



The two epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which together contain about 28,000 lines of verse, are the first works of literature in Europe. They were written by Homer, who lived in Greece in about the eighth century BCE, regarding a period of time long before his own, around 1200 BCE.

The *Iliad* concerns Greece's war with Troy, also known as Ilium, and the heroes that took part in it.

The *Odyssey* describes the adventures of the king of Ithaca, Odysseus, between his victorious departure from Troy and his return to his homeland.

The cause of the Trojan War was the anger of the Spartan king Menelaus. He had received Paris, the son of the king of Troy, as a guest at his palace; Paris ate, drank and made merry, but finally seduced Menelaus' wife, the beautiful Helen, and made off with her.

The Greeks viewed this as a national insult. In response, the most powerful of the Greek kings, Agamemnon, who was the brother of Menelaus and the ruler of Mycenae, amassed an army and ships with his friends and allies, and together they went to Troy to punish Paris and bring back Helen. The Trojan War lasted for ten years and ended with a victory for the Greeks.

More than a century ago, the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann used Homer's poems to discover the location of Troy on the north-west coast of Asia Minor, near the Dardanelles, in what is now Turkey.

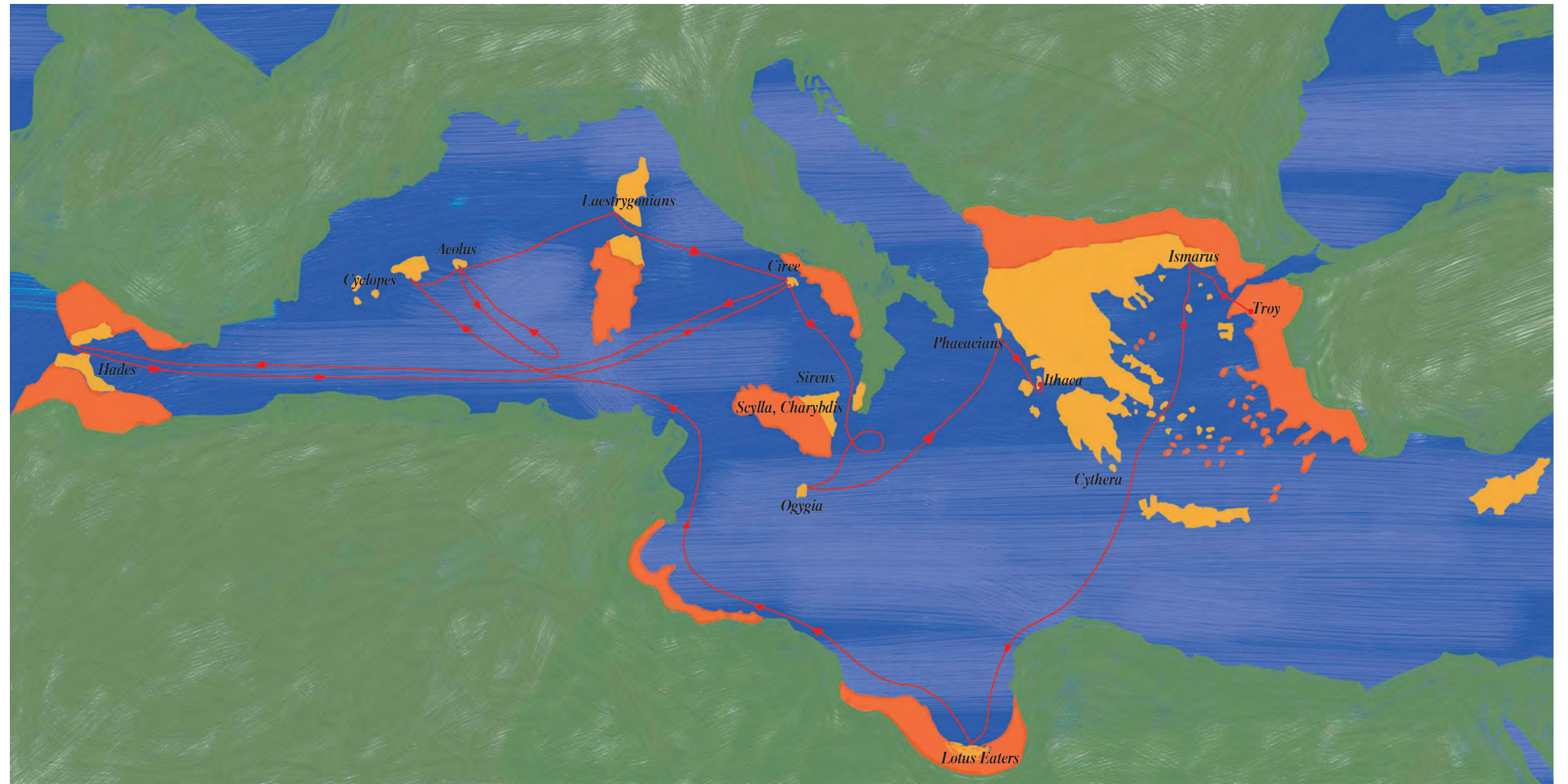


Following his excavation of Troy, Schliemann went on to explore Mycenae and the palace of King Agamemnon, who was the leader of the Greek army. Since then, many other locations referred to by Homer, and previously thought to be mythical, have been discovered. Because of this, we now know that 3000 years ago, the Achaeans – Homer's name for the Greeks – lived in a number of small kingdoms. From inscriptions found in their palaces, we also know that these people spoke Greek.

