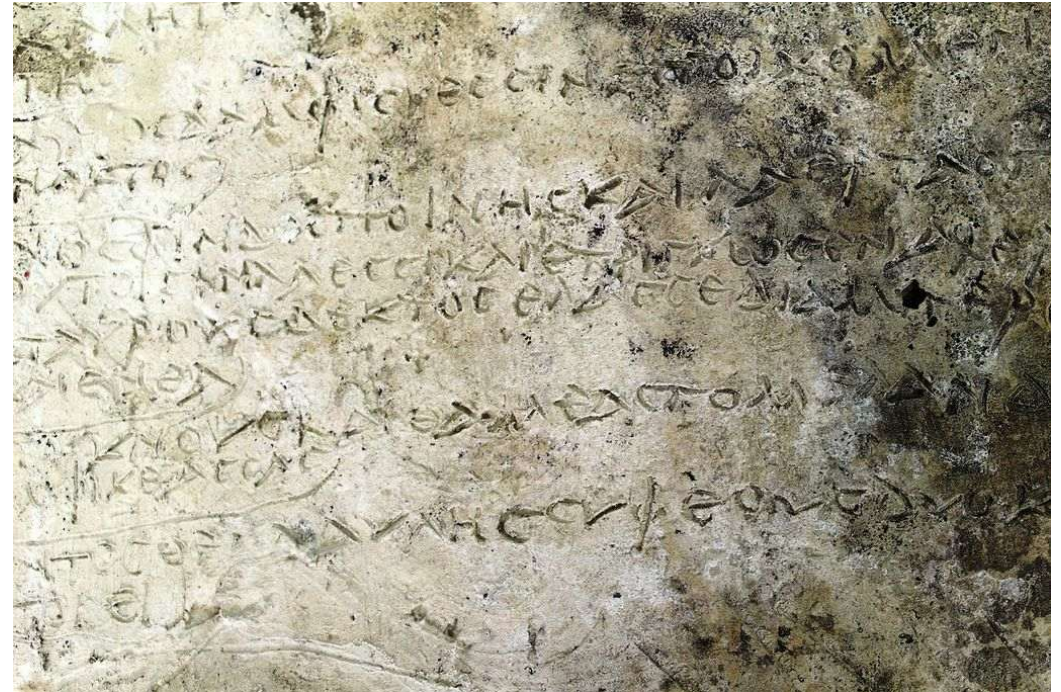
Exploring the Homeric Code in the Iliad: Voices, Values and Narrative Structures





In this elective we will:

- explore the values of the Homeric Code
- analyse perspectives of heroes, women and marginal characters, identifying key epic literary devices and structures through collaborative close reading
- consider how to strengthen and support inquiry-based classroom practice.



Oldest Greek fragment of Homer discovered on clay tablet.
13 verses from the Odyssey chiselled into a clay tablet dating to the 3rd Century A.D., representing the oldest lines of the poet found.

Learning Outcomes



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Junior Cycle
Classics

Junior Cycle

2.8

recognise and explain common Greek concepts and words associated with Homeric epic (for example, timé, kleos, aidós, areté, pathos)

2.10

create a code of honour for modern day heroes/heroines with reference to the Homeric code

Senior Cycle

1.13

illustrate by examples the use of poetic devices and techniques that are characteristic of epic poetry (such as epithets and similes) and explain their effects and how they develop from Homer to Virgil

1.14

examine the story telling techniques of Homer and Virgil (such as narrative voice, perspective and bias, use of direct speech, type-scenes, ring composition, and the handling of time and space)



Glossary of Terms



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Appendix B: Glossary of Classics terms

This glossary has been added to explain the meaning of classics terms as they appear in this specification to help with understanding when reading.

Term	Interpretation
Administrative centres	Public buildings or locations where government business or legal matters could be transacted, such as council houses, basilicas and fora.
Commemorative monuments	Monuments that are a memorial of an important event or person, such as triumphal arches, columns and mausolea.
Cultural representations	Texts, literature and language, art, architecture and material culture, produced by a people, through which we can explore and learn how this community's culture functions, develops and relates to others.
Digression	In literature, a stylistic device in which the author temporarily departs from the main subject discussed, for example, to provide background information about a person or event or to explore an interesting side-line to a story.
Epic	A long narrative poem about the deeds and adventures of heroes, incorporating myth, legend, folk-tale and history. Epics are often of national significance in that they represent the past, values and ambitions of people.
Epithet	In epic, a descriptive word or a phrase that is commonly applied to a person, thing or place to express a characteristic attribute or quality, such as 'swift-footed' (Achilles) or 'sandy' (Pylos).
Etymology	The study of the origin of words and the way in which their meaning and application has changed over time.
Inflection	Changes of form that words undergo to express different grammatical categories such as case, gender, number, person and tense.
Leisure buildings	Buildings used for public entertainment and relaxation, such as amphitheatres, circuses, theatres and bath-houses.
Material culture	Physical objects and artefacts that help us explore and understand a people's culture and its social relations.
Myth	A traditional story, concerning the legendary past of a people. Myths typically deal with supernatural beings and gods, as well as extraordinary mortal heroes and heroines. They often explain a particular cultural practice such as a ritual or custom.
Simile	A figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another thing of a different kind. In epic, a simile will typically be introduced with the words 'like' and 'as', and it will often compare at length and in detail.
Text	The term text can represent for example an inscription; an excerpt from a myth, epic or tragedy; a piece of graffiti; visual images and narratives.
Visual culture	The aspect of a culture that is expressed in visual images.

