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Chapter 7

The Homeric epics

1. Introduction

The earliest poets whose works were recorded in writing are Homer and Hesiod.⁶³⁰ Both probably date to the first half of the seventh century. We know next to nothing of Homer himself, except that he apparently operated in Western Asia Minor, and he may have been associated with the island of Chios from an early date.⁶³¹ In antiquity, it was believed that he composed both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Many poems and songs composed later were attributed to Homer; this was common practice with poets who were admired by later Greeks (e.g., the Homeric hymns to the gods). In this chapter, I shall discuss the evidence presented in the two Homeric epics, with special emphasis on the war-poem, the *Iliad*.⁶³²

Can the epics be used as a source of historical information? This depends firstly on whether or not one believes that the epic world described in the poems is internally consistent. Authors such as Anthony Snodgrass and Nicholas Coldstream believe that the Homeric world is a mishmash that incorporates elements from both the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Snodgrass argues that the different elements can no longer be untangled and that the epics are thus useless as reliable sources of information for any period in particular.⁶³³

However, other authors are not as pessimistic. Moses Finley argued that we should look at the structure of Homeric society rather than try and determine which (material) elements are Mykenaian or Archaic.⁶³⁴ Ian Morris disagrees, suggesting instead that one ought to examine Homeric 'culture', in the sense of 'taken-for-granted attitudes about how the world works', rather than its social 'institutions and forms of behaviour'.⁶³⁵ Both argue that the epics are not only internally consistent, but can also be used as a source of information for a particular period in time. The question then becomes, which period?

Following the spectacular discoveries made by Heinrich Schliemann at Hissarlik (Troy) and Mykenai in the later nineteenth century, it was long

630 The translations used in this chapter are by Richmond Lattimore.

631 See, e.g., brief discussion in Burgess 2001, 122–124.

632 I consider both poems the work of a single author.

633 Snodgrass 1974, esp. pp. 124–125; see also Morris 1997, 536–539.

634 Finley 1978 [1954], 153.

635 Morris 2001, 57; cf. Finley 1978 [1954], 48–50 (emphasis on social structure).

maintained that the world described by Homer corresponds to that of the Late Bronze Age (the Mykenaian period).⁶³⁶ Others, including Ian Morris, instead have argued that the Homeric world more closely resembles the Early Iron Age or, more specifically, Homer's own age. Finley once suggested that the Homeric world ought to be dated to the ninth century,⁶³⁷ but archaeological evidence collected by Jan Paul Crielaard strongly favours a date in the early seventh century.⁶³⁸ I agree that the world described in the Homeric epics is consistent and that the poems are a valuable source of information. Furthermore, I also agree that the epic world is best dated to the early seventh century.

Before turning to an examination of the epics themselves, let us consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence. One weakness is that the poet often mixes fantasy with reality. Hans van Wees has demonstrated that most of the fantastic elements tend to be exaggerations of reality; for example, some shields in the epics, while based on contemporary items familiar to both the poet and his audience, are fabulously large, but that is because the heroes were supposed to possess superhuman strength.⁶³⁹ Another problem is that descriptions are often too vague to allow for a detailed reconstruction of a particular item. For example, the shield of Achilles is described in quite some detail in the *Iliad*, but aside from the fact that it was large, round, and decorated with scenes representing a city at peace and one at war, we cannot know exactly what it looked like.

However, the epics do provide information on certain aspects of early Greek warfare that are difficult or even impossible to deduce from the archaeological or iconographic evidence. Homeric notions regarding valour or death on the battlefield, the nature and style of warfare, the social makeup of an army in the epics, and so on, may aid in determining the meaning of a specific archaeological assemblage or vase-painting. This is an important reason for first studying the various classes of evidence separately in the present book.

Much of this chapter is indebted to Hans van Wees regarding Homeric society, violence, and warfare; I should like to single out his monograph *Status Warriors* (1992) as the one publication that I found most useful in examining the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The weapons, armour, and related paraphernalia, described in the Homeric poems, have been the subject of a number of studies.⁶⁴⁰ The section on Homeric arms and armour builds in particular on the chapter on the same topic by F.H. Stubbings in the *Companion to Homer* that he edited with A.J.B. Wace in 1962.

2. Epic society

The world described by Homer can be reconstructed to a reasonably

636 A point of view still defended by Shear 2000.

637 Finley 1978 [1954], 48.

638 Crielaard 1995*b passim*.

639 Van Wees 1992, 17–21.

640 Most importantly, Lorimer 1950, as well as the relevant volumes in the *Archaeologia Homerica* series; see also Van Wees 1992, 1994, and 1998.

accurate degree, even if some authors disagree about particular details. The epic world is divided into larger and smaller territorial units, each of which contains a number of towns. One town in each territory is the home of a hereditary ruler. Homeric society is divided into four social groups, namely: (a) an 'aristocracy' of *basileis*;⁶⁴¹ (b) a common element consisting mostly of farmers (smallholders) and a few skilled specialists (craftsmen); (c) a group of landless poor who work as hired labourers and are referred to as *thētes*, and finally; (d) slaves (*douloi*).

Nearly all of the main characters in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* belong to the social group called *basileis* ('chiefs', sometimes rendered 'princes'), who own sizeable tracts of arable land and considerable numbers of livestock. Some of these *basileis* are rated more highly than others, and one of them is the ruler of the whole community. All of the main heroes are either rulers themselves or the sons of rulers. Odysseus, for example, rules (verb, *anassō*) the people of Ithaka. He is assisted in his duties by other *basileis*, specifically the elders (*gerontes*): affluent men who are the heads of their households.⁶⁴² The *basileis* who have a say in political matters are sometimes referred to collectively as the *hēgētores ēde medontes*, 'leaders and councillors' (e.g., *Od.* 7.186).

The *basileis*, particularly the leaders, consider themselves to be a superior kind of people; they are the *aristoi*, literally the 'best' that a community has to offer. The leaders distinguish themselves from others by being decisive in battle; they also determine politics and deal with all matters pertaining to law and order within the community (cf. *Il.* 1.490–492). Furthermore, they are among the richest of the people in their community, possessing large amounts of treasure (*keimēlia*). Naturally, they have illustrious forebears and can recount their ancestries when the need arise. They emphasise their wealth by keeping horses. Finally, they engage in a life of leisure and are thus, for example, able to organise and participate in games and feasts.

Social relations in the epic world are horizontal rather than vertical, i.e. most interaction is between social peers. In other words, men associate with other men of equal or similar status (the obvious exception being dependents, especially slaves). The worlds of the *basileis* and of the common people appear to exist more or less side by side; only infrequently do the two social spheres interact directly. Firstly, many of the actions undertaken by the leaders (rulers and elders) are presented as being either in the public interest or otherwise sanctioned by the community as a whole. In the assemblies at home, it appears that a large cross-section of the community was present, even if only leaders were supposed to speak (e.g., *Od.* 2.6–259). Secondly, it appears that some sort of tax was levied on the common people that was redistributed in the form of *gerousios oinos*, 'wine of the elders' (e.g., *Il.* 4.257–263). Thirdly, a leader might be awarded a *temenos*, a piece of 'public land', for services rendered (e.g., *Il.* 12.310–314); no doubt the other leaders of a community would allocate the land, but it is nevertheless

641 Yamagata 1997 (*anax* and *basileus*).

642 Van Wees 1992, 31–36.

presented as something approved of by the people as a whole.⁶⁴³

Nevertheless, the relationship between the leaders and the rest of the community was normally one of mutual respect, as demonstrated by the description of Nestor and a few thousand of his people sacrificing bulls to Poseidon (*Od.* 3.4–11). The common people simply appear to engage in pursuits different from those of the *basileis*. For example, they do not appear to be present in the Achaian camp and might not have any particular role to play in battle. In Homeric descriptions, the leaders of the *basileis* fight and speak, while the *dēmos* appear to stand idly by. Most modern commentators assume that the *dēmos* consists of commoners, but this need not at all be the case. Instead, the *dēmos* or ‘mass’ of the people might equally well consist of lower-ranking *basileis*, such as the sons, neighbours, and friends of the leaders; slaves and other dependents might also be included among them. The independent smallholders, presumably the largest segment of society, is perhaps not present at all. I shall return to this point later, but suffice to say that the assumption that members from all Homeric socioeconomic walks of life took part in war seems to me untenable.

The notion that only the aristocracy and dependents fought perhaps sheds some further light on the following passage in the *Iliad*. When in the Achaian camp morale is at an all time low, and much of the army is preparing to scatter and sail off home, the following occurs (*Il.* 2.188–206):

Whenever he [*i.e.*, Odysseus] encountered some *basileus*, or man of influence, he would stand beside him and with soft words try to restrain him:

‘*Daimonie!* It does not become you to be frightened like any coward. Rather hold fast and check the rest of the people [*laos*].
[...]

When he saw some man of the people [*dēmos*] who was shouting, he would strike at him with his staff [*skēptron*], and reprove him also:

‘*Daimonie!* Sit still and listen to what others tell you, to those who are better men [*phēteroi*] than you, you skulker and coward and thing of no account whatever in battle [*polemos*] or council [*boulē*]. Surely not all of us Achaians can be as *basileis* here. Lordship for many is no good thing. Let there be one ruler [*koiranos*], one *basileus*, to whom the son of devious-devising Kronos [*i.e.*, Zeus]’ gives the sceptre and right of judgement, to watch over his people.’

The use of *daimonie* is interesting, since it is used to denote both *basileis* and ‘men of the *dēmos*’. This vocative is used as a form of address with an essentially neutral meaning; it is often translated as ‘dear sir/madam’.⁶⁴⁴ The distinction made here by Odysseus is often interpreted as the distinction between ‘princes’ and ‘commoners’, but this need not be the case if we assume that the *basileis* and other men of substance are somehow senior to the ones who meet with Odysseus’ sceptre. Furthermore, this situation *does* take place within a clearly military context, namely the

643 Also Bellerophon by the Lykians (*Il.* 6.194–195). A later passage demonstrates that only the elders, *gerontes*, award *temenoi*, but they do so on behalf of the entire community (*Il.* 9.573–580). *Temenos* later refers to a temple’s precinct; it was also used on Mykenaian Linear B tablets to denote the ruler’s land.

644 For further details, consult Brunius-Nillsen 1955.

Achaian camp, during the tenth year of a long campaign, and morale among the Achaians is low. Most people were probably never beaten in peacetime.⁶⁴⁵

Odysseus' comment in the cited passage that the men of the *dēmos* are 'cowards' and count for nought in battle, and (therefore?) have no say in political matters, should not be taken literally. However, as Hans van Wees has pointed out, some specialists

rely on the straightforward premise that a battle is decided collectively by all who join combat. They further assume that all those who join combat will feel that their share in dangerous labours gives them the right to share in the rule of the community. But the *Iliad* presents a world in which a battle of many may be decided by few, and in which it is only a few who base a claim to power on participating in battles fought by many. The explanation, it seems to me, is that decisiveness in battle is claimed for those who are in power, rather than power claimed for those who are decisive in battle.⁶⁴⁶

This is indeed true. However, in this case, the *dēmos* among the Achaians in the *Iliad* need not consist of regular commoners, but might include lower-ranking *basileis* and possibly—though the evidence is slim at best—dependents (*i.e.*, slaves and even *thētes*, 'hired labourers'). Slaves and *thētes* are at the lower rungs of the Homeric social ladder. Contrary perhaps to our own notions, slaves appear to be better off than the ostensibly free *thētes*. When Odysseus meets the shade of Achilles, the latter emphasises the wretchedness of the afterlife. He says that he would rather work as a *thēs*, a hired labourer (a person without any kind of security), than be lord of the dead (*Od.* 11.489–491). To him, the fate of a *thēs* was the most dreadful kind of existence in life. A slave, after all, is essentially chattel that, like livestock, must be fed and kept at another man's expense for him to remain useful, whereas a *thēs* might be chased off one's field before getting paid.⁶⁴⁷

3. Arms and armour

In the epics, the emphasis is squarely placed on the *basileis*, especially the leaders (heroes). In battle, these men use shields, helmets, body-armour (especially cuirasses and greaves), a wide array of weapons (swords, spears, slings, bows and arrows), horses and chariots. All these items are described in a consistent manner throughout Homer's war-epic, and are furthermore consistent with descriptions of arms and armour in the *Odyssey*, although the latter does not deal immediately with warfare. The material of choice for the manufacture of weapons and armour is bronze, which in the case of the swords was probably picked more for its lustrous appearance than its superiority over iron.⁶⁴⁸

What kinds of weapons and armour were used by the fighting men in the epic world? The answer depends on two factors, namely: (1) the relative

645 Cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.58–61.

646 Van Wees 1988, 23.

647 Although even a slave might be chased off were he to offend his master (*Od.* 21.370–371).

648 Van Wees 1994, 134; cf. Gray 1954, 14–15

wealth of the man in question, and; (2) to some degree, personal preference. It appears that most men fight as spearmen, equipped with at least a spear and shield. However, pieces of armour and weapons, while functionally the same, normally differ in design, materials used, and decoration. All of the fighting men at Troy had to equip themselves; as such, personal preference and ability would have ensured no two men were probably kitted out using identical pieces of equipment (*e.g.*, *Il.* 3.15–20). For example, one need only compare the shields used by the various heroes in the *Iliad*.

As the poet focused on describing the exploits of the *basileis*, in particular the heroes of the story, we are best informed about their apparel. The following lines from the *Iliad* are a description of what we might regard as the typical equipment used by the leaders:

Let a man put a good edge on his spear, and his shield in order,
let each put fodder before his swift-footed horses,
and each man look well over his chariot, careful of his fighting,
that all day long we may be in the division of hateful Ares. (*Il.* 2.382–385)

The Trojan leaders are typically equipped in much the same manner as the Achaian, with shield, spear, and chariot. The arming scenes give a good idea of what the panoply of a Homeric spearman could look like (*e.g.*, *Il.* 11.15–43). First, the warrior puts on greaves to protect the shins, then a corselet or cuirass to protect the upper body (torso). The warrior next slings a sword across the shoulder, picks up his shield, puts on his helmet, and finally grabs a pair of spears. A leader then rode to the battlefield on his chariot, while most other warriors had to walk.

a. The shield

Homer uses two words for shield: *sakos* and *aspis*.⁶⁴⁹ The latter would become the standard term for shield used by later Greek writers. Stubbings pointed out that both words had a set of epithets that could be used in standard formula. Thus, the *aspis* is frequently described as bossed (*omphaloessa*) and round (*pantos' eisē*; *Il.* 7.250, 11.434, 13.405), while the *sakos* is instead said to be made of ox-hides (*Il.* 5.452, 12.105) and to resemble a tower (*purgos*; *Il.* 11.32–33). But there are many exceptions in the text: Achilles' shield, for example, is called a *sakos* but is definitely round in shape. Stubbings suggested that the two terms had therefore become 'assimilated',⁶⁵⁰ but perhaps it is safer to say that while both words were originally used for different types of shield, the terminology was not always rigidly applied.

