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“THE MAN WHO MADE THE SONG WAS BLIND”

Representations of Homer in modern times I

Eric Moormann

*Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;
Yet, now I have considered it, I find
That nothing strange; the tragedy began
With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.
O may the moon and sunlight seem
One inextricable beam,
For if I triumph I must make men mad.*

(William Butler Yeats¹)

Homer is usually represented as a blind bearded man, with long hair, and with a curved back. These physical features of old age are mostly stressed clearly and may indicate that he is an ideal teacher of wisdom.² When other people accompany him, the distinction between old and young, and physically weak and vigorous is mostly clearly visible. Visitors come to get instruction from the master.

Since some time I am collecting representations of Homer from the Renaissance onwards, which yields a rather large amount of fascinating instances.³ In this contribution I focus on those in which Homer plays a central role as symbol of poetry, that means particularly scenes that take place on Parnassus and the like.⁴

¹ W.B. Yeats, The Tower II, stanza 5, in *The Tower* from 1928, in which the blind poet Raftery features. Cited from Yeats 1950, 220.

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As the 'I' after the sub-title makes clear, this contribution has a sequel: E.M. Moormann, "There is a triple sight in blindness keen". Representations of Homer in modern times II, in A.P.M.H. Lardinois, M.G.M. van der Poel & V.J.Ch. Hunink (eds.), *Land of Dreams, Greek and Latin Studies in Honour of A.H.M. Kessels*, Nijmegen 2005, in press.

² P. Zanker remarks that old age is an 'attribute' of intellectuals (Zanker 1995, 28). See in general Graziosi 2002, 51-89, 98-110.

³ To my knowledge, there are almost no overviews concerning post-antique portraits of Homer. See P. Betthausen, in: *Wiedergeburt* 1999, 171-174.

⁴ On representation of narrative scenes and fictitious portraits see my other essay (see note 1).

Homer's blindness is generally considered as a mark of sagacity, sobriety, spiritual richness, and not as an awkward lack of sight.⁵ In Homer's portrait this feature is made nobler than it may be in practice: the gaze seems to look upwards, towards the Olympic heaven where Homer's gods are residing, and thus echoes the gaze of princes, generals and learned men as depicted in the Hellenistic era. Blindness apparently does not prevent Homer from inventing the most beautiful texts like his blind colleague Demodocus at the court of the Phaeacians (*Odyssey* 8.62-82). In sum, blindness renders him more vulnerable, but also wiser than others. He has an internal visionary look. He shares this positively interpreted command of his handicap with Tiresias who had been man *and* woman and knew which sex had gained the most satisfaction from making love. Hera was angry when she heard that women enjoyed nine times as much as men who had such a pleasure one time only, and saw the secret of her gender betrayed. Tiresias was struck with blindness, but Zeus made it more bearable by giving him wisdom and clairvoyance.⁶

In reality, Homer was not born blind according to various authors. In older sources, apart from the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* (verse 172) and Thucydides (3.104.4.5), blindness is not reported, and Proclus maintains that the poet was not blind at all.⁷ It is in the Greek *Lives of Homer* of the Roman era that this item is introduced, probably as a parallel to the mentioned Demodocus. Hesychius (in *Suda* ο 251.6) believes him to be blind from birth. Pseudo-Herodotus suggests that an ailment at Kolophon caused his blindness (Ps.-Hdt. 8). There is a highly fantastic ancient tradition that Homer's blindness was a punishment for his seeing Helen or the shield of Achilles in its full splendour.⁸ Plato (*Phaedrus* 243a) suggests that Homer could have prevented his blindness, after being struck by it because of bad words about Helen, in writing a *palinodia*, literally a 're-singing'. Stesichorus had been so wise as to revoke his ill-tempered words on this topic with such a *palinodia*.⁹ Whatever the reason may be, it is the power of his own words that caused Homer's disease in various versions of his biography. Perhaps the punishment made him better like Tiresias: the one became the greatest poet, the other the greatest seer.

Portraits in Antiquity

Homer was portrayed for the first time in the second quarter of the 5th century BC, the time when the Greeks started to make portraits of important persons from the past. There are several copies of such portraits, among which the beautiful head in Munich.¹⁰ The old man with a very long, well-groomed beard, long hair and large closed eyes in a soft, idealized face immediately forms a type, that of a *kalos geron*,¹¹ whilst it also fits into the starting production of individual portraiture (e.g. the Tyran-

⁵ See the *Lives* (West 2003); Zanker 1995, 24; *Wiedergeburt* 1999, *passim*; Graziosi 2002, 125-163.

⁶ Hesiod, Fragment 275. Variants of this story, also with other explanations of Tiresias' blindness, especially Callimachus and Ovid, are discussed by Van Tress 2004, 72-109.

⁷ See for a collection of the sources Richter 1965, 45-46 and Deubner 1998. Proclus, *Chrestomathia* 1.6.

⁸ Anonymous 1.6 (West 2003, 436-437).

⁹ *Phaedrus* 243a-b. Cf. Graziosi 2002, 147-150.

¹⁰ Homer was more or less invented in the 6th century by the Homeridai at Chios (e.g. West 2003, 311; see on them Graziosi 2002, 208-217); the portrait therefore comes at the appropriate time. Richter 1965, 45-56, figs. 1-127 records all monuments portraying Homer. Cf. Schefold 1997, 92-93 (Munich), 272-277 (Hellenistic types); Zanker 1995, 21-29, fig. 9 (Munich), 161-166, fig. 89-90 (Hellenistic types). Deubner 1998, 497: the man portrayed in the Epimedes type might be another person, hitherto unknown to us. Graziosi 2002, 130-131, 150-159.