Appendix 2: Glossary of Classical Studies Terms

TERM	DESCRIPTION
Acropolis	Literally 'top of the city,' a rocky outcrop above the city of Athens where some the city's most prominent buildings stood, such as the Parthenon, Erechtheion and theatre of Dionysus.
Antiquity	The historical period before the Middle Ages.
Athens	Greek city state, powerful and influential in the 5th and 4th centuries BC and the source of much of the surviving 'classical' Greek literature, at and architecture
Barbarian	Used by Greeks and Romans of all people who were not Greeks or Romans.
Bias	Inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something.
Catharsis	A release of strong emotions which provides relief.
Chorus	A Group of performers in an ancient tragedy or comedy which reacts to the stage action through collective song, dance and speech.
Circus Maximus	Chariot-racing stadium and mass entertainment venue in the city of Rome.
Civic life	The public life of citizens, concerned with the matters of the community and nation, as opposed to their private life.
Civilisation	The society, culture, and way of life of a particular people or area.
Classical	In a narrow sense: relating to the 5th and 4th centuries BC, seen as the high point of Greek civilisation. In a broad sense: relating to ancient Greek or Roman literature, art, or culture in general.
Colosseum	Amphitheatre in the city of Rome, built in AD 72-80 for gladiatorial contests and other public spectacles
Cultural norms	The attitudes and behaviours which are considered normal or typical within a community of people
Deus ex machina	Literally 'god from the machine,' a plot device in Greek tragic drama whereby a god is unexpectedly introduced (by strage-crane, <i>mechane</i>) to resolve an apparent deadlock in the plot.
Direct speech	Reporting what a speaker said by repeating their actual words (quoting).
Divine speech	Words spoken by a goddess or god.
Dionysus	The Greek god of wine and merriment at whose annual Athenian festival tragic and comic theatre plays were performed.
Dramatic device	Convention used in theatre plays which is unrealistic but is accepted by the audience because it is familiar from other plays, such as a messenger speech, recognition or <i>deus ex machina</i> .
Dramatic irony	A situation in a Greek tragic play where the full significance of a character's actions or thoughts is clear to audience but not to the characters in the play.
Ecphrasis	Extensive, vivid verbal description of a visual work of art such as a painting or sculpture.

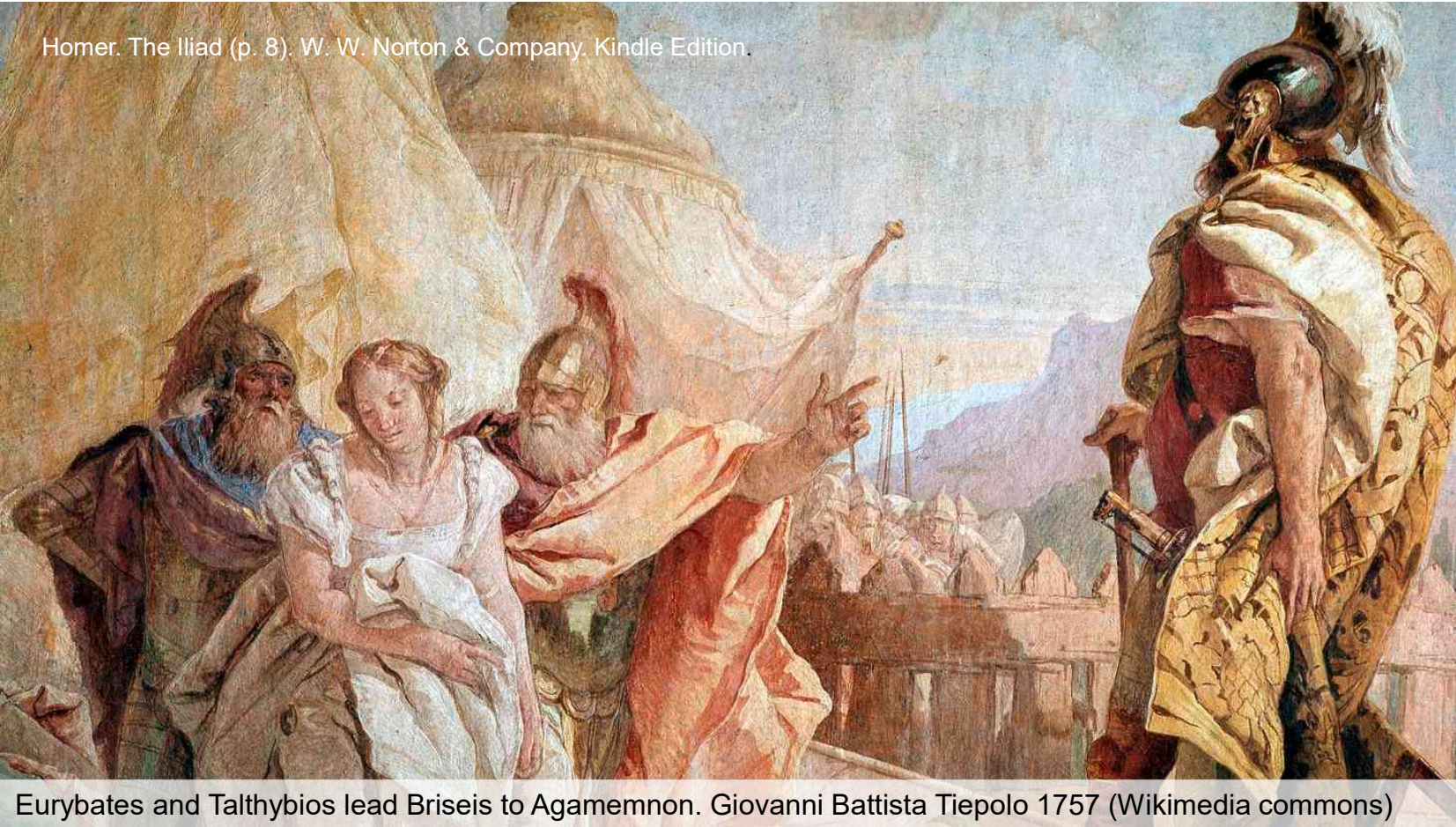
Glossary of Homeric Terms

Greek Term/Literary Device	Explanation/meaning
agathoi, agathos	people of superior social status or noble station
aídos	shame leading one to treat others with respect due to their status in the social world; fear of condemnation and disapproval of one's social group
anax andron	lord of men (said of Agamemnon)
areté	excellence, virtue (within one's social context); being the best you can be; also used to indicate courage and military prowess, derived from Ares
aristeia	excellence, prowess as a warrior
aristos	to be the best; a man of excellence
charis	gratitude, kindness
charme	delight, especially delight in battle
dios	brilliant (Odysseus in cleverness; Achilles in battle)
epios	gentle (said of Patroclus, and at times, Priam); in Homeric times, one generally seeks to be gentle when warranted with one's people, but harsh with the enemy
eris	strife, often referred to as soul destroying
fatum	fate, see also moira
gera	gifts of honor
heiot	slave, has no rights
heros	live in die in pursuit of honor and glory - the Greek term for "hero" is heros. It can be translated as "protector" or "defender".
hippodamoi	tamers of horses (Hector, the Trojans)
hubris	excess pride or arrogance, usually leading to ruin (a serious flaw in Greek heroes); excess of pride which shows disrespect for gods and man
hypermoiran	seemingly beyond one's portion, acting in a way as if to seem to transcend fate
ise moira	an equal portion of moira or fate
ker	one's destined path
klea andron	famous deeds of heroes
kleos esthlon	noble glory
kleos	glory, often implying fame and immortality (in the memory of others), achieved as a result of one's time (acts of excellence meriting honor)
kratós	possessing higher social status
kudos	triumphant power or success resulting in glory, prestige and high rank
metis	cunning (Odysseus)

Homer. The Iliad (p. 8). W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.