Some shields, at least, are quite large, such as Paris' *mega sakos* (*Il.* 3.335) or the *sakos* that belonged to Diomedes' father, Tydeus (*Il.* 5.126). Hektor's bossed *aspis* is described as reaching from the neck to the ankles (*Il.* 6.117–118; *cf.* 15.645–646). The shield strap or *telamōn* appears to be a standard feature of Homeric shields; its presence is either stated outright (*Il.* 2.388–389, 5.798, 14.404–405), or implied (*Il.* 4.478). The strap enables the

649 Gray 1947, 113.

650 Stubbings 1962, 510.

shield to be slung across the back; sometimes the strap is used to keep a shield in front of one's chest, as with Sarpedon's *aspis* (*Il.* 12.400–402; *cf.* 12.425–426). Nestor's *aspis* is equipped with *kanōnes* or 'cross-rods' (*Il.* 8.193), possibly serving as handles as well as supports for the shield itself.

Formulaic statements like 'shield-bearing people' and descriptions of close-range fighting suggest that shields are used by just about all fighters operating at close- to short-range (*Il.* 4.201–202; *cf.* also 14.370–377), *i.e.* within a spear's throw. Shields may be held aslant against one's shoulder (*e.g.*, *Il.* 15.474, 22.4). Van Wees suggests that these must therefore be Argive shields.⁶⁵¹ However, it is quite possible to hold a single-grip shield at an angle so that one has the arm in a relaxed position while the upper rim rests against the shoulder; in fact, one would expect shields equipped with neck- or shoulder-straps to encourage such a position when not slung on one's back. Many shields are equipped with bosses, which again suggest that we are dealing with shields equipped with single, central handgrips rather than Argive-type double-grips,⁶⁵² although the evidence does not preclude the use of Argive shields in some passages *per se*.

Aias' *sakos* is said to be made 'of bronze and sevenfold ox-hide' (*Il.* 7.219–220). Odysseus' *sakos* has bright patterns painted on it (*Il.* 10.148–149). Following the death of Patroklos, Achilles is given a new *sakos* made by Hephaistos himself. It is described in detail in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad*. The surface is decorated by two scenes drawn from daily life, one representing a city in times of peace, the other in times of war. The strap was covered with silver (*Il.* 18.478–607). Agamemnon's round *aspis* has a bronze facing with ten concentric circles on it, decorated with twenty tin bosses and a central boss made of cobalt; the face of the Gorgon is inscribed in the centre, flanked by *Deimos* and *Phobos*, 'Fear' and 'Terror'. As with the shield of Achilles, the strap was decorated with silver (*Il.* 11.32–40).

b. The helmet

Four different words are used in the epic to denote a helmet, but they appear to be interchangeable. The most common word is *koros*, followed by *kunēē*, *truphaleia*, and *pēlēx*;⁶⁵³ the more familiar word *kranos* is apparently not used until Herodotos (*e.g.*, 1.171). Most of the helmets described in the *Iliad* are said to be made of metal (*e.g.*, *Il.* 4.495; 7.12), or implied to be; consider, for example, the number of helmets that are described as 'shining', such as Hektor's helmet (*Il.* 3.83 and 5.680). Bronze is the metal of choice where most items of weapons and armour are concerned (but not tools), and helmets are apparently no exception.⁶⁵⁴

Some helmets are described as having 'hollow eyes' (*e.g.*, *Il.* 5.182, 13.529–530); no doubt this indicates that the helmet covers most of the face as well as the cranium, leaving only holes for the eyes to see through. Again, it seems likely that these were made of metal. The mention of cheek pieces

651 Van Wees 2004, 249–252.

652 *Cf.* Snodgrass 1964*b*, 170.

653 Stubbings 1962, 513.

654 Gray 1954, 5 (table C).

also indicates that some helmets, like the one worn by the greater Aias, cover much of the face (*Il.* 16.106). The helmet of Epikles, an unfortunate companion of Sarpedon's, is described as being 'four-sheeted' (*tetraphalon*), *i.e.* made of four sheets of (presumably) bronze rather than hammered out of a single sheet (*Il.* 12.384).

When Odysseus and Diomedes embark on their scouting mission in the tenth book of the *Iliad*, they are given non-metallic helmets (no doubt because metal helmets would have gleamed in the light of the moon and could therefore be more easily spotted by the Trojan lookouts). Odysseus is given a non-metallic helmet as well, namely a boar's tusk helmet (*Il.* 10.261–265). Such helmets are known from both Minoan and Mykenian iconography; several actual examples have also been unearthed. Some have suggested that the presence of this helmet in the epics is proof that the stories date back to the Bronze Age, but other explanations are also possible. For example, such helmets could still have been made in Homer's own age, or perhaps the poet was familiar with one that had been passed from one generation to other as an heirloom.⁶⁵⁵

Diomedes receives a leather skull cap (*kataitux*), which is said to protect 'the heads of strong men in battle' (*Il.* 10.259). The choice of words—including the use of a word to specifically denote this cap—implies strongly that this is in fact a far more common type of headgear than at first appears. Bronze helmets in the *Iliad* may be worn by leaders, for example, while their followers perhaps wear such leather caps. The cap worn by Diomedes is specifically said to lack both 'horn and crest'; the bronze helmets donned by the Achaian and Trojan leaders are invariably equipped with horsehair crests (*e.g.*, *Il.* 3.371–372). Horses, of course, are status symbols of the elite. This again suggests that metal helmets equipped with horsehair crests were typical of the leaders, and that other men had to make do with simple caps (although I must admit there is no solid evidence for this assertion).

c. Body-armor

The poet often refers to the *chalkochitōnas Achaious* or 'bronze-shirted Achaians' (*e.g.*, *Il.* 1.371; 2.163; 10.287). This suggests that most of the Achaians don bronze body-armor. Certainly, all of the main characters in the *Iliad* do so before setting out to fight. The cuirass, *thōrēx*, is a common piece of wargear worn by many of the men on the Achaian side. However, Trojans also wear bronze cuirasses; in fact, they are at least once referred to as 'bronze-shirted Trojans', just like the Achaians (*Il.* 5.180).⁶⁵⁶ These cuirasses may have been made of two halves or 'hollows', *gualoi* (*Il.* 22.321–325), which suggests that they consisted of a front and back plate.⁶⁵⁷ Non-metallic corselets, by contrast, are rarely mentioned; the lesser Aias is specifically said to wear one made of linen (*Il.* 2.529), as do at least two Trojan fighters (*Il.* 2.830).

655 Lorimer 1950, 132–133; Crielaard 2000, 51–63.

656 See also Stubbings 1962, 507.

657 King 1970, 295.

In addition to a breastplate of some kind, certain Achaian heroes are also equipped with a *zostēr* and/or a *mitrē*. When Menelaos is wounded by Pandaros, the arrow is said to pass first through his *zostēr*, then his cuirass, and then through his *mitrē*, ‘which he wore to protect his skin and keep the spears off’, before piercing his skin (*Il.* 4.134–140). The *zostēr* thus appears to have been some sort of belt, tied around the waist; in this case, the *zostēr* appears to be tied around the cuirass, which in turn at least partially covers the *mitrē* underneath. A little further on, Menelaos tells Agamemnon that the wound was not too grievous, as the arrow was turned aside by his *zostēr* and the *zōma* (‘flap’) beneath it, to which—or in front of which—his bronze *mitrē* was fixed (*Il.* 4.185–187). When Machaon, the healer, arrives, Menelaos slips the *zostēr* off, then removes the flap and the *mitrē* (*Il.* 4.215–216). In a later battle, Diomedes attacks the war-god Ares and, with the aid of Athene, succeeds in driving his spear through the god’s *mitrē* and into his belly (*Il.* 5.855–857).

Nestor also possessed a *zostēr* (*Il.* 10.77–78); Oineus once gave Bellerophon a *zostēr* dyed red (*Il.* 6.219–220); Aias gave Hektor a purple *zostēr* (*Il.* 7.305). Unlike Menelaos, Agamemnon wore his silver *zostēr* underneath his cuirass (*Il.* 11.234–237). The *zostēr* in all these cases appears to be a belt made of fabric (it can be dyed, after all), perhaps equipped with a (broad) metal clasp or buckle, and sometimes covered with silver plates (as appears to be the case with Agamemnon’s *zostēr*),⁶⁵⁸ worn around the waist, possibly extending a little further down to cover more of the lower belly (e.g., *Il.* 5.539 and 616–616). The *mitrē* appears to be something quite distinct from a *zostēr*; many scholars use it to refer to semi-circular bronze belly-guards, which is probably correct considering the scanty descriptions in the *Iliad*.⁶⁵⁹ The Lykians are specifically said to lack the *mitrē* (*Il.* 16.419), so a bronze belly-guard appears to be a common piece of equipment in the epic world.

d. Greaves

The Achaians are typically called *euknēmides*, ‘strong-greaved’ (e.g., *Il.* 4.80, 6.529); once they are called ‘bronze-greaved’ Achaians, *chalkoknēmides* (*Il.* 7.41). Greaves (*knēmides*, singular *knēmis*), protection for the shins, are perhaps the most common piece of armour worn by the fighters in the *Iliad*. The poet hardly ever describes the greaves in any detail, so it is often unclear of what material they were made; the common assumption that all greaves were made of bronze might well be wrong.⁶⁶⁰ Some men have ankle clasps made of silver, *argureoisin episphuriois*, with which they fasten their greaves to their legs, such as Agamemnon (*Il.* 11.18). The greaves of Achilles, fashioned by none other than Hephaistos, are either decorated

658 I see no evidence to support Hans van Wees’s claim that the *zostēr* was wholly composed of metal rather than (dyed) fabric, let alone that it was ‘a substantial piece of armour in its own right’ (Van Wees 1994, 135), unless ‘sword belts of silver’ (*Il.* 18.598) are also ‘substantial’ pieces of armour.

659 Jarva 1995, 51 (with references).

660 Stubbings 1962, 505–506.

with or made of tin (*Il.* 18.612), and also fastened using silver ankle clasps (*Il.* 19.370).

e. The spear

Spears feature prominently in the *Iliad* and is the main offensive weapon used by both Achaians and Trojans. The words for 'spear' are *aichmē*, *enchos*, *akōn* or *akontos*, *doru* or *douros* (*douratos*). The most common word to denote any fighter who is not an archer, in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is *aichmētēs*; i.e. 'spearfighter' or 'spearman' (e.g., *Il.* 3.179). Certain groups of people as well as individuals are singled out by the poet and described as being particularly deft at wielding the spear (e.g., *Il.* 2.131). It is commonly made of ash and fixed on either end are a spearhead and a butt-spike; the butt-spike or *saurotēr* (literally, 'lizard-killer') enabled a man to stick the spear upright into the ground when not in use. When Nestor and the other leaders visit the shelter of Diomedes during the night, they find him and his *hetairoi* outside, sleeping with their heads of their shields and their spears driven into the ground beside them (*Il.* 10.153).

Most spears are used for both thrusting and throwing. The spear is clearly an expendable weapon, as it can be thrown and lost, as well as broken in close-range combat; one line indicates that most warriors would probably make some attempt at retrieving a cast spear (*Il.* 11.357). Hence, the heroes are typically equipped with a set of at least two spears, including Nestor (*Il.* 10.76), Hektor (*Il.* 11.212 and 12.464–465), and Idomeneus (*Il.* 13.241); the ambidexterous hero Asteriopaios even threw both his spears at once and also clearly did not use a shield (*Il.* 21.144–163). Some spears were undoubtedly used only for thrusting, such as the massive, eleven-cubit (nearly five metres) lance used by Hektor at one point (*Il.* 6.319). Likewise, the spear of Achilles is said to be so large that only he could wield it (*Il.* 16.142–144), like his father before him (*Il.* 19.387–391).⁶⁶¹ However, for the most part, it seems that all spears were essentially dual-purpose weapons, useful as both lances and javelins. The importance of skill in throwing is demonstrated by the javelin contest that is part of the funeral games for Patroklos (*Il.* 23.622).

Extra-long 'pikes' appear to have been weapons specifically made for shipboard use; the poet calls them *naumacha xusta*, 'ship spears'. Aias at one point is equipped with a sea-pike, said to be a whopping twenty-two cubits (*circa* ten metres) in length!⁶⁶² Armed with this weapon, the hero 'strides up and down the decks of the vessels' in the Achaian camp (*Il.* 15.674–678), ready to fend off the attacking Trojans. He manages to keep the Trojans at bay and prevent them from setting fire to the ships (*Il.* 15.472–476). Its great size apparently prevents even the heroes of epic from throwing it, using it instead solely in hand-to-hand combat.⁶⁶³

The spear is the only weapon that the heroes always take with them.

661 This is analogous to Telemachos being able to string his father's bow, which all of the suitors fail to accomplish (*Od.* 21.124–130).