¹¹ A fine analysis is that by P. Zanker, in: *Ulisse* 1996, 25-26 cat. 12 (copy Museo Barracco, Rome), who discusses sagacity stemming from blindness and the idea of elderly beauty. See also Zanker 1995, 21-29

nicides and the Themistocles). The entire statue probably represented an old standing man with a staff or rod. We do not have other fictitious heads until the Roman copies of two variations of an apparently famous head type from the Hellenistic age, showing an old blind man with curly hair and beard and a diadem, called the Apollonios and Farnese types. The head is curved forwards and most busts show the rim of a cloak at the neck. Of the latter type, highly praised in modern times, there are some twenty copies, called after its best-known example at Naples from the former Farnese collection at Rome, where numerous visitors from the north had admired it (plate I).¹²

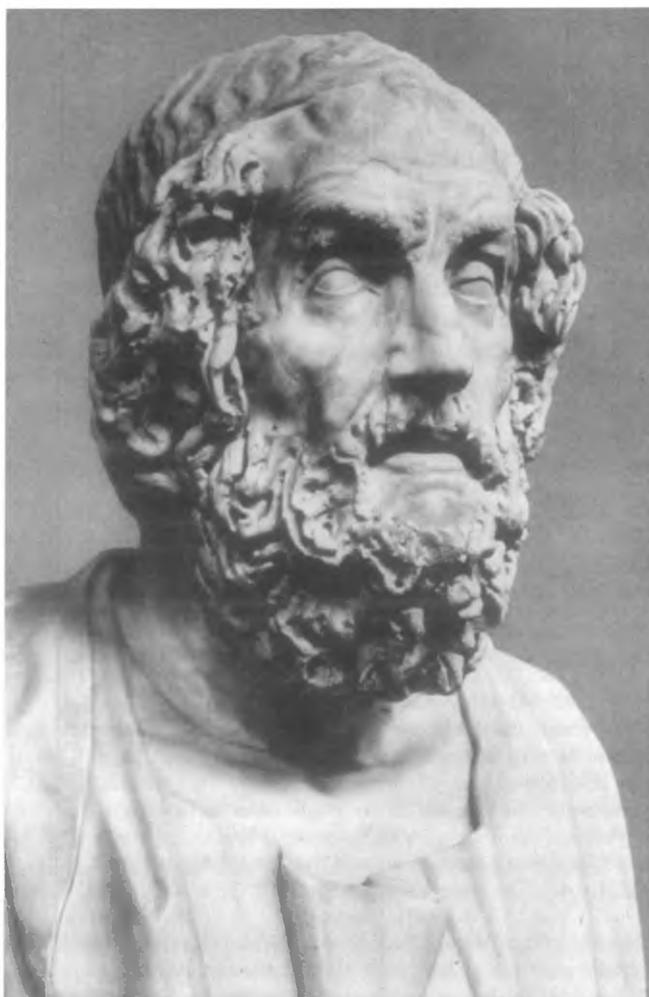


Plate I. *Homer from the Farnese Collection. Marble bust, Roman imperial era after a lost Hellenistic original. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6023 (photo author)*

¹² E.g. P. Zanker, in: *Ulisse* 1996, 26-27 cat. 1.3 (copy Musei Capitolini, Rome, seen by Orsini and many others and copied in gypsum for Goethe, who wrote about it for Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente*, cited in Zanker 1995, 163-164). According to Otfried Deubner, the head originally belonged to the statue of a seated Homer; one might visualize this like the seated Posidippus in the Louvre (Deubner 1998; for the Chrysisippus: Von den Hoff 1994, 96-111; Zanker 1995, 98-102, fig. 54-56).

A portrait of a standing Homer was exposed in the library of Pantainos of the Hadrianic period on the Agora in Athens. It was flanked by partly preserved large marble figures of cuirassed women, symbolizing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* is slightly bigger and has the place of honour at Homer's right side.¹³ The two were considered as Homer's daughters (*Anthologia Palatina* 16.292; Ps.-Plut. 1.4) and the military look refers to the genre of epic. Pseudo-Longinus stated in his *On the Sublime* (9.11-15) that Homer was young when writing the *Iliad*, and old when he put down the *Odyssey*.

During the Hellenistic age narrating scenes featuring Homer were introduced in the arts, to begin with, the 2nd-century BC relief in the British Museum with the 'Apotheosis of Homer', dedicated by Archelaos from Priene.¹⁴ The House of the Epigrams at Pompeii has a room, painted in the third quarter of the 1st century BC, displaying a set of large landscapes with written epigrams commenting on the images.¹⁵ One shows Homer and the fishermen of Ios who give him a riddle: "The ones we caught we left behind, the ones we missed we carry."¹⁶

Pseudo-Herodotus continues: "The result of this infirmity was that Homer died on Ios – not from his failure to interpret the boys' saying, as some suppose, but from his indisposition." Pseudo-Plutarch, however, states: "Unable to work this out, Homer became depressed and died."¹⁷ The story must have old roots, because Heraclitus uses it to criticise Homer: "Men are subject to error regarding the knowledge of visible things, as is Homer who, however, was wiser than all Greeks. For boys who were killing lice mislead him by saying: 'all we have seen and taken, we leave, but all we have neither seen nor taken, we carry with us.'¹⁸

As far as I know, there are no depictions of other episodes from Homer's life in ancient art.¹⁹

Homer in the Middle-Ages

Before presenting the first modern images, some words must be said about the period between Antiquity and the Renaissance, when Homer was not depicted in the arts except in manuscripts.²⁰

¹³ Richter 1965, 57 cat. k, figs. 110-113; E. Lygouri-Tolia, *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* V (1990) 647-648 s.v. Ilias; VI (1992) 942-943 s.v. Odysseia; *Ulysse* 1996, 28 cat. 1.4.

¹⁴ Deubner 1998, 494 wittily remarks that this Homer cannot be blind, "andernfalls entbehrte diese Darstellung einer wesentlichen Pointe." As to the relief the literature is vast, but see Richter 1965, 54 cat. I, figs. 114-116; Schröter 1977, 24-28, fig. 1; Zanker 1995, 156-157, fig. 85; Schneider 1999, 183-187; Moormann 2000, 78-79, fig. 16-17 (superiority of Homer symbolised by the mice that eat the volume under his footstool).

¹⁵ Richter 1965, 55 cat. t; *Pompeii. Pitture e mosaici* III, Rome 1991, 569.

¹⁶ Ps.-Hdt. *Life of Homer* 35, here cited in the translation of West 2003, 399.

¹⁷ Ps.-Plut. I = West 2003, 410-411. The same is found in Proclus 5 (West 2003, 422-423), Anonymous I (West 2003, 436-437), Anonymous II (West 2003, 440-443), Anonymous III (West 2003, 448-449). Hesychius of Miletus, finally, writes: "The true version is that he did not succumb to lust, which begins from the eyes, and for this reason he was reported to be blind" (West 2003, 431). West 2003, 311-312 tells that riddles are a *topos* in the biographies of wise people. On the riddle Koniaris 1971, who gives other instances of the story like the *Certamen* vs. 321-332 in an appendix (p. 36-38). Levine 2002-2003 argues that the story contains numerous elements from Homer's poems.

