



Kings in Combat: Battles and Heroes in the Iliad

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KINGS IN COMBAT: BATTLES AND HEROES IN THE *ILIAD*

I. INTRODUCTION

What decides the outcome of a Homeric battle? This may sound like one of those arcane problems only a devoted Homer-specialist would care to raise, but in fact the question strikes at the root of major issues in archaic Greek history.

The orthodox answer is that Homeric battles were decided by single combats between champions, with the rest of the warriors only marginally influencing the fighting. It is added that these champions were aristocrats, 'knights'. On this interpretation many have argued that the political dominance of archaic Greek aristocrats was largely based on their military dominance, and that their power was seriously impaired when, in the seventh century B.C., military prominence shifted to the mass, the 'commoners'; this change in the balance of power contributed crucially to the rise of the *polis* and the emergence of tyrannies. In outline the theory derives from Aristotle (*Pol.* 1297b) and is firmly entrenched in modern works.¹

But, long ago, another answer was formulated: that Homeric battles were decided by the efforts of the mass of the armies. This was argued by Franz Albracht in 1886 and, independently, by Andrew Lang in 1910. Though Albracht's view found its way into the *Realenzyklopedie* (1921) and the *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* (1928), neither his nor Lang's interpretation became widely accepted.²

More recently, the unorthodox answer has been gaining ground. First, G. S. Kirk voiced his doubts about the consensus: 'I am inclined to think that [the champions'] tremendous effect on the course of fighting as a whole is a poetical device rather than a real and common element of... tactics.' Then, in 1977, Joachim Latacz published the most detailed analysis of Homeric warfare to date. This reaffirmed Albracht's view, and persuaded most reviewers to agree enthusiastically that the masses must have been decisive. Finally, Lang's version of the argument was revived in 1985, when W. Kendrick Pritchett gave it his approval, and concluded: 'The essential and final decisions in the *Iliad* hinge on battles of masses'. It follows that 'there is no literary evidence for a view... that there was a change of tactics in the early seventh century... and mass fighting cannot be invoked as constituting a change in social relationships.'³ The link between changing tactics and changing power relations is severed and *polis* and tyrant are left unexplained.

¹ E.g.: J. Boardman *et al.* (edd.), *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 29–30; Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World*³ (Oxford, 1983), pp. 210–11; Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece* (London, 1980), p. 54; J. B. Bury and R. Meiggs, *A History of Greece*⁴ (London, 1975), pp. 94–5. A modified version in: J. Boardman and N. G. L. Hammond (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*², vol. III, 3 (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 327, 340–1.

² F. Albracht, *Kampf und Kampfschilderung bei Homer*, Part I (Naumburg, 1886), pp. 27–40; A. Lang, *The World of Homer* (London, 1910), pp. 54–9; E. and F. Lammert, *RE* II.A.1, s.v. *Schlachtordnung* (1921), col. 444; J. Kromayer and G. Veith, *Heerwesen und Kriegführung der Griechen und Römer* (Munich, 1928), p. 26. In n. 2, Kromayer expresses his scorn for the 'vielfach verbreiteten' orthodox view, as something no *Homerkenner* would take seriously!

³ G. S. Kirk, 'War and the Warrior in the Homeric Poems'. In: J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *Problèmes de la guerre* (Paris, 1968), p. 111; J. Latacz, *Kampfsparänese, Kampfdarstellung und Kampfwirklichkeit in der Ilias, bei Kallinos und Tyrtaios* (Munich, 1977), esp. p. 225 [reviews: M. M. Willcock, *LCM* 2 (1977), 241–2; L. Bodson, *AC* 47 (1978), 602–3; M. L. West, *CR* 29

How can scholars disagree so radically on what decided the outcome of Homeric battles? One simple reason is that there is no agreement on how these battles were fought. A second reason is that the epic poet himself held problematic views on the subject. In what follows I shall attempt, first, to reconstruct the manner of fighting and the course of battle in the *Iliad*, then to look into the matter of ‘decisiveness’; finally, I shall put forward some suggestions on the relevance of the question for the interpretation of Greek history.

II. AN INTERPRETATION OF HOMERIC BATTLES

2.1. *The three components of combat*

Let us begin with the few things generally agreed upon. Through most of the *Iliad*, the poet recounts the deeds of individual warriors, collectively called ‘forward fighters’ (πρόμαχοι) or ‘the foremost’ (πρώτοι). In the singular they are referred to as πρόμος. As these terms indicate, they fight ahead of others, who are spoken of as the ‘multitude’ (πλήθος) and the ‘mass of companions’ (ἔθνος εταίρων).

Occasionally, instead of man-to-man encounters, the poet offers a sweeping view of the battlefield. Such synoptic glances or *Komplexiv*-depictions, as they have been called, show us an anonymous multitude in action. Some passages describe hand-to-hand fighting. The men are said to be ‘striking with their spears and swords’ (e.g. 15.278), and to move up close to the enemy. The noise, the dust and the density of the crowd are emphasised. Others picture missile exchanges: ‘Many sharp spears hit... and feathered arrows, flying from bow-strings, and many large rocks struck the shields of the fighters’ (16.772–5).

From this evidence, scholars trying to understand Homeric battles have, without exception, inferred that the *Iliad* describes three main components of fighting. They are: (1) single combats fought by πρόμαχοι, (2) massed hand-to-hand combat, and (3) massed missile combat.

The differences between these components are thought to be the following. Firstly, and most obviously, massed fighting involves many more men than single combats do. Secondly, in massed fighting the combatants on each side find themselves much closer together than πρόμαχοι do – indeed, the men taking part in massed hand-to-hand fighting are supposed to be organised in a close formation of lines and columns. Thirdly, whereas πρόμαχοι are free to use any kind of weapon, in massed combat men must of necessity fight with *either* missiles *or* handweapons. These distinctions are unanimously accepted and are crucial to the rest of the argument.

From this point on, opinions begin to diverge, because it is far from clear how the pieces of the jigsaw fit together. For example, the first battle opens with what sounds like a massed man-to-man clash: ‘When moving towards one another, they reached the same ground [χώρον ἕνα], shields met, spears and the might of bronze-cuirassed men met, and embossed shields clashed together. A great noise arose,’ etc. (4.446–51). The third battle, however, seems to open with a prolonged missile fight: ‘All morning... missiles from both sides hit their mark, and men fell’ (11.84–5). And the second battle begins with both. The ‘man-to-man clash’ and ‘missile’ battle

(1979), 135–6; W. Kierdorf, *HZ* 229 (1979), 396–7; J. A. F. Delgado, *Emerita* 48 (1980), 152–4; F. M. Combellack, *CPh* 77 (1982), 62–5; and R. Leimbach, *Gnomon* 52 (1980), 418–25, the only one to disagree; W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War*, Part IV (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 7–33 [quotes: 30 and 44; curiously, Pritchett appears to be supporting two different views (see nn. 6 and 7)]. Further support for this interpretation comes from I. M. Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 171–210.

descriptions are repeated word for word and seamlessly linked.⁴ Again, shortly after the Trojans are described as closing, 'striking with spears', they appear to be far distant and 'many spears cast by strong arms... landed in the earth in between, before they could reach white flesh'.⁵ Changes from massed to single combat and vice-versa are equally abrupt and unaccounted for.

One approach to this problem is that of Finley and others, who hold that one cannot reasonably *expect* the pieces to fit, because the poet did not have a clear picture of battle in mind, to begin with. The poet's concern was to show the prowess of individual warriors and for that purpose it hardly mattered to him exactly how they killed their opponents, let alone how their deeds were supposed to fit in with various kinds of mass action going on 'in the background'.⁶

The other approach is to assume that the poet did have a certain 'vision' of the battles he describes, and that 'it is wholly possible, if one is interested, to understand exactly what is being described'.⁷ Unfortunately, among those who have set about reconstructing such a coherent vision, there is considerable disagreement, particularly on the relation between 'single' and 'mass hand-to-hand' combat.

A first view, which may be regarded as the orthodox one, maintains that the poet envisages battles fought by means of single combats. While there are occasional traces of massed hand-to-hand fighting, these do not substantially alter the picture.⁸ A second view, that of Kirk, says that, on the contrary, the poet envisages massed clashes, but simply ignores the general picture when he deals with individual warriors. For poetic reasons he presents their deeds *as if* they were single combats.⁹ Both interpretations admit, in effect, that the *Iliad's* accounts of fighting are inconsistent; each can claim to discern a coherent conception of battle on the part of the poet only by dismissing as irrelevant a significant part of the evidence – without sufficient reason, I feel.

A third view, advanced by Lang, argues that the poet envisages a battle in two phases: first the massed formations clash, then, gradually, they are broken up, and single combats take place.¹⁰ A fourth and final view, elaborately argued by Albracht, Latacz and others, holds that things happen the other way round; first single combats are fought by men stepping out from the front rank, then there is an organised advance of the entire formation, resulting in a massed fight.¹¹ These last two

⁴ 8.60–5 and 66–7.

⁵ 11.564–5 with 571–4, 576, 589.

⁶ M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London, 1977), p. 74. See also: Leimbach, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 424; this view seems to be commonly held, but it is not often found in writing. A similar approach is that which interprets the descriptions of fighting as consisting of short, conventional combat scenes built into a larger structure according to literary conventions – thereby excluding the possibility that the poet has a comprehensive 'vision' of battle. See e.g. Martin Mueller, *The Iliad* (London, 1984), pp. 102ff.; Tilman Krischer, *Formale Konventionen der Homerischen Epik* (Munich, 1971), pp. 13–89.

