The Odyssey in Historical Context
Work and the Human Condition: Fall 2008

I. Ancient Greek Culture

II. Orality and Oral Literature

III. Homer
Ancient Greek Culture

“Greek” not “Greece”

Four “Ages”

A. Mykenaean Age (c. 1500-1100 BCE)
   • historical setting of Homer’s *Iliad* & *Odyssey*
   • Dorian invasions

B. Dark Age (c. 1100-750)
   • cultural setting of Homer

C. Archaic Age (c. 750-500)
   • *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written down

D. Classical age (c. 500-322)
   • Homer the “moral curriculum”
II. Orality and Oral Literature

Odyssey: A text of an oral poem

Primary Orality

Greek Orality during the Dark Age

Features of Oral Poetry

- Formulaic
- Repetitive
- Standardized epithets
- Additive
- Concrete
- Conservative
Homer

A. Historical Evidence of Events in Homer

- Achaeans
- Troy
- War, c. 1200 BCE
B. Growth of Homeric Epics

- Oral Culture after Dorian invasions
- Bards
- Rhapsodes
- Greek alphabet, end of Dark Ages
- Continuation of Oral Tradition
- Moral Curriculum of Classical Era
C. Homer as Historical Evidence

What does Homer tell us about…

… the rhapsodes?
… the audience?
… Greek social structure?
… Greek ideals and values?

The Household

The Polis