¹⁸ Diels & Kranz 1951, 163 Fragment B56. There is a pun with the word φθέρες that means 'lice' and 'destroyers' alike. Other polemic reactions to Homer are Fragment A22 and Fragment B42.

¹⁹ Richter 1965, 55 cat. s, figs. 114-116 has a bowl from Herculaneum (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 25.301) with an apotheosis of Homer, seated on an eagle, which was copied by Tischbein, and some sarcophagi with the poet (p. 55, cat. p-r, fig. 117).

²⁰ E.g. the Homer ms. in the library of Pistoia, Fondo Forteguerriano A 55 from the 15th century. On Homer in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance see still Seznec 1995, passim (cf. Index s.v. Homer).

The Greek texts were almost entirely forgotten in the Western Middle-Ages, whereas the stories of the Trojan War and its aftermath were known via excerpts in Latin like the *Ilias Latina* and Latin elaborations by Dares and Dictys, which formed the basis for several versions of the Troy novels like Benoît de Saint Maure’s *Roman de Troie* and John Lydgate’s *Fall of Troy*.

Homer’s reputation as the most venerable poet remained alive and was especially based on Macrobius’ early 5th-century *Saturnalia*, in which, amongst others, Virgil’s (reputed) sources were discussed. This was one of the most widely read texts in the Middle Ages. In his view Homer had been the first and immediately all-encompassing writer of antiquity and this judgment was generally accepted. In his *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis* (2.10.11) it was formulated in the following way: *Homerus, divinarum omnium inventionum fons et origo, sub poetici nube figmenti verum sapientibus intellegi dedit*. Despite the poetical form, Homer is a teacher in all matters for persons who are open to comprehend them.

Dante, Petrarch, Poliziano, Pontano and others expressed this meaning in numerous works. In the beginning of the 16th century Homer was second best in the favour of Virgil, who was considered a more civilised poet. From the second half of the 18th century onwards the scale would again tip in favour of Homer.²¹

One important example, Dante, may illustrate the medieval vision of Homer.²² Having entered into Hell under the guidance of Virgil, Dante encounters Homer, sporting a sword, in the first circle amongst numerous good, but unbaptized, antique personalities (*La divina commedia, Inferno* 4.86-90):

*Mira colui con quella spada in mano,
che vien dinanzi ai tre sì come sire:
quelli è Omero poeta sovrano;
l'altro è Orazio satiro che vene;
Ovidio è 'l terzo, e l'ultimo Lucano.*

Some lines later he concludes (vs. 94-96):

*Così vid' i' adunar la bella scola
di quel signor de l'altissimo canto
che sovra li altri com' aquila vola.*

Dante describes Homer sitting amidst a group of poets, placed in the first circle of Hell, far from the atrocious punishments Dante will encounter in the following circles. They were not sinners, but they had not been baptized and would not receive God’s mercy in the Final Judgment. Their life is rather tranquil and Virgil, now the guide of Dante through the Hell, normally would be one of them.

At first sight, the sword is not an appropriate object to be held by poets, but it symbolises the genre Homer wrote, the epic, as well as his position as king (*sire, signor*; line 96: *sovra*) of the poets.²³

²¹ Cf. Vogt-Spira 2000; *Wiedergeburt* 1999. As to the humanists see Kleckner 1994.

²² For Dante and Homer see Martellotti 1973.

²³ Dante personally did not know the ancient representations of the cuirassed epic poems (see above, with note 13). On the Archelaos relief they are young ladies clad in long-sleeved chitons.

In the 22nd book of *Purgatorio* Statius tells his life and his conversion to Christianity. Virgil explains to Dante some aspects and summarises the sources of learning. Without naming him he refers to Homer (*Purgatorio* 22.100-105):

*“Costoro e Persio e io e altri assai,”
rispose il duca mio, “siam con quel Greco
che le Muse lattar più ch’ altri mai,
nel primo cinghio del carcere cieco;
spesse fiate ragionam del monte
ch’ ha le nutrici nostre sempre seco.*

Homer was fed by the Muses and got his divine inspiration from them. The mountain mentioned is Parnassus and it inspires the poets, Virgil included.

This testimony would remain of great importance, and Dante’s commentator Cristoforo Landino stressed in several texts, among which the preface to his important and influential Dante commentary, that Homer was the foremost poet. He was the first to describe the glory of Greece and was an eternal teacher in public and private, practical and philosophical matters: even Alexander the Great cherished his texts.²⁴ In a way, although Orpheus and Musaeus could be considered his forerunners, Homer had constructed the Greeks:

Nullos enim adhuc Graecia historicos habuerat, quando ab Homero heroica tempora et Troiae bella describebantur. Nulli adhuc philosophi de vita et moribus disputabant, cum vel item vates omnia praecepta, quae ad bene beateque vivendum nos adhortabantur, explicabat; neque quae aut in re publica temperanda aut in exercitu ducendo nos doctiores reddunt, verum et ea quae in privata atque ociosa vita nos instituunt, optime exposuerat.²⁵

The sadness that he could not read the poet in his original version made Francesco Petrarch conclude that Homer and his predecessors Orpheus, Musaeus and Linus were *nomina nuda*.²⁶ Nevertheless, like for other authors, Homer is greater than Virgil.²⁷

Homer and other famous men in Urbino

Most of the following instances of Homer representations show him at Parnassus, amidst colleagues and the Muses. The works of art in question were made expressly for determinate rooms,

²⁴ Landino 1974, I, 25 (*Praefatio in Virgilio*). Taken from Plutarch, *Vita Alexandri* 7. In the same manner Petrarch: Schröter 1977, 77.

²⁵ Landino 1974, I, 22 (*Praefatio in Virgilio*). Cf. p. 48 (*Prefazione dantesca*), where Homer, Orpheus, Linus and Amphius are recalled as the forerunners of poetry. According to the *Proemio al commento dantesco* (Landino 1974, I, 139) Homer learnt from Orpheus and Musaeus, Virgil from Ennius, Lucretius, Plautus and Terentius, whereas Dante had no teacher. Petrarch, finally, had Pindar and Horace as his examples. R. Cardino gives examples of a similar reasoning (Landino 1974, II, 26-27), quoting Leonardi Bruni’s *De studiis et litteris*.

²⁶ Francesco Petrarca, *De vita solitaria* 3.12.