662 On the possible symbolic importance of the sea-pike, see Frazer 1983.

663 See also Ahlberg 1971a, 45–46.

When Agamemnon gets out of bed in the tenth book of the *Iliad*, he flings on some clothes and ‘took up a spear’ (*Il.* 10.24) before rousing any of the other men. Likewise, when Menelaos gets up, he puts on some clothes, dons a helmet, and ‘took up a spear in his big hand’ (*Il.* 10.31). The same goes for Nestor (*Il.* 10.135), and Diomedes (*Il.* 10.178). Of course, this all takes place in a military camp, in close proximity of the enemy, so it is perhaps no more than normal for men to go about armed. Yet, even in times of peace, men apparently never leave their homes without their spears. When Telemachos sets off to the assembly at Ithaka, the fact that he took his spear along is taken for granted (*Od.* 2.10). Similarly, guests always arrive with spears, which either they themselves or their host may put in a spear-rack (*Od.* 1.120–129).

f. The sword

Unlike most spears, a sword (*xiphos*, *phasganon*, or less commonly, *aor* or *aoros*) was not a throwaway weapon. Swords are important status objects in the *Iliad*, and many of them are quite ornate. Typically, the swords of heroes are said to be studded with silver nails, such as those of Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.45) and Paris (*Il.* 3.334); the hilt on Achilles’ sword is made of silver, too (*Il.* 1.219). The blades are invariably said to be of bronze. However, a real bronze sword cannot be given a fine edge like a blade of steel; it would be nigh impossible to chop off heads and limbs. Bronze swords are normally used for thrusting only. Bronze is a relatively malleable metal and bends easily when hacking or parrying blows, and we never hear of any heroes bending their swords back into shape. A hit from a bronze sword may not break the skin, but when done with sufficient force it could break bones and cause internal bleeding.⁶⁶⁴

The sword is the standard piece of equipment that the heroes always carry around with them. When Achilles contemplates killing Agamemnon, it is his sword that he intends to use (*Il.* 1.190–191), rather than his spear. A spear was no doubt unwieldy in situations such as the night expedition described in book ten of the *Iliad*. Diomedes and Odysseus in this case only take their swords (*Il.* 10.254–261). On the battlefield, a sword is used only after a warrior has run out of spears (*e.g.*, *Il.* 3.355–369). That sword and spear were considered part and parcel of the warrior’s equipment is demonstrated by the fact that Odysseus gave Iphitos both in return for the famous bow that he had received from him (*Od.* 21.33; a fine example of gift-exchange).

Like the spear, the sword is apparently routinely carried by a man of high standing. When Telemachos sets off for the Ithakan assembly, he takes both his spear and his sword along (*Od.* 2.3). Telemachos apparently even carries his sword while at home (*Od.* 20.125, 21.119); if this had been an abnormal show of strength or manhood, the suitors would certainly have commented on it. Importantly, when Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, asks if he could string the bow, Penelope promises the following if he were to succeed:

664 Dickinson 2006, 146.

I will give him fine clothing to wear, a mantle and tunic,
and give him a sharp javelin [*akonta*], to keep men and dogs off,
and give him sandals for his feet, a sword with two edges,
and send him wherever his heart and spirit desire to be sent. (*Od.* 21.339–342)

Only exceptional guests are offered clothes and weapons. Telemachos offers the same to Odysseus when the latter is a guest of Eumaios' (*Od.* 16.78–81; also *Od.* 19.241–243); slaves like Eumaios did not normally possess weapons, so it falls on the slave's owner to provide such gifts. When the suitors are attacked by Odysseus and his compatriots, they are apparently all armed with swords, as Eurymachos tells them to hold the tables up as shields against the arrows and rush at Odysseus with their blades (*Od.* 22.74–75 and 79–80). Unlike the spear, which was placed in a spear-rack, the sword always remained at the side of its owner, no doubt because it was even more closely connected to him and served as a reminder of his warrior prowess and status as a *basileus* even when among friends.⁶⁶⁵

g. *The bow and arrow*

Most modern commentators regard the bow (*bios*) as a cheap and primitive weapon, used mostly in the hands of people who were too poor to be able to pay for 'proper' equipment.⁶⁶⁶ Certainly, modern writers only build on the foundation provided by most Classical Greek authors themselves, who often levelled disparaging remarks at the skill and bravery of those who fought using *belea*, 'missiles' (e.g., *Thouk.* 6.69). In the *Iliad*, enemy archers are held in disdain because they fight from a distance. Achamas, a Trojan hero, insults the Achaians by calling them *iomōroi*, 'arrow-fighters' (*Il.* 14.479); from *ios*, 'arrow'. Likewise, when Diomedes is wounded in the foot by one of Paris' arrows, he shrugs it off and insults his assailant by calling him a *toxotēs*, 'archer' (*Il.* 11.385). Of course, archers *were* appreciated by their friends (e.g., Agamemnon's praise of Teukros at *Il.* 8.277–291), regardless of the enemy's opinion of them!

As far as archers in the Homeric epics are concerned, there are no grounds to believe that they were either unskilled or poor. The bows featured in the epics are invariably of composite type, rather than the cheap, 'simple' or 'self' bows that poorer fighters might conceivably have used. The latter were made of suitable branches with string attached; construction was simple. The composite bow is a more complex weapon, both more expensive to build and more difficult to use. The fourth book of the *Iliad* features a detailed description of the composite bow (*Il.* 4.105–126), stressing its (re)curved appearance (cf. *Il.* 3.18, 6.322, 8.266). There is no sign of the simple bow in the epic world; the more powerful and ornate composite bow is the ranged weapon of choice.

References to arrows and the wounds they cause occur frequently in the *Iliad*,⁶⁶⁷ but this tells us little about the actual number of archers that either

665 'During the day, a man and his sword are evidently inseparable' (Van Wees 1998, 335).

666 E.g., the dismissive remarks in Lazenby 1991, 91.

667 *Il.* 4.124–140 (Menelaos wounded), 5.95–100 (Diomedes wounded by Pandaros),

side used, as one archer may fire many arrows before having to rest and restock on ammunition. The Lokrian contingent is unusual in that it consists solely of archers,⁶⁶⁸ who are also equipped with slings (*Il.* 13.712–722). They are specifically said not to be equipped with neither helmets or shields, and that they are next to useless at close-range fighting (*Il.* 13.712–718). Their commander, the lesser Aias, however, is equipped in the same manner as most of the other heroes and fights at close-range. The Lokrian contingent is exceptional as they apparently mass together and fire large volleys at the enemy, which ‘confuses’ the Trojans (*Il.* 13.715–722), perhaps because they were otherwise unfamiliar with this tactic? It is clear from the descriptions that most archers operate singly and resemble modern snipers, picking specific targets, as we shall see below.

Some of the other heroes in the *Iliad* are also said to be great archers,⁶⁶⁹ such as Odysseus and Philoktetes. Odysseus once travelled to Ephyre in Thesprotia in search of poison to dip his arrows in (*Od.* 1.260–263). However, Odysseus’ archery skills are not displayed until the *Odyssey*, and Philoktetes was abandoned on the island of Lemnos after he had been bitten by a snake (*Il.* 2.716–725). Helenos attempts to kill Menelaos, but the arrows are deflected by the Spartan king’s shield and armour. Menelaos then wounds Helenos, who flees (*Il.* 13.581–600). All of the archers named in the poems belong to the elite. Archery thus appears to have been a part of the upbringing of many of the *basileis* featured in the Homeric epics. For example, an archery contest is part of the funeral games for Patroklos (*Il.* 23.850), and all of the suitors at Ithaka know how to shoot. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ skill as an archer fulfils a crucial role in the denouement of the story (*Od.* 21.403–430).

There are three main archer-heroes in the *Iliad*. On the Achaian side, there is Teukros, a bastard son of Telamon and therefore a half-brother of the greater Aias. Since archers apparently cannot carry shields, they instead seek cover behind the shields of their companions, as Teukros does behind Aias’ shield (*Il.* 8.266–272). Idomeneus calls Teukros the greatest of the Achaian archers, but is careful to stress his skill at hand-to-hand combat as well (*Il.* 13.313–314). At one point, Teukros attempts to kill Hektor, but he hits another man instead (*Il.* 8.300–303). He tries a second time, but misses

8.80–86 (one of Nestor’s horses shot by Paris), 11.373–383 (Diomedes wounded by Paris), 11.504–507 (Machaon wounded by Paris), 11.579–584 (Eurypylos hit by Paris), 16.25–27 (Patroklos lists the wounded), 16.510–512 (Glaukos hit in the arm by Teukros), 19.59–60 (Achilleus wishes Briseis had been killed by an arrow), 21.110–113 (Achilleus tells Hektor how he may one day be killed by either spear or arrow).

668 One immediately thinks of other regions that, in Classical times, developed reputations for yielding excellent troops of particular types; for example, Kretan archers and Rhodian slingers (e.g., Thouk. 6.43; Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.9 and 3.4.16).

669 Some of the gods are also known for their skills in archery. Apollo and Artemis are both described as skilful archers. At the start of the *Iliad*, Apollo’s arrows are thought responsible for the deaths during the plague (*Il.* 1.42–52). Homer later refers to the myth of Niobe, whose children were slaughter by the twin gods after she had been bragging about them, committing the sin of hubris (*Il.* 24.602–617). When Odysseus visits the underworld, he also encounters the ghost of Herakles, prowling about with his bow and arrow at the ready (*Od.* 11.601–608).

again and now hits Hektor's squire (*Il.* 8.309–313). Angered by the attempts on his life, Hektor picks up a ragged stone and smashes it into Teukros' chest. It is supposed to be a near-fatal wound, but the archer is back on the battlefield the following day (*Il.* 8.319–328). Perhaps this means that Teukros, like Pandaros, wore body-armor. In any event, Teukros is foiled by Zeus when he tries, for the third time, to kill Hektor and his bowstring snaps. He then heads for his tent to fetch shield, helmet, and spear so that he may fight at close range (*Il.* 15.458–483). The poet makes no mention of Teukros putting on his body-armor, only his shield, helmet, and spear, which strengthens the supposition that aristocratic archers, at least, may all have worn body-armor.

Among the Trojans, Pandaros is singled out by Aeneias as a great archer (*Il.* 5.171–173). He explains that while his father owned many chariots and fine horses, he did not bring any of them for fear of not being able to feed them at Troy. Had he brought his father's chariots and horses, his father, Lykaon, told him he would have been able 'to lead the Trojans'. But he did not, choosing instead to walk to Troy, armed with his bow and arrows (*Il.* 5.192–205). Pandaros is the one who breaks the truce at the beginning of the *Iliad* when he shoots Menelaos (*Il.* 4.92–103). He manages to hit Diomedes in the shoulder (*Il.* 5.95–100). Aeneias and Pandaros decide to work together in trying to kill Diomedes. Aeneias takes the reins of his chariot while Pandaros readies himself with a spear. However, Diomedes turns the tables on them and manages to kill Pandaros instead, who falls to the ground. It is then that we learn that Pandaros, while apparently not equipped with shield or helmet, did wear armor, since it rattles when he hits the dust (*Il.* 5.294–296).

The third main archer hero, Paris, makes an initially bold appearance at the start of the third book of the *Iliad*. He leaps from the ranks of the Trojans, wearing a leopard skin, equipped with both sword and bow, and brandishing two spears. He challenges the best of the Achaians to fight him in single combat. Menelaos steps up to the plate, which disheartens the Trojan *basileus*. Nevertheless, Paris proposes that the two of them should decide the outcome of the war. If he defeats Menelaos, the Achaians must return home empty-handed; if Menelaos wins instead, Helen will be given back to him, along with all of her possessions (*Il.* 3.15–75). Paris then proceeds to equip himself properly, donning his armor and putting on greaves as well as ankle-guards, and so forth (*Il.* 3.326–339). The two men engage in combat, but when Paris comes close to being defeated by his opposite number, he is rescued by Aphrodite (*Il.* 3.380–383). From this point onward he appears almost exclusively as an archer, wounding a number of the Achaian heroes, including Diomedes (*Il.* 11.373–383). Later traditions would feature Paris as the killer of Achilles (by shooting an arrow into the latter's proverbial heel).

In short, there is little support in the epics for the notion that archers were either poor or unskilled. Why would—for argument's sake—a *thēs* ever use a bow, if he did not receive the required equipment, provender, and the necessary training from an outside source? The common people of Homeric society were probably excluded from taking part in the athletic

competitions of the rich, and they were unlikely to have organised funeral games for their own relatives. They might have used the bow for hunting, but there are strong reasons to suppose that hunting, too, was a prerogative of the *agathoi*; there is no evidence, to my knowledge, that Homeric commoners hunted for food using the bow. Skamandrios, a hero killed by Menelaos, is said to have been a great huntsman and (therefore?) a skilled archer as well (*Il.* 5.50–53).⁶⁷⁰ Bows, especially the composite variety described in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, were weapons of the rich: only the wealthy had the necessary means and time to master their use. This explains why, with the exception of the anomalous Lokrian and possibly, on the Trojan side, Paionian contingents (*Il.* 2.848),⁶⁷¹ the bow is a fairly uncommon weapon on the epic battlefield.⁶⁷²

h. Makeshift weapons

The Greek word *belea* means ‘missiles’, and covers both arrows and any other kind of weapon that was cast or hurled, including javelins, slingshot, and rocks picked up from the ground. We have already seen that arrows were probably fairly uncommon and that there was no apparent distinction between spears and javelins as such. Slings were also rare and apparently confined to the Lokrian contingent. So we are left with rocks and other makeshift weapons that could be easily picked up and thrown by anyone with a decent sense of direction.

A typical scene is described when Hektor tries to parlay with the Achaians. The Trojan hero makes his way into the no-man’s land between the Trojan and Achaian armies. As he approaches the Achaian lines, however, ‘the flowing-haired Achaians kept pointing at him with their arrows and with flung stones striving ever to strike him’ (*Il.* 3.79–80). Hektor later walks through the lines (*stiches*), fighting with spear and sword and throwing large rocks himself (*Il.* 11.540). Of Telamonian Aias, Idomeneus says that he cannot be defeated by any man ‘who could be broken by the bronze and great stones flung at him’ (*Il.* 13.323). When the Trojans try to storm the walls of the Achaian camp, some of the defenders

670 Based on the iconographic evidence, some of which is discussed in section ??, above, it seems that Greeks preferred the spear to the bow when hunting from at least the seventh century B.C. onwards; see also Hull 1964, 7–8.

671 The men of Philoktetes are also said to be ‘well skilled in the strength of the bow in battle’ (*Il.* 2.720), but the impression I get from this is that these men, unlike the Lokrians, do not fight primarily as archers, but as spearmen who are able to wield the bow when necessary.