⁷ M. M. Willcock, 'Battle Scenes in the Aeneid', *PCPS* (1983), 87.

⁸ See note 1. Adherents of this view tend just to ignore massed hand-to-hand fighting, but some have explained that it is an 'interpolated' element: G. Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*⁴ (Oxford, 1934), p. 151; T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London, 1958), pp. 214–20.

⁹ Kirk, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 110–14; cf. Pritchett, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 15–21; G. Finsler, *Homer*, 1. Teil: *Der Dichter und Seine Welt*² (Berlin, 1914), pp. 142–3.

¹⁰ Lang, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 54–9; cf. Pritchett, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 14–15, 28–30.

¹¹ Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 10–12, 27–40; Lammert and Lammert, *op. cit.* (n. 2), col. 442–4; Kromayer and Veith, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 23–6; Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), *passim*, esp. pp. 118–19, 140, 225. See also: T. D. Seymour, *Life in the Homeric Age* (New York, 1907), pp. 559–85; P. Couissin, *Les Institutions militaires et navales* (Paris, 1931), pp. 17–19; F. Lammert,

interpretations claim to take into their stride all the evidence on fighting. It seems to me, however, that, although the latter in particular does indeed come close to doing so, neither view is completely satisfactory, because (a) significant inconsistencies *within* the depiction of individual phases remain unaccounted for; (b) there is no explicit evidence for transitions from one phase to another; and (c) the order in which the phases of battle occur is variable and cannot be reduced to a single pattern.¹²

In sum, I find that no-one has fully succeeded in reconstructing the vision of battle that the poet may have had. I think this is due to a false perception of the problem. In what follows, I shall argue that the distinctions made between single and massed, and between missile and man-to-man combat, do not apply to the *Iliad*; that the poet describes, not three kinds of fighting, but one, and only one; and that there is, in consequence, no jigsaw to piece together.

2.2. *The men in front*

Combat between *πρόμαχοι* is described at length and in graphic detail, as the following sequence may serve to illustrate.

The Trojan Helenos deals a fatal sword-blow to a Greek warrior. Menelaos is angered and makes for Helenos, 'shouting threats, shaking his sharp spear'. Helenos shoots an arrow at him, but is wounded by his opponent's spear and retreats to the 'mass of companions'. Menelaos next throws a spear at a certain Peisandros, who is moving towards him, but misses and is himself struck on the shield by the Trojan's spear. He 'jumps at' Peisandros, taking a blow with an axe on his helmet, and strikes lethally with his sword. He then strips the armour of his victim, gives it to his 'companions' and 'himself, going back again, joined the *πρόμαχοι*. There, Harpalion... jumped at him and from close by struck the centre of Menelaos' shield with a spear, but was unable to drive it through. He drew back again to the mass of companions to escape death, looking anxiously around so that no weapon might touch him. As he withdrew, Meriones shot an arrow at him and hit his right buttock.' Harpalion dies in the arms of his *ἑταῖροι* (13.576–655).

The situation is clear: the fighting takes place among the *πρόμαχοι*, while behind them a mass of *ἑταῖροι* are in relative safety. A man picks an adversary and moves as near to him as is necessary to shoot an arrow, cast a spear or stone, or stab with spear or sword. Unless killed in combat, he then falls back upon the mass. The pattern recurs in every battle-scene. Warriors go 'through the *πρόμαχοι*' and 'run' or 'jump' at their opponents before they fight.¹³ All kinds of weapon, including arrows and stones, are used simultaneously. The spear, either thrown as a javelin or thrust as a lance, is by far the most commonly mentioned.¹⁴ Men may come close to their target

RE XIX.2, s.v. *Phalanx* (1938), col. 1626–7; A. Küsters, *Cuneus, Phalanx und Legio* (Würzburg, 1939), pp. 5–9; P. Ducrey, *Guerre et guerriers dans la Grèce antique* (Fribourg, 1985), pp. 42–3, 63.

¹² I shall return to (a) in section 2.3 and to (b) in section 2.4; (c) is illustrated by the comparison of 4.446–51, 8.60–7 and 11.84–5, made in the text above. It is further illustrated by the disagreement on which phase is supposed to come first, and by the fact that Albracht, Lammert, Couissin and Ducrey (as cited in previous note) all allow for 'exceptional' reversals of the presumed order.

¹³ βῆ δὲ διὰ προμάχων: 4.495; 5.562, 566, 681; 17.3, 87, 124, 592; 20.111. θύνε διὰ προμάχων: 5.250; 11.188, 203, 342; 20.412. ἴθυσεν δὲ διὰ προμάχων: 16.582; 17.281. Joining *πρόμαχοι*: 3.31; 5.134; 8.99; 13.642; 15.457. 'Jumping' forward: e.g. 11.256; 13.541; 15.520, 525; 16.319–20, 330 (*ἐπορούειν*); 11.489; 12.404; 13.643; 17.342 (*ἐφάλλομαι*); 12.191; 13.546; 17.293 (*ἐπαίσειν*).

¹⁴ It is not possible to distinguish between 'javelins' and 'lances' in the epic. The difference in use is expressed in verbs for 'striking' (with hand-weapons) and 'hitting' (with missiles). See H. Trümper, *Kriegerische Fachausdrücke im Griechischen Epos* (Basel, 1950), pp. 90ff.

to strike, or to retrieve their spear, or, if they have killed, to try to take spoils, but in each case they will quickly retreat to safer surroundings.¹⁵

This style of fighting presupposes that individual combatants are separated by a considerable distance from one another as well as from the enemy. The extent of the space around them is indicated by the fact that spears overshooting their mark may harmlessly fall to the ground, but sometimes hit an unintended target. Again, although there is supposed to be sufficient time to run up to a fallen warrior and drag away the corpse or some of its armour, defenders are usually at hand soon enough to make taking spoils a highly dangerous enterprise.¹⁶

Thus far, I am in agreement with most scholars on the basic tactics of 'single combat'.¹⁷ I should like to point out, however, that the terms 'single combat' and 'duel' are misnomers, which have presumably been inspired by the formally arranged single combats which open and close the first battle. Certainly, there are occasions on which two warriors approach one another, threatening or challenging, and fight to the death. But these are not typical.¹⁸ Usually, as far as one can tell, the victim is unaware of any immediate threat when he is hit by a spear or arrow. When fighting hand-to-hand, the attacker often strikes when his opponent is turning his back or otherwise unable to defend himself. If his first blow is not fatal, he may abandon the attack. And it is not uncommon for someone who does notice the impending peril to run away, or for one who has by chance survived an attack to ignore it, rather than fight it out.¹⁹ It appears that the bulk of individual deeds in epic battles are hit-and-run assaults, not duels.

For the present argument, a more important feature of *πρόμαχοι*-combat is the impact of army organisation on the course of fighting. While it is generally acknowledged that leaders bring personal 'friends', 'companions' (*ἑταῖροι*) or 'retainers' (*θεράποντες*) with them to war, no-one seems to have recognised that a band of leader and followers constitutes a cohesive unit in battle. While some band-members are found outside the actual fight, among the 'multitude', others are

¹⁵ ἄψ δ' ἑτάρων εἰς ἔθνος ἐχάζετο: 3.32; 11.585; 13.165, 533, 566, 596, 648; 14.408; 16.817. Cf. 11.595; 15.591; 17.114. Retreat to *πλήθος*: 11.354-60; cf. 17.30-1; 20.196-7, 376-8. Retrieving one's spear and running back is mentioned as regular practice (13.506-15), and occurs at 4.527-35; 5.610-23; 11.357-8; 13.567-75; 16.806-15. Wounded men almost invariably retreat at once. When one takes spoils, one obviously has to withdraw to dispose of them.

¹⁶ Spears hitting the ground: 13.502-5; 16.608-15; unintended victims: e.g. 13.183-7, 402-12; 14.459-75, 487-91; 15.520-4; 17.304-11. Despoiling: e.g. 4.463-9, 491-3, 531-5; 5.615-26; 11.246-60, 368-77; 15.573-91; 17.288-302.

¹⁷ E.g. Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 28-34; Seymour, *op. cit.* (n. 11), pp. 584-5; Kromayer, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 24-5; Couissin, *op. cit.* (n. 11), p. 18; Küsters, *op. cit.* (n. 11), pp. 6-9; and, most elaborately as well as nearest to my view, Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 129-78, esp. 140 and 170.

¹⁸ Formal duels: 3.76-461 and 7.54-312. Informal duels: e.g. 5.628-69; 16.419-507; 20.158-329; 21.139-201, 545-605; 22.226-369. Martin Mueller, *op. cit.* (n. 6), does take them as typical (p. 78), in spite of compiling much evidence to the contrary (pp. 79-81). He reconciles the evidence with his reading of it by claiming that the poet describes only 'the decisive and disabling blow' (p. 82), not the full 'duel'. I can see no reason to think that this is so.

¹⁹ Against 28 cases in which the participants are aware of being under attack and try to counter it, I find 17 cases in which the intended victim withdraws (e.g. 5.21-6; 14.488; 15.727-31; 17.574-81; 22.136-46) or ignores the attack (e.g. 13.183-7, 402-12, 502-5; 17.304-11) and 125 cases in which there is no sign of awareness at all (not counting a further 130 cases in which we hear no more than the name[s] or number of victims). Apart from having his back turned (e.g. 13.545-59), the target may be busy plundering a corpse (e.g. 4.467-9), 'dazed' (13.434-44; 16.401-10), wounded (16.818-22), or fighting someone else (16.319-25). Running away after delivering an unsuccessful blow: 13.643-51; 16.806-15; 17.43-50.

engaged in combat, and there is constant interaction between them. Those at the back assist the fighters, by taking care of spoils and prisoners taken, and carrying wounded or dead companions from the field. Those in front sometimes stand side by side. They also feel bound to defend the corpses of fallen friends, and to avenge their deaths.

