

# When were the Iliad and Odyssey created? - A late Bronze Age story recalled in Iron Age times -

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(Relating to a Linked-in Discussion Group)

"Mutating Genes in Homer": *Genomes and language provide clues on the origin of Homer's classic.*

Hosted by Ellie Rose Elliott

03.07.13

By Mel Copeland

**(response to [Ellie Rose Elliott](#))** Other clues in the dating of the Iliad and Odyssey involve the tradition of cremation and raising a tumulus over the dead, such as the case of Patroclus and Achilles (who was placed in the tumulus of Patroclus), the transition from bronze to iron, and mythological characters and their dating. The latest dated tumuli found in Greece might establish the latest date in which the Iliad could have been conceived, for the bard of the Iliad would not have remembered tumuli burials had they ceased to be practiced for several hundred years. Plutarch's "Lives" – The life of Alexander – says that Alexander placed offerings at Achille's "grave marker" when he visited Troy, that it was still there even in his day. The Greeks practiced shaft –grave inhumation (visible at Mycenae i.e., the Grave Circle) and cremation/tumuli burial. The Grave Circle is dated Late Helladic I, 1550-1500 B.C., and the tumuli are dated Late Helladic II (1500-1400). (Late Helladic III is 1400-1060 B.C.)

By 1200 B.C. all of the Mycenaean cities had been destroyed. Pausanias' book states that when he toured Mycenae a local guide showed him the tumulus of Agamemnon outside the walls (not within the Grave Circle). The tumulus of Agamemnon would have to date after 1180 B.C., when Troy was destroyed, thus suggesting that either the dating of the tumuli is wrong or Agamemnon was not buried in a tumulus. But the practice in the Iliad suggests that like Achilles and Patroclus he also would be buried in a tumulus.

Another important note is that Troy VIIa had a lot of Grey-Minyan ware, common to Orchomenos, the home of the Minyans. Jason's mother was believed to come from the line of the Minyans (king Minyas), and the Iliad says 30 ships were supplied by the Minyans, led by Ascalaphos and Ialmenos. The abundance of the Grey-Minyan ware might be attributed to the ten-year-long occupation in the siege of Troy, or an actual infusion of Greek settlers from Orchomenos. Still, the latest date of Grey-Minyan ware in Orchomenos could set the the latest date of the Iliad. Also, urnfields were found at Troy as well as a tumulus listed in the Iliad as "Dancing Myrines Barrow." Urnfields can be traced up the Danube, significantly among the ancient Vinca culture, and ultimately over the Alps in the early Etruscan, Villanovan Culture. The Etruscans also practiced both inhumation and cremation, placing their cremated dead in Urnfields, in tumuli carved into the tufa and rock-cut tombs. Tumuli spread from the Scythians et al., around the Black Sea littoral to the Caspian and Ural Seas, the Thracians, Lydians, Phrygians, Greeks, Illyrians, Etruscans, Iberians, Britains, and to northern Germany. A timber-lined barrow in Germany (the Hochdorf Grave Barrow) is similar to British tumuli and looks identical to the main tumulus "of Midas" in Gordion, Phrygia. The double horse burial in Gordion's tumulus KY is like the Scythian double grave burial in Tuva, Russia. Finally the timber-lined tombs within the barrows from

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Scythia to Germany lead back eastward, among a red-haired people who dressed in plaids, of the Altai Mountains, bordering the Tarim Basin, called Tocharians, who buried their dead in hollowed-out tree trunks.

Often associated with tumuli were megalithic structures (single standing stones (menhirs), stone circles, recumbent stone circles and portal tombs (dolmens). Besides European sites, dolmens have been found along the Black Sea coast of Georgia (ancient Colchis) that are similar to Irish dolmens, southern India and even Korea and Japan. Menhirs were often found atop Scythian tumuli, perhaps used as boundary stones, as in Italy. The Easter Aquhorthies recumbent stone circle, from [Aberdeenshire.gov.uk](http://Aberdeenshire.gov.uk) illustrates a recumbent stone circle that matches the description of a court described in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century Njal's Saga. A similar court was held by Agamemnon and his chiefs, described in the Iliad, where Agamemnon sat in judgment upon a recumbent stone, while the chiefs sat facing him within the stone circle. A standing stone (menhir?) was listed in the Iliad, chapter 21, as a stone that marked the turn-around in the chariot races held during the funeral games of Achilles' friend Patroclus. Thus, the practice of holding court in a stone circle may be relevant to the dating of the Iliad – with respect to any like practice in Greece. We suspect that stone circles in Britain would have been used in a similar manner.

### **Bronze Age funeral games around the tumuli**

The funeral and games remind us of the funerals of the Scythians, described by Herodotus, which included a wagon/chariot of the chief, sacrificed concubines and personal guard (one group of warriors was mounted - impaled on staffs in the horses around the chief) and treasure. At the time the funeral celebrations took place, the dead chief would have been placed on a wagon and carted around the territory of his domain. Sacrifices at the tumuli also took place in the burial of Patroclus. Achilles sacrificed Trojan slaves before Patroclus' funeral pyre and also cattle and sheep. He put some horses atop the funeral pyre. Patroclus' ashes were collected in an urn and a mound was thrown over it. When Achilles was killed by Paris, a similar event took place and his ashes were placed in an urn next to that of Patroclus.