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Timé

Eurybates and Talthibios lead Briseis to Agamemnon. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo 1757 (Wikimedia commons)

Material and social recognition of a hero's worth often represented by war prizes, gifts or status.

Example: The treatment of Chryseis and Briseis as trophies.

"Just as Apollo will take Chryseis back, away from me, when I send her to him on my own ship, escorted by my very own companions, so I shall take your beautiful Briseis, your trophy."

Kleos

Fame or renown that ensures a hero's memory lives on after death. It is what warriors strive for through great deeds.

Example: Achilles feels his kleos/reputation have been insulted by Agamemnon's demands.

“By this I swear to you a mighty oath. The Greeks will all be longing for Achilles one day and you will have no power to help, and you will grieve and many men will die at Hector's murderous hands. Then you will tear your heart inside you in a bitter rage because you failed to pay the best Greek fighter proper respect.”

Homer. The Iliad (p. 10). W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.



Ancient Greek polychromatic pottery painting 300BC of Achilles during the Trojan War (Wikimedia Commons)

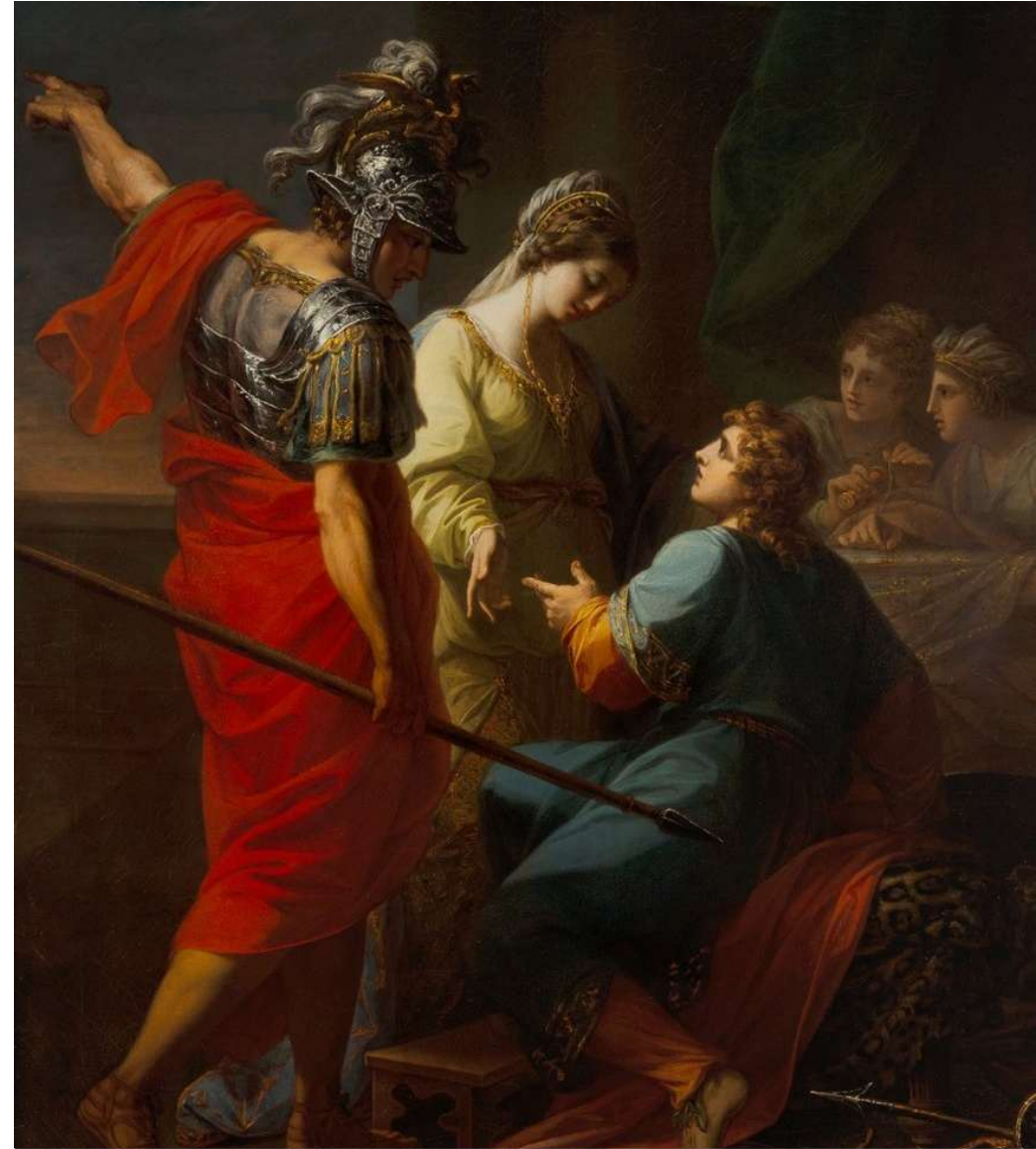
Aidos

A powerful sense of shame, modesty or respect often linked to social expectations or obligations to others (family, comrades, gods).

Example: Hector shaming Paris as he hides from the fighting.

“Seeing his brother, Hector scolded him with words to bring him shame. “You are so strange! It is not right for you to be so angry. The troops around our city and high wall are dying! War is raging round this town because of you! And you yourself would challenge and fight with anyone you saw hold back from hateful war—as you are doing now!”

Homer. The Iliad (pp. 145-146). W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.