Take for instance the band led by Aias and Teukros: 'Many good men, *ἑταῖροι*, followed Aias. They took over his shield whenever he was overcome with sweat and exhaustion' (13.709–11). And not only that: 'in their shining armour, they fought hard in front' (13.719–20). Teukros is accompanied by Pandion, who carries his bow for him (12.372). When Teukros is knocked out by a stone, he is immediately shielded from further danger by his brother Aias, and lifted up by two 'trustworthy *ἑταῖροι*', who 'carried him groaning bitterly to the ships' (8.330–4). Later, he is seen avenging the death of another band-member, the *θεράπων* Lykophron, who had been living as a refugee in his and Aias' house (15.430ff.). In other cases, too, we hear of a leader angrily retaliating when he sees a 'dear drinking-companion' (17.577), or one of his countrymen, killed. And when a leader falls, followers 'stand around him, holding long spears in their hands' (4.532–3). It is unusual for warriors to *fail* to give this kind of mutual support, and the poet remarks on such occasions.²⁰

Two other forms of co-operation may be noted. Charioteers provide a place of refuge for chariot-fighters by driving their horses to and fro in their immediate vicinity; and an archer's companions may offer him the shelter of their shields, while he prepares to attack, since he cannot hold a shield and shoot an arrow at the same time.²¹ All in all, co-operation is an important element of battlefield behaviour. Indeed, it is held to increase an army's fighting strength. 'Joint prowess [*συμφερτῆ ἀρετῇ*] comes even from very poor [fighters]' (13.237), and in one episode we hear that 'far fewer [Greeks than Trojans] fell, because [the Greeks] always remembered to protect one another in the crowd' (17.364–5).

From these signs of cohesion within the bands, we must infer that leaders are surrounded by their followers, and that they are accompanied by them, when they move to another part of the field or leave and re-enter battle. In fact, though never stated in so many words, it is constantly implied that they are, as I have tried to show elsewhere.²² To judge from the mobility of the leaders, the poet cannot have been thinking in terms of large numbers of followers, but they may still have amounted to a few dozen.²³ We must take it, then, that a substantial number of followers fight

²⁰ Men defending their brothers: 11.248ff., 428ff.; 14.476–85; 16.319–21, 321–5; 20.419ff. Cousins: 15.422–8, 545–59; brother-in-law: 13.463–9. A fellow-refugee: 16.570ff. Leaders retaliating for the death of companions: 4.491ff.; 5.533ff.; 15.518ff.; 17.344ff., 575ff.; countrymen: 14.476ff. (Boiotians); 16.419ff. (Lykians); 17.348ff. (Paionians). See also: Trojans at large defending a corpse, e.g. 5.618ff.; 13.511ff., 551ff.; 15.583ff. Failure to defend a brother: 5.21; a leader: 13.659; 15.650ff.; 16.290ff. There are many more examples of this sort of interaction, but in these the relation between victim and defender/avenger is not made clear.

²¹ Archers: 4.112–26 and 8.266–72. Charioteers: e.g. 13.384–6; 15.456–7; 17.501–2, 699 and cf. 11.339–42, 354–60.

²² See: H. van Wees, 'Leaders of Men? Military Organisation in the *Iliad*', *CQ* 36 (1986), 288–90. My argument here reinforces a point that Albracht (op. cit. [n. 2], p. 28) and especially Latacz (op. cit. [n. 3], pp. 83–5) have been at pains to make: that the poet's narrative technique is 'selective', i.e. that he *implies* the presence of a large number of fighters, while directly mentioning a few only.

²³ On the supposition that a leader lived together with his followers during a campaign, we might take an epic band to consist of some 50 men (8.562–3), which would coincide with the usual size of a ship's crew. It is suggested that Akhilleus has at least a dozen followers sharing his hut: 'only' two serve him, the rest sit apart (24.473–5). On the relation between these bands and the 'contingent' following the heroes, see Van Wees, op. cit. (n. 22), 296–301.

among the *πρόμαχοι*, though they are barely visible owing to the poet's preoccupation with their leaders.

On a higher level of organisation, too, we find co-operation. Leaders often join forces against an opponent. Antilokhos, for example, seeing Menelaos risk his life, 'went through the *πρόμαχοι*' and 'stood very close by him'. Their adversary, 'although a good fighter did not stand his ground, when he saw two men staying together [*παρ' ἀλλήλοισι μένοντε*]' (5.565–72). The Aiantes are almost always fighting next to one another: 'we face harsh Ares, staying together [*παρ' ἀλλήλοισι μένοντες*]' (17.721). A leader in danger may call upon others for help. He may even retreat and search for support before returning to face his attacker.²⁴ Given the organisation of the army in bands, co-operation between leaders implies that their followers join forces as well, and hence that a comparatively large and dense cluster of *πρόμαχοι* emerges on the battlefield.

This analysis of *πρόμαχοι*-combat (apart from suggesting a mentality rather different from the one commonly ascribed to Homeric warriors, by emphasising the prominence of hit-and-run tactics and of co-operative action) casts some doubt on the validity of the distinction between 'single' and 'massed' combat. The poet imagines that, at any moment in battle, there are, not a mere handful, but many *πρόμαχοι*. Is it not possible, then, that he is referring to these 'foremost fighters', rather than the 'multitude', when he describes a panorama of large numbers of men locked in combat?

2.3. *The evidence for massed combat*

We must look more closely at depictions of an indefinite, but clearly large, number of men, rather than named individuals, in man-to-man combat.

Around [Protesilaos'] ship, Greeks and Trojans fought one another at close range [*αὐτοσχεδόν*]. They did not stand far away [*ἀμφίς μένον*] under attacks of bows and javelins, but they stood near.... They fought with sharp axes and hatchets and big swords and spears. Many swords...fell to the ground...; the black earth ran with blood (15.707–15).

This passage is sometimes adduced as the clearest evidence of the 'multitude' advancing and engaging in massed hand-to-hand combat.²⁵ But, strictly speaking, all it says is that many 'Greeks and Trojans' went forward to fight, rather than hang back and stay passive under a hail of missiles. It then stresses their use of hand-weapons. It does not say that *all* men went forward simultaneously – let alone in strict formation – , nor that those who did *stayed* forward. It does not say that they used hand-weapons *only*.

The passage, therefore, while open to interpretation as a scene of massed hand-to-hand fighting, does not preclude an alternative reading: it could be describing a large number of simultaneously fought combats in *πρόμαχοι*-style. The alternative reading may not seem the most obvious, but it has the merit of solving one of the apparent inconsistencies I referred to earlier: almost immediately after this scene, the poet tells us that the Trojans 'rushed at the Achaeans *even more*' (*μᾶλλον ἐπ'... ὄρουσαν*, 15.726) and, worse, that they drove them back with 'missiles' (*βελέεσσιν*, 727). On the traditional interpretation, this is nonsense. But if one assumes that the pattern of fighting is that of *πρόμαχοι*-combat, it is quite possible for many men to attack at

²⁴ See esp. 13.455–97, where it is made clear that there is a 'mass of men' (*λαῶν ἔθνος*, 495) with the leaders; and further: 5.166ff.; 8.91ff.; 11.311ff., 461ff., 505ff., 575ff.; 12.331ff.; 14.421ff.; 16.490ff.; 17.89ff., 212ff., 483ff.

²⁵ E.g. Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 188; Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 39.

close range and ‘even more’ to do so later. And it is perfectly possible for many men to throw missiles while many others are fighting hand-to-hand.

The same applies to all passages of this type. I have already quoted the lines in which Trojans are ‘striking with their long spears’ and I have pointed out that they are abruptly followed by a few lines in which Trojans are *throwing* their spears and often even fail to reach the enemy (p. 3). In another episode, we hear how the Greeks were assaulting the Trojans ‘striking with their swords...’ (15.278) until Hektor inspired his men, and ‘Trojans charged forward in throngs [προὔπυψαν ἀολλέες]’ (15.279–312). The only weapons mentioned in the (short) course of this attack are spears and arrows – and once again many of them fall short of their target (15.312–19). On the traditional interpretation, the situation in each case is one of massed combat to begin with, and there is no room for a further advance, let alone for enemies to be out of reach of long-range missiles. But again it is possible to reconcile these passages with the idea that a depiction of πρόμαχοι-combat is intended. After all, ‘striking with spears and swords’ is one element of their manner of fighting, and casting spears is another. ‘Charging forward in throngs’ need mean no more than that their hit-and-run attacks come thick and fast. And since this interpretation makes sense of otherwise unintelligible battle scenes, I think it is to be preferred to the traditional one.²⁶

I would conclude that the poet, when he switches from named warriors to ‘men’ at large, does not move from one kind of fight to another, but depicts the same fight, first in close-up, then from a bird’s eye perspective, and that he highlights its most dangerous aspects by laying stress on ‘striking’ and ‘advancing’.

A second type of evidence depicts warriors gathered in dense crowds.