²⁷ I do not want to work out the vastly discussed Homer-Virgil *paragone*. See, i.a., Landino 1974, II, 264-266, 172-274 (commentary R. Cardini); Kleckner 1994; Vogt-Spira 2000, with bibliography.

especially libraries and *studioli*, and the poet played a rôle in the decorative programs made for that ambiance. From the Middle-Ages onwards, libraries contained series of Wise Men, writers and scientists featuring the four disciplines and, from the Renaissance onward, mythological subjects like Apollo and the Muses, *Hercules Musarum*, the Sibyls and the Seven Sages. Among them Homer might be a prominent figure, but in the scholarly literature his place is rarely singled out. A few examples will be mentioned in the following.²⁸ The *studiolo* was invented in 15th-century Florence and one of the first fully decorated examples was created for Federico da Montefeltro at Urbino.²⁹ The Flemish painter Justus van Gent painted a series of portraits around 1476 for this *istudio*.³⁰ Homer formed a counterpart with Virgil and their modern pendants were Petrarch and Dante. The large series includes politicians, philosophers, orators and scientists, always from antiquity and modern times alike. The small room has a wooden panelling under the portraits (still extant) illustrating the various facets of Federico’s life as statesman, military leader and literary person. The portraits of the antique figures are dressed in modern robes. Homer is leaning over a windowsill on which a large book is lying.³¹ The man is old and has long grey hair and a beard. His eyes are closed; a wreath crowns the head. He wears a white tunic with long sleeves and a richly embroidered mantle. There was a short Latin comment underneath the image that we know from a transcription of 1592:

*Smirnaeo, cuius poësin ob divinam disciplinarum varietatem omnis
aetas admirata est, assecutus nemo post, gratitudine pos.*³²

The text explains that the poet from Smyrna is the first and foremost literary artist, whose poetry is relevant for various *disciplinae*. Homer is an ideal example for the prince and masters the different aspects of learning. This idea matches Landino’s sentences quoted above and expresses the general meaning at this time.³³ For the historical figures, Van Gent could not rely on antique models, but his Homer was represented according to the standard formula of an old and wise man with internal (in)sight. The image emerged from the literary and not iconographical sources of the Roman period must have been his immediate example.

²⁸ Masson 1972 gives an overview of themes and fashions in libraries all over Europe. Homer is not mentioned but once, p. 44, i.e. regarding Urbino (see below). Staikos 2000 concentrates on the collections; the few descriptions of interiors do not produce examples of Homer representations. Bosser 2003 presents some examples in beautiful pictures, but does not address the topos of famous writers and the like.

²⁹ Liebenwein 1977 on the genre. He mentions Petrarch and discusses Urbino. Thornton 1997, 101-102, reminds a study in Venice in the 1570s of the Venetian scholar Andrea Pasqualigo, who possessed marble busts of Homer, Socrates and other ancient persons, five in total. Homer and Socrates symbolised the interest in poetry and philosophy.

³⁰ Liebenwein 1977, 83-96; Kühnast 1986. The paintings were taken off in 1632 so that the 28 portraits got dispersed.

³¹ Liebenwein 1977, 209 note 300; Kühnast 1986, fig. 48. The panel is in the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche at Urbino.

³² L. Schraderus, *Monumentorum Italiae, quae hoc nostro seculo et a christianis posita sunt*, Halberstadt 1592, 284. Facsimile in Kühnast 1987, 238.

³³ Cf. Seznec 1999, passim.



Plate IIa. Raphael, *Parnassus*. Fresco, 1510-1511. Rome, Vatican Palace, *Stanza della segnatura* (©Museum)

Homer on Raphael's Parnassus

Raphael's 'Parnassus' in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican Palace is the oldest representation of a gathering of *uomini illustri* in which Homer is a pivotal person (plate IIa).³⁴ Raphael painted this fresco in 1510-1511 for Pope Julius II Della Rovere as a symbol of the union between antique and modern cultural splendour in a room that has been interpreted as a library. It shows the earthly Paradise, where poetry and music lead to ascesis and harmony. Apart from Apollo, playing the contemporary *lira da braccio*, and the Muses eighteen poets (the double number of the Muses) are united on the mountain, at the right eight and at the left ten persons. The identification of most of them is a matter of discussion. Only Sappho has a label showing her name. If we may see the young man who takes notes, listening to the singing Homer, as a representation of

³⁴ Schröter 1977, 1 *expressis verbis* states that there is no predecessor, which opinion is substantiated in her admirable study. The literature about the Stanza della Segnatura is very vast. I refrain from entering into problems that do not pertain to my subject. Therefore I mainly quote Emiliani/Scolaro 2002, 168-171, with excellent images. See also Joost-Gaugier 2002, who does not single out the figure of Homer. As to the genesis of the Parnassus theme see Schröter 1977. Her own ideas about the fresco itself were presented in Schröter 1978 and should have been worked out.



Plate IIb. *Dante, Homer and Vergil. Detail of Raphael, Parnassus. Fresco, 1510-1511. Rome, Vatican Palace, Stanza della segnatura (©Museum)*

Ennius, this would refer to his label of *alter Homerus* by Horace.³⁵ Dante, Virgil and Statius are well recognisable; they stand next to the blind old man (plate IIb).

Homer's head is tilted backwards, shows a vexed mien and has an open mouth, whereby he evokes the Laocoon's tortured face.³⁶ This artistic quotation is well chosen, as Laocoon was seen, immediately from the moment of discovery in January 1506, as an extreme example of cruel suffering caused beyond his guilt. We read this notion in poems by people who were connected with the papal court like Jacopo Sadoletto, Evangelista Maddaleni de'Capodiferro and Eurialo d'Ascoli.³⁷ Homer suffered likewise and his talents were not always acknowledged, but he would become the greatest poet, though being blind and sometimes despised by men: he had been an orphan from early childhood, was made hostage and suffered attacks from sailors and dogs. The bites of the dogs are not equal to those of Laocoon's serpents, but they provoked the same reaction of pain and suffering. The *vitae* contain passages about cruel behaviour against him and also testimony the great love he gave to the people, singing his divine songs. In sum, Homer became

³⁵ Horace, *Epistulae* 2.1.50. The Ennius identification, given in Emiliani/Scolaro 2002, goes back to D. Redig de Campos, but is disputed. Cf. i.a. Schröter 1978. At p. 95 she points at Kalliope (with tuba) who is called the 'Musa Homeric' during the Middle Ages and might be the *trait d'union* between Apollo and Homer because of her intermediary position. There is an antique tradition of Ennius seen by Homer in a dream on the Helicon (Schröter 1977, 18).