672 Rawlings 2007, 38, claims that Homer ‘regularly mentions swarms of arrows in flight’, but the cited passages do not support this. At *Il.* 15.313, arrows are shot, but the number of arrows are not stated; if a dense cloud of arrows had been imagined the poet would certainly have said so. At *Il.* 16.773 (not line 774), arrows are mentioned, but the number is again not given. Lattimore renders *oi te pteroentes* as ‘many feathered arrows’ (emphasis mine), but the word ‘many’ does not appear in the original Greek; however, *polla* is used specifically concerning the number of spears at *Il.* 16.772 and the large stones at *Il.* 16.774. This suggests to me that the number of arrows, especially when compared to thrown rocks and the like, might actually have been relatively small (also *contra* Van Wees 2004, 170).

tear stones out of the towers (*purgoi*) and fling them at the attackers, 'and the helms and shields massive in the middle crashed hollow underneath the impact of rocks like millstones' (*Il.* 12.160–161). Both the Trojans and Achaians throw large numbers of stones at each other around the wall of the camp (*Il.* 12.287–289).

i. Chariots and horses

While obviously neither arms nor armour, chariots and horses are so much part of the apparel of the more affluent warrior in the epic world that they can be conveniently discussed here. Chariots and horses, high-status symbols *par excellence*, feature prominently in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 20.326), and many people and regions are closely associated with them.⁶⁷³ Some confusion arises due to Homeric terminology: the poet refers to both horsemen and charioteers as *hippeis*. At least some of the horses may have been ridden rather than yoked to a vehicle (e.g., *Il.* 11.150–152 and 15.269–270). Horsemen as well as charioteers may have been a regular feature of the epic battlefield (perhaps in *Il.* 23.131–134?).

Horses are a particularly common in Anatolia, where the land itself is obviously better suited to the rearing of these animals than Greece is. For example, Priamos tells Helen of how he once visited Phrygia, where he 'looked on the Phrygian men with their swarming horses, so many of them' (*Il.* 3.185–186). Later, the Phrygians are called *hippodamoi*, 'horse-tamers' (*Il.* 10.431). It is probably no coincidence that the mythical Amazons, who were presumably envisioned by Homer as horse-riding warrior-women, were thought to come from the east, whence they raided the Phrygians and Lykians (*Il.* 3.189; they were also defeated by Bellerophon, *Il.* 6.186).

The epic heroes, as the wealthiest combatants in the field, use chariots as their mode of conveyance of choice.⁶⁷⁴ Interestingly, Odysseus does not seem to possess a chariot; perhaps chariots and horses are rare on islands. In any event, most chariots in the *Iliad* are drawn by teams of either two or four horses (*Il.* 8.184–185, 16.466–476). Each chariot carries two people: a warrior—usually one of the Achaian or Trojan heroes—and a charioteer (e.g., *Il.* 8.116–129). Chariots are used to transport the heroes to, from, and on the battlefield. Once the hero spots an enemy, he normally dismounts to engage the foe on foot (*Il.* 3.29, 4.231, 5.13), his charioteer manoeuvring to a place of safety where he waits for his master to call on him. Rarely do the heroes fight directly from their chariots (e.g., *Il.* 7.13–16). Chariot races are mentioned a number of times in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 9.123–124, 9.265–266, 11.697 and further), and a race was part of the funeral games in honour of Patroklos (*Il.*

673 For example, *Il.* 2.230 (Trojans as 'breakers of horses'), 2.237 (Kastor a 'breaker of horses'), 3.75 (Argos said to provide good pasture for horses), 4.202 (Trikkha also good horse country), 8.194 (Diomedes a 'breaker of horses'), 15.262–270 (Hektor compared to a horse breaking from its stable), 16.584 (Patroklos referred to as a 'lord of horses'). The Trojans, of course, are especially associated with the horse, and it has been suggested that Trojan religion was dominated by horses and the god Poseidon; this is thought to explain why the Trojans were so eager to bring the wooden horse into the city (Macurdy 1923; cf. Maitland 1999).

674 Cf. Van Wees 1994, 9–14.

23.262 and further).

The overall picture concerning the use of chariots seems 'perfectly plausible'.⁶⁷⁵ However, some modern commentators believe that chariots were introduced by the poet in a deliberate attempt to archaize the story. These writers argue that while the poet describes chariots, he 'actually' had mounted horsemen in mind when describing these scenes.⁶⁷⁶ This is unlikely for two main reasons.⁶⁷⁷ Firstly, the war-chariot remained largely unchanged, structurally speaking, from the Bronze Age down to Classical times. It is true that chariots might have been used solely in races and processions. However, and secondly, there is nothing inherently implausible about the Homeric use of chariots as battlefield-taxis.⁶⁷⁸

4. The social life of weapons and armour in the epic world

Arms and armour are to the heroes important not just on the battlefield, but in everyday life; 'martiality' in its broadest sense. We have already seen how no self-respecting Homeric *basileus* went around town unarmed; even in times of peace, a man carried a sword. Similarly, weapons and armour could be exchanged between friends, especially *xenoi* ('guest-friends): the sword and spear that Odysseus gave Iphitos in return for the latter's bow has already been mentioned, above (*Od.* 21.33).

Weapons and armour could also be passed from father to son, and not necessarily following the death of the former (*e.g.*, *Il.* 17.194–197). Achilles, for example, uses his father's spear in battle (*Il.* 16.143–144). It is a characteristic feature of Homeric society that sons are thought to resemble their fathers in wit and strength. Of all the men present in Odysseus' palace, only Telemachos, his son, comes close to stringing his father's bow (*Od.* 21.128–130). Most weapons and armour, including of course the Pelian spear and the bow of Iphitos, have a biography of their own that adds to their lustre and thus also to the fame of their owners.

It is customary in epic warfare, as we shall see later on, to strip the enemy dead of their armour and weapons. Such equipment was normally re-used by the victors, or dedicated to the gods. When Hektor challenges the Achaians to a fight, he swears to hang the armour of his victim in the temple of Apollo if the god were to keep him safe (*Il.* 7.81–86). After all, victory (*nikē*) is granted to mortals by the gods. This means that the gods must always be thanked, which includes the offering of proper (animal) sacrifices. Thus, after a successful raid, the Pylians sacrifice to the gods 'all through the city' (*Il.* 11.705). When their city is later besieged by the Epeians, they sacrifice some more to ask the gods for help (*Il.* 11.726–728).

However, not all enemies were stripped off their armour. Andromache tells how Achilles, after killing her father Eëtion, 'did not strip his armour, for his heart respected the dead man, but burned the body in all its elaborate war-gear and piled a grave mound over it' (*Il.* 6.416–420; *cf.* 7.89–90).

675 Singor 1995, 190; see also Anderson 1965, Anderson 1975.

676 Greenhalgh 1973, 1–2 and 7–12.

677 See also Rawlings 2007, 39.

678 Anderson 1975, 178–179.

Cremation in arms appears to be a relatively rare phenomenon in the epic world, and the practice is not limited to brave fighters. One of Odysseus' ship-mates, Elpenor, is specifically described as 'not terribly powerful in fighting nor sound in his thoughts' (*Od.* 10.552–553). He goes to sleep on the roof of Kirke's island and later, in a drunken haze, forgets the ladder and falls to the ground, breaking his neck. Odysseus later meets Elpenor's shade, who asks him to burn his body in full armour and to raise a mound over his tomb, planting an oar on the top so all could recognise it from afar (*Od.* 11.66–78).

Funeral games sometimes accompany the cremation and burial of esteemed warriors. Many of the activities have a decidedly martial character. During the funeral games in honour of Patroklos, the heroes engage in various violent games, including boxing, wrestling, spear-throwing, and running (*Il.* 23.621–623). Achilles is renowned for his fleetness of foot, which is important in combat and put to the test in running contests (*Il.* 23.792); Ares, the war-god, is specifically said to be the fastest of all the Olympian gods (*Od.* 8.331). A duel between Diomedes and Aias is also part of Patroklos' funeral games: the object of that particular 'game' was to wound one's opponent (*Il.* 23.798–825). Some of the prizes that could be won in these contests included gifts of armour and weapons; Odysseus and the greater Aias once competed for the sake of Achilles' armour (*Od.* 11.543–555).

However, games are not limited to funerals. They can also be organised for their own sake. Neleus, Nestor's father, once sent a chariot to compete in races organised in Elis (*Il.* 11.698–701), an action perhaps prefiguring later aristocratic traditions involving Panhellenic games at Olympia (which lies in Elis) and other major sanctuaries. But men also engage in sports as a way of killing time. When Achilles withdraws from battle, his Myrmidons amuse themselves on the beach by throwing the discus or spear, and practising the bow (*Il.* 2.773–775). Aside from the recreational value of such activities, these also provided the men with practice in spear-casting and shooting. All of these athletic activities, along with the practice of bearing arms and the exchanging of martial gifts, further strengthening the ideological links between the *basileis* and violence.

5. Warfare in the epic world

Having examined the weapons and armour used by the fighting men in the Homeric world, it is time to see how and why they put their bloodthirsty equipment to use. In the present section, various aspects of warfare in the epic world are examined, including possible causes of war, to raising an army, the organisation of the epic army, types of battles, the death of warriors in combat, and raids.

a. Causes of war

An examination of war and violence begs the question of why men in the epic world fight. Interestingly enough, the most obvious reason to wage war, namely the acquisition of territory, does not feature in the epics. When

Troy was captured, for example, the city was razed to the ground and its population either enslaved or killed (e.g., *Il.* 2.226–227, 4.338–339, 8.165, 9.270, 16.830–832); its territory was not added to Agamemnon’s domain, nor was this ever contemplated by any of the Achaians or Trojans.

Instead, insults are apparently the main cause of conflict between communities. When offended, there are two courses of action. One may retaliate swiftly and dreadfully, or one may seek a diplomatic solution. Both were available to men in the Homeric epics. Two instances spring to mind. The first is a story told by Nestor in the *Iliad*. His father, Neleus, ruler of Pylos, once sent a chariot to compete in games held in Elis. The Epeians stole the chariot, thus angering the Pylians. Nestor then led a party of young men on a raid and stole a considerable amount of livestock; they also made a number of prisoners (*Il.* 11.669–704).

The second story involves Odysseus in a similar situation, but with a different course of action adopted by Odysseus’ father, Laërtes, who was then ruler of Ithaka. Once, the men of Messene had sailed to Ithaka and taken three hundred sheep; they also enslaved the herdsmen. Unlike Neleus who authorised the retaliatory raid led by Nestor, Laërtes and the other elders (*gerontes*) sent the young Odysseus on a diplomatic mission to Messene to ask for suitable compensation (*Od.* 21.15–21). We never learn whether he was successful or not (knowing Odysseus, he probably was), but it is noteworthy that violence was clearly not the only option available to solve problems.

The immediate cause of the Trojan War was Menelaos’ wounded honour (*timē*).⁶⁷⁹ This was the direct result of Paris insulting Menelaos by abducting the latter’s wife, Helen, as well as making off with valuables looted from Menelaos’ home in Sparta (*Il.* 7.362–364).⁶⁸⁰ As such, Paris also violated the rules of *xeinia* (hospitality).⁶⁸¹ The situation between Menelaos and Paris quickly devolved into a full-scale war in order to avenge Paris’ wrongdoings and to restore Menelaos’ honour. Menelaos’ brother, Agamemnon, was the ruler of Mykenai and had the allegiance of all the Achaian rulers and their armies (according to non-Homeric legend, the oath of Tyndareos sworn by all the rulers of Greece ensured that Paris caused the largest force ever seen to set sail for Trojan shores when he abducted Helen).

Van Wees regards the conflict between Menelaos and Paris as essentially

679 Anthropologists have observed that ‘Primitive peoples may say they have to avenge injuries for the sake of honor, but the selectiveness and manipulativeness [*sic*] of their memories for these injuries has often been noted: they can “forget” stains on their honor a long time until they find it convenient to “remember” them’ (Dawson 1996, 27–28).

680 Enemy raids of cattle and women, as well as the wilful destruction of property, are among the main causes of warfare (battle) in the Homeric world (e.g., *Il.* 11.669–704); the prospect of acquiring personal wealth and glory motivates individual heroes and their bands of followers to take part in the actual fighting. Enemy raids of cattle and women, as well as the wilful destruction of property, are among the main causes of warfare (battle) in the Homeric world (e.g., *Il.* 11.669–704); the prospect of acquiring personal wealth and glory motivates individual heroes and their bands of followers to take part in the actual fighting.

681 Herman 1987, 125–126.

a private quarrel, whereby Menelaos drew on his personal influence (via Agamemnon), to assemble an army, which then escalates into a full-blown war between two communities.⁶⁸² Menelaos and Paris are both seen as representatives of their communities; both the Achaians and the Trojans have a well-developed sense of community (e.g., *Il.* 12.243, 15.496–498). Something similar can be found in the *Odyssey*, where Eupheithes, father of Antinoös, once incurred the wrath of the people on Ithaka when these learnt that he had raided the nearby Thesprotians, and thus feared that these might retaliate (*Od.* 16.425–427).⁶⁸³ When Telemachos visits Nestor, he tells the old man that he and his shipmates are from Ithaka, before immediately adding that their business is a private matter, *prēxis d' hēd idiē*, not public, *ou dēmios*, literally 'of the people' (*Od.* 3.81–82). Men are normally thought to represent their community when abroad, unless they specifically say otherwise, as Telemachos does here.

Despite the Trojan War being presented as a full-scale war between two communities and their allies (Sparta *c.q.* Mykenai and their allies *versus* the Trojans and their allies), it is clear that if Menelaos were to die on the battlefield, the war would be essentially over (*Il.* 4.178–181). However, some heroes vow to continue fighting whatever happens (*Il.* 9.40–49). After all, fighting at Troy offers more than just the risk of death, and the other leaders and their men have ulterior motives for fighting at Troy. Through fighting and achieving victory (*nikē*), men gain *kudos*, the divine glory of success granted by Zeus. *Kudos* in turn, as Bart Natoli has suggested, allows a man to gain both *timē* and *kleos*.⁶⁸⁴ *Timē*, 'honour', is particularly expressed in material terms: at least some of the booty are regarded as *geras*, 'prizes of honour' (e.g., Briseis). The Achaian heroes often ponder the great wealth that is in store for them once Troy is finally captured (e.g., *Il.* 2.373–374). This success (*nikē*) would increase the Achaians' *kudos* and allow them rightful access to Troy's wealth and thereby measurably increase their *timē*; the capture of the city itself would add to their *kleos* or prestige.