Strong *φάλαγγες* went and stood around the two Aiantes...; shield pressed against shield, helmet against helmet, man against man. The shining *φάλοιοι* of their horsehair-crested helmets touched when they nodded, so closely did they stand together. Spears, shaken by strong hands, overlapped’ (13.126–35, cf. 16.215–17). They were ‘packing themselves together like a wall [πυργηδόν]’ (13.152, cf. 15.618).

Elsewhere we hear that warriors ‘strengthened the *φάλαγγες*’ (11.214–16; 12.414–15; 16.562–3) or that they ‘stood close by [πληγίοι] one another, leaning their shields against their shoulders, raising their spears’ (11.593–4, cf. 13.488).

It has often been said that such passages furnish evidence of mass-fighting in a particularly tightly organised formation – labelled *Synaspiamos* by Latacz. On one view, this well-ordered mass has been permanently present in the background, and now moves into action; on another, the poet suddenly brings it on stage for poetic purposes, without regard for context.²⁷ Neither view is correct. Firstly, it is quite clear

²⁶ There are fifteen further passages of this type. In almost all cases a ‘massed advance’-interpretation is precluded by subsequent references to (a) further ‘advances’, (b) individual mobility, or (c) the use of missiles. One group refers to men ‘jumping’ or ‘rushing’ at the enemy: (1) 4.470–2, followed by 4.473–504, in which (b) and (c) occur; (2) 8.251–65 ~ 266–334 (c); (3) 11.67–73 ~ 84–5 (c); (4) 14.400–1 ~ 421–32 and 440–2 (a), 402ff. (b, c); (5) 15.379–89, 405–18 ~ 420ff. (b, c); (6) 16.764–71 ~ 16.772–82 (c); (7) 15.592–3 ~ no ‘inconsistent’ references. A second group refers to the use of hand-weapons: (8) 16.633–7 ~ 16.638–40 (c); (9) 17.730–1 ~ 18.152, 231–2 (c). A third refers to *φάλαγγες*, *επίχες* or ‘all’ Trojans advancing towards a single Greek leader: (10) 11.343–8 ~ 349ff. (b, c); (11) 11.411–20 ~ 11.459–60 (a), 421–61 (b); (12) 13.330–44 ~ 13.361–423 (b, c); (13) 17.107 ~ 17.233–6, 262–8 (a). Finally, there is a further case of ‘charging in throngs’ – (14) 13.136 ~ 13.145–8 (b), 149–205 (b, c) – and one in which ‘Trojans followed their leaders, some ahead, close together, and other behind them’ – (15) 13.800–1 ~ 13.810, 833–7 (a), 806–7 (b).

²⁷ Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 63ff.; Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 36–8; *versus* Webster, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 214–20 [cf. G. S. Kirk, ‘Objective Dating Criteria in Homer’, *Museum Helveticum* 17

that these dense clusters of warriors *develop* in the course of battle. The ‘strong *φάλαγγες*’ which ‘went and stood around the Aiantes’ consist of men who, exhausted and dispirited, had been taking a break from battle until a god disguised as Kalkhas encouraged them to get back into the fight (13.83–125). The Greek leaders who take a stand close together, ‘raising their spears’, do so in response to a cry for help from a fellow-leader (11.586–94; 13.476–88).²⁸ In short, the dense masses depicted represent the result of developments of the kind outlined in the previous section: men joining forces in the course of *πρόμαχοι*-combat.

Secondly, it must be noted that the men who pack themselves together are still standing at some distance from the bulk of the hostile army, although perhaps nearer to the enemy than they would otherwise be. They are not yet fighting, but draw up *in preparation* for defensive or offensive action.²⁹

For example, Greeks form a ‘wall’ around the Aiantes waiting for Hektor and his men to attack (13.126ff.) and later stand near Idomeneus to defend him against an imminent attack by Aineias (13.476ff.). The Myrmidons draw up closely around their leader while getting ready to join battle (16.211ff.). The fact that they are said to ‘raise’ and ‘shake’ their spears, which strongly suggests that they stand ready to *throw* them,³⁰ confirms that the poet thinks of these solid blocks of warriors as being separated from their enemies by a substantial gap, not locked in hand-to-hand combat.

Scholars have usually taken it for granted that, when men mass themselves together, they do so for the purpose of advancing *en masse* and fighting man-to-man. While a few passages might at first glance appear to confirm this supposition, others clearly contradict it. To take some examples of the latter first, we find that after the Greeks have ‘strengthened the *φάλαγγες*’, Agamemnon ‘rushed in first’, because he wanted to ‘fight far in front [*πολὺ προμάχεσθαι*]’ (11.214–17). When the Greeks have ‘surrounded the ships with a fence of bronze’ (15.566–7) and are keeping together ‘like a wall’ (15.618–22), Antilokhos ‘jumps out from among the *πρόμαχοι*’, throws a spear, is chased away from his victim by a shower of Trojan missiles, and runs back to the *ἔθνος ἐταίρων* (15.568–91). When defenders stay close together around the corpse of Patroklos, they are still expected to ‘fight in front [*προμάχεσθαι*]’ (17.358) and, in fact, they ‘constantly . . . , relentlessly dashed forward [*αἰεὶ . . . ωλεμέες ἐγχερίμπποντο*] with their sharp spears’ (17.412–13).³¹ In short, everything in these scenes suggests that, dense masses or no, the battle is waged *πρόμαχοι*-style.³²

(1960), 194], and ‘orthodox’ scholars in general. For 13.83–135 and 16.199–217, see Van Wees, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 294 n. 51 and 292. It is not clear exactly what ‘strengthening the *φάλαγγες*’ implies, but increased density seems suggested.

²⁸ So, too, H. L. Lorimer, ‘The Hoplite Phalanx’, *ABSA* 42 (1947), 114; and F. Kiechle, *Lakonien und Sparta* (Munich, 1963), p. 268.

²⁹ *Contra* Kromayer, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 25.

³⁰ So Lorimer, *loc. cit.* (n. 28); Albracht argues that this refers to ‘levelling’ spears, ‘zum Stosse, nicht zum Wurfe’ (*op. cit.* [n. 21], p. 38); cf. Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 192.

³¹ It must be noted that here, exceptionally, Patroklos’ defenders are told not to ‘exceed’ others in *προμάχεσθαι* (17.358). I take this to mean that they must not fight *too far* out in front. It might conceivably mean that they must not fight ahead of others *at all*, but this possibility seems to be ruled out by the reference to ‘dashing forward’ *αἰεὶ* and *ωλεμέες* (i.e. there is not a single united advance, but a sustained series of attacks – by individual fighters), and by the fact that one of the protagonists is moving in and out of the fight (17.574, 581; cf. 561–4) and uses a missile (17.574–8).

³² The other relevant passages are: (1) 11.593–4: the Greeks are called upon to stand *πλησίον* by Aias, who is retreating from the enemy; no subsequent fighting is described. (2) 16.211–17: Myrmidons are massed together; two leaders go ‘*ahead* of them all’ because they want to ‘do battle *in front* of the Myrmidons’ (16.218–20); when they rush in, ‘in throngs’, Patroklos is ‘first

There are five passages which may seem to suggest a massed clash. In these, the poet, having described 'strong' or 'dense' *φάλαγγες*, begins his account of the ensuing fight with the phrases 'shields clashed together' (4.448–9; 8.62–3), 'they clashed together' (16.565), 'they went very near [*αὐτοσχεδόν*] with their long spears' (13.496–7), 'they drove [Hektor] off, striking with swords and spears' (13.147–8). Reading this with the picture of the massed ranks still in mind, one is inclined to imagine them all charging at the enemy in a body. However, the poet does not in so many words say that they do. He speaks, not of 'formations', but of numerous individuals who 'go near', 'clash' and 'strike'. I have tried to show above that, in other contexts, there are many similar phrases which do not refer to a massed attack, but highlight one aspect of *πρόμαχοι*-combat. It seems to me that the same argument applies here. As mentioned earlier, the clash of shields introducing the second battle is immediately followed by volleys of missiles being exchanged throughout the morning (pp. 2–3). In the first battle it is abruptly followed by a characteristic sequence of *πρόμαχοι*-action (4.457–70). The protagonists among those who 'clashed together' fighting over Sarpedon's corpse are throwing rocks at one another (16.569–88). Those who stand *πλησίον* and then go *αὐτοσχεδόν* are 'aiming [to throw] at one another through the crowd' (13.498–9; cf. 502, 506, etc.) and apparently *continue* to move *αὐτοσχεδόν* (13.526) and use missiles as well as hand-weapons (e.g. 559–60). The men who use their swords and cause Hektor to withdraw tackle the Trojan attacking next by *throwing* a spear at him (13.156–68) and from this moment the battle is in every respect like one fought by *πρόμαχοι* (169–205).

One could argue that all this is simply nonsense – but there is no need to do so. One could argue that we are to infer a sudden change of tactics, a new phase of battle – but there is nothing to suggest this. I would conclude that this category of evidence for massed combat, too, can and must be read as depicting 'synoptically' the style of fighting practised by *πρόμαχοι*. Even when massing themselves together, the warriors stay at a distance from the bulk of the enemy and fight in their accustomed manner: they run forward, fight, and return to the mass behind them. They have flocked together at a danger spot simply in order to outnumber the enemy; the closeness of their ranks is an inevitable by-product, not a tactical aim in itself.

It remains to investigate the evidence for massed missile fighting.