Hector, Paris and Helen. Angelica Kaufman 1770 Oil Canvas. (Wikimedia Commons)

Invocation

Poet calls upon the Muse for inspiration

Example: The opening of the epic as the bard invokes the Muse

“Goddess, sing of the cataclysmic wrath of great Achilles, son of Peleus, which caused the Greeks immeasurable pain and sent so many noble souls of heroes to Hades, and made men the spoils of dogs, a banquet for the birds, and so the plan of Zeus unfolded—starting with the conflict between great Agamemnon, lord of men, and glorious Achilles.”

Homer. The Iliad (p. 1). W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.



CLIO
History



POLYHYMНИЯ
Hymns & sacred song



TERPSICHORE
Dance & choral singing



MELPOMENE
Tragedy



THALIA
Comedy



EUTERPE
Flute-playing

6 of the 9 muses of Greek Mythology – World History Encyclopedia 2023



Direct Speech

Characters speaking in their own voices.

Example: Achilles and Agamemnon's quarrel in Book 1 of the *Iliad*

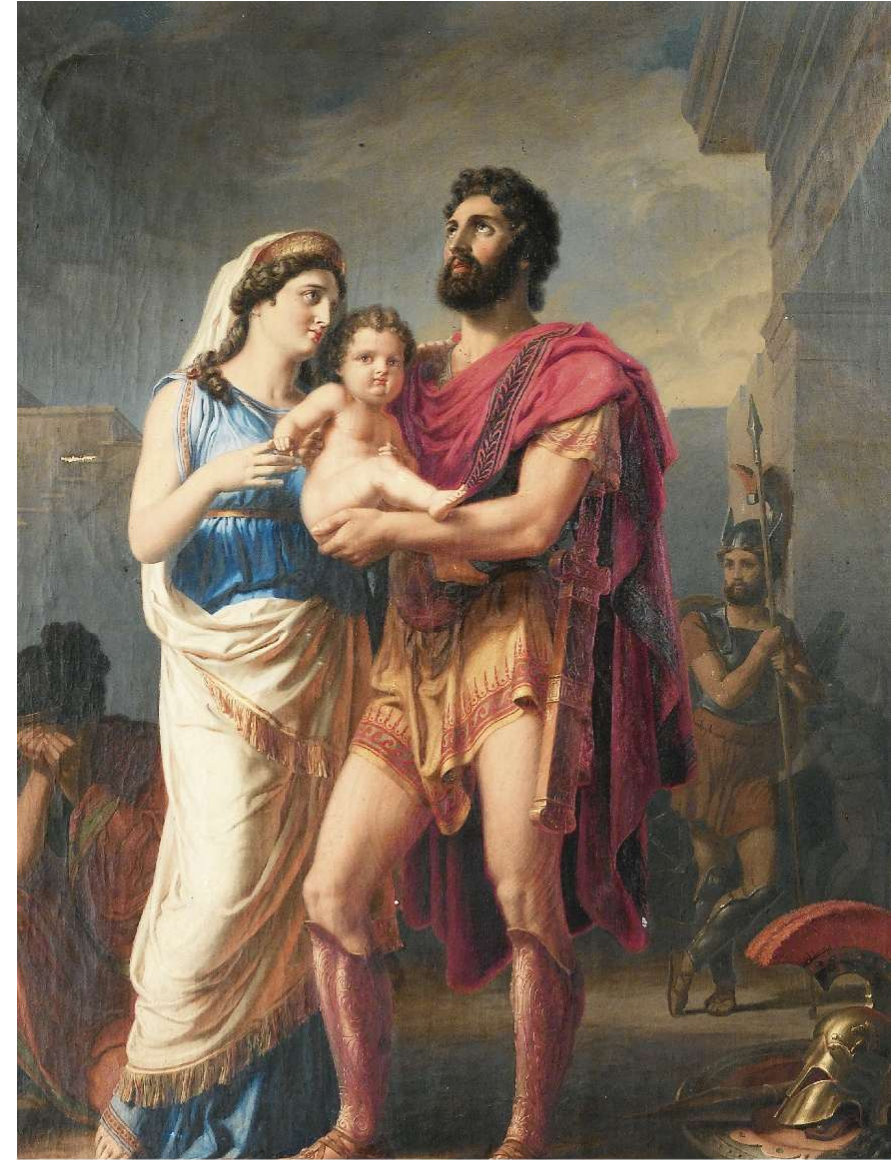


The anger of Achilles 1819 Jacques-Louis David
Kimbell Art Museum, Texas (Wikimedia Commons)

What is the Homeric Code?

A shared value system governing heroic behaviour, motivation and reputation in Homeric epic.

- key values include honour (timē), glory (kleos) and reputation, loyalty, respect of status and hierarchy, bravery and avoidance of shame
- it shapes decisions, relationships and conflicts throughout the Iliad.



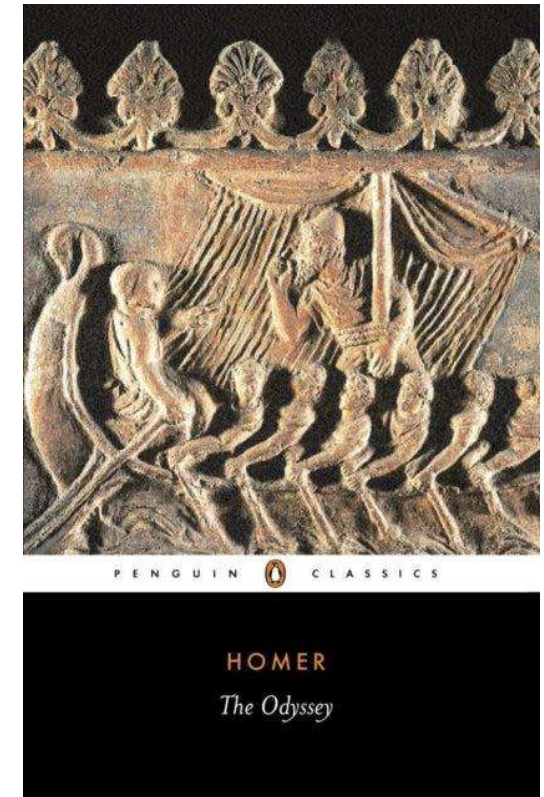
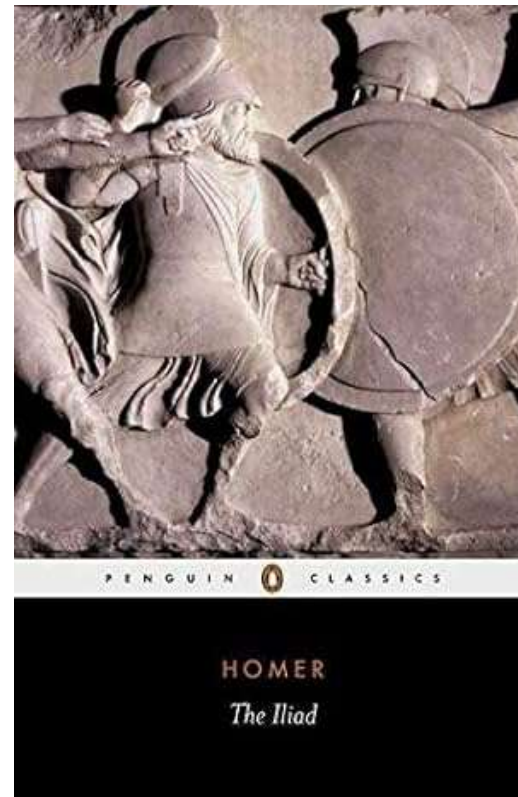
The farewell of Hector to Andromache by Carl Friedrich Deckler 1900. (Wikimedia commons)