Kleos is a man's fame or reputation, and is all that survives after death, so the heroes strive to make a name for themselves and become the object of stories generations later. By contrast, a man's *timē* or honour is lost when he dies: the treasures that symbolise his honour pass on to his heirs (e.g., *Od.* 9.263–265). Nowhere is the heroic thirst for glory stated more emphatically than by Achilles when he addresses Agamemnon's envoys:

For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me
I carry two sorts of destiny toward the day of my death. Either,
if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
my return home is gone, but my glory [*kleos*] shall be everlasting;
but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
the excellence [*esthlos*] of my glory [*kleos*] is gone, but there will be a long life
left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly. (*Il.* 9.410–416)

682 Van Wees 1992, 172–175.

683 See also Rawlings 2007, 31; cf. Van Wees 1992, 191–199.

684 For more on the relationship between *kudos*, *kleos*, and *timē*, refer to the useful discussion in Natoli 2006.

Van Wees has argued that war in the *Iliad* is status warfare, *i.e.* a kind of warfare in which men fight to enhance not just their personal, but more specifically their collective status.⁶⁸⁵ The fighting in the *Iliad* appears only to *reinforce* the status of the heroes. The actual status of a hero remains essentially the same and is measured by the number of ‘gifts of honour’ (*geras*) or booty that he receives.⁶⁸⁶ Thus Agamemnon, as the commander-in-chief of the Achaian forces and the greatest of the rulers, receives far more of the spoils than men who are arguably better fighters, as Achilles bitterly points out (*Il.* 1.225–244).

b. Raising an army

In war, each of the heroes commands his own group of followers, referred to as *hetairoi* or ‘companions’, essentially ‘friends’ (*philoï*). The companions are ubiquitous (e.g., *Il.* 1.179; 2.778; 3.1; 4.379; 7.115; 11.461; 13.164–165; 16.816–817). Patroklos, for example, is one of Achilles’ companions (*Il.* 9.205); the death of this close friend is the reason that Achilles eventually returns to battle.⁶⁸⁷ In battle, the heroes are hardly ever alone, which explains why the poet specifically mentions when they are caught on their own, without any companions nearby (e.g., *Il.* 11.401–410).⁶⁸⁸ At least some companions are called *therapōntes* (‘retainers’, ‘henchmen’; I would also offer ‘householdmen’). Van Wees suggests that all the followers of a leader are both his *therapōntes* and his *hetairoi*, and that a very small number of these men ‘perhaps the only retainers to live in their masters’ houses are refugees without a livelihood or a place to stay, while other retainers are local men with their own households’.⁶⁸⁹ It appears that most families were supposed to supply one warrior each; one of the Myrmidons, Argeiphontes (*i.e.* Hermes), tells Priamos that he and his six brothers cast lots, and he was thus chosen by fate to accompany Achilles to Troy (*Il.* 24.399–400).

That statement begs the question: were men sometimes forced to go to war? There is no proof in the epics that some men were pressed into joining a military campaign. Perhaps only the father of Argeiphontes, as the head of his household (*oikos*), was asked to accompany Achilles. He may have decided to send someone else in his stead to fulfil the favour; Achilles, after all, went in his father’s place, on account of Peleus’ advanced age. This would explain why Argeiphontes and his brothers cast lots (Achilles was an only son). Near the beginning of the *Iliad*, Achilles tells Agamemnon:

I for my part did not come here for the sake of the Trojan
spearmen to fight against them, since to me they have done nothing.
Never yet have they driven away my cattle or my horses,
never in Phthia where the soil is rich and men grow great did they

685 Van Wees 1992, 206–207.

686 Cf. Ready 2007 (acquisition of spoils).

687 There is no proof in the *Iliad* that Achilles and Patroklos were lovers: such is wishful thinking on the part of commentators, ancient and modern. Achilles and Patroklos were war-buddies and foster-brothers. For further insight and discussion, refer to Shay 1994, 40–44.

688 Stressed by Van Wees 1988, esp. pp. 5–7 and 21–22.

689 Van Wees 1992, 32; cf. *Od.* 13.265–266.

spoil my harvest, since indeed there is much that lies between us,
the shadowy mountains and the echoing sea; but for your sake,
o great shamelessness, we followed, to do you favour [*chairēs*],
you with the dog's eyes, to win your honour [*timē*] and Menelaos'
from the Trojans. You forget all this or else you care nothing. (*Il.* 1.152–160)

Achilleus makes clear that he and the other leaders followed Agamemnon as a favour (*charis*). Joining the expedition appears to have been wholly voluntary, although there is evidence that some leaders, at least, felt obliged to join because of public opinion (e.g., *Od.* 14.235–239). A few high-ranking leaders were able to politely refuse an invitation to war by sending the commander-in-chief some valuable gift. Echebolos, son of Anchises, gave Agamemnon a beautiful mare, 'so as not to have to go with him to windy Ilium but stay where he was and enjoy himself' (*Il.* 23.295–296). An outright refusal to Agamemnon's request would probably have been frowned upon, so Echebolos tries to soften the blow by giving the Mykenaian ruler a valuable gift. Friends from further afield might even send a gift of their own accord. When Kinyras, the king of Cyprus, heard that Agamemnon was preparing for war, he sent his friend a beautiful cuirass as a token of his friendship and support (*Il.* 11.19–23).

When the suitors in Ithaka hear that Telemachos has set off to visit the mainland, Antinoös asks which of the young men (*kouroi*) went with him: the *exairetoi* ('chosen men') of Ithaka, or perhaps *thētes* in his employ, or even slaves (*Od.* 4.642–644). The *exairetoi*, 'chosen men', were no doubt culled from the upper echelons of society, i.e. the *basileis*. It thus appears that only the aristocracy and their dependents (slaves and *thētes*) were eligible for service of this kind, and only *kouroi* at that (probably because Telemachos himself is a young man who has yet to prove himself). The common people are again curiously absent: we shall see a little further on that this does not appear to be a case of wilful neglect on the part of the poet, but a feature of archaic society.

Odysseus' house features a store-room filled with all sorts of treasures (*keimēlia*) and weapons (*Od.* 2.337–347); no doubt other *basileis* also possessed such rooms. Weapons, armour, and other (metal) objects are also displayed in a *basileus'* hall. When Odysseus is shooting the suitors with Iphitos' bow, Telemachos runs off to fetch equipment from an inner room (*Od.* 22.101–115); earlier, he had removed all of the weapons and armour from Odysseus' hall, where the suitors spent most of their time (*Od.* 19.1–34, 22.23–25). While most men no doubt had to supply their own weapons and armour, at least some in the retinue of a wealthy man could be supplied from the latter's surplus equipment. At one point in the *Iliad*, the Achaians are told to exchange shields and spears, so that the braver fighters might replace their battered equipment with the more pristine pieces of armour and weapons used by those who tend to avoid the brunt of fighting (*Il.* 14.370–387). Such passages suggest that ownership of equipment was perhaps not as strictly personal as is sometimes thought.

c. The journey to the battlefield

In order to reach Troy, the heroes have to traverse the Aegean sea. Ships

were probably owned by only a few of the wealthiest residents in a Homeric community, *viz.* the heroes of the poems. It seems likely that influential men might have been able to borrow a ship as a favour or in exchange for a portion of the envisioned booty. When Telemachos wishes to visit the mainland, he first asks the men at assembly to give a ship and some crew (*Od.* 2.209–217); a little later Athene (disguised as Mentor) tells Telemachos that she will find both ship and crew for him (*Od.* 2.285–295).

Ships in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are long and slender open boats ('longships'), which are dragged unto a beach and fixed with 'long props' (*ermata makra*) to prevent them from falling to one side. It can be deduced that in the so-called 'Catalogue of Ships', most vessels possessed either fifty or twenty oars. The Boiotians are said to have brought fifty ships, each of which carried a hundred and twenty men (*Il.* 2.509–510), but these may not have all been oarsmen. Ships with twenty and especially fifty *oarsmen* were regarded as fairly standard types (*e.g.*, *Il.* 16.168–170).⁶⁹⁰ In the *Odyssey*, a ship with twenty oars is referred to as an *eikosoros* (*Od.* 9.322–323). A fifty-oared vessel is referred to as *pentekontoros* by Herodotos (*e.g.*, *Hdt.* 6.137), but not Homer. This supports the notion that the fifty-oared vessel was the typical warship familiar to Homer, requiring little further description.⁶⁹¹ They were used to transport troops and also, as we shall see a little further on, to carry out raids on neighbouring towns.

d. Fortifications in the epic world

When the Achaians arrive at Troy, they conquer the beach and build their camp. When not fighting or raiding, the Achaians linger here. Within the camp, the Achaians are grouped according to regional contingent, their ships drawn up on the beach with their huts and shelters built alongside them, forming streets and an *agora* or place of assembly (*e.g.*, *Il.* 1.185, 475–476, 2.19, 2.399, 10.74, 11.805–807).

In the seventh book of the *Iliad*, Nestor advises the Achaians to fortify their camp (*Il.* 7.327–343). The Achaians collect their dead and burn their bodies. They pile earth onto the pyre to form a mount, on which 'towering ramparts' are built so as to better defend the camp. They build walls, fitted with 'strong gates', and dig a deep trench just outside of the newly-made walls to strengthen their position even further. Remarkably, part of the structure is made of stone (*Il.* 12.154–155). The Achaians also fix sharp stakes within the ditch (*Il.* 7.433–441, 9.348–350), and also in front of both ditch and wall (*Il.* 8.343–344, 15.1–2), some with the express purpose of keeping out chariots and horses (*Il.* 12.50–79). This fortification circuit apparently rivals the walls of Troy itself, made by Poseidon and Apollo (*Il.* 7.454–463). The Achaian camp actually resembles a town more than a typical military camp.

Troy is not the only fortified city in the *Iliad*. In fact, walls are a fixture in many descriptions of towns in the Homeric world. Some Achaian towns are described as strongholds (*Il.* 2.646, 2.691, and so on). When Boiotian Thebes

690 See also Wallinga 1993, 40 (with references).

691 In Herodotos' time, there were no less than three different kinds of warships (pentekonters, biremes, triremes); see chapter 3, below, for further details.

was founded, it was immediately walled, 'since without bulwarks they could not have lived, for all their strength, in Thebes of the wide spaces' (*Od.* 11.264–265). The major difference between most fortified places and Troy is a matter of quality and scale. The Trojan fortifications, which consists of walls, towers, and ramparts, along with a variety of strong gates, are apparently made of much tougher materials than appears usual; perhaps the Trojan walls are made entirely out of stone rather than mud brick on a stone foundation? Or perhaps the walls of Troy were more remarkable for their great height? In any event, stone was apparently used extensively in the city's construction (*Il.* 6.242–250). Troy's streets are called *euktimenos* and *euruaguia*, 'well-laid' and 'wide' (*Il.* 6.391; 9.28), so presumably these have a stone or cobbled surface, further reinforcing the notion that, at least within the context of the epic world, Troy is a city made mostly out of stone.

All walls in the epic world are taken by storm (*Il.* 4.239, 7.164). The war-god himself, Ares, is frequently referred to as a *teichesiplēta*, 'stormer of walls' (*Il.* 5.31, 5.455, and so on), as well as a *ptoliporthon*, 'sacker of cities' (e.g., *Il.* 20.152). In order to capture a fortified settlement (*ptoliethron*; Lattimore translates this as 'citadel'), one's troops needed to scale the walls and either surprise the enemy or overwhelm them with superior numbers (e.g., *Il.* 13.81–87, 16.698–709). This suggests that most walls in the epic world were not that high. One portion of the walls of Troy are specifically singled out as being easier to climb (*Il.* 6.433–434), perhaps because it was made largely of mud brick or rough stones, featured a more gentle slope, or maybe because it was not as tall as the other sections.

It is interesting that apparently no siege engines of any sort were used, not even (improvised) ladders or simple battering rams.⁶⁹² Some heroes use boulders to smash gates and walls (*Il.* 12.445–466); stakes are employed as levers to topple enemy battlements (*Il.* 12.257–261). Despite the lack of any apparent siege apparatus, siege warfare or, more specifically, the storming and sacking of cities, appear to have been among the most common military activities in the Homeric world (e.g., *Il.* 1.19, 2.728, 9.327–328). It is certainly no coincidence that war is represented on the new shield of Achilles by a city under siege (*Il.* 18.509–512). Once again, this suggests that fortifications were rather simple, with most towns having straightforward defences that could be easily climbed because of either the materials used in their construction (stone foundations with mud-brick superstructures) or because they were not all that high.

There are three ways in which an attack on a city might end. The most violent is for the attackers to somehow capture the city. The consequences of conquest would be harsh in the case of Troy; the city would be sacked and then razed to the ground, the men and some of their children would be killed, the women and remaining children enslaved (*Il.* 6.447–465). But many Trojans hope that it will never come to this. They believe that if they can hold on long enough, the Achaians—demoralised, tired, and possibly

692 Some have suggested that the Trojan horse was actually a siege engine, something similar to an Assyrian battering ram; see, e.g., Fields 2004, 51–52 (with references).

hungry—will just pack up and leave, ending the war. Finally, there is a third option: a city under siege may offer a bribe to the attackers. Sensing his impending doom, Hektor laments that he did try to find a peaceful solution. Why, he wonders, did he not go and meet with Achilles, ‘and promise to give back Helen, and with her all her possessions, all those things that once in the hollow ships Alexandros brought back to Troy [...]; to give these to the Atreus’ sons to take away, and for the Achaians also to divide up all that is hidden within the city, and take an oath thereafter for the Trojans in conclave not to hide anything away, but distribute all of it’ (*Il.* 22.111–122; see also 509–512).

Aside from their obvious defensive value, a wall also has an important symbolic value, separating the human city-dwellers from the hostile countryside (*agros*), the home of wild animals and monsters.⁶⁹³ The town, sometimes delineated by its walls, is the basic constituent element of Homeric territories. Hence, when Agamemnon wishes to make peace with Achilles, he offers him treasures and slaves, the hand of one of his daughters, and no less than seven towns (*Il.* 9.149–156). To demonstrate his affection for Odysseus, Menelaos tells Telemachos that he wanted to ‘empty’ (*exalapazō*) one of his own cities for Odysseus and his people to dwell in,⁶⁹⁴ somewhere close to Menelaos’ Sparta (*Od.* 4.174–179).