One passage unambiguously describes it, as it is envisaged by scholars. It is practised by the Lokrians, who stay 'hidden at the back, firing missiles', because 'they did not have plumed helmets of bronze, did not have round shields and ashen spears, but joined the expedition to Troy trusting in bows and slings alone' (13.714–21). We have to imagine them shooting arrows randomly into the enemy ranks, over the heads of the men in front. The poet presents this as an exceptional case. It is introduced to

to *throw* his spear' (16.276, 284). (3) 16.600–2: Trojans spontaneously gather *ἀολλέες* round Glaukos; the ensuing fight involves the use of missiles (16.603–13). (4) 12.86–106: Trojans are organised in five groups, they 'lock shields' and advance against the Greek wall; Greeks 'jump' forward out of the gate (12.145, 191) and throw spears at the enemy (183, 189); those on the wall throw stones (154–61, 287–9, 380) and shoot arrows (388, 400–1) as well as stab at the attackers; the Trojans either throw stones too (287–9, 445–66) or individually run up the wall, fight, and retreat if necessary (387–407), and at one point are said to 'press forward *more*' (414). Even after the Greeks on the wall have 'strengthened the *φάλαγγες*' (415) and in fierce combat (416–36) 'struck [*οὐτάζοντο*]' (427) one another, there are men 'turning their backs', i.e. retreating from the enemy (428). Evidently, the massed advance is not brought up to the foot of the wall and the assault is carried out *πρόμαχοι*-style. On (2) and (4) see also Kiechle, op. cit. (n. 28).

explain the fact that the Lokrian leader, Aias, son of Oileus, has no companions to follow him into the fight, in contrast to other leaders.³³

In spite of this, it is often claimed that the Lokrian style of fighting is common in Homeric battles, on the assumption that most men in the army are equipped like the Lokrians and therefore, like them, fight *en masse* at the back.³⁴ It is admittedly possible that the poet has in mind armies which include a significant number of 'light-armed'. Although the armies at large are emphatically depicted as 'bristling' with shields, helmets and spears, 'bronze-cuirassed' and 'bronze-greaved', two of the heroes do fight briefly using bows, and without armour,³⁵ and arrows, while not often mentioned in scenes of 'single combat', are prominent in the 'synoptic' descriptions.³⁶ From this one could argue that the presence of many light-armed archers is implied. It is also true, of course, that the long range of bows and slings would allow one to stay fairly far from the enemy.

It is wrong, however, to think that men who lack armour necessarily stay 'at the back'. The very first man we find 'moving in front of the crowd, with long strides' (3.22), Paris, is wearing only the hide of a panther for protection. Moreover, he carries two spears and a sword, as well as a bow: apparently his lack of armour would not prevent him from using striking-weapons. For the more cautious, there is the possibility, mentioned above, of taking cover behind another man's shield. Further, it is wrong to think that archers generally confine themselves to long, random shots over the heads of the combatants. Whenever an individual archer is shown in action, he is aiming at a particular opponent and facing him directly. Such light-armed men as there may be in an epic army, then, are supposed to be able to fight among the *πρόμαχοι* one way or another.

It may be that the Lokrians stay in the rear, not because they lack armour as individuals, but because, unlike other contingents, they lack armour as a *group* and cannot find any protection at all.³⁷

However that may be, the important fact is that the Lokrians are an exception. The implication is that the poet does *not* expect his audience to interpret other 'missile'-scenes as representing this style of fighting. Moreover, to read all references to missiles in that way produces the inconsistencies which have already been pointed out. If 'all morning, missiles from both sides hit their mark' refers to a mass missile fight, how could 'shields clash' a moment before? It should be clear by now that there is nothing

³³ 13.701–12.

³⁴ Lammert and Lammert, *op. cit.* [n. 2], col. 436–7, 442; Küsters, *op. cit.* [n. 11], p. 2; Lang, *op. cit.* [n. 2], p. 55 (= Pritchett, *op. cit.* [n. 3], p. 14); Albracht, however, insists on the exceptionality of the Lokrians, *op. cit.* [n. 2], pp. 6, 33.

³⁵ Helmets, shields and spears: 4.281–2; 7.61–2; 13.126–35; 16.211–17. Cuirasses are added at 13.339–42 and 19.359–61. *χαλκεοθώρηκες*: 4.448 = 8.62 (cf. the common *χαλκοχίτωνες*). *χαλκοκνήμιδες*: 7.41 (cf. the common *εὐκνήμιδες*). Light-armed: Teukros (8.266–72, cf. 15.442–83) and Paris (3.17–19, cf. 3.332–3; 6.321–2).

³⁶ Arrows: 3.79–80; 8.513–15; 11.191 = 206; 15.313–19; 16.361, 772–8. The possession of bows is widespread: 2.719–20 (Phthians); 2.773–5 (cf. *Od.* 8.219–20); 2.848 = 10.428 (Paionians). The Phthians and Paionians, though noted for their archery, do not limit themselves to shooting 'from the back', witness their appearances in battle: 13.693–700; 16.290–2; 21.205–11. The importance of archery is confirmed by *Odyssey* 8.215–18. Note that there are armoured archers as well (see: B. J. Hijmans, 'Archers in the *Iliad*'. In: *Festoen* [Festschrift A. N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta] [Groningen, 1976], pp. 343–52).

³⁷ This tribal peculiarity may have been invented to explain why Aias son of Oileus is always joining the men of the other Aias, or else the Lokrians may have been regarded as 'underdeveloped', as the (West) Lokrians were by Thucydides (1.5.3). The (East) Lokrians, however, are already called 'close-fighting' (*ἀγχέμαχοι*) in the Hesiodic *Shield of Herakles*, 25.

in this formula that forces us to think that those who launch missiles do not run back and forth in the manner of *πρόμαχοι*, or that they use missiles only. It is open to us to see this passage and others as a second type of ‘synoptic’ depiction of *πρόμαχοι*-combat, different from the first in its emphasis on missile fighting.³⁸

To sum up, the battles of the *Iliad* are not a jumble of three styles of combat. There is only one kind, the hit-and-run tactics of *πρόμαχοι*, described from two angles: one offering close-ups of individual warriors, and one offering a panorama of battle, sometimes focusing upon the hail of missiles, sometimes upon the hand-to-hand encounters, and sometimes giving the full picture by juxtaposing the two.

2.4. *The men at the back*

As we have seen (2.2), *πρόμαχοι* fight with a ‘multitude’ at their back. If I am right that all the fighting is done by *πρόμαχοι*, and that there is no question of the ‘multitude’ engaging in any kind of massed combat, what *does* this mass of men do?

There is a common belief that the mass and the *πρόμαχοι* constitute two separate, permanent bodies of men. On the one hand, there is the orthodox idea that the *πρόμαχοι* are aristocrats as opposed to the multitude, who are commoners. This view is based on no more than the prominence of ‘noble’ men in the narrative and a casual equation of the numerical and social meanings of ‘mass’. On the other hand, there is the idea, put forward by Albracht, Latacz and others, that the *πρόμαχοι* are those who are the best warriors and stand in the first line of the formation. Those drawn up in the next lines are the mass.³⁹ The only basis for this view is the notion that there is a line-and-column formation to begin with: with this in mind, obviously, one is forced to assume that the number of potential *πρόμαχοι* is somehow restricted, since the original formation would dissolve in no time if *any* man could leave his place to rush at the enemy.⁴⁰ On both views, a man’s membership of either *πρόμαχοι* or ‘multitude’ is fixed for the duration of battle, or even for life. If this were correct, my interpretation of the battle scenes would have to lead to the conclusion that a minority of warriors does all the fighting, the *πλήθους* doing none at all.

Against this, there is abundant evidence that each and every man in the army may join combat, or refrain from it, whenever he pleases. We find that not even the most energetic of warriors is always among the *πρόμαχοι*. Hektor, who ‘never stayed among the multitude of men, but used to run far forward’ (22.458–9), is nevertheless occasionally to be found moving ‘towards the *πλήθους*’ (11.354–60); having ‘interrupted the fight’ (16.721, cf. 723), he does ‘not fight as *πρόμαχος*, but wait[s]

³⁸ Missile-passages: 3.79–80; 17.370–5. All others have already been quoted in the text or among the ‘inconsistent’ passages of notes 26, 31, 32.

³⁹ Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 129–78, esp. 140, 159–60, 170; Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 27–30, 35–9.

⁴⁰ See: Pritchett, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 21–5; Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 45–67; Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 10–12, 24, 34–8. The evidence for a rigid formation consists of the words *φάλαγγες*, *στίχες* – interpreted on etymological grounds as ‘lines’ –, and *πύργος* – thought to be an oblong formation. Elsewhere I have tried to show that these interpretations are incompatible with epic army organisation, and I have advanced alternative etymologies (Van Wees, *op. cit.* [n. 22], 292–5). The present argument will show that the existence of such formations would be incompatible with the epic manner of fighting, too. For Pritchett’s repeated assertion that the *πρόμαχοι* are not the first line of men, but a ‘forward echelon... a company or battalion’ (*op. cit.* [n. 3], pp. 25–6; *idem*, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*, part V [Berkeley, 1985], pp. 18–19 = 26–7), there is no evidence at all.

among the multitude and out of the turmoil' (20.376–7).⁴¹ Aineias, the second best warrior on the Trojan side, is seen 'at the very back of the crowd' (*ὑστατον ὀμίλου*, 13.459). On the Greek side, too, men like Antilokhos and Teukros, among 'the best in the army' (13.117) stay 'in the rear [*ὀπιθεν*]. They were catching their breath at the ships' (13.83–4). Nestor, Idomeneus and Meriones each spend a considerable time back at the ships, talking and even drinking, while the battle rages.⁴² It appears, then, that these men can go wherever they want. That they are most frequently found in front is because they *choose* to be there.