Why does the Homeric Code matter in the classroom?

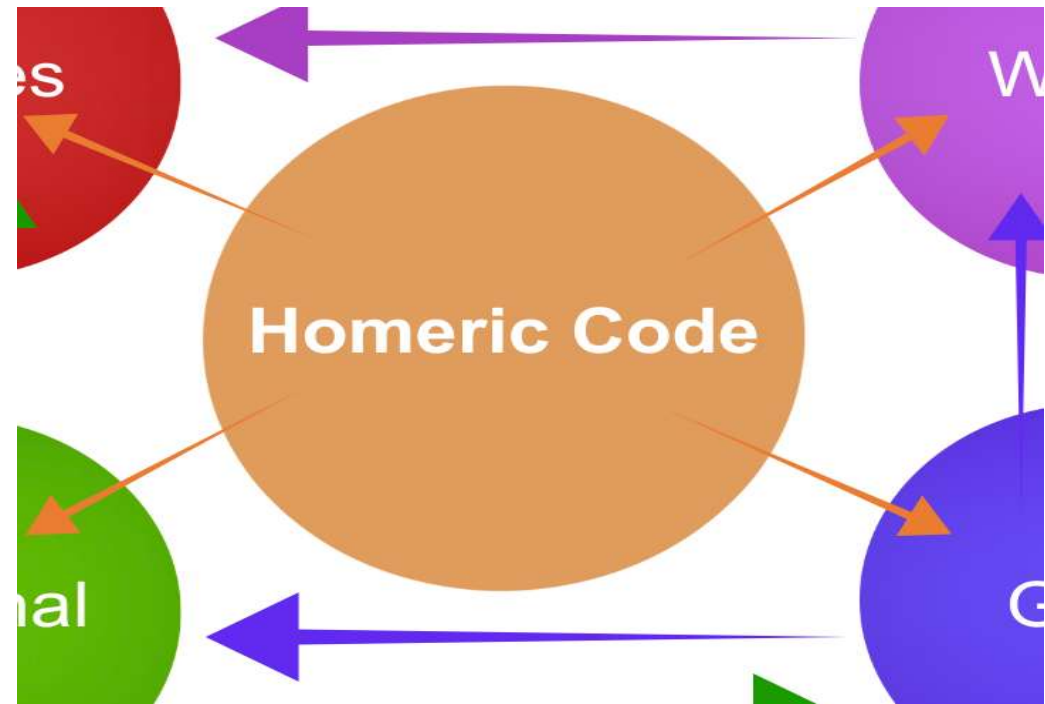
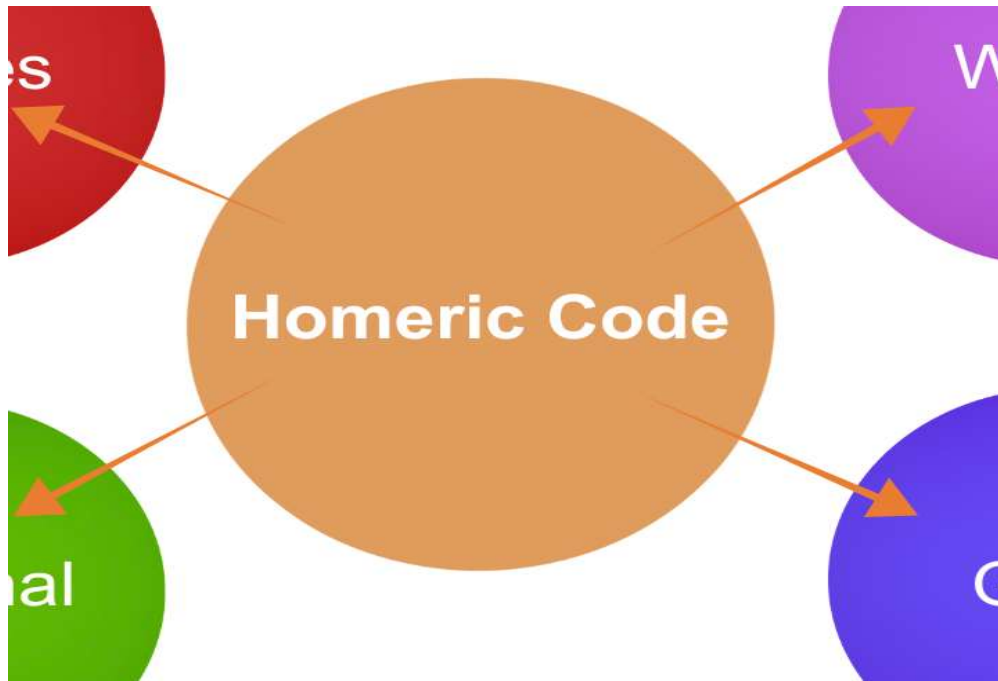
The Homeric Code:

- provides a **framework** for analysing character motivation
- helps students understand why heroes act in seemingly extreme ways
- supports close reading and thematic exploration.