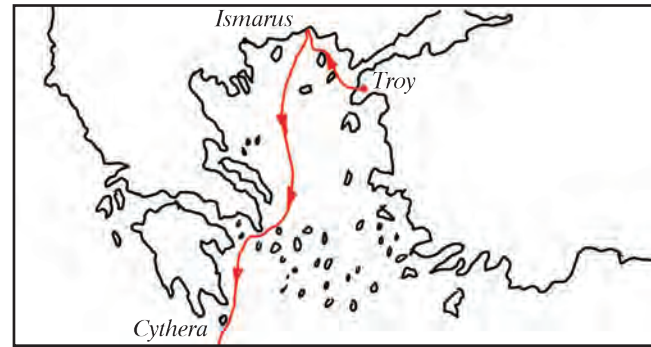
Scholars in the Alexandrian period divided the ancient texts of the Iliad and the Odyssey into 24 parts known as "rhapsodies", one for each letter of the Greek alphabet. The books in the Iliad are referred to by the capital letters from alpha to omega and those in the Odyssey by the lower case letters. Each book has a different number of lines. In this telling of Homer's story we will not follow the order of the rhapsodies, but the chronological order of the events. The numbering of the verses follows Zisimos Sideris' translation.

In Homer's time, the known world was that encountered by sailors on their voyages around the Mediterranean Sea. Their ships had a single sail and many oars, and so they preferred to navigate in the daytime and during the summer months, staying close to the coastline. The Greeks had explored all the islands and coasts around their sea. When they returned home, they narrated what they had seen on their travels. They saw the Strait of Gibraltar, to the west, as a river leading into the underworld, the land of the dead known as Hades. To the east, at the Bosphorus, where the sun god, Helios, rose at dawn each day, they imagined another river. Their gods, however, lived among them, at the top of Mount Olympus, and people often encountered them wherever they happened to be. Gods and mortals came and went as they pleased in the known world and only Helios and Hades, the ruler of the underworld, lived outside it. Anyone who studies the *Odyssey* will have their own opinion about where Odysseus and his companions were driven by the winds as they attempted to return home to Ithaca. What we do know is that the winds that filled the sails of the ships in Homer's time are exactly the same as the ones we have today. We also know that even today, sailors journeying without a compass, can find their way based on the position of the sun during the day, and the moon and stars at night. In this book, we can only guess where the winds might have taken Odysseus, and which places he might have visited before arriving at Ithaca, since all the places referred to by Homer after his first port of call, Ismarus, are entirely imaginary.

It is difficult to fit the words of poets onto a map, but nothing is more truthful than art. It is up to us to discover that truth.



BOOK 9 (i), LINES 1-575
Odysseus sets off on his voyage home and arrives
at the land of the Lotus Eaters (39-169).



When he set off on his voyage home, Odysseus had a dozen ships under his command, each with fifty men. However, things went badly for him from the very beginning. The wind was against them and pushed the ships northwards, up to Ismarus, the city of the Cicones, in Thrace.

They anchored there and while waiting for the wind to change, Odysseus' men descended on the city and ransacked it. Odysseus himself had no way of stopping them. After ten years of war they still had not had their fill of fighting.

The Cicones took to the hills to save themselves, and begged their neighbours for help. Odysseus told his men to prepare to leave as soon as possible, but they found a store of sweet wine and immediately began carousing. Night came and finally they fell asleep. At dawn, the Cicones returned and in their attack killed about fifty of Odysseus' men. The remainder ran for their ships and set sail.

Zeus, the all-seeing ruler of the gods, was angry with Odysseus' greedy companions for looting the city of the Cicones. He sent the north wind

to swathe the land and sea in thick cloud, and darkness descended from the sky.

The wind battered the ships, forcing them into the waves. The men took down the sails so that the wind would not tear them to shreds, and rowed with all their might to the nearby shore. They moored there and spent two days and nights until the wind had dropped.

Finally, on the morning of the third day, the sea was tranquil. They raised the sails of the ships and set off again. The journey was calm and they were nearing their homeland, when at Cape Malea, off Cythera, they ran into bad weather again.

For nine days, they were buffeted this way and that by adverse winds; on the tenth, the weather deposited them in the land of the Lotus Eaters.

The exhausted sailors stepped onto the shore and settled down to eat, having fetched water from a nearby spring. When they were full and had rested for a while, Odysseus chose three of them to go inland and find out what sort of people lived there.

However, they were slow to return. The local