One reaches the same conclusion when considering the warriors who do *not* fight much. These are said to 'stand off' [*ἀφεστάναι*] or '...far away' [...*έκás*], to 'shirk' [*μειθεύειν, καταπτώσσειν*]. They may, for example, be asked: 'Why do you stand off, shirking...? You ought to be taking a stand among the foremost' (4.340–2) or 'Shall we shirk like this, Melanippos?...No. follow me! The Greeks should no longer be fought by standing off' (15.553–7). Throughout the battle scenes there are references to 'shirkers', and many Trojans as well as Greeks are 'standing off' even during the critical fight at the ships.⁴³ Most explicitly, it is said that men may 'shirk the fighting of their own free will' (*έκών*, 13.234), or 'stand off and fight not, doing as they please' (lit.: 'gratifying their *θυμός*', 14.132). Exhaustion, fear, and bearing a grudge against one's leader are all given as reasons for *μεθημοσύνη*, 'an inclination to shirk'.⁴⁴

In keeping with this, much of the leadership that is exercised is concerned with encouraging men who are *not* fighting to engage in combat.

Akhilleus 'told each man: "Do not stand far away from the Trojans now, Akhaians. Come! A man must go forward against another, and he must be eager to fight" (20.353–5). In an earlier battle, 'both Aiantes roamed about everywhere..., giving orders, kindling the spirit of the Akhaians. Whomever they saw shirking the fight completely, they rebuked, one gently, another harshly: "Friends! You who excel [*έξοχος*] among the Greeks, you who are average [*μετρέεις*], you who are rather bad [*χειριότερος*] – all men are certainly not equal in war, after all –, now there is a task at hand for everyone! You yourselves know this, of course. Pay no attention to those who shout [threats] and do not turn back towards the ships, but go forward and encourage one another" (12.265–74).⁴⁵

Albracht suggests that this kind of speech would be addressed to the men 'in the first line' only,⁴⁶ but, evidently, *all* men in the army are encouraged to join combat. Latacz, therefore, claims that such speeches – *Kampffparänesen* – are intended to bring about the transition from single to massed hand-to-hand combat. In other words, they would amount to an order to advance, given to the previously passive 'multitude'.⁴⁷ But the contents of the speeches and particularly the references to

⁴¹ Cf. 11.163–4 and the threats uttered against enemy *πρόμαχοι*: 'go to your *πλήθος*, do not stand up to me' (17.30–2; 20.196–8).

⁴² Nestor: 11.596–804; 14.1–15. Idomeneus and Meriones: 13.208–329. Earlier, Paris had taken time off to sleep with Helene! (3.380–448; 6.313–7.12), Hektor takes care of business in town (6.86–118, 237ff.) and a *θεράπων* of Eurypylos is staying in his hut during battle: 11.843. Let me repeat that leaders are – explicitly, in the case of Idomeneus (13.210–13) – accompanied in their movements by *έταίροι*.

⁴³ 13.737–9; 15.671–5; '*μειθέντες*': e.g. 4.351, 516; 13.97, 229. The contrast is made very clear at 4.231–50, 371–3; 5.252–8, 476–7; 13.260–5; 15.707–15 (quoted above, 2.3), and see several passages quoted below.

⁴⁴ 13.121, with 13.83–98; 13.108–10, 14.49–51; 13.459–60.

⁴⁵ Other examples are: 4.223–421, 516; 6.83; 12.409–12 (quoted below, 3.1); 13.83–125, 206–39; 14.128–32.

⁴⁶ Op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 29–30.

⁴⁷ Op. cit. (n. 3), p. 172. Latacz (ibid., 177, 225) and Albracht (op. cit. [n. 2], p. 39) are forced to assume that the *πρόμαχοι* step back into the first line of the formation before the massed advance takes place. The evidence Latacz adduces consists of phrases such as 'he jumped at the

‘shirking’ make no sense if the men involved have been obediently keeping formation and waiting for their turn. They are clearly addressed to warriors who were supposed to have joined combat already, but have not yet done so.

Hence, the implication of such exhortations is that *everyone* – the point is laboured by the Aiantes – is free both to fight and to refrain from it. Given this state of affairs, there can be no question of men permanently belonging to either the ‘multitude’ or the ‘foremost fighters’. The *πρόμαχοι* and *πλήθους* must be respectively those who happen to be actively fighting, at any given moment, and those who are not.⁴⁸ The *πρόμαχοι* are not an élite force of aristocrats or selected ‘first line’ warriors, nor are the *πλήθους* those of lesser social status or lesser fighting ability. Instead, the composition of both groups is constantly changing, as warriors take turns at fighting.

Thus, the entire army is involved in battle, the major difference between individual warriors being the proportion of time spent fighting to time spent resting. Some warriors may spend much time in combat, while others spend most of it watching, but no-one fights without a break, and hardly anyone, presumably, gets away with not fighting at all. Even Thersites, regarded as the worst man in the army (2.248–9), claims to be able to take prisoners in battle (2.229–31).

Under these conditions, the ratio of active *πρόμαχοι* to passive *πλήθους* inevitably is variable. While the name of the latter shows they are always a majority, there still are significant differences. At one extreme, the fighting is desultory: ‘They fought intermittently, avoiding one another’s missiles, standing far apart’ (17.373–5), i.e. individual men venture near the enemy only rarely, so that there are never more than a few *πρόμαχοι* at a time. At the other extreme, ‘they constantly..., relentlessly dashed forward with their sharp spears, and killed one another’ (17.412–13); ‘sweat constantly and relentlessly streamed down each man’s knees, shins, feet, hands and eyes’ (17.385–7), i.e. men attack without resting, so that there are many *πρόμαχοι* and battle is ‘strong, harsh, full of tears’ (17.543–4).

In sum, any man on a Homeric battlefield may join the ‘foremost fighters’ for as long as he is willing and able actively to engage the enemy. If he so chooses, he may refrain from combat and be part of the ‘multitude’ of men who for the moment keep out of immediate danger. Throughout battle individual combatants are able to move about a good deal, pick their targets and use both long- and short-range weapons. The number of active combatants is in a flux. It increases locally when forces previously scattered along the front draw closer together; and it increases when men begin to spend less time resting at the back and more in actual combat. These developments may also be reversed.⁴⁹ All this is depicted quite consistently, so it would appear that the poet had a clear vision of what battles in heroic times were supposed to be like.⁵⁰

What, then, did he think decided the outcome of such battles?

ετίχες’ (20.353), ‘he went [forward] among the first’ and even ‘he led’, which are too vague to support his assumption. Note also Couissin’s unsupported claim that mass missile combat is brought to an end when the phase of single combat begins (op. cit. [n. 11], p. 18).

⁴⁸ *πλήθους* basically means ‘multitude’, of course, and simply indicates large numbers (as in 11.404–5; 17.221). It is only when used in contrast to *πρόμαχοι* that it acquires the connotation of ‘the men at the back’.

⁴⁹ A reversal of this kind is indicated in 13.737–9, and in references to the ‘scattering’ of battle (e.g. 15.328). Not much attention is given to it in the narrative, presumably because situations of increasingly intense combat make a better story than the reverse.

⁵⁰ I cannot here go into the question of how this consistent ‘heroic’ picture relates to the styles of warfare of Greek history: I will argue later that the present interpretation has consequences

III. RULERS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

3.1. *The decisive factor*

None of the battles in the *Iliad* results in outright victory and defeat. The objectives of battle are respectively the invader's ships and the walls of Troy. Both sides come very near their aim, but neither achieves it. Armies flee, recover, gain the upper hand and flee again, without ultimately decisive results.⁵¹ When one party flees, their pursuers continue to fight in *πρόμαχοι*-manner. Attackers run after the fleeing enemy, but retreat when he turns to defend himself, and they fight with missiles as well as striking-weapons. Moreover, individual warriors interrupt their pursuit to plunder their victims, a habit which obviously slackens the pace of the advance. Leaders may try to keep up the pressure by shouting at their men to continue attacking and not to gather spoils, but, nevertheless, pursuit appears to be rather slow and scattered.⁵²

Hence it is possible for individuals and for clusters of men to turn around and locally resist a further advance. And it is even possible for the entire army to come to a halt and face about, before the enemy is upon them. When this happens, the pursuers who have advanced farthest withdraw a little (5.502–5; 13.145–8), and there may be no fighting at all for a while ('the Greeks retreated, they ceased from slaughter', 6.107). More usually, battle is joined again immediately.

To establish the respective merits of the view that such turning-points are brought about by the deeds of a handful of 'heroes', and of the view that they are the result of 'mass' action, it will be necessary to look in detail at the way the poet deals with them.⁵³

Some breakthroughs are described as the result of the army's efforts as a whole. Once, 'through their own prowess [*εφ' ἄρετῆ*], the Greeks broke the *φάλαγγες*' (11.90–1). On another occasion one of the last few men to hold his ground while the other Greeks flee, exclaims:

ὦ πόποι, even an utter fool can now see that father Zeus himself helps the Trojans! All their missiles hit their mark, whoever cast them, bad man or good. Zeus guides them all alike. But all of ours merely fall harmlessly to the ground (17.626–33).

