



## Summary :

Sculptor from Priene. The renowned work of art 'Apotheosis of Homer', which was probably created in Pergamon in the third quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, is attributed to him.

## Date and Place of Birth

Third quarter of the 2nd century BC - Priene

## Main Role

Sculptor

## 1. Introduction

Archelaos, son of Apollonius, was a sculptor from [Priene](#). His only piece of work that is known to us is a marble stele called 'the Apotheosis of Homer', one of the most widely researched works of ancient Greek art, which still remains subject to interpretation.

## 2. The "Apotheosis of Homer"

This relief was found in the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the outskirts of Rome and is on display in the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> It is dated between 150 and 120 BC<sup>2</sup> and owes its name to the multi-faced allegorical representation of its lower tier, where a series of personified deities – Oikoumene (Inhabited World), Time, Mythos, History, Poetry, Tragedy, Comedy, Nature, Virtue, Memory, Faith, Wisdom – venerate and praise [Homer](#), by wreathing the poet and making offerings to him. The latter is represented as a mature bearded man who is sitting on a throne. Surrounding him, and on their knees, lie the personifications of his epics, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. The representation on the upper tier of the work of art has a relevant context; in a rocky landscape which represents a mountain, two Muses are reciting the Homeric epics, while [Apollo](#) plays along his music. The audience consists of [Zeus](#), Mnemosyne and the other Muses. On the right end of the representation is Homer's statue,<sup>3</sup> placed on a pier and in front of a tripod, a position which indicates the heroic and divine praises that the poet received. The location of the two aforementioned scenes cannot be identified with a specific place, but the relief's topographic and architectural depth reflects the stage structures and scene painting of the Hellenistic period.<sup>4</sup>

Most scholars who have examined this work of art believe that it concerns a votive sculpture which an unknown epic poet of the Late Hellenistic period, and admirer of Homer, set up in a sanctuary (perhaps a 'Homerion'), after his victory in a poetic contest.<sup>5</sup> However, according to a later and quite persuasive opinion, the relief is linked to [Pergamon](#) and is considered as a representation of a theory concerned with the scientific, literary and educational significance of Homeric work. This theory, which was developed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, is connected to the Stoic philosopher and interpreter of the Homeric epics [Crates of Mallus](#) and his literary school; his school's activities were directly related to the Library of Pergamon.<sup>6</sup> According to this theory, the Homeric epics are projected as the general source of education and as the foundation of all human knowledge. In such a scholarly environment has Archelaos' relief been created, symbolizing the transference of a philosophical and literary theory to a work of art with an allegorical context and an educational style. It is also likely that the relief was intended for display as a kind of painting in a [gymnasium](#), an educational institution ('didaskaleion') or a library. Also, it is generally acceptable that the personifications of Time and the Inhabited World on the lower tier of the sculpture are portraits of specific Hellenistic leaders and, even though no unanimous opinion on the identity of these personalities exists, one might as well accept their identification with the King of Pergamon, [Attalus III Philometor](#) (138-133 BC) and his mother Stratonike.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the relief comes from the kingdom of Pergamon or another area of influence, and it was probably created between 138 and 133 BC, the time period when Attalus III was king.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the tight bonds between Rome and the kingdom of Pergamon during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC justify the place where the relief was recovered, and it must have been transported to Italy towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC or during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>9</sup>



The influence of Pergamon's art on Archelaos' work is also further revealed by iconographic elements; the figure of Tragedy is a precise copy of a statue from Pergamon which is currently in the Berlin Museum, while the figures of the Muses remind of statue types of around the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC or a little earlier, with stylistic similarities to others that have been traced in western Asia Minor around the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>10</sup> The birthplace of the sculptor, Priene, had indeed its own cultural tradition, but maintained close ties with the kingdom of Pergamon around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

### 3. Evaluation

Archelaos does not appear to be one of the greatest sculptors of his time, while his activity seems to have not overpassed the regional boundaries of his birthplace. His name, however, is diligently signed on the sculpture on a very clear spot – beneath the rock where Zeus appears to be resting – and such an action is not usual for works of art of a smaller scale. His work is quite ambitious and is characterized by the presence of an elaborate composition (it involves 28 figures), delicacy of execution and a naturalistic and academic style. Moreover, it remains unique in our days from an iconographic point of view.

1. No. of finding 2191. Height 1,15 m. The sculpture is made out of Asian marble and was traced near the ancient town Bovillae of Latium, perhaps in a Roman villa.
2. For this relief there have been many chronological suggestions, ranging from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. However, the generally accepted dating is the one of 150-120 BC, which has been suggested by its main researcher, Pinkwart, D., *Das Relief des Archelaos von Priene und die "Musen des Philiskos"* (Kallmunz 1965), pp. 48-63, based on epigraphic, iconographic and stylistic elements.
3. This statue has been identified with Hesiod, Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes or an unknown dedicator-poet of the relief.
4. According to some researchers, the mountain depicted on the relief's upper tier is identified with Elikonas, Parnassus or Olympus, while on the lower tier there is Homer's sanctuary, perhaps the 'Homerion' of Alexandria.
5. For a general presentation of various opinions see Pinkwart, D., *Das Relief des Archelaos von Priene und die "Musen des Philiskos"* (Kallmunz 1965), pp. 64-90, esp. pp. 86-90.
6. For the description and interpretation of the relief's representation see Boutiras, E. «Περί της Κρατητείου αιρέσεως. Σκέψεις γύρω από το Ανάγλυφο του Αρχελάου από την Πριήνη», *Εγνατία* 1 (1989), pp. 129-170.
7. Pinkwart, D., *Das Relief des Archelaos von Priene und die "Musen des Philiskos"* (Kallmunz 1965), pp. 40-42, 77. Boutiras, E., «Περί της Κρατητείου αιρέσεως. Σκέψεις γύρω από το Ανάγλυφο του Αρχελάου από την Πριήνη», *Εγνατία* 1 (1989), pp. 129-170.
8. The point of view according to which these figures are the portraits of the king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopator (222/221-205 BC) and his sister and wife Arsinoe III has found many supporters. According to this view, the relief, on which the 'Homerion' of Alexandria is depicted, was created around the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC in Alexandria. According to another opinion, the relief depicts the portraits of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III, but it was created later on in Syrian land, under the kingship of Alexander I Balas (150-145 BC) or his wife Cleopatra Thea and his son Antiochus VIII Grypos (125-120 BC). There is also the opinion which supports that the relief illustrates the portraits of the last two or of Attalus II and his mother Apollonis. On the various portrait identifications see Moreno, P., *Scultura ellenistica* 2 (Roma 1994), p. 815, ft. 927.
9. In order to justify the relief's recovery place, it has also been claimed that it was created in Italy around the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC and that Archelaos was another one of the sculptors who worked in Italy for the Romans. Ridgway, B.S., *Hellenistic Sculpture* 1. *The styles of ca. 331-200 BC.* (Madison Wisconsin 1990), pp. 263-267.



10. It is about the so-called Muses of the Rhodian sculptor Philiskos (160-150 BC), who led earlier researchers to consider the relief of Archelaos as a Rhodian work of art in the end of the 1st c. BC. See Bieber, M., *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age 2* (New York 1961), pp. 127-30· Pinkwart, D., *Das Relief des Archelaos von Priene und die "Musen des Philiskos"* (Kallmunz 1965), pp. 91-168· Ridgway, B.S., *Hellenistic Sculpture 1. The styles of ca. 331-200 BC* (Madison Wisconsin 1990), pp.257-268.

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