In the Iliad the funeral of Patroclus also included a fine funeral feast and games which consisted of archery, javelin throwing, stone hurling, wrestling, chariot racing, etc., as later practiced in the Olympic Games (begun ~400 B.C.). If Patroclus was buried about 1180 B.C. then we may ask what happened to the practice of "games" in the interregnum between 1180 B.C. and the beginning of the Olympic Games in 400 B.C. The funeral games were part of the tumuli culture, when the tumuli ceased to be raised the games would have presumably ceased.

### **Weapons and tools in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age**

As noted, Achilles used a hunk of iron instead of a stone in the stone hurling contest. The hunk of iron is a signal to us that the Greek army that invaded Troy was of the "Iron Age" (the date of the Iron Age varied from culture to culture). The Iron Age in Anatolia began with the Hittites (1450-1200 B.C.); in

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Central Europe the Iron Age began in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the Villanovans (~1,000 B.C.) were apparently the earliest Iron Age culture in Central and Northern Italy. The Iron Age of the Near East is believed to be from 1200-1000 B.C., with continuity with the Late Bronze Age towards 1,000 B.C. In the Iliad the weaponry is bronze, except special gifts that had “steel” points offered by Achilles to the winners. In spite of the special nature of the gifts, there are several comments in the Iliad that repeat the fact that iron was in use: Book V, Book VI, Book VIII refer to cities with “iron gates,” Book IX refers to “grey steel,” Book X refers to a man pleading for his life “I can pay a ransom, I have gold and bronze and wrought iron at home.” Book XIII says that Telamonian Aias (Ajax) would yield to no man alive... if steel or stones can break his bones.” Book XIX says “...and cold steel reaps the fields.” Book XXIII, “Funeral of Patroclus,” Achilles produced a lump of roughcast iron which he took from Eetion, after he killed him, and he said to those who wish to contend for that prize, “No shepherd or plowman will need to visit the city for iron, there will be plenty at home.” Finally, shifting to the Odyssey we see the opening of the story with Athena disguised as a captain of a ship carrying a cargo of iron visiting Odysseus’ palace in Ithika. A ship with iron ore cargo clearly puts this portion of the Homeric story in the Iron Age.

I suggest that the Greeks of the Trojan War were clearly Iron Age men, though equipped with bronze weapons, and had plenty of iron at home; a Trojan ally about to be killed offered iron as his ransom as well, and the fact that they need not go to the city for iron suggests that iron must have been used in plowing and shepherding. If we use the criteria of a transition at the end of the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, where both bronze weapons were in use as well as iron, then we might expect that the Iliad was conceived about 1,000 B.C. Another work, the Rig Veda, which is believed to have been created about 1,200 B.C., describes the Aryan invaders of the Indus Valley attacking “iron-gated cities,” though weaponry in those early chapters of the Rig Veda list bronze weapons, as I recall. Since we know that Troy VIIa was destroyed in 1180 B.C. and the Hittite capital in 1189 B.C., one must reconcile the iron tool-making back to those two events to place the creation of the Iliad and the Rig Veda in that era. Otherwise, we may suspect that the creation of the Iliad would have been on the cusp of the Iron Age, about 1,000 B.C., a time when the Etruscans are believed to have arrived in Northern Italy as the Villanovan Culture.

### **Date of the Drought**

Other evidence that may relate to the date of the Greek invasion, that lasted ten years, would have been a drought. Herodotus notes that the Tyrrhenians left Lydia as a result of a drought, where King Attys asked that the nation be divided, with half, led by Tyrsenus, being selected to migrate to another home. Tyrsenus and his people ended up in northern Italy, founding the Etruscan Civilization. A Solar Model produced by PNAS covering sun activity from about 30,000 B.C. to present showed a spike in solar activity about 1,200 B.C. which would have produced a drought at the time of the destruction of Troy and subsequent migration of the Tyrrhenians to Italy. The Tyrrhenians established themselves as great mariners and obtained a reputation of being pirates. They traded from the interior of France to the Black Sea littoral, Syria and Lebanon and the north coast of Africa.

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## Mythological clues on the date of the Iliad