Clearly, there is a *general* imbalance: all Trojans, 'bad' and 'good', are made to defeat their opponents. Apollo goes so far as to say that he has seen men cheat fate, 'relying on their strength and efforts and bravery and *numbers*' (*πλήθει*, 17.328–30).⁵⁴

On the other hand, in quite a number of cases, the poet specifically gives the death of a single, exceptionally good warrior or otherwise outstanding man as the cause of flight. 'First, Aias... broke a Trojan *φάλαγξ*... by killing a man, who was the best among the Thracians' (6.5–7). 'Then the Greeks were miraculously put to flight by

for Greek history, whether or not the Homeric type of fighting was ever practised. (I should like to mention that a further section, in which I argued that the Homeric use of chariots is consistent in itself and with the picture of battle, has been dropped for lack of space.)

⁵¹ Accounts of flight and recovery: Latacz, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 213–14; Albracht, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 41–52; cf. M. M. Willcocks, *A Companion to the Iliad* (Chicago, 1976), p. 280.

⁵² Descriptions of *πρόμαχοι*-style fighting during flight and pursuit, e.g. 5.37–497; 11.90–165, 544–74; 16.306–418; 17.597–633, 722–61 (cf. 18.148–53). Note that men may still be *called* *πρόμαχοι*, too: 8.99–100. Nestor and Hektor telling men not to stop for the collection of spoils: 6.66–71; 15.343–51.

⁵³ I will leave out of consideration the divine contribution to the course of battle, as belonging to a different plane of causation.

⁵⁴ Other occasions: 8.335–6; 16.352–7 and 364–71; 17.274–6; and, once, the Greeks almost manage to score a success 'beyond the fate set by Zeus, through their own strength and effort' (17.319–22).

Hektor and father Zeus, all of them. He killed only Periphetes, the Mykenaian, ... a fine man in all ἀπειράι' (15.636–42). It is not the case that the role of the mass is now suddenly forgotten. Hektor's killing of Periphetes is, for example, linked to an overall trend of Trojan success, since the remark that 'father Zeus' played his part, too, apparently refers to the verses: 'Zeus constantly raised great courage among [the Trojans]. He put a spell on the spirit of the Greeks and denied them *kudos*, but urged the others on' (15.592–5). There are several instances in which flight is simultaneously attributed to a single killing and to wider developments.⁵⁵

Even when one man's death is, without modification, said to have been the cause of flight, as with Aias' killing of the best Thrakian, it occurs in a context of general fighting: 'Now here, now there, battle swept forward over the plain as they aimed their bronze spears at one another, between the streams of Simoeis and Xanthos' (6.2–4).⁵⁶

Without losing sight of the total picture of events, then, the poet singles out one death for special attention, and attaches decisive importance to it. The same high estimation of a single man's fate leads him to suggest that even the temporary elimination of a prominent warrior may stimulate the enemy to attack more fiercely, and his friends to become afraid.⁵⁷

One finds a similar pattern with regard to the end of flight. In the event of general recovery, the poet does not give much scope to individual heroics. Commonly, the multitude comes to a halt at a 'natural' place. The Greeks stop running when they have reached the trench they have dug, the wall behind it, the sterns of their ships or their living quarters; the Trojans when they have reached the chariots they have left behind, or the gates of Troy, or only when they are safe within the city walls. A leader then goes around 'everywhere' encouraging 'everyone', and battle is resumed.⁵⁸

A local recovery is sometimes credited to a single warrior who turns to face the enemy. The poet attributes a triggering effect to his action. It causes his friends to rally round him and join combat again. 'First Glaukos, leader of Lykians, turned. He killed Bathykles.... The Trojans rejoiced greatly, and went and stood around him in throngs' (16.593–4; 600–1).⁵⁹

⁵⁵ In 5.27–9, the Trojans panic because of the death of a son of a 'fine rich man' while the cause of their flight is described in 5.37 as 'the Greeks forced back the Trojans'. Compare 14.489–507 – son of the richest man in Troy is killed – with 14.510 – 'Poseidon forced the battle', through inspiring the Greeks to greater efforts; 16.588 – *πρόμαχοι* retreat before Patroklos – with 16.592 – 'The Trojans retreated, the Greeks drove them back'. Elsewhere, the cause for flight is not explicitly given, but it is preceded by a reference to a general charge, as well as a depiction of the deeds of a single hero: 11.292–5, with 296–309 (Hektor); 12.442–4, 467–71 with 445–66 (Hektor); 20.353–63 (cf. 394–5; 22.205–7) with 20.381–22.363 (Akhilleus).

⁵⁶ Compare 16.268–77 – Myrmidons 'falling on the Trojans in throngs' – with 16.284–92 – Patroklos makes the Paionians run 'by killing their leader'; 16.633–58 – fierce fighting and divine intervention – with 16.659–60 – Lykians run away because Sarpedon is dead; 21.206–8 – death of Asteropaios makes Paionians run – with the general flight envisaged throughout the book (esp. 21.1–16). At the time of the fear-inspiring deaths of Demokoon (4.497–505), Moullos (11.738–46) and Phorkys (17.312–16) there are numbers of *πρόμαχοι* around their killers (resp. 4.495; 11.744; 17.281).

⁵⁷ 5.95–105 (Diomedes); 11.284–91 (Agamemnon); 11.459–60 (Odysseus); 14.418–41 (Hektor); 15.484–500 (Teukros); and 11.504–9 (Makhaon); 15.458–62 (Hektor).

⁵⁸ Trench: 8.213–52; wall: 12, *passim*; ships: 8.335–47; 15.367–78; huts: 15.655–67; Trojan chariots: 15.3, cf. 270, 279; Skaian gate: 11.170–214; 16.697–714; city: 21.606–11/22.1–6. On two occasions, Hektor's encouragements bring the Trojans to a halt in the middle of the plain: 5.461–97; 6.73–106.

⁵⁹ His victim is the son of the richest man of the Myrmidons (16.595–6); cf. 16.421–2; 17.277–303 (leader of the Pelasgians); 17.333–45. An important recovery in the 'centre' is

On the other hand, it seems that an enemy advance can be halted by the determination of only one or two warriors not to run away. For example, when Aias retreats, the Trojans advance, but 'now and again, he would regain his furious strength, and, turning round once more, he would hold back the *φάλαγγες* of Trojans.... By himself, he fought wildly, standing mid-way between Trojans and Greeks' (11.566–71). However, on closer examination one finds that the heroes performing such feats are not thought of as literally alone, nor as literally holding back the entire enemy host. From the context it is possible to deduce that their resistance is only locally effective, and that they make their stand surrounded by followers. Once again, the poet has the total picture in mind, but chooses to focus on one or two men and present *their* actions as crucial.⁶⁰

Thus, the poet's view turns out to be two-sided. He feels that an army cannot win a battle unless all its men join combat. This is implied in the endless exhortations to the men to join in, and made explicit in Akhilleus' admission that 'it is difficult for me, although I am a strong man, to keep so many men engaged and fight them all' (20.356–7), a sentiment echoed by Sarpedon, who adds gnominically 'the work of more is better' (12.410–12). And it is polemically expressed by Thersites, who suggests that the army should sail home, leaving Agamemnon in Troy 'to enjoy his booty in peace, so that he may find out whether we are of any help to him, or not' (2.236–8).

At the same time, the poet holds that a single outstanding fighter's contribution to battle may rank as highly as that of the entire multitude of warriors. This is not only implied, as we have seen, by his way of describing some of the developments of the battles, but is shown clearly in his view of what a 'champion' may mean to others.

Hektor says: 'I myself excel among the war-loving Trojans with my spear, I, who protect [the Trojan women] from the day of slavery' (16.834–6). The Trojans agree. They nick-name his son 'Astyanax', 'because [Hektor] by himself [*οἶος*] kept safe their gates and walls' (22.506–7; 6.403). In the field, he 'saved his loyal companions' (16.363; cf. 17.149–51). His death, therefore, spells doom for the city (24.728–30); the enemy wonders 'whether they will leave the citadel, now that he has fallen' (22.383–4). In Greece, too, it is 'the best men [*ἀριστῆες*], who keep safe the towns' (9.396), while the best of the Greeks before Troy, not having to defend a city, are held responsible for protecting the army and the ships. Akhilleus bitterly regrets not having been 'a saviour [*φάος*] to Patroklos nor to the other companions, ... although I do not have an equal among the Greeks in war' (18.102–6). Patroklos had warned him: 'how will posterity benefit from you, if you do not protect the Greeks from destruction?' (16.31–2).⁶¹

In the epic conception of battle, then, no man is expendable, but a great warrior is held to be capable of contributing infinitely more than an average man to the outcome of the fight, and hence to the survival of the army and all the community.

brought about by Poseidon, who causes the Aiantes to make a stand, and then tells many others to gather around them (13.43–135).

⁶⁰ The implications are clearest in 11.336–542, on which see Van Wees, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 288–90. In the defence of the ships, while it is suggested that Aias is the only man not to flee (15.675), it becomes clear that many other Greeks are still resisting, too (15.670–3, where the *εταῖροι* are Greeks; 687; 696–715). See also: Aiantes' defence at 17.720–34; 18.150–8; Diomedes and Nestor at 8.99–131. For a discussion, see Seymour, *op. cit.* (n. 11), pp. 564–6.

⁶¹ Cf. Patroklos: 16.39, 95–6; Aias, 'fence of the Greeks' (3.229): 6.6; 12.334; Teukros: 12.334; 16.512; Idomeneus: 13.424–6; Diomedes: 16.75.

I will argue that the poet adopts this view because it forms an essential part of his conception of the legitimate exercise of power and privilege.