This gifting of towns suggest that military might is centred around the figure of the ruler, and probably concentrated in his hometown, effectively the ‘capital’ within his territory. This seems particularly true in the case of Menelaos: the original inhabitants of the town that he wants to give to Odysseus would no doubt object to being ousted from their homes. However, they are apparently unable to do anything about it. Earlier in this chapter, we have already seen how Telemachos picked *kouroi* from among the ‘chosen men’ (no doubt *basileis*), and the dependent social groups (slaves and *thētes*).

This clear distinction between aristocrats, for whom warfare and violence were a way of life, and the mass of the common people, for whom warfare was something beyond their sphere of experience, is also found in Hesiod’s poetry. His world has been examined in great detail by Anthony Edwards. Edwards suggests that the contacts between Hesiod’s farming community in Askra, a *kōmē* (village), and the *basileis* (leaders) of Thespiai were limited to judicial cases, concluding that Hesiod’s *Works and Days* provides no basis whatsoever for the claim that the kings of the *agorē* wield economic, political, or military authority in Ascra.⁶⁹⁵ Likewise, Askra has no apparent economic, political, or military obligations, except that inhabitants may seek the judgement of Thespian *basileis* in otherwise irresolvable conflicts, which suggests some kind of link between the two settlements. Hesiod never mentions war and is only concerned with

693 In general, see Scully 1990; specifically for the *Odyssey*, see Edwards 1993; cf. Aristotle *Pol.* 1253a7 (*zoōn polition*).

694 The verb *exalapazō* is used here in the sense of ‘to vacate’ or ‘to empty’, but its more common meaning is ‘to raze’ (a settlement). Menelaos has enough power, apparently, to remove the entire population of a town, no doubt forcibly if necessary.

695 Edwards 2004, 66.

farming and, to a very modest degree, trade.⁶⁹⁶

This negative evidence itself is suggestive, as it seems to compare favourably with the Homeric world, where villages appear vague and indistinct, with the *basileis* concentrated in relatively few towns, and where military might is concentrated in the larger towns and around the figures of the *basileis* in particular (cf. Hesiod's parable of the hawk and the nightingale). In sum, then, it seems to me that only the aristocracy engaged in combat, perhaps supported by slaves and other dependents, while the mass of the common people stayed at home; the latter relied exclusively on the military prowess of the elite for their protection and were otherwise essentially defenceless. This explains why powerful rulers like Agamemnon and Menelaos are able to 'empty' settlements in their territories if they so desire, as they are the wielders of supreme military, and thus political power in their respective domains.

e. Army organisation

While the poet does not describe all of the particulars of the Achaian army, it is clear that he had a consistent vision of what it was supposed to be like. Homer obviously drew on the experiences of warfare in his own time when discussing the organisation of the Achaian army. 'Surely,' as Van Wees rightly asserted, 'were this army organisation the brain-child of the poet or a succession of poets creating the *Iliad*, he or they would have added a few lines of clarification for the benefit of the audience.'⁶⁹⁷ In any event, the organisation of the Achaian army appears to be relatively straightforward.

The poet uses a number of terms that have often been defined rather narrowly by modern commentators. However, ancient Greek authors are not known for their consistency as far as terminology is concerned, and Homer was no different.⁶⁹⁸ The army itself is often referred to as a 'host', *stratos*. The word *phalanx*, usually in the plural (*phalanges*) is sometimes used to denote battle-lines, especially lines or ranks of men, fighting or standing side by side; the word implies throngs of men rather than a neat array (e.g., *Il.* 11.90, 19.158). The word *stix*, always in the plural (*stiches*), is used to denote both ranks and files of men, as well as simply large bodies of men (e.g., *Il.* 4.221–231, 16.173; of horses, *Il.* 20.326). Similarly, the word *purgos* ('tower') is sometimes used to denote a dense group of fighters (*Il.* 4.334 and 4.347). None of these terms appear to refer to a specific kind of military unit or formation.⁶⁹⁹ However, a more meaningful distinction is made between fighters engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, the *promachoi* or *protoi*, and those that keep their distance, the *plethus* ('multitude'). The heroes, being well-armoured and equipped with spears and swords, usually fight at close-range, as *promachoi* (*Il.* 2.474–483).⁷⁰⁰

696 On warfare in Hesiod, see Edwards 2004, 76.

697 Van Wees 1986, 296.

698 For further discussion, refer to Trumphy 1950.

699 *Contra* Latacz 1977, 49 and Pritchett 1985-GSaW4, 21–25; cf. Van Wees 1994, 3–9.

700 Singor 1988, 77–92 (as well as pp. 93–111), suggests that the *plethus* were lighter armed or even lightly-armed men, but I am not so sure. The term seems to me only to indicate the position of a warrior on the battlefield, i.e. in front of the army or

The commander-in-chief of the Achaian army is Agamemnon, ruler of Mykenai and frequently referred to as the *anaxandron*, the 'lord of men' (e.g., *Il.* 1.172). He frequently relies on the advice of sagely fighters, especially Nestor (e.g., *Il.* 2.360–368), and also calls assemblies to discuss important matters with the other *basileis*, witnessed by the remainder of the army, the *plethus* or *laos* (e.g., *Il.* 2.50–53) On the Trojan side, Priamos is nominally in charge, but due to his advanced age, the actual commander in the field is Hektor, assisted by other prominent men such as Aineias and the leaders of various contingents, such as Sarpedon and Glaukos, who lead the Lykians.

The Achaian troops assembled before Troy are grouped together according to regional contingent. The contingents for both the Achaians and the Trojans are listed in the second book of the *Iliad*, in a section known as the 'Catalogue of Ships'.⁷⁰¹ The Achaian forces number at least sixty thousand men, which is no doubt an example of epic exaggeration.⁷⁰² In any event, each regional contingent has its own leader. For example, the Myrmidons of Phthia are under the command of Achilles. A leader may decide to carve up his contingent into different sections (*stiches*);⁷⁰³ Achilles, for example, at one point divides the Myrmidons into five different groups, each with its own leader (*Il.* 16.168–199). This dividing up of the troops is then not mentioned again by the poet, so perhaps Achilles only defined the sections in order to send similarly-sized groups of men out to different parts of the battleline. That a battleline exists is demonstrated by instances where men are specifically sent out to reinforce either the left, centre, or right of the entire army, *pantos stratōs* (e.g., during the battle at the ships at *Il.* 13.308–314, where the camp provides some structure to the battlefield that the open plain probably lacks).

The Trojan contingents, unlike the Achaian, are frequently referred to as *epikouroi*,⁷⁰⁴ perhaps partly because the Trojans and their allies are not as culturally homogenous as the Achaians, speaking many different languages (*Il.* 2.803–804), and can thus not be collectively referred to by one name.⁷⁰⁵ But the word *epikouros* carries a further connotation. Early on, Priamos tells Helen that he, as an *epikouros*, was once summoned to the aid of Otreus and Mygdon to fight against the Amazons (*Il.* 3.185–189). Sarpedon at one point tells Hektor that he came to Troy as an *epikouros* (*Il.* 5.477–478 and 491; also *Il.* 12.101), even though he himself was never threatened by the Achaians (*Il.* 5.482–484). Poulydamas later rebukes Hektor, telling him, 'now you have utterly forgotten your armed companions (*epikouroi*) who for your sake, far from their friends and the land of their fathers, are wearing their lives away' (*Il.* 16.538–540). Only once are Achaians referred to as *epikouroi*. Agamemnon reminds Diomedes of his father, Tydeus, who once came to Mykenai with Polyneikes to ask for *epikouroi* to aid in the war against

'submerged' among the throng (*plethus*) of men behind.

701 On Homeric catalogues and their similarities to battle narratives, see Beye 1964.

702 Cf. Finley 1978 [1954], 51.

703 See also Van Wees 1986; Latacz 1977, 60.

704 *Il.* 2.130, 2.803–815, 3.451–456, 5.473, 6.111, 6.227, 7.348, 7.368, 7.477, 8.497, 9.233, 10.420, 11.220, 11.563, 12.61, 12.108, 13.755, 17.14, 17.212, 17.220, 17.335, 17.362, 18.229.

705 Cf. Thouk. 1.3.

Boiotian Thebes (*Il.* 4.376–379).

In other words, an *epikouros* is someone who comes to the aid of a friend, especially—if not exclusively—in *defence* of said friend. It is stated specifically in the *Iliad* that the Trojan *epikouroi* render aid in exchange for rich gifts (*Il.* 17.220–226); after all, unlike the Achaians, the Trojans have no Achaian cities nearby to loot. In the case of the assault on Thebes, these allies are perhaps called *epikouroi* because they will have no chance to actually plunder the city: Polyneikes wants to oust his brother and seize control of the city and its territory, not raze it to the ground. Aside from the examples already cited above, the meaning of *epikouros* as someone who comes to one's defence is clear from the following, spoken by the goddess Athene:

Now may all who bring their aid to the Trojans be in
such case as these, when they do battle with the armoured Argives,
as daring and as unfortunate, as now Aphrodite
came companion in arms [*epikouros*] to Ares, and faced my fury. (*Il.* 1.428–431)

The defenders of Troy are thus compared to Aphrodite who came to the defence of Ares against Athene; the mortal *epikouroi* do so in exchange for rich gifts, while Aphrodite does it to protect her lover (again, there is no other reward in sight other than what the defender might give to his *epikouros*). The meaning of *epikouros* shall be discussed further in our analysis of Archilochos in the next chapter.

Many commentators claim that Homeric warfare consisted essentially of disorganised skirmishing, with individual champions as the poet's focal points. However, such a scheme is applicable only to brawls; it is clear that the fighting described in the *Iliad* is not a free-for-all. Instead, the Homeric *stratos* or army—like any other army at any other point in history, as far as I know—is composed of distinct bodies of men, military units, who work together to achieve a common goal (*viz.* defeating the enemy). The importance of working together is stressed every so often in the *Iliad* (*e.g.*, *Il.* 5.565–572 and 13.234–237). Homer even suggests that the Achaians are better at co-operating than the Trojans and their allies (*Il.* 17.360–365); perhaps co-operation among the latter is made more difficult by the many different languages that they speak (*Il.* 2.804).⁷⁰⁶ This might be regarded as an early example of the dichotomy between 'Greeks' and 'Asiatics' that would arise particularly after the Persian Wars (*cf.* *Hdt.* 9.62).⁷⁰⁷

In the *Iliad*, military units consist of a leader (often a named hero, *e.g.* Achilleus or Hektor) and his followers (collectively referred to as *hetairoi*). The leaders use chariots as battlefield-taxis, while their followers included spearmen (*aichmētes*), as well as some archers (*toxotes*), and possibly other horsemen (*hippeis*). The men do not manoeuvre in formation; any formations that are adopted arise spontaneously and are always used defensively, *i.e.* statically, rather than offensively (see below). However, in a few instances the men do march toward the enemy in 'waves', *i.e.* more or

706 For more on the differences between Achaians and Trojans, see Mackie 1996.

707 Konstan 2007, 178–179.

less in ranks (e.g., *Il.* 13.795–801). One passage in particular offers a good description:

As when along the thundering beach the surf of the sea strikes
beat upon beat as the west wind drives it onward; far out
cresting first on the open water, it drives thereafter
to smash roaring along the dry land, and against the rock jut
bending breaks itself into crests spewing backsalt wash;
so thronged beat upon beat the Danaans' close battalions [*phalagges*]
steadily into battle, with each of the lords commanding
his own men; and these went silently, you would not think
all these people with voices kept in their chests were marching;
silently, in fear of their commanders; and upon all
glittered as they marched the shining armour they carried. (*Il.* 4.422–432)

I shall use the term 'warband' as a convenient shorthand for the Homeric unformed unit just described, *i.e.* a group composed of a leader and his followers.⁷⁰⁸ Homer himself sometimes uses the word *lochos* to refer to a body of men, a 'unit' (e.g., *Od.* 20.49). This word is also used to denote a small group of men hiding in ambush (e.g., *Il.* 6.187–190; the wooden horse is a 'hollow *lochos*' or 'ambush', *Od.* 4.277).

How large are these warbands? It seems likely that each warship, crewed by about fifty men, would form a single warband on land, with their captain as leader. A good example are the descriptions of Odysseus' wanderings, where his men look up to him and worry about their leader's safety (e.g., *Od.* 10.261–269 and 419–421). When on Kirke's island, Odysseus divides the men in two equal parts, appointing Eurylochos as commander of one section and himself of the other (*Od.* 10.203–205). Ship crews, especially groups of fifty men, may have been the basis for division of the troops. For example, when Achaian sentries are posted to keep watch on the Trojans, each of them is given command of one hundred troops (*Il.* 9.85–88), and Achilles divides his Myrmidons into five sections, each consisting of the crews of ten ships or five hundred men (*Il.* 16.168–199).

f. Agents and attendants in the Achaian army

Any army requires agents of some kind with specialised skills. The epic army has several, namely seers (*manteis*), healers (*iatroi*), heralds (*kērukēs*), and scouts (*episkopoi*, *kataskopoi*; also just *skopoi*),⁷⁰⁹ whose duties are also akin to those of spies. Kalchas is the chief *mantis* on the Achaian side, although Agamemnon claims that he is notoriously dour in his outlook (*Il.* 1.106–108). Herald's perform a number of important functions: they apparently determine when men ought to stop fighting (e.g., *Il.* 7.273–282), they call the men to assembly following an order of the *basileis* (e.g., *Il.* 9.9–12), they carry messages, even in the thick of battle (e.g., *Il.* 12.342–363), and serve as town-criers (*Il.* 11.684–685); they also serve as attendants (e.g., *Il.* 24.148–151; see also below). Like the heads of wealthy households,

708 Van Wees 1986, 289 (*etc.*), uses simply 'band'.

709 On the lack of differentiation in terms for 'spy', 'scout' in Homer, see Russell 1999, 11 n. 3 and 103 n. 1.

heralds wield sceptres to indicate their right to arbitration, both in battle and at the assembly. Neither seers nor heralds appear to take part in any of the fighting around Troy.

By contrast, there are no 'full-time' healers or spies in either the Trojan or the Achaian armies.⁷¹⁰ Among the latter, the sons of Asklepios, Podaleirios and Machaon, are the best healers in the army, but they also take part in the general fighting. At some point, Machaon is even wounded by Paris (*Il.* 11.506–507). Idomeneus then tells Nestor to ride out and save Machaon, as 'A healer (*iatros*) is a man worth many men in his knowledge of cutting out arrows and putting kindly medicines on wounds' (*Il.* 11.514–515). Healers, then, are mostly men skilled in performing what we call battlefield triage, the treatment of wounds.⁷¹¹ Other warriors are also skilled at healing wounds, such as Achilles, who was trained by the Kentaur Cheiron (*Il.* 11.827–831).