³⁶ Emiliani/Scolaro 2002, 172, 183 (good detail pictures).

a sort of Christ *avant la lettre*. This interpretation is permitted, when compared to the way the humanist interpreted mythology as a kind of religious teaching in the light of Neoplatonism. This strategy had to explain that “Plato accords with Moses, and Socrates ‘confirms’ Christ, so Homer’s voice is that of a prophet.”³⁸

The high esteem Dante and Petrarch had expressed of him is reflected in Raphael’s Parnassus, perhaps via the Renaissance commentators like Landino. Some aspects of the representation seem to reflect the lines quoted from Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. As the king of poets, Homer is allowed to sit on Parnassus (*Purgatorio* 22.104: *monte*), next to his wet nurses, the Muses. The stemma Apollo-Orpheus-Musaeus-Linus-Homer, proposed in many texts, implies that Homer is a far descendant of Apollo himself and is therefore allowed to stand next to the god of music.

The importance of Homer is underlined by the *grisaille* in the dado on the right, showing Alexander laying the *Iliad* of Homer into the sarcophagus of Achilles near Troy (plate III), whereas the left panel contains Augustus impeding the destruction of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.³⁹



Plate III. Raphael, *Alexander the Great deposits Homer's works into the tomb of Achilles at Troy*. Fresco, 1510-1511. Rome, Vatican Palace, *Stanza della segnatura* (©Museum)

³⁷ See Settis 1999, 4, 15, 65, and the collection of reception instances collected by Sonia Maffei in Settis 1999, 85-230, esp. 87-88. The motif is based on Virgil’s impressive description of Laocoon’s death in *Aeneis* 2.199-231.

³⁸ Seznec 1995, 98. I owe this reference to Volker Manuth.

³⁹ Emiliani/Scolaro 2002, 129. The Alexander story, reported by Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandrou* 1.12 and Plutarch, *Vita Alexandri* 7 and 15.8, was very popular from the Renaissance onwards. Cf. above note 24. As to Virgil who wanted his work to be burnt after his death (19 BC), see Donatus’ *Virgil vita*.

Raphael's fresco became immediately very famous and was discussed by many colleagues and, later, art historians.⁴⁰ A print by Marcantonio Raimondi, not an exact reproduction, but an 'enriched' version, possibly based on an early draft of Raphael's work, spread its fame over Europe.

Pellegrino Tebaldi decorated the 'print room' of the library in the Escorial around 1590, following an iconographical programme drawn by the librarian of this royal resort, father José de Sigüenza, in which theology, philosophy and the *artes liberales* have their place of honour. Homer is a Michelangelesque figure, seated on a throne, holding a book in his right and pointing downwards with his left.⁴¹ He does not follow a classical statuary form and his costume is not genuinely ancient. Homer's head is crowned with a turban which might reflect his Anatolian roots, but also alludes to his quality as an early magician like Orpheus. Other writers and learned men, symbolising the disciplines mentioned are depicted in the same ensemble.

Seventeenth Century Parnassi

Nicolas Poussin, the illustrious classicist painter from France, was highly inspired by Raphael and his work, which we easily recognize in his 'Apollo and the Muses on Parnassus' from about 1625 (Anthony Blunt) or 1631-1632 (Pierre Rosenberg), according to Blunt a rather weak canvas, but for Rosenberg a fresh youthful work of the French master (plate IV). The composition differs in many respects from the Raphael fresco – and even from Raimondi's print – and we must describe it on its own. It shows the virtues of poetry.⁴² Apollo crowns the late poet Giovan Battista Marino (1569-1625), famous for his *Adone* and other, partly posthumously published poems, and, moreover, friend of the painter. The nine Muses and eight colleagues accompany him. On the left Homer is standing next to Virgil and Torquato Tasso, whereas the other four figures on the right have not been identified.

I was not able to find data about the Poetry that decorates the ceiling of one of three rooms in the casina Mocenigo at Murano in the Venetian lagoon. This villeggiatura complex, dedicated to the arts and literature, was constructed between 1591 and 1617. The paintings are attributed to Carletto and Benedetto Caliari.⁴³

A highly personal and surprising variation upon the Parnassus theme is to be seen in the Salone degli Argenti in Palazzo Pitti at Florence. This huge hall was decorated with grand fresco paintings in 1635-1636 on the occasion of the marriage of Ferdinando II Medici and Vittoria della Rovere. Giovanni Mannozi, called Giovanni da S. Giovanni, drew the iconographical programme and executed most murals. Because of his untimely death in December 1636 some parts had to be done by others; the whole room was ready in 1641.

⁴⁰ See Emiliani/Scolaro 2002 for a lengthy discussion of opinions and interpretations.

⁴¹ Good picture in Bosser 2003, 193.

⁴² The painting is at Madrid, Museo del Prado: Blunt 1966, 90 cat. 129; Blunt 1967, 72-73, pl. 18; Rosenberg 1995, 206-207 cat. 45. My short lines are based on Panofsky 1960, 51-56. He discusses at length 'Inspiration du poète' from 1629-1633 (Paris, Musée du Louvre), where the poet probably is not Homer but Virgil, as proposed by Marc Fumaroli (cf. Rosenberg 1995, 178-181 cat. 30). In that painting, however, the titles of *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* are indicated on books held by the persons. Rosenberg 1995 follows Panofsky's interpretation.

⁴³ Touring Club Italiano, *Guida d'Italia. Venezia*, Milano ³1985, 650-651. The other two rooms are dedicated to Love and Music.



Plate IV. *Nicolas Poussin, Parnassus. Oil on canvas, 1625 or 1631-1632, 145 x 197 cm. Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. 2313 (©Museum)*

On one wall Giovanni depicted how time destroys books and manuscripts (amongst which texts of Parmenides), how Islam drives poets away from Parnassus by satyrs, harpies and nymphs, and how the personifications of Tuscany and Munificence are ready to welcome these cultural heroes as a pearl in Florence's crown: 'Il tempo distruggitore', 'Le Muse con i poeti e i filosofi sono scacciati dal monte Parnaso' (plate V) and 'La Fama mostra alla Toscana e alla Munificenza i filosofi raminghi e dolenti'.

On the first painting, the real evil is represented by Mehmet II, the conqueror of Byzantium in 1453, who flies above Time and is accompanied by a Harpy carrying the *Koran*.

