The Iliad and Homer

Homer makes us Hearers, and Virgil leaves us Readers.

[Alexander Pope]

Mira colui con quella spada in mano, che vien dinanzi ai tre si come sire.

Quelli è Omero, poeta sovrano...

(Virgil to Dante, Inferno IV.86-8)

Take note of him who holds that sword in hand and comes as lord before the three:

He is Homer, sovereign poet.

[Transl., Bob Hollander; http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/]

1. The Homeric Question: Who or what is Homer?
   a. The Greek text of the Iliad, a retrospective (Knox, 5ff.)
      i. Fagles's text: David Monro/Thomas Allen (Oxford, 1902)
      ii. First printed edition: Florence, 1488 (Slides from Paris 1554 edition)
      iii. The Greek poet in a (Greekless) Latin World
         1. Constantinople/Istanbul (= Byzantium) falls to the Ottoman Turks 1453
         2. Boccaccio (1313-1375) learned Greek
         3. Petrarch (1304-1374) tried but gave up
         4. Dante (1265-1321) never knew Greek
      iv. Manuscript Tradition: text transmission
         1. Scribes and scholars
         2. Ancient capital script vs. minuscule
            a. breathings and accents
            b. from scroll to codex
         4. Early texts and Greek poleis
         5. Cup of Nestor (before 700 BCE, Ischia): Iliad 11.745-53 (Slide)
            Nestor's cup was fine for drinking, but whoever drinks from this bowl will be at once seized by the desire of beautiful Aphrodite
      v. Dark Age: Homer's century: late 8th-early 7th BCE

The end of an era

2. 'Oral Poetry Theory' and the 15,693 lines of the Iliad
   a. Friedrich August Wolf, Prolegomena ad Homerum (1769): Homer the illiterate
   b. Giambattista Vico (1668-1744): Homeric poetry the creation of the whole Greek people?
   c. Milman Parry (1902-1935),Traditional Epithets in Homer (1928)
      i. Milman Parry Collection: http://www.chs.harvard.edu/mpc/
   d. Formulas and heroic verse: the dactylic hexameter (see Knox, 15ff.)
   e. Composition in Performance: Iliad composed 725-675 BCE
      i. Did Homer write? (Adam Parry and Albert Lord)
      ii. If so, on what? Papyrus from Byblos, the Phoenician port?
      iii. What does oral composition mean to us readers?

3. Troy and the end of a Mythic Era
   a. Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890) and Sir Arthur Evans (1851-1941)
   b. Hisarlik
   c. Trojan War? Fall of Troy: 1180 BCE?

Mythology vs. Myth
"A CUP BETTER THAN NESTOR'S"

The inscription (restored in the lower half of the frame) on a vase fragment found at Ischia, an island off Naples, is one of the earliest known examples of the Greek alphabet, dating to the eighth century B.C. shortly after Greeks learned this new method of writing. The spelling is archaic, and goes from right to left, in metrical pattern: a spondaic trimeter followed by two Dactylic hexameters, saying: "Nestor's cup was fine for drinking, but whoever drinks from this bowl will be at once seized by desire of beautifully-crowned Aphrodite." The reference is to Nestor, king of Pylos, an old man in the Iliad—which Homer had composed only shortly before this bit of boasting verse was scratched on a clay bowl in the Greek colony near Cumae.