Mythology remembered in the Iliad is another area that may indicate the age of the text. For instance the heroes of the Iliad are all descended from gods just a few generations removed. Their memory of their origins is thus in the formative stage, and their mythology would thus be relatively new for them, perhaps spanning a period of a hundred years. One may derive some indicators on the date of the Iliad from a closer examination of their mythology from a formative period, comparing it to known, earlier models i.e., the story of Dionysus, compared to that of Perseus and the earlier Osiris, who share similar elements. Dionysus was kidnapped by Tyrrhenian pirates, thus placing his story after 1,000 B.C. In contrast the story of Osiris may date from the Old Kingdom, about 2,500 B.C. With respect to the leader of the war against Troy, Agamemnon, we can trace his ancestry three generations removed from the gods: from Atreus, his father, Pelops his father, his father Tantalus from Anatolia, who was a son of Zeus and the nymph Plouto. Tantalus was condemned to eternal punishment in Tartarus. Although Agamemnon's palace was Mycenae, the founder of Mycenae was Perseus (the Persians claim descent from him), who was the son of Zeus and Danaë, the daughter of Acrisius. Acrisius was the son of Abas and Aglae (her father Lobates, a Lycian), grandson of Lynceus, great-grandson of Danaus. Danaus and Aegyptus were twin sons of Belus, who ruled the vast territory under the domination of the kingdom of the Nile. Each brother had 50 children by many wives, but Danaus had only daughters, while Aegyptus had only sons. Belus gave Libya to Danaus, Arabia to Aegyptus. Aegyptus promptly conquered the Melampodes and named their land Egypt, after himself. Aegyptus wanted Danaus' daughters as brides for his sons, and this caused Danaus to suspect his brother wanted all of the lands of Belus and with the help of Athena built a double-prowed ship and sailed to Argos, the homeland of his ancestress, Io, an Argive princess, daughter of Inachus. Inachus, the chief river of Argos, often personified as a god, a son of the Titans Oceanus and Tethys. Some say Inachus was not a god but the first king of Argos who named the river for himself and who was the first to worship Hera. Inahu married the ash-nymph Melia, also a child of Oceanus, and she bore him two sons, Phoroneus and Aegialeus and a daughter, Io. Melia may also have been the mother of his daughter Mycene. Io was a priestess of Hera, the patroness of Argos, and attracted the attention of Zeus, who had already seduced Io's niece, Niobe. Hera's jealousy of Zeus' philandering eventually ended up in Io being changed into a lovely white heifer. She was then tied to an olive tree, guarded by the many-eyed Argus Panoptes, to protect her from Zeus.

Seeing that Zeus was attempting to get to the cow, Hera sent a gadfly to sting her and chase her away, where she crossed the Straits of Maeotis which were renamed for her the Bosphorus (Cows' Ford). After encountering the rocky crag where Prometheus was bound, she entered the Egyptian city of Canobus or Memphis and sank down exhausted. In due time she resumed the appearance of a human. Zeus caught up with her and visiting her bedside begot a child, Epaphus, who was kidnapped at the request of Hera and taken to Syria. Io found him being nursed by the queen of Byblus and returned with him to Egypt. She married Telegonus and instituted the worship of Demeter. It is said by many that Egyptians worshipped both Demeter and Io under the name of Isis.

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Note that the link to Danaus involves a far more complex history than represented in the paternal lineage of Agamemnon and other Trojan War heroes. If Isis and Io were the same character, the story would reach back to the Old Kingdom. It is obvious from the Iliad that Mycenaean Greeks had connections and interests throughout the Mediterranean. While Agamemnon's brother Menelaus, and his wife, Helen, were entertaining the Trojan Prince Paris (Alexander) in their palace in Sparta, King Menelaus was called to Crete to attend the funeral of his maternal grandfather. His mother was Aerope, wife of Atreus, daughter of Catreus, king of Crete. Catreus was the son of Minos and Pasiphaë. Thus, according to this myth Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, and Menelaus, king of Sparta, were removed just three generations –through their mother's side - from King Minos. If we use the dating relating to the time Mycenaean Linear B was being used in the Minoan palace sites - the period 1420 - 1375 B.C. at the latest – we would estimate that the grandfather of Menelaus, Minos, died about 1170 B.C., using 70 years as a generation ( $3 \times 70 = 210$  years;  $1375-210 = 1165$  B.C.). Knossos remained an administrative center until 1200 B.C. It has been estimated that the site was abandoned at the time of the late Bronze Age (1380-1100 B.C.). If Paris kidnapped Helen ten years before Troy VIIa was destroyed (destroyed 1180 B.C.) the visit of Paris to King Menelaus and Queen Helen of Sparta would have to be placed about 1169-1180 B.C. Paris had been a guest in the house several months before Menelaus left for Crete. Shortly after Menelaus departed, Aphrodite caused Helen to fall in love with Menelaus, fulfilling her promise to Paris at the Judgment of Paris, that he would be given the hand of the most beautiful woman at that time: Helen, daughter of King Tyndareüs. Unfortunately Tyndareüs had already betrothed his daughter to Menelaus through a bargain with King Agamemnon. Such are the fickle fingers of the gods who reward men with favors that sometimes are drawn out of Pandora's Box.

If we use the Mythological memory, the Iliad and Odyssey should have been created within the memory of the generation following the Trojan War, placing the date of their creation about 1100 B.C. The books might have been written down in Linear B (though it is not probable), since Linear B ceased to be used at the time Troy and the Greek cities, i.e., Pylos, Argos, Mycenae, etc. were destroyed. Linear B documents found in their ruins report the invasion that destroyed them. The story of the Trojan War would thus be carried orally until the stories could be set down in writing, estimated by some to be about 700 B.C. If it is correct that the Arcado-Cyprian group is apparently descended more closely from Mycenaean Greek, we could expect terms used in the Iliad and Odyssey to reflect that relationship.

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