The second fresco shows Parnassus sacked by satyrs and Homer leading Aristotle, Sappho, tormented by an ugly old Fury, and Dante out of the image to the right. As Eduardo Giglioli puts it: "Egli [Homer], benchè cieco, incede sicuro e porta avanti le braccia nude cercando con le mani la porta che deve condurlo a Firenze, la città delle arti, delle scienze e delle lettere. Egli va avanti indisturbato, solenne e nessuno osa toccare l'eroe della grande epopea antica."

On the third fresco the only philosopher recognisable is Empedocles. The whole programme – including the ceiling with the reunion of the Medici and Della Rovere families – hails Tuscany's cultural richness started by Cosimo il Magnifico. The dynasty of the Medici takes over responsibility for culture from ancient Byzantium.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Giglioli 1949, 122-134, quotation from p. 131. See also Banti 1977, 35-41, 77-78, pls. 110-111, 129-137. I owe these references to dr. Arno A. Witte. For Giglioli (1949, 129-130) 'Maometto' is not specific, but Banti (p. 36) defines him as the famous conqueror Mehmet II.



Plate V. *Giovanni da San Giovanni, Le Muse e i poeti scacciati dal monte Parnaso. Fresco, 1635. Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Sala degli Argenti (after Banti 1977, tavola 133)*

The so-called Brautkammer in Berlin's Stadtschloss contained figural scenes on the ceiling painted by the French artist Jacques Vaillant in 1680. The central panel showed Apollo, Hermes, the Horae, Chronos and History, whereas the cornice contained small red tondi with grisaille-like busts of Achilles, Thetis, Homer and Hesiod. The decoration was destroyed during the Second World War and is only known from old photographs. The decorative programme evidently formed an allusion at the noble examples the Greeks give and their eternal value for mankind.⁴⁵

Homer's turn at the turn of the nineteenth century

After a long period of absence, at least in the arts, Homer got a greater esteem in the run of the 18th century. Denys Diderot saw him as the representative of the primitive, simple and pure civilisation of early Greece, in contrast with the (too) civilised and sophisticated Virgil of the Romans who had been the favourite poet of the 17th and early 18th centuries. The notion of 'edle Einfalt', advocated by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, also worked in favour of the Greek poet. The various German translations and Wolff's Homer studies helped to increase Homer's status.⁴⁶ Therefore, especially France and Germany show an increase of Homer depictions at this time.

When Christopher Wren designed the library of Trinity College at Cambridge (1676-1686) he also planned the interior to be adorned with busts. One of them is the Farnese Homer installed in the course of the 18th century. It probably is a work of the French sculptor Louis François Roubillion. Other copies were placed in the library of Wolfenbüttel, purchased by Gottfried-Wilhelm Leibnitz (now Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum), and in Friedrich the Great's Sanssoucci, combined with Socrates and the Apollo Belvedere. Goethe bought a gypsum copy of the Farnese head when he stayed at Rome.⁴⁷

Gilded busts of ancient writers are present in the library of the Benedictine abbey at Admont near Salzburg. They were made around 1774 and support as consoles the vaults instead of capitals. Homer's head is not shaped after the Farnese Homer, but shows similar features like the blind (or closed) eyes and the curly beard.

In his house at Haidhausen near Munich, the painter Robert von Langer decorated the garden room with an allegory of Love and Poetry between 1826 and 1828. Among the themes Homer and Dante, combined with Tasso and Ariosto, represent ancient (pagan) and Christian literature (north wall), whereas Homer and the Muses are depicted on the east and west walls. The south wall contained motifs from the world of Aphrodite and Dionysus. According to Eva Christine Nielsen the artist aimed at an educating programme, footed on the neo-classicist tradition of Winckelmann and artists like Carstens, Flaxman and Koch.⁴⁸ The Homer is seated and clad like a Greek philosopher, but has the head of the Farnese bust. He gesticulates with his right hand and holds a lyre in the left one. Calliope crowns him with a laurel wreath.

⁴⁵ See Wiesinger 1992. On the painting Hesiod's name is misspelled as Hesiodes.

⁴⁶ See *Wiedergeburt* 1999; Vogt-Spira 2000.

⁴⁷ D. Kreikenbom, in Schulze 1994, 51-53 cat. 9-10: marble copy by Alexander Trippel in Schloss Ludwigsburg (Stuttgart) from ca. 1780 and an antique copy of the Farnese type at Schwerin. In the comments by Detlev Kreikenbom these and other library examples are mentioned.

⁴⁸ Nielsen 2002, 33, 55-59, 77, figs. III.29-31 (also on internet: <http://epub.uni-muenchen.de/archive>).



Plate VI. *Joseph Abel, Klopstock unter den Dichtern im Elysium. Oil on canvas, 1807, 196 x 253 cm. Vienna, Österreichische Gemäldegalerie, inv. 3641 (©Museum)*

The Viennese painter Josef Abel made a variation of the Parnassus theme on an enormous canvas of 196 x 253 cm in 1807. He depicted how the German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock enters the Elyseum (plate VI).⁴⁹ 23 literati are sitting in a serene landscape, while the Hamburg poet is introduced by a Muse and welcomed by Homer. Modern poets are sitting on the left: Dante, Ariosto, Boccaccio, Metastasio, Alfieri and Tasso are next to Petrarch and Laura. The blind Milton is guided by his daughters. The right side contains the classic writers Virgil, Horace, Pindar and Sappho. Orpheus is considered one of them. Putti fly over Homer and Klopstock, holding a garland. Klopstock (1724-1803) had become famous with the epic *Der Messias* and developed Horace-like verse schemes in the lyrics that made him more popular. He was estimated for his pureness as a poet.⁵⁰ Abel made the work at Rome, where he was inspired by Raphael's Parnassus and probably also by the Poussin image.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Vienna, formerly Kunsthistorisches Museum, now Österreichische Galerie Belvedere ÖG Inv.Nr. 3641. Painting from 1807: Aurenhammer 1966, 11-12, figs. 9; Hülmbauer 1992, 12. The title is 'Klopstock unter den Dichtern im Elysium'. The landscape is by Johann Christian Reinhart.

⁵⁰ Aurenhammer 1966, 11 shortly discusses the adoration of Klopstock.

⁵¹ Aurenhammer 1966, 8, 11. He was also influenced by Carstens (*ibid.*, p. 9).