Spies are simply volunteers from among the fighters themselves. The tenth book of the *Iliad* is again illustrative. The Achaians want to know what the Trojans are up to, but to spy on them would require special courage. Nestor asks the question to the assembled *basileis*: 'O my friends, is there no man who, trusting in the daring of his own heart, would go among the high-hearted Trojans?' (*Il.* 10.204–205). The object of the expedition is to either capture a lone enemy warrior or to overhear the plans that the Trojans are forging (*Il.* 10.206–210). If the spy were successful, Nestor continues, then 'huge and heaven-high would rise up his glory (*kleos*) among all people, and an excellent gift (*dosis*) would befall him' (*Il.* 10.212–213). Diomedes volunteers and picks Odysseus to accompany him on the expedition, during which they capture and interrogate the Trojan spy Dolon. The Trojans furthermore keep lookouts on the plain (*Il.* 8.553–865, 9.1), and one Polites took up position on the burial mound of Aisyyetes to keep an eye on the Achaians (*Il.* 2.791–794).

Full-time male servants or attendants are absent in the Achaian army. Instead, heralds and female slaves perform duties that in Classical times would typically be handled by personal attendants. In addition to heralds and female slaves, a leader could also order *hetairoi* to perform certain tasks. Before setting off on their mission to try to appease Achilles, Phoinix and the other representatives sent by Agamemnon wash their hands in water poured by heralds, while *kouroi*, 'young men' (perhaps young *hetairoi*?), fill a mixing-bowl with wine that they then pass from one man to the next (*Il.* 9.173). Herald's lead lambs to the slaughter in a sacrifice to mark an oath; they, like the *kouroi*, sometimes also wash the hands of their superiors and mix wine (*Il.* 3.268–270).

Following the failed embassy to appease Achilles, Patroklos orders his *hetairoi*, 'companions', and *dmōēsi*, 'slave-girls', to make a bed ready for

710 That there were professional healers available outside of the context of the army is borne out by a statement made by Eumaios: 'For who goes visiting elsewhere so as to call in another stranger, unless he is one who works for the people (*dēmiourgos*), either a prophet, or a healer of sickness, or a skilled workman, or inspired singer' (*Od.* 17.382–385).

711 Homeric medicine is not as primitive as often assumed; see Tzavella-Evjen 1983.

Phoinix (*Il.* 9.658–659). Later, Achilles orders two *therapōntes* to take care of Priam's mules, horses, and herald (*Il.* 24.572–581), while female slaves are ordered to wash Hektor's body (*Il.* 24.581–586). Achilles' *hetairoi* and female slaves also make a bed for Priam (*Il.* 24.643–644). The situation in the Achaian camp is similar to that in Troy (*e.g.*, *Il.* 3.421–423), at Ithaka (*Od.* 1.106–112), and other towns, where men rely on heralds, friends (especially *therapōntes*), and female slaves; male slaves are apparently found only in the countryside (*e.g.*, Eumaios and other swineherds, *Od.* 14.1–28).⁷¹² Male prisoners in the Achaian camp are never used as slaves or attendants: they are either sold off or kept for ransom (*e.g.*, *Il.* 11.104–106).

g. Open-field or pitched battles

As suggested in the previous subsection, the Trojan War is not a siege in the proper sense of the words. The Achaians seldom try to storm the walls or take the gates; when they do, the gods usually prevent them from actually capturing the city (*Il.* 21.514–517). Neither do they try to cut off the Trojan lines of supply or communication; for example, the Achaians never try to starve the Trojans out.⁷¹³ Instead, they construct a massive camp on the beach that is essentially a city in itself. When the Achaians and Trojans fight, they do so out in the plain between the camp and Troy itself; the character of the war is rather more like that between two neighbouring towns. The most likely explanation is that the poet was unfamiliar with protected warfare between enemy communities. Why else would the Achaians not have tried to come up with simple siege devices like ladders or battering rams?

Most of the actual fighting in the *Iliad* takes place on a great plain, through which runs the Skamandros river (*Il.* 2.465). When the armies (*stratoi*) assemble, their size is emphasised: for example, the Myrmidons under the command of Patroklos at one point come streaming out of the Achaian camp like wasps from a roadside nest (*Il.* 16.259–261). Bodies usually litter the ground after only a few moments of fighting. The ground quickly runs red with the blood of slain and wounded warriors (*Il.* 8.65). The fighting typically lasts all day, at the end of which each side collects their dead, try to identify the remains, and then cremate the bodies (*Il.* 7.421–432). The burnt remains are then buried somewhere close to the battlefield. At one point, Nestor advises to build a funeral pyre close to the ships and have the bones collected to bring back to Greece upon the conclusion of the Trojan War (*Il.* 7.326–335).⁷¹⁴

Most battles in the *Iliad* that are described in some detail are fairly massive engagements between large groups of people. These battles consist of a multitude of hand-to-hand engagements, where individuals are grouped in small bands, with some men providing cover with missiles (arrows, stones, and thrown spears). Bands and even individual fighters may break off from the fighting to rest, pick up replacement weapons, have their wounds seen to, and so on. While Homer clearly focuses on the

712 See also Van Wees 1992, 49.

713 Cf. the criticism of Agamemnon expressed in *Thouk.* 1.9–11.

714 See also Pritchett 1985-GSaW4, 100–102.

exploits of the heroes, the idea that the success of either the Achaian or Trojan army on the field of battle depended solely on the actions of these individual champions, and not on the masses in general, cannot be maintained.⁷¹⁵ Latacz, in his study of Homeric warfare, claimed that there were three stages to Homeric battles, namely missile (*belea*) combat, single combat between *promachoi* (champions), and finally *mêlée* combat.⁷¹⁶ However, I agree with Van Wees that Homeric battles are not fought in stages; these three different kinds of battle instead occur simultaneously, not sequentially.⁷¹⁷ Furthermore, I would add that relatively short-range combat between spear-wielding warriors is probably the most common kind of fighting in the poem, since archers appear to be an uncommon sight on the battlefield.

Small war-bands, consisting of either major or minor leaders and their followers, are the basic tactical units on the battlefield. These bands are highly mobile, allowing them to, for example, return to camp and pick up a fresh supply of weapons while on the plain the battle rages on (for example, *Il.* 13.247–248 and 13.254–265). There is no fixed structure within the warband; ‘any massing of troops could only be temporary.’⁷¹⁸ Only in some cases, as pointed out earlier, do the men march toward the enemy in ‘waves’. The members of a warband rely on their leader, which makes them somewhat vulnerable; many *hetairoi* scatter when their commander is killed. Sometimes, warbands may adopt a defensive formation of sorts. A remarkable example is the tactic is used to protect Patroklos’ fallen body from the Trojans. A number of Greek fighters gather round the corpse and form a kind of wall (the poet calls it a ‘fence’) with their shields, their spears held out in front of them to deter any would-be assailant (*Il.* 17.354–355). Such tactics make the ‘closed ranks’ of the later ‘hoplite phalanx’ seem like a very natural formation.

Such battles around the corpses of fallen comrades occur frequently in the poem. As Singor puts it:

In the *Iliad*, a large part of the fighting among the *promachoi* is around the corpses of fallen warriors. These fights belong to the ‘typical battle scenes’ of the epic. Both sides’ heroes and their *hetairoi* are frequently drawn into a fight in order either to partake in the despoiling of a slain foe or to help protect a fallen friend.⁷¹⁹

The fighting is gritty, with men seeking victory through whatever means necessary. For example, when Agamemnon kills Hippolochos, he cuts off his arms and sends the body rolling into the mass of fighters, ‘like a log’ (*Il.* 11.145–147). Another Achaian warrior, Peneleos, kills a Trojan by spearing him in the face. He then cuts off the head and lifts it into the air on the spear, causing the Trojans to shake with fear (*Il.* 14.496–507). Following the death of Patroklos, Iris tells Achilles that Hektor wishes to cut off the his friend’s head and fix it to one of the stakes on the walls of Troy (*Il.* 18.175–177).

715 As already pointed out long ago by Calhoun 1934a, 307–308.

716 Latacz 1977, 116–223 *passim*.

717 Van Wees 1988, 2.

718 Van Wees 1994, 4.

719 Singor 1995, 194–195.

Achilleus, consumed with rage, at one point desires to cut Hektor's body to pieces and devour his flesh raw (*Il.* 22.346–348). Finally, when Hektor is dead, Achilleus drags the body back to camp. There, the Achaians quickly flock around the dead Trojan hero. They stab the corpse and make mocking comments: 'See now, Hektor is much softer to handle than he was when he set the ships ablaze with the burning firebrand' (*Il.* 22.373–374).

h. Ambuscades and single combat

While all-out battle between the Achaians and Trojans typically involves thousands of combatants, surprise attacks are undertaken by smaller groups of men. Specifically, ambuscades (*viz.*, attacks from a hidden position) are a common feature in the epic world (*e.g.*, *Il.* 18.520–529; *Od.* 4.842–847). As Pritchett notes, 'the ambush was common, and was regarded as demanding special courage.'⁷²⁰ Surprise attacks were not despised as cowardly, no doubt much to the chagrin of a few modern commentators.⁷²¹ 'Clearly,' as Pritchett puts it, 'there was in Homer no moral taboo against slaying from ambush.'⁷²² Indeed, the city of Troy was eventually captured through the ruse of the wooden horse (*Od.* 4.271–289, 8.492–520).

The rarest kind of engagement in the epic world is single combat between champions, *i.e.* formal engagements that follow after a challenge has been issued. One of these battles is fought by Aias and Hektor in the *Iliad*. After a brief verbal exchange, they come to blows. They first throw their spears at each other, which get stuck in their shields. They yank the spears out and use them in close-range combat, stabbing at each other. Hektor attempts to pierce Aias' shield, but the bronze spearhead is bent back. Aias manages to draw blood with his spear. Hektor then picks up a large rock and slams it into Aias' shield. The Achaian hero in turn picks up a boulder and throws it at his Trojan rival, who buckles beneath its weight. Hektor gets back up, and the two heroes draw their swords. Two heralds—one Achaian, the other Trojan—suddenly appear. They tell the warriors to cease fighting, as day darkens into night. Aias tells the heralds that Hektor must decide whether or not to continue fighting, since he was the one who originally challenged the Achaians to do battle with him. Hektor chooses to honour the tradition and stop the battle. Before leaving, the heroes exchange gifts: Hektor gives Aias a sword and scabbard, receiving a war-belt (*zōstēr*) in return (*Il.* 7.244–312).

Such an exchange of gifts on the battlefield is not without precedent. When Glaukos and Diomedes meet each other, 'in the space between the two armies' (*Il.* 6.120), the latter demands to know who the enemy is. Glaukos finds this a curious question (*Il.* 6.145), and indeed, such an exchange between enemies is anomalous (most men are killed within moments of being introduced by the poet). Nevertheless, Glaukos proceeds to tell Diomedes of his lineage, which allows the poet to recount the story of

720 Pritchett 1974-GSaW2, 178 (citing *Il.* 1.225–228, 4.391–398, 13.275–294, and 24.778–781).

721 See Krentz 2000 for an excellent discussion.

722 Pritchett 1974, 178.

Bellerophon. When he is done, Diomedes rejoices. He plants his spear in the ground and tells Glaukos that their grandfathers were friends. The two then decide to honour these ancient ties and avoid each other on the battlefield from now on. To cement their agreement, they exchange armour; the poet quickly adds that Glaukos temporarily lost his mind as he exchanged his golden armour for Diomedes' bronze (*Il.* 6.234–236).

True single combat between champions, who fight while the other fighters sit back and watch, are very rare. The best example of such an engagement occurs near the beginning of the *Iliad*. The armies of the Greeks and Trojans are gathered on the battlefield when 'Alexandros the godlike leapt from the ranks of the Trojans' to challenge 'the best of the Argives to fight man to man against him in bitter combat' (*Il.* 3.16–20). Menelaos rises to the occasion and the two fight, with the duel determining the outcome of the overall war. After a brief arming scene, both first throw their spears before closing to fight hand-to-hand, slashing at each other with their swords. However, the battle ends inconclusively when Aphrodite whisks Paris to safety (*Il.* 3.356–381).

i. Stripping of the dead

Much of the fighting in the *Iliad* takes place around the corpses of the fallen. During these *Leichenkämpfe*, friends try to drag the body of their fallen comrade back behind their own lines, while the enemy attempts to strip the corpse of its armour and despoil the body.⁷²³ At one point, Hektor and Aineias chase off a number of young Achaian warriors. The poet adds that 'Many fine pieces of armour littered the ground on both sides of the ditch, as the Danaans fled' (*Il.* 17.760–761). Enemy horses and chariots were also appropriated where possible (for example, *Il.* 5.165).

Arms and armour are of course valuable pieces of equipment, but they are also imbued with the aura of the person who previously used them (*e.g.*, *Il.* 23.798–800 and 826–835). After killing Patroklos, Hektor strips the body of its armour. The equipment had previously belonged to Achilles, the greatest of the Achaian warriors. Hektor later dons this armour in the subsequent fighting as the material manifestation of his *timē* and to remind the other men of the *kleos* he gained by killing Patroklos and stealing Achilles' armour (*Il.* 17.122). But there is another aspect to this re-use of armour. Homer mentions that when Hektor puts on the armour, 'Ares the dangerous war god entered him, so that the inward body was packed full of force and fighting strength' (*Il.* 17.210–212). He then calls out to his companions and returned to the fray, 'flaming in the battle gear of great-hearted Peleion' (*Il.* 17.214). By donning the armour of a great warrior, one can be imbued with some of his strength.

j. Raids for plunder

When Telemachos visits Pylos in search of news about his father, aged Nestor begins his account of the Trojan War as follows:

723 Examples include: *Il.* 4.466, 506, 532; 5.164, 435; 6.28, 71; 7.77–80; 11.110; 13 and 15 *passim*; 16.246–247; 22.258–259.