Character Types and the Homeric Code





Homeric Heroes

- In the Iliad, Homeric heroes are seen as greater human beings than the ordinary warriors, some may have a divine or semi-divine parent, though the hero himself is still mortal and subject to death, unlike the gods.
- Heroes are of such stature that they sometimes provoke the gods and on occasion may even fight with a god.
- Each hero is distinguished by a virtue (a good quality), but may also have a bad quality, e.g. Achilles is the greatest warrior, but he is also petulant (impatient, irrational) and self-centred.
- Their heroic power is double-edged.

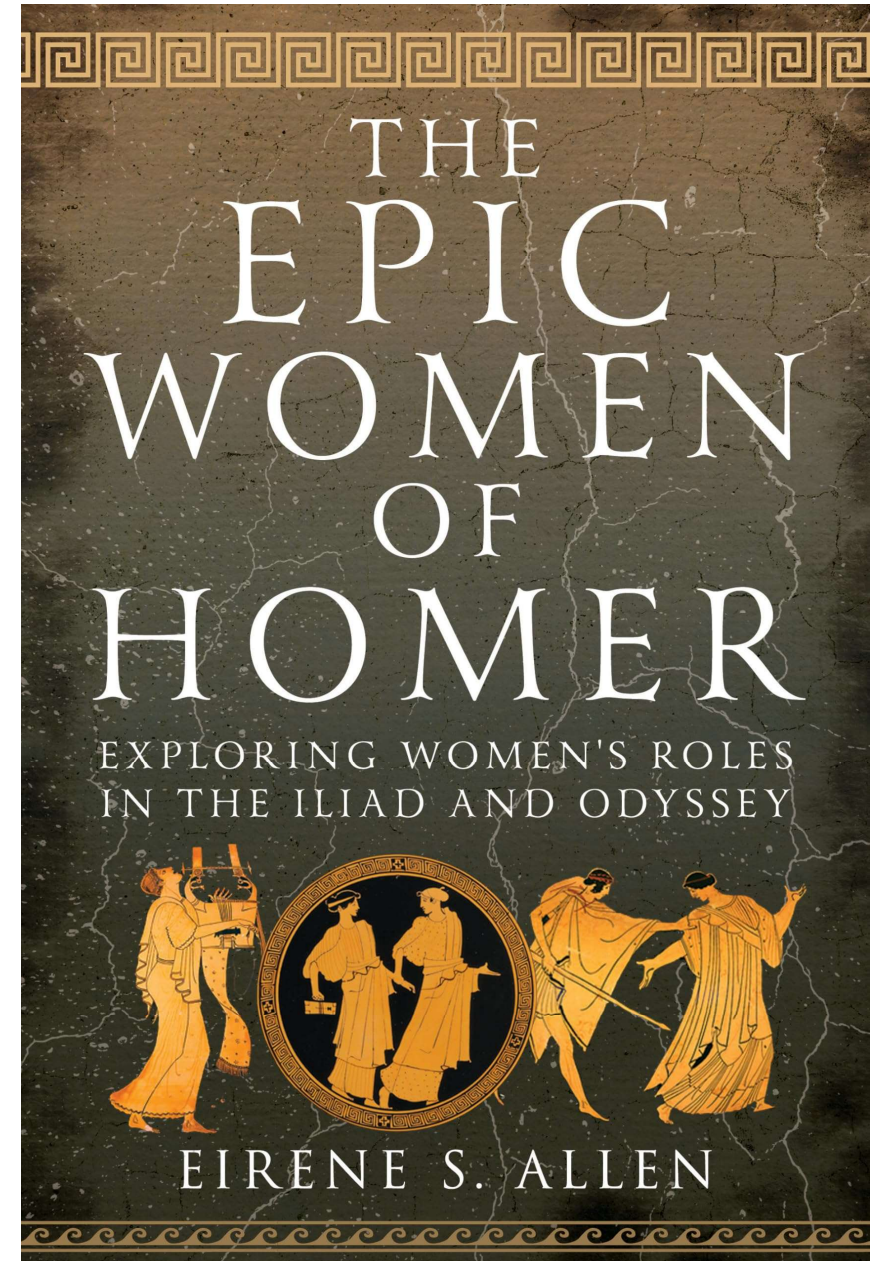


The seven heads of heroes from Homer's Iliad. Heinrich Dieterich 1801-1805 Etching (British Museum)

“conflict within heroism between individual ambition and collective good, and the dangers of putting personal honour above all else.” William Allan, Bloomsbury 2012