Plate VII. *Jean-Louis-Dominique Ingres, Apothéose d'Homère. Oil on canvas, 1827, 386 x 512 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 5417 (photo author)*

Ingres and Delacroix

In the hottest moment of the Greek Independence War Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres made his 'Apothéose d'Homère' (1827), a work serving as an *acme* of neo-classicist art, sometimes criticized for its stiffness and bad composition (plate VII). It apparently invited artists to make parodies of it.⁵² The large canvas was to adorn the ceiling of the Salle Clarac in the Louvre, where Egyptian antiquities were exposed, but became famous, when it was shown at the World Exhibition of 1855 in the Musée du Luxembourg.⁵³ The crowded picture shows Homer seated in front of a Ionic temple dedicated to him, as we may deduce from the Greek inscription ΟΜΗΡΟΣ on the frieze. On the basis of the throne is written: ΑΝΔΡΩΝ ΗΡΩΩΝ ΚΟΣΜΗΤΩΡΙ (To the man

⁵² The photographer Walter Barnes made an Apotheosis of Degas in 1885 (i.a. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum). See Vigne 1995, fig. 2.

⁵³ The painting is in the Musée du Louvre. Whiteley 1974, 45-47; Compin/Roquebert 1986, III, 324-325 (sketches); Vigne 1995, 174-180, fig. 150.

who brings fame to heroes), which reflects the epitaph of the poet, known from various sources.⁵⁴ The female personifications of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are seated near his feet and from both sides groups of antique and modern artists, writers and politicians who may form the sources of inspiration of Ingres and other neo-classicists are ascending. Many portraits are copies from famous works like the self-portrait of Poussin and that of Raphael from his ‘School of Athens’ in the same room as the ‘Parnassus’. Next to Homer are Dante and Virgil: Dante is almost the only non-antique man so near the throne. Among the classical worshippers are the three great Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, as well as Pindar, Plato, Aesop and Anacreon. Phidias and Alexander the Great cannot be absent. The modern persons in this crowd of 46 people include Corneille, Racine, Molière, Shakespeare, and Camões. Apelles guides Raphael. As George Vigne puts it, the ensemble forms a self-portrait of the maker who considers Homer as the alpha and omega of his arts and of all those portrayed, that means of eternity.⁵⁵

The theme occupied Ingres until his last old days, when he made a large drawing in 1864-1865.⁵⁶ This shows more or less the same composition, but with still more worshippers. However, some quit, others enter. So, Tasso and Shakespeare must leave, being romantic writers according to Ingres, whereas David and Mozart enter as good classicist artists. Ingres introduces himself with a youthful face. The temple is improved thanks to advice of the archaeologist Jakob Ignaz Hittorf. It is scarcely probable that Ingres had the ambition to redo his old project, but he continued playing with the idea of portraying supreme examples in the form of six medallions among which Homer, Orpheus and Dante.⁵⁷

There was more of Homer in the Salle Clarac, named after the artist-archaeologist Frédéric Comte de Clarac (1777-1847) who spent many years working in the Louvre and published huge works on Greek sculpture. Next to Ingres with his Apotheosis of Homer, other painters and stucco makers were involved to decorate its walls with appropriate themes. Nicolas Gosse and Auguste Vinchon painted *grisailles* in 1827-1833, showing ‘Homère chantant’ and ‘Honneurs rendus à Homère’ as well as scenes from the Homeric poems.⁵⁸ On the first frieze various people like a nude warrior, a traveller with cap, a woman with a child, women with water jars, and a boy with Phrygian cap surround Homer. The second scene shows people who bring garlands and a nude warrior crowning Homer. This warrior might be Achilles or Hector and symbolize the genre of epos, especially the *Iliad*. To the right of the latter Odysseus with his typical cap and dog is recognizable, obviously representing the *Odyssey*. Among the other figures who represent characters from *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, we recognize Andromache with Astyanax and Paris. The grey friezes work like Thorvaldsen’s contemporary imitations of marble or plaster relief. The brothers Charles

⁵⁴ It was recorded in Aristotle’s *De poetis* (O. Gigon (ed.), *Aristotelis opera* 3. *Librorum deperditorum fragmenta*, Berlin/New York 1987, 265-266, figt. 20, 1 and 20, 3) and cited in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 18, Ps. Plutarch I, 4, Hesichius 7, Anonymus I, 6, Anonymus II and III: ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων κοσμήτορα θεῖον Ὀμηρον (= West 2003, 353, 411, 431, 439, 443, 449: “adormer of warrior heroes, the godly Homer”).

⁵⁵ Vigne 1995, 179. Vigne (p. 174-180, fig. 150) criticizes the painting for the too many details, lust of copying and mass of learned elements.

⁵⁶ Vigne 1995, 311, fig. 268; *Métamorphoses* 1995, 147-150.

⁵⁷ Vigne 1995, 314, figs. 269-270.

⁵⁸ Compin/Roquebert 1986, III, 285. Paul and Raymond Balze and Michel Dumas executed a copy of Ingres’ Apotheosis to replace the original one in 1855 (Compin/Roquebert 1986, III, 40).

and Auguste Moënc made small friezes with Apollo and the Muses and personifications of the seven cities that claimed to be the birthplace of Homer.⁵⁹

Between 1837 and 1847, Eugène Delacroix painted the decoration of the Salon du Roi of the library in Palais Bourbon. Each cupola contained a representation of the main literary genres, whereas the pendants contained exponents thereof. The fifth one was dedicated to Poetry, embodied by Orpheus as the inventor of poetry and contrasting with Attila as emblem of barbarism. In the surrounding pendants Homer, Virgil, Dante and Ariosto were planned to personalize the genre of epic poetry, Homer being the first great poet ever. As Delacroix wrote in his proposal, he wanted a “Homère aveugle, son baton et sa lyre à la main, son aigle planant au dessus de sa tête et tenant dans ses serres son immortel laurier.”⁶⁰ However, the definitive version has Alexander the Great with the box containing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Homer would not be left out in Delacroix’ large painting in the cupola of the ‘Rotonde’ of the library of the Palais du Luxembourg at Paris, transformed into the seat of the French senate in the 1830s under Louis XVIII. Between 1842 and 1846 Delacroix adorned this cupola with a fresco inspired by the verses of Dante about Homer in Hell, quoted at the beginning, the ‘Elysée d’Homère’. Orpheus stands for the invention and Homer for the realisation of poetry. Various details from Dante’s text are present in the description by Théophile Gautier: “Homère, le poète souverain, le prince du chant sublime qui vole au-dessus de tous les autres comme l’aigle, suivi, mais à distance respectueuse de sa belle école. Horace, Virgile, Ovide et Lucain. Le chantre d’Achille a la main appuyée sur un glaive comme un guerrier. Pour avoir si bien chanté les combats, il faut être un héros! L’épée va mieux à ce mâle génie que le lyre du poète.”⁶¹ Some differences may be noted as well. Homer is firmly standing and holds a sceptre or staff instead of a sword. All poets are dressed in Raphaelesque mantles, in bright colours, and have green laurel wreaths around their heads. Around the lower rim of the cupola other important figures, mythical and historical alike, are depicted.