Dear friend, since you remind me of sorrows which in that country
 we endured, we sons of the Achaians valiant forever,
 or all we endured in our ships on the misty face of the water
 cruising after plunder [*lēidos*] wherever Achilles led us,
 or all we endured about the great city of the lord Priam
 fighting; and all who were our best were killed in that place. (*Od.* 3.103–108)

The Achaians never established a line of supply back to Greece. Instead, they had to raid the towns and islands close to Troy in order to obtain their 'plunder', *lēis*. When Achilles boasts of his military prowess, he recounts how he destroyed (*alapazō*)—that is, captured and sacked—no less than twenty-three towns in the vicinity of Troy, twelve by sea and eleven by land, as part of these raids (*Il.* 9.328–329). With the obvious exception of Troy, walled towns appear relatively easy to take by storm, especially by the presumably large numbers of Achaians led by Achilles. A passing reference in the *Iliad* indicates that most towns were destroyed by burning (*Il.* 21.522–523). Elsewhere, a besieged island-town is described. Smoke rises as the town itself is ablaze. During the night, the townsfolk light signal-fires in the hope that men from neighbouring islands would come to their aid (*Il.* 18.207–213).

The booty obtained in these raids included food, slaves, cattle, and other valuable goods, which were not distributed by Achilles, who apparently led these expeditions, but by Agamemnon, who was the commander-in-chief of the Achaian forces and thus nominally in command. Excess goods were exchanged with traders from nearby islands, such as Euneos, son of Iason and a *basileus* of Lemnos (*Il.* 7.467–475). In many cases, raiding and trading probably went hand in hand. However, while *basileis* engage in some trading, they never consider themselves professional traders. All Greek traders in the epic world appear to be *basileis*, who ply the seas as merchants only occasionally. Only Phoenicians are presented as professional traders (e.g., *Il.* 23.744; *Od.* 13.272–286, 14.288–298, 15.415–482). Laodamas, a Phaiakan, insults Odysseus by calling him a trader (*Od.* 8.159–164).⁷²⁴

Raids are also organised outside the context of open war, typically for the express purpose of acquiring goods or treasure. Such raids allowed a man to increase his honour by capturing *gera* ('prizes of honour'), as well as increase his *kleos* by demonstrating his military prowess or excellence (*arētē*) in combat. Raiders are common enough in the epic world to be denoted by a specific word, namely *lēisteres*, literally 'booty-takers'. Frequently during his wanderings, Odysseus is asked by his host whether he is on some specific business or 'roving as pirates do' (e.g., *Od.* 9.252–255; Telemachos at *Od.* 3.71–74). Crafty Odysseus often responds with a lie.

In one of these lying stories, Odysseus claims he is Kastor, son of Hylakos of Krete, who frequently went raiding. Kastor mounted nine successful raids, gained much wealth in this manner, and made sure to reward his friends for their aid on these expeditions. This, Odysseus adds,

724 Further details can be found in Van Wees 1992, 238–248; on aristocratic activities overseas in general, see Crie laard 1996.

made him 'feared and respected' (*deinos t' aidaios*) among the Kretans (*Od.* 14.234; cf. 8.22). After the Trojan War, Kastor intended to raid Egypt. He arranged nine ships and then organised a six-day feast, apparently to round up some willing crewmen to accompany him on his expedition. When they finally get to Egypt, Kastor told his men to wait by the ships as he explored the country; however, they ignored his orders and started raiding anyway, slaying men and carrying off women and children. Soon, defenders came pouring out of the city. Many of the raiders were killed or enslaved, and Kastor himself surrendered to the Egyptian pharaoh (*Od.* 14.248–291). On Ithaka, Odysseus largely repeats this story of a failed raid on Egypt to Antinoös, with a few minor alterations (*Od.* 17.419–444).

Among the Phaiakans, Odysseus tells the truth of how he came to wandering the sea. Shortly after the conclusion of the Trojan War, he and his followers sailed to Ismaros and sacked the city of the Kikonians, killing their people and seizing the women and possessions. Odysseus then urged his men to take their booty and escape, but they chose to linger instead. The surviving Kikonians rallied, summoned their neighbours (who were 'skilled in fighting men with horses'), and then attacked in the early morning. Typical of fighting in the Homeric world, the battle lasted all day; it was also fought close to Odysseus' ships. For each ship, six of Odysseus' men were killed, but at last they managed to escape (*Od.* 9.39–61).

k. Distribution of booty

It is a characteristic feature of warfare in the epic world that all collected booty is brought to the leader of a raid or war and then distributed by him among his companions and subordinate leaders.⁷²⁵ For example, after Nestor had led a group of young men in a retaliatory raid against the Epeians, the booty was handed over to Neleus, who took his share and then redistributed the remainder among his people (*Il.* 11.684–688). Similarly, when Achilles leads the Achaians on raids against Lyrnessos, Asian Thebes, and other places, the booty is brought to Agamemnon, who takes what he likes and then distributes the remainder among the other Achaian leaders.

The initial quarrel in the *Iliad* between Agamemnon and Achilles demonstrates that the rewards are not always distributed to everyone's liking. Achilles complains that Agamemnon takes more than his fair share, since he is obviously not as skilled in combat as Achilles. This centralised distribution of booty also explains why some men strip the armour of fallen enemy warriors without having actually killed those men themselves: it is the leaders who will eventually decide which man receives which portion of the booty. The only exception to this rule is the weapons and armour that *leaders* strip from enemy corpses and keep for themselves: Idomeneus does this (*Il.* 13.260–265), as does Hektor after stripping the armour of Achilles from Patroklos' lifeless body (*Il.* 17.188–197).

725 Ready 2007, 4–13 (with references).

l. Prisoners of war

Among the booty collected by the victors are prisoners. Some of these, particularly women like Briseis and Chryseis, are enslaved. Others are sold off to passing traders in exchange for other goods. A few of the wealthy captives are held for ransom. Ransoming captives appears to be an important means of acquiring wealth in the epic world, although the Achaians are often ruthless and take no prisoners. When the Trojan warrior Adrestos is at Menelaos' mercy, he begs the Spartan ruler to help him 'and take appropriate ransom', adding that his father is rich and has a considerable amount of treasure in his home (*Il.* 6.46–47). Menelaos prepares to have Adrestos taken back to the Achaian camp, when Agamemnon passes by and rebukes his brother for not killing the Trojan outright (*Il.* 6.55–60). When on a night expedition, Diomedes and Odysseus run into a Trojan spy called Dolon, who also asks to be taken captive and held for ransom. However, Diomedes ruthlessly beheads him (*Il.* 10.378–457). Nevertheless, there are other references to men being held for ransom; prisoners of war in general are considered 'prizes of honour' (*Il.* 2.237). Some Trojan prisoners were sacrificed by Achilleus at Patroklos' pyre (*Il.* 23.20–23). Even the dead may sometimes be held for ransom; Priam, after all, has to buy back Hektor's lifeless body from Achilleus (*Il.* 24.501–502, 555–556, 594).

Some men who surrender are apparently not held at ransom; they might not even end up as prisoners in the usual sense of the word. In the false story told by Odysseus of a failed raid in Egypt, he says that when the battle went awry he dropped his armour and weapons to the ground, went to the Egyptian ruler in his chariot, clasped and kissed his knees. The pharaoh then took pity on him and protected Odysseus, who then spent seven years in Egypt, collecting much wealth in the meantime, until a Phoenician came along and enticed Odysseus to travel with him to Libya, intent on selling the Achaian there as a slave (*Od.* 14.276–297). Clearly, surrendering was a gamble in the epic world: one might be taken prisoner and held for ransom, killed outright, be enslaved, or indeed be treated like a guest and apparently subject to normal laws of hospitality, which included the collecting of gifts.

m. Death of the warrior

At the end of a day of battle, each side collects their dead, try to identify the remains, and then cremate the bodies (*Il.* 7.421–432). The burnt remains of the Achaian dead are buried somewhere close to the battlefield. At one point, Nestor gives the advice to build a funeral pyre close to the ships and have the bones collected to bring back to Greece upon the conclusion of the Trojan War (*Il.* 7.326–335).⁷²⁶ Funeral games are organised to honour the most esteemed of the fallen warriors, such as Patroklos and Hektor; these funeral games also provide an arena in which those who honour the dead may compete to attain *kleos* of their own.

Death is an unavoidable as well as lamentable part of life, and presented

726 See also Pritchett 1985, 100–102.

as such in the Homeric epics. It seems likely that many of the fighters on the battlefield were relatively young men; older men were sometimes exempt from fighting, like Nestor and Priamos. Important in this regard is Priamos' lament about his advanced age. In this brief passage, he idolises youth and the brave death of a young warrior, while deploring the death of an older man:

[...] For a young man all is decorous
when he is cut down in battle and torn with the sharp bronze, and lies there
dead, and though dead still all that shows about him is beautiful;
but when an old man is dead and down, and the dogs mutilate
the grey head and the grey beard and the parts that are secret,
this, for all sad mortality, is the sight most pitiful. (*Il.* 22.71–76)

When Hektor is killed by Achilleus towards the end of the *Iliad*, Achilleus ties the body behind his chariot and drags it back to the Achaian camp. There, the Greeks gather round to stab and poke the body in order to despoil it, mocking the fallen hero (*Il.* 22.373–374). Achilleus in his anger even drags the body around Troy behind his chariot (*Il.* 22.395 and further). The gods, however, intervene and preserve Hektor's youthful beauty, so that his appearance remains unspoiled. The theme of young men slain in valiant combat is one that will resurface in our examination of the lyric poets in the next chapter.

The legacy passed on to the living was considered more important than the prospect of a joyful afterlife. In other words, Achilleus' fame or *kleos* among the people left behind was considered more important than how he would continue his existence in Hades' realm. This notion served as a stimulus to excel in life, so that one would be remembered in rumours, legends, songs, and burial mounds (*e.g.*, *Il.* 7.89–90; *Od.* 8.72–82). In the words of Jean-Pierre Vernant:

When the hero gives up a long life in favour of an early death, whatever he loses in honours paid to his living person he more than regains a hundredfold with the glory that will suffuse his memory for all time to come.⁷²⁷

However, dying of old age was apparently the norm. In one passage (*Il.* 6.145–149), Homer compares the death of men to the shedding of leaves in autumn, with the tree thriving anew in spring. As C. Sourvinou-Inwood put it, the poet here 'offers a vivid articulation of the model of the familiar death'. The simile demonstrates 'a striking acceptance of the discontinuity of the individual set against the continuity of the species which gives it a meaning, and of individual deaths as episodes in the self-renewing life-cycle of nature, the community and the family.' In short, 'Acceptance of, and respect for, the cosmic order is deeply rooted in Greek mentality of all periods.'⁷²⁸

727 Vernant 2001, 320.

728 Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, 34.

6. Conclusions

The Homeric poems provide a consistent and detailed picture of the epic world, in which the *basileis* take centre stage. The *basileis*, or more specifically, the *leaders* among the elite, claim to be decisive in battle. Other fighters supposedly count for nothing in either battle or speech. As symbols of their military (and hence political) might, the *basileis* are armed with spears and swords even in times of peace. While a spear is normally placed in a spear-rack when visiting a friend, the sword never leaves a man's side.

Most of the fighting men in the epic world wear bronze body-armor, bronze helmet, greaves, and a shield; they are armed with two spears and a sword. The sword is invariably well-made and expensive; one imagines that only the well-to-do were equipped with such a weapon. Spears, on the other hand, are literally throwaway weapons. The typical fighter in the *Iliad* is therefore called *aichmētēs*, 'spearman'; the wealthiest of these (*i.e.*, the heroes of the story) use a chariot as a mode of conveyance on, to, and from the battlefield. Archers appear to be fairly rare: they are all experts and rank among the *basileis*, such as Pandaros and Paris. Exceptional is the Lokrian contingent, essentially a unit of archers who also double as slingers. Archers operate on the battlefield as modern-day snipers, picking specific targets; again, only the Lokrian contingent is anomalous for its use of volley-fire.

An army is raised through ties of blood, friendship, and dependency. It is unclear whether all men had to supply their own equipment. Certainly, the heroes were no doubt wealthy enough to provide arms and armor to their followers if need be. Odysseus' hall, for example, is lined with weapons, helmets, and shields that could be used in case of an attack. Ships were probably owned by the wealthiest of men, but whether these owned maybe one or two, or a fleet, is unclear. Political and military power appears to be concentrated in the major towns, with small villages being virtually defenceless.

The Achaian and Trojan forces assembled on the plains of Troy each have a commander-in-chief. The armies (*stratoi*) themselves are divided into regional contingents. The allies of the Trojans are called *epikouroi*, which I suggested was a term applied mostly to people who come to aid in one's defence and have to be repaid for their services by granting them gifts (for unlike the enemy, they have no cities to plunder when the war is won). The contingents themselves are broken up into smaller war-bands, each consisting of a leader and his *hetairoi*, 'companions'. These war-bands are bodies of men who do not normally fight in any kind of formation; horsemen, archers, and spearmen typically mingle freely, with spearmen apparently predominant among them. Groups of men are called *phalanges*, *stiches*, or *lochoi*.

The war against Troy appears anomalous when compared to more typical battles (*ptolemoi*, *machai*) in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The Trojan War is not a siege in the strictest sense of the word. The Achaians build a monumental camp, essentially another town, in close proximity to Troy, and the two sides regularly engage each other on the plain between each other's base of operations. Only seldom do the Achaians try to storm the

wall or capture the gates. Siege techniques are also primitive. Men either try to climb enemy walls, topple them using stakes, or smash the gates using boulders. Siege ladders are never used, although they were no doubt widely employed. Battering rams are also unknown. The most typical kind of warfare familiar to Homer are overseas raids, in which attacks are usually over quickly. Raids are hit-and-run attacks against settlements where the raiders try to avoid being drawn in a pitched battle against any defenders who might come to the victims' aids.

Only when the raiders outnumber their victims, as during the raids led by Achilles during the Trojan War, do the attackers regularly not only raid but sack (*i.e.*, capture, loot, and destroy) enemy cities. The purpose of all raids is to acquire booty, which is brought before the highest authority available, usually the leader of the raid, except during the Trojan War, as the commander-in-chief of the Achaian forces is Agamemnon rather than Achilles. The Trojan War's main cause was breach of *xeinia*, hospitality. However, some raids were also retaliatory in character. A few of these involved neighbouring communities, which explains why some eventually devolved into all-out pitched battles.