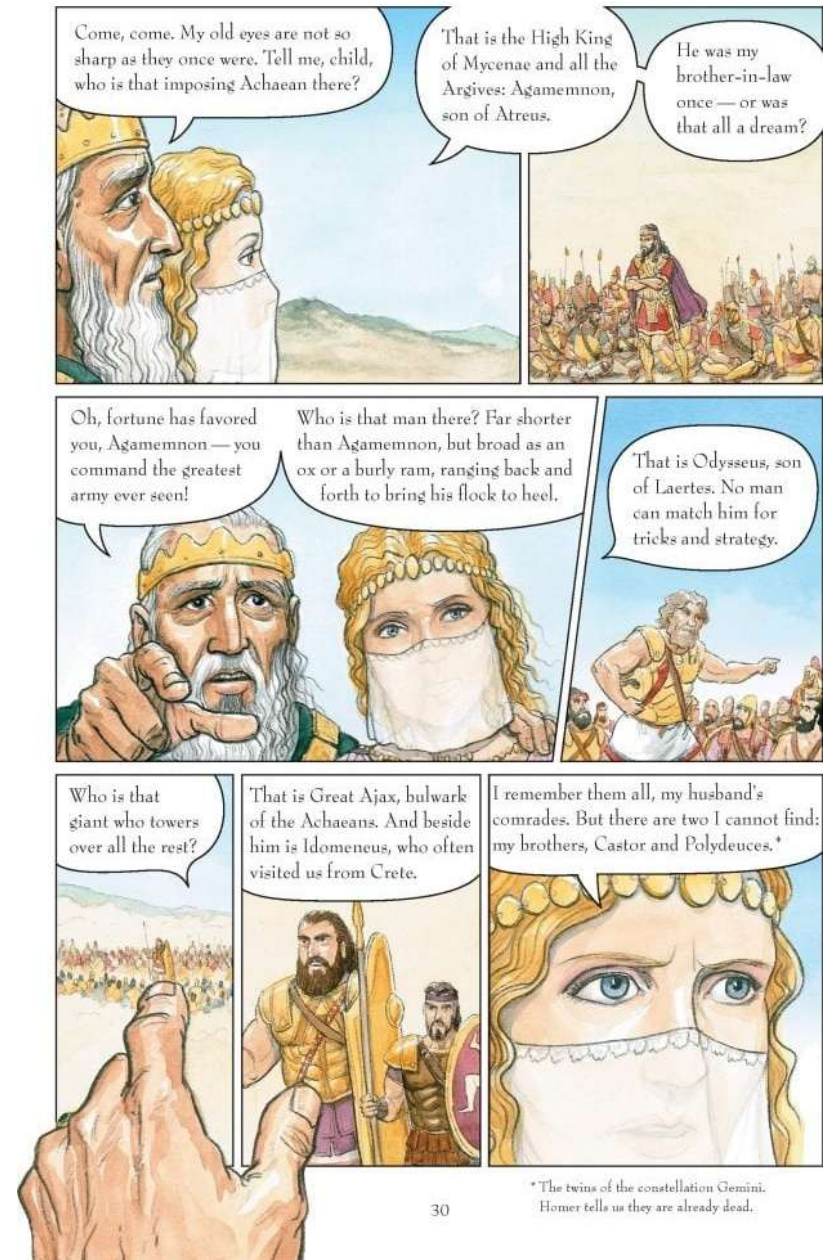
Women in the *Iliad*

- Women are excluded from heroic power but possess strong moral and emotional authority.
- They expose the personal and social cost of heroic values such as honour and glory.
- Through lament, memory and protest, they challenge the heroic narrative of war.
- Example: Andromache reveals how Hector's heroism leads to the destruction of family life.



Marginal Characters

- Marginal characters exist outside the heroic elite and lack social or military power.
- They offer alternative perspectives on heroism, leadership and justice.
- Their voices often expose hypocrisy, imbalance, or suffering within the heroic system.
- Example: Thersites highlights inequality and suppressed opposition. A common Greek soldier who openly criticises Agamemnon for greed and poor leadership.
 - Thersites is described as physically ugly and socially inferior - lacking any status. Many of his complaints echo what Achilles has already said, but he is publicly humiliated and beaten by Odysseus. (Book 2 line 210)





Close Reading and Text Analysis

3 key questions

What values are presented in the passage/extract?

How does Homer use literary devices or narrative structures to shape our understanding?

What narrative purpose does this character or scene serve within the epic?

“You shameless, self-centred...! How can you expect any of the men to comply with you willingly when you send them on a raid or into battle?”

It was no quarrel with Trojan warriors that brought me here to fight. They have never done me any harm. They have never lifted oxen or horses of mine, nor ravaged my crops back home in fertile Phthia, nurse of warriors. The roaring seas and many a dark range of mountains lie between us.

We joined your expedition, you shameless swine, to please you to get satisfaction from the Trojans for Menelaus and yourself, dog-face - a fact you utterly ignore. And now comes this threat from you of all people, to rob me of my prize in person, my hard-earned prize which was a tribute from the army. It is not as though I am ever given a prize equal to yours when the Greeks sack some prosperous Trojan town.” (page 8 Book 1, Iliad by E.V. Rieu, penguin classics)

Close Reading

Group work – Breakout Rooms - Padlet

Using the extract allocated to your group from the Iliad, discuss the 3 associated questions.

Make reference to the glossary of terms as you formulate your responses to each of the questions.

Consider and discuss in the breakout room how you could use this approach to support students in the classroom?



Ancient Greek man with wax tablet. Painting by Douris 500BC – Berlin Museum – (Wikimedia commons)



Achilles

How does Achilles' speech in Book 1 challenge the idea that heroic honour is fair or just?

Andromache

How does Andromache's speech change our understanding of Hector's heroism?

Hector

How does Hector's farewell speech change our understanding of what it means to be a hero in the Homeric world?

Priam

How does Priam's supplication force Achilles, and the audience, to rethink vengeance and honour?

How could this inquiry-based approach support students in the classroom?



How do/could you provide formative assessment opportunities for your students to understand these epics terms and literary devices?



Example:

Group work – sentence starters

- Achilles is angry because Agamemnon does not respect him...
- Andromache and Priam show how war affects those who are not celebrated as heroes...
- Andromache's speech exposes the human cost of heroic values in a world dominated by war and reputation...



PEEL Writing Framework

What is the PEEL writing framework?

The PEEL writing structure is a tool to help history students develop well-structured paragraphs in essays. It ensures that arguments are clear, supported by evidence, and effectively linked back to the essay question. Using PEEL, students can present their historical knowledge logically and coherently, enhancing their analytical and writing skills.

How to Use the PEEL Structure

Each paragraph in a history essay should follow the PEEL format:

- **Point:** Clearly state the main idea or argument of the paragraph.
- **Evidence:** Provide factual information, historical sources, or examples that support your point.
- **Explanation:** Analyse the evidence, explaining its significance and how it supports your argument.
- **Link:** Connect the paragraph back to the question or the next point to maintain a cohesive argument.

Example of a PEEL Paragraph:

Sample question: To what extent was the Treaty of Versailles fair?