The last example of this section belongs to Paris’ Belle Époque. The Opéra Garnier at Paris, finished in 1875, got a lavish painted decoration in all rooms. The big foyer was decorated by Paul Baudry. The western archivolt shows ‘Les poètes civilisateurs’, in which Homer thrones in the centre and Orpheus and Achilles stand for elementary values, the former as symbol of civilisation, the latter as example of virtue. The composition resembles that of Baudry’s great source of inspiration, Ingres.⁶²

Homer at Athens

The new capital of Greece was also proud of the great men of the past. Homer could not lack in the imagery of culture and tradition Athens wanted to display. The new University was a focal

⁵⁹ Compin/Roquebert 1986, IV, 97. The date should be 1827; they adorn the ‘voussoirs’.

⁶⁰ Sérullaz 1963, 51 (project of 1838). Definitive version: p. 54, fig. 57. The other figures make also place for new themes, viz. Ovid in exile, Education of Achilles, and Hesiod with the Muses (scheme at p. 77). See also, with concentration on Orpheus, *Métamorphoses* 1995, 71-75.

⁶¹ Th. Gautier, *La Presse* 31 January 1847, quoted in Sérullaz 1963, 402. Sérullaz gives a colour plate opposite to p. 402. See also *Métamorphoses* 1995, 71-75.

⁶² *Métamorphoses* 1995, 75, 163-165; Foucart & Prat 1980, fig. 71. Robinson 1987 sees the paintings as an expression of French fierceness after the French-German War, although they had been painted previously.

monument in this respect. Therefore, we see him in the centre of a group of young people in the left portico of the main building of the *Panepistimio* designed by the Danish architect Christian Hansen in 1841 (completed in 1864). The sketches for these paintings were made by Karl Rahl (1861) and the frescoes were carried out by the Polish painter Eduardo Lebieski as late as 1888. In the middle, a seated Homer plays on a lyre, held in his left hand, and sings his poems, while Orestes and Pylades on his left and Kleophantes, Learchos and Hermodoros on his right are listening. The young men are marked by names written above them like those on Greek vases and in ancient mural paintings. A child is writing, probably the lines Homer is reciting. The series of ancient learned men matches the group in the central panel around king Otto. As a whole, the frieze can be seen as a direct reference to the Parthenon frieze and, in respect of the iconography of Homer, as a sort of Parnassus. The set of figures is a good parallel for the Albert Memorial discussed hereafter.⁶³

Prince Albert and Homer

A kind of Parnassus is the Albert Memorial at London. When Queen Victoria’s beloved husband Prince Albert died in 1861, the whole nation mourned him. Immediately the idea was launched to erect a memorial at the southern side of Hyde Park. George Gilbert Scott designed a ‘Parnassus’ crowned by a Gothic chapel, executed between 1863 and 1876. A gilded Albert is seated in a neo-Gothic shrine and looks towards the Royal Albert Hall. Under his feet runs a frieze sculpted by Henry Hugh Armstead and John Birnie Philips in 1873, representing the arts. On the south frieze by the former, Homer is sitting below Albert’s feet in the centre and stands for the beginnings of both literature and music, being surrounded by illustrious colleagues in these arts (plate VIII). Next to him we see Dante, Virgil, Petrarch and Shakespeare, whereas composers and writers of various nations (many of them German, being compatriots of the prince) are standing at the sides. The other façades have the foremost representatives of painting, sculpture and architecture, with Raphael, Michelangelo and Arnolfo di Cambio as their leaders. As a whole, the selection is not emphasising English talents in particular, but stands for a really international group of artist, from an anonymous Egyptian pyramid builder to modern representatives. Homer is present once more: a mosaic image of him stands in the front (i.e. south) gable of the aedicule, next to the personification of Poetry, forming the beginnings of profane poetry, his counterpart being King David for the religious poetry. The whole series forms a good selection of the Victorian canon of artists in the mentioned fields. The prince himself always had shown a great interest in the arts, favouring in the first place Raphael’s talents as a painter.⁶⁴

⁶³ G. Panetsos, Η συγκρότηση του Αθηναϊκού νεοκλασικισμού, in: Ch. Bouras *et al.* (eds.), *Αθήνα. Από κλασική εποχή έως σήμερα (5^{ος} αι π.Χ. – 2000 μ.Χ.)*, Athens 2000, 398-435, fig. 410-414. I thank Gert Jan van Wijngaarden for his assistance to check my description and for the bibliographical reference.

⁶⁴ Brooks 2000. See especially the chapter ‘Iconography and Victorian Values’ by Colin Cunningham, in: Brooks 2000, 206-251. The architect, George Gilbert Scott, designed the iconographical programme.



Plate VIII. *Henry Hugh Armstead, Literature and Music. Marble relief, 1872-1876. London, Albert Memorial, south frieze (photo author)*

Conclusion

Within the context for which these works of art were made, Homer is a positive person, wise, artistically superb, an inspiration for mankind. He won his place on Parnassus or in the Elysium by suffering and hardship on earth and is allowed to sit next to the highest power, Apollo. In sum, he is a cultural hero. Unfortunately he was not christianised and could not enter heavenly paradise. The Parnassus representations have a stimulating and edifying value for the onlooker and a realm of learnedness and arts. Homer's important position stems from the traditional notion of his superiority to other writers. His works encompass all vital values of mankind and represent all genres of literature, arts and crafts, science and so on. Especially Dante, Raphael, Ingres and Delacroix wanted to display the vast learnedness of antiquity as model for our times.

The cycles of single portraits in libraries (Cambridge, Admont etc.) have the same function; some series are systemized according to genres and branches of research. The rooms where the decorations are were about reading and learning.

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