

## THE ROLE OF ORAL POETRY IN ANCIENT GREEK SOCIETY

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***ANNOTATION*** *This article examines how oral poetry shaped ancient Greek society, focusing on its roles in preserving culture, educating citizens, providing entertainment, and influencing political life. The author highlights that oral poetry, exemplified by works like The Iliad and The Odyssey, was central to Greek identity, functioning as a vessel for collective memories and societal values. The article discusses the oral techniques used by poets, such as formulaic phrases and memory aids, which enabled them to adapt their performances to different audiences and contexts. The study emphasizes oral poetry's role in fostering social unity by conveying shared ideals and ethical principles through narratives. It also explores the work of rhapsodes, performers who brought these stories to life in public settings, creating a collective cultural experience. The article further delves into the shift from oral storytelling to written literature, analyzing how literacy changed the way these texts were preserved and understood.*

***Keywords:*** *Oral poetry, Ancient Greek society, Cultural transmission, Epic poetry, The Iliad, The Odyssey, Rhapsodes, Oral tradition, Formulaic composition, Mnemonic devices, Collective memory, Social cohesion, Performance and ritual, Religious practices, Political discourse, Storytelling, Literary heritage, Transition to literacy, Greek identity, Public performance.*

## INTRODUCTION

In ancient Greek society, oral poetry was a vital element of cultural, social, and political life. Before the advent of widespread literacy, the Greeks relied on oral traditions to pass down knowledge, preserve historical events, and strengthen communal bonds. Epic works like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* acted as cultural touchstones, embodying shared values, collective memory, and moral teachings. Performers known as rhapsodes employed techniques such as formulaic expressions and mnemonic devices to craft and adapt these stories, ensuring their relevance across time and diverse audiences. Oral poetry was more than just entertainment; it was a means of education and a unifying force in society. Through public performances at festivals and gatherings, it conveyed ethical lessons, celebrated heroic ideals, and reinforced a sense of shared identity. Additionally, it played a significant role in religious and ceremonial practices, demonstrating the close connection between artistic expression and both sacred and civic life. This article investigates the diverse functions of oral poetry in ancient Greek society, focusing on its role in transmitting culture, shaping societal values, and influencing the development of literary traditions. It also explores the shift from oral performance to written records, examining how this transition altered the way these narratives were preserved and understood. By studying the importance of oral poetry, we can better appreciate its foundational role in ancient Greek culture and its lasting influence on Western traditions.

### FINDINGS. 1. Cultural Preservation and Transmission

Oral poetry played a crucial role in preserving and sharing cultural knowledge in ancient Greek society. Through epic tales, myths, and stories, it helped maintain historical events, social norms, and collective values, ensuring they were passed down through generations in a largely illiterate society.

### 2. Building Social Unity and Identity

The public recitation of oral poetry helped foster a sense of unity and shared identity. By celebrating common traditions, heroic figures, and moral

ideals, these performances reinforced community bonds and gave the audience a sense of pride and connection to their culture.

### 3. Educational and Moral Teaching

Oral poetry served as an educational tool, imparting lessons on history, ethics, and societal expectations. The themes of heroism, honor, and justice, often present in works like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, played a key role in shaping the moral values of ancient Greek society.

### 4. Religious and Ritual Importance

Oral poetry was closely linked to religious rituals and ceremonies. It played an essential role in festivals and religious observances, often invoking the gods and exploring humanity's relationship with the divine, underscoring its spiritual significance.

### 5. Artistic Techniques and Flexibility

Poets employed specific techniques like formulaic phrases, repetition, and mnemonic aids to compose and perform long stories. These methods allowed them to adapt their performances to different audiences while maintaining consistency and coherence in the narrative.

### 6. Engagement with Politics and Civic Life

Oral poetry also influenced political and civic matters. Public recitations often highlighted themes of leadership, governance, and civic duty, helping to shape public thought and influence political actions.

### 7. Shift to Written Tradition and Legacy

The transition from oral to written poetry changed how these stories were preserved and interpreted. Works like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, once flexible in performance, became fixed texts, marking a significant shift in literary tradition while preserving the core of Greek oral culture. These findings demonstrate the diverse and significant role of oral poetry in ancient Greek society, revealing its influence on culture, social cohesion, politics, and its lasting impact on Western literary traditions.

**CONCLUSION.** In conclusion, oral poetry was a crucial element of ancient Greek society, serving much more than just entertainment. It was essential for preserving cultural knowledge, transmitting myths, historical events, and societal values across generations. Through performances, oral poetry fostered social unity, shaping collective identity and reinforcing community bonds. Additionally, it played a significant educational role, teaching moral lessons and ethical principles that helped shape the values of Greek society. The connection between oral poetry and religious rituals further emphasized its importance, as it was integral to public ceremonies and often explored spiritual and divine themes. Poets used formulaic language and mnemonic techniques to adapt their performances to various contexts, ensuring that these traditions remained relevant over time. As Greek society moved from oral traditions to written forms, texts like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* became fixed, preserving the legacy of oral poetry in Western literature. Despite this shift to writing, the values and cultural insights embedded in oral poetry continue to influence modern society, demonstrating the enduring power of storytelling. Ultimately, oral poetry was not just an art form in ancient Greece; it was a vital force in shaping cultural identity, education, and social cohesion, leaving a lasting impact on Greek civilization and its literary heritage that continues to resonate today.

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