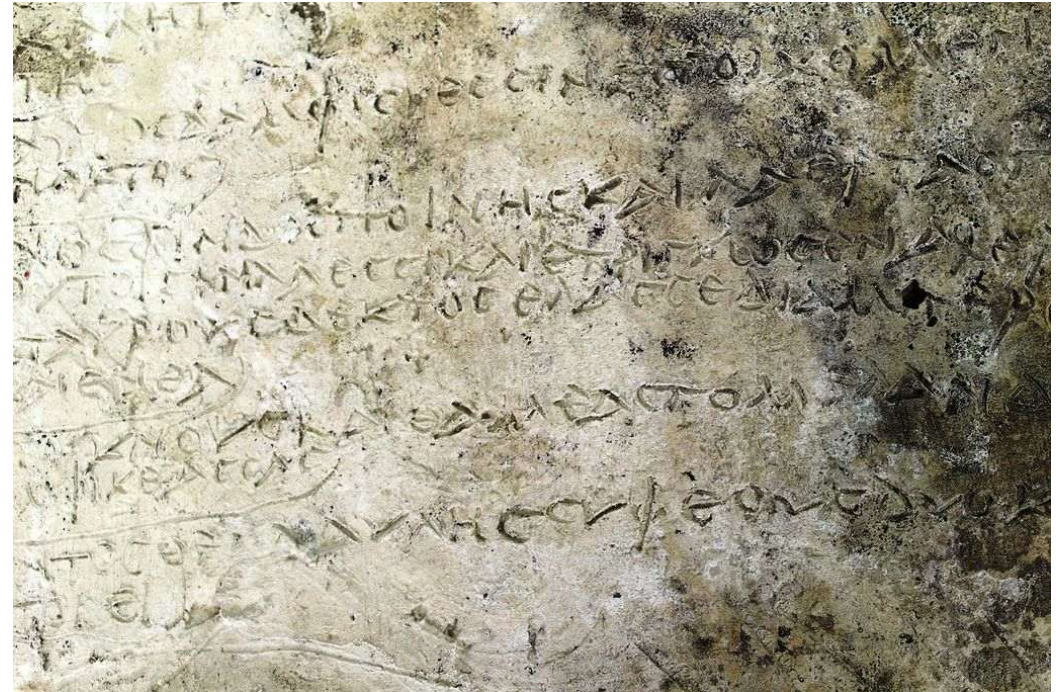
- **Point:** The Treaty of Versailles was harsh on Germany, particularly in its territorial losses.
- **Evidence:** Under the treaty, Germany lost 13% of its land, including Alsace-Lorraine to France and the Polish Corridor to Poland.
- **Explanation:** These territorial losses weakened Germany economically and politically, leading to resentment and instability.
- **Link:** This territorial reduction contributed to German hostility toward the Treaty and played a role in the rise of nationalist movements, ultimately leading to World War II.

Following the PEEL structure can help to support students of History construct clear, concise, and well-supported arguments in their written work, leading to more effective and persuasive writing.



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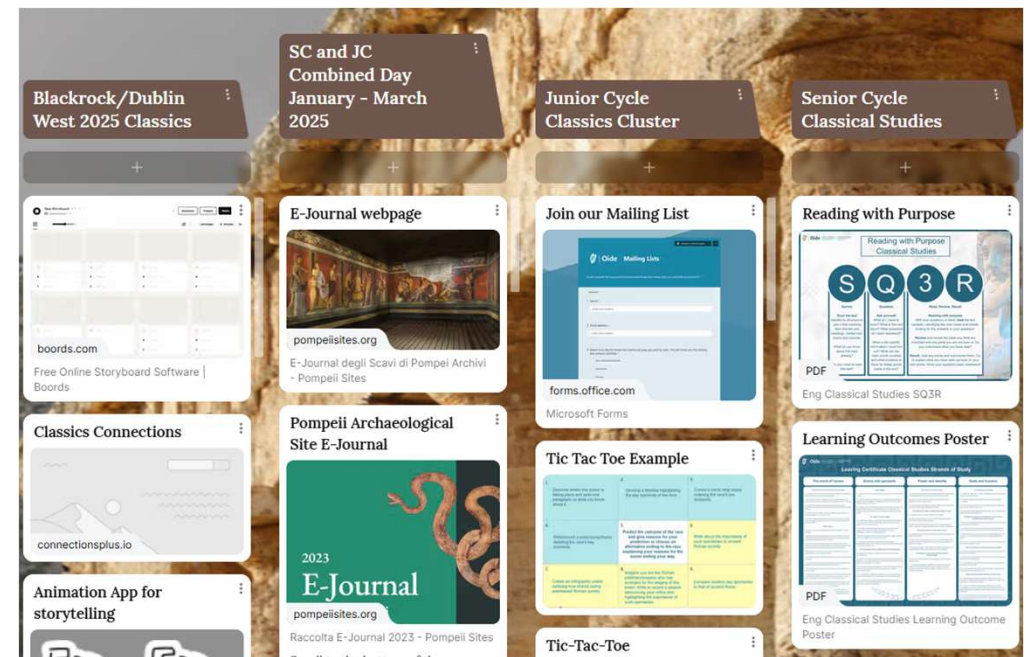
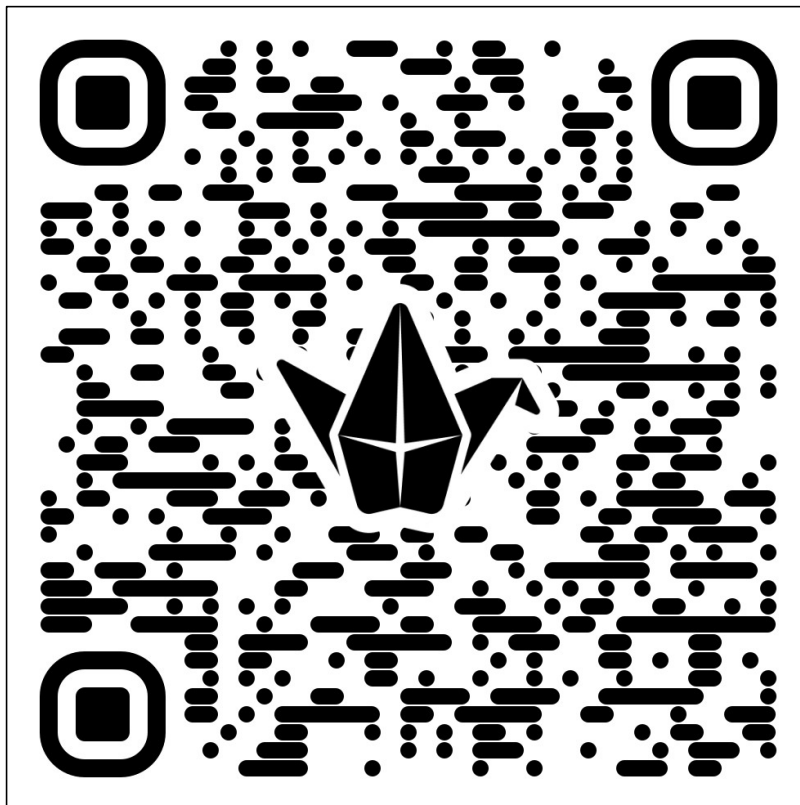


Oldest Greek fragment of Homer discovered on clay tablet. 13 verses from the Odyssey chiselled into a clay tablet dating to the third century A.D., representing the oldest lines of the poet found.



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Classics Padlet



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