3.2. *Leaders and champions*

Most leaders in the *Iliad* are βασιλῆες. The precise status of βασιλεύς, ‘king’, is a matter of contention, but for my purposes it is sufficient to note that it appears to be a rank, not an office, to some extent hereditary and bringing certain privileges with it.⁶²

One of the best-known statements on being a βασιλεύς is a speech by Sarpedon. He imagines one of his countrymen speaking about ‘our βασιλῆες, [who] rule over Lykia and eat fat sheep and drink choice, honey-sweet wine’ (12.317–20), and he asks his fellow-βασιλεύς Glaukos: ‘Why are we two shown the greatest respect in Lykia – with a seat, joints of meat, and more cups – and why do all look up to us as if to gods? And we possess a large estate...’ (12.310–13). He does not wait for an answer, but continues: ‘Because of this we must now stand among the foremost of the Lykians and face hot battle’ (12.315–16). For his part, Glaukos had already been instructed by his father ‘always to be the best and excel above others, in order not to shame the family of your fathers, who were the best men in Ephyre and Lykia’ (6.207–10).

This has suggested to many scholars that the tacit answer to the rhetorical question ‘why do we enjoy privileges?’ is: because we are excellent fighters.⁶³ I daresay that the poet intended to suggest this, too. But we happen to know that both the βασιλεία and the large estate were acquired by Sarpedon and Glaukos’ common grandfather, Bellerophon (6.193–5), who was awarded them for killing the monstrous Khimaira, defeating the Solymi and Amazons, and finally eliminating ‘the best men of Lykia’ who tried to ambush him (6.179–92). His grandsons have *inherited* their estate and honours.

The poet seems to be making a point here: the status and privileges of ‘kings’ may be acquired by birth, he says, but they were originally acquired through warriorhood, and those who subsequently enjoy them ought to justify this by proving themselves great warriors.

A similar point is made with regard to the right to speak. When Diomedes is about to make a proposal to Agamemnon, he first defends his right to be heard, by claiming that his grandfather ‘was outstanding in ἀρετή’ (14.118) and that his father was not only married to a daughter of Adrestos, and a wealthy man, but ‘excelled above all Greeks with his spear... Therefore, if I speak well, you must not hold my speech in contempt, saying that my family is bad [κακός] and without strength [ἀναλκις]’ (14.121–7). His position in the council is apparently based on birth. But, while the poet does not ignore the wealth and connections of the family, he presents the warlike qualities of its successive heads as the crucial ingredient of its status.

He further makes the right to speak conditional upon a man’s own fighting qualities. This is not mentioned in the case of Diomedes, whose excellence is perhaps too obvious to need comment – though even he may have to be reminded that he may be good in debate (4.400), but still must live up to his father’s reputation (4.370–402). But it *is* made emphatically with regard to Thersites. When Thersites speaks in

⁶² For recent discussions see: Robert Drews, *Basileus* (New Haven/London, 1983), pp. 100–15; Pierre Carlier, *La Royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre* (Strasbourg, 1984), pp. 136–230.

⁶³ Notably A. W. H. Adkins, whose theory of why Homeric morality suits Homeric society hinges on this notion (see *Merit and Responsibility* [Oxford, 1960], esp. p. 61). In a more recent work he notes that Sarpedon has, in fact, inherited his privileges, but he does not draw the conclusions I am drawing (‘Values, Goals and Emotions in the *Iliad*’, *CPh* 77 [1982], 293). Latacz’s view is similar to that of Adkins (op. cit. [n. 3], pp. 152–3).

assembly, he is silenced by Odysseus for no other reason than that, ‘although you are a fluent orator, ...there is no-one in the army worse [*χεριώτερος*] than you. Therefore, you shall not speak about the *βασιλῆες*...’ (2.246–50). The ‘multitude’ praises Odysseus for this (2.270–8), although Thersites had been expressing what they all felt (2.221–3). All are agreed, then, that regardless of what a man has to say, or how well he can speak, he has no right to do so unless he is a good warrior, from a family of good warriors.⁶⁴

Another valuable privilege of *βασιλῆες* is the right to a large cut of the spoils of war. Akhilleus mentions that he has destroyed 23 towns,

from each of which I took many fine things of value, and each time I brought them all and gave them to Agamemnon. And each time he, who had stayed behind at the ships, after receiving it handed out small amounts and kept much... He gave due shares [*γέρα*] to the best men and the *βασιλῆες* (9.330–4).

A man may get a share by virtue of being a *βασιλεύς*; and Agamemnon has the right to dispose of booty as he pleases, by virtue of being the most powerful *βασιλεύς*. This emerges in the course of the quarrel over the distribution of booty between Akhilleus and Agamemnon. The former is urged not to contest the latter’s decision, ‘because he certainly does not have an equal share of privilege [*τιμῆ*], a sceptre-bearing king to whom Zeus gave *kudos* [*sc.* Agamemnon]... He is a better man, because he rules more people’ (1.277–81).

Again, we know that Agamemnon has become the most powerful *βασιλεύς* through inheriting his position. This is symbolised by the sceptre handed down to him from his grandfather Pelops, ‘to carry, to rule over many islands and all Argos’ (2.101–8). And again, we find that the poet does not think inheritance is a sufficient justification for privilege. The man who takes the lion’s share of the spoils must also take the lion’s share of the fighting, and Agamemnon is criticised at great length for not doing so. He is ‘a *βασιλεύς* who exploits the people’ (*δημοβόρος*, 1.231, cf. 1.225–32), and cannot expect any Greek to ‘obey [him] willingly, or go on a raid, or fight with strength against men’ (1.150–1, cf. 149–68 and 2.225–40).

In short, whatever status and privilege a man has, and whichever way he has come by it, his claim to it is legitimate, in the poet’s view, *only* if he proves to be a deserving warrior.

In the same vein, the poet suggests that, as long as a *βασιλεύς* excels in combat, he can afford to be deficient in other desirable qualities, such as good leadership, rhetorical skill, intelligence and kindness. This is brought out in the contrasting bits of advice given to Akhilleus and Patroklos when they set off for Troy. Akhilleus is instructed in literally the same way as Glaukos: ‘always be the best’ (11.784). Patroklos’ father, on the other hand, says: ‘My child, Akhilleus is of superior birth... He is much greater in strength, but you... must guide him. He will listen – to his benefit’ (11.786–9). Akhilleus himself, emphatically claiming to be the best in war, concedes ‘though in debate [*ἀγορῆ*] others are better’ (18.106). What his father tells him to prove, what he himself wants to see recognised and what his friends take for granted, is his superiority as a fighter. It is acknowledged that he is a less than ideal man ‘in counsel’, and it does not really seem to matter.

Similarly, Agamemnon and Hektor are both far from capable commanders-in-chief. They come up with several schemes that are demolished by men with a reputation for intelligence, and Agamemnon, though not Hektor, recognises his own

⁶⁴ I am not denying that being a good speaker and counsellor is a highly rated quality (see Malcolm Schofield, ‘*Euboulia* in the *Iliad*’, *CQ* 36 [1986], 6–31), but it seems that it is a quality which the poet appreciates only in those who are good warriors, too.

shortcomings.⁶⁵ But it is not thought to be a fatal failing for a commander not to be a clever strategist: he must merely be open to advice.

Nestor tells Agamemnon: 'You, above all, must speak and listen to others, and carry out anything that anyone else may feel bound to suggest for the benefit of all (9.100–2). Poulydamas complains to Hektor: 'You want to know better than others in counsel [*βουλή*], but you certainly cannot handle everything at once, by yourself. To one man god gives warlike qualities... another Zeus endows with a fine mind' (13.728–33).

By contrast, it apparently is important for a commander-in-chief to be an excellent fighter. Agamemnon is in this respect put on a par with Diomedes and Aias (7.179–80) and Hektor is said to be the greatest warrior born from mortal parents (10.46–52). Note also that, although the outstanding men whose deaths, as we have seen, mark a turning-point in battle, often are leaders, their deaths are described as the loss of a champion fighter, rather than the loss of a general, so to speak.

Hektor's final decision to meet Akhilleus man-to-man and not take refuge in the city should, I think, be seen in this light. It is often said that he sacrifices the well-being of Troy to his personal honour. He will die a 'noble' death, but the Trojans, bereft of their commander, will perish as a result.⁶⁶ I would say that, since Hektor's main quality is supposed to be his superior individual strength in combat, not his strategic insight or ability as a leader, there is no point in his saving himself in order that the army may still have a leader. What the army needs is a great fighter, who can stand up to the enemy's best fighter. This is what Hektor had promised to be and to do (8.530–7; 18.305–8). So far he has failed – 'relying on his *own strength*, he destroyed his men' (22.107) – and now, to remedy his failure, he attempts to fulfil his promise and fight Akhilleus. If he fails, things will look black for the Trojans, not because they need his commandership to win, but because their champion will have proved to be worse than the enemy's champion. In short, Hektor's decision is no evidence for a scale of values in which the interests of the individual prevail over those of the community: it reflects a scale of values in which warriorhood is the crucial quality of a leader.

Why this preoccupation with warriorhood? It seems to me that fighting with one's own hands is one of the very few ways the poet can envisage a *βασιλεύς* 'repaying' the community for the 'respect' it shows him. In return for their obedience and their gifts, his countrymen can have only one thing: his utmost efforts on the battlefield. These will bring the community the reflected glory of having reared a great warrior. In *this* respect, Hektor is a model commander: 'You were a very great glory to them, as long as you lived' (22.435–6).⁶⁷ More importantly, the fighting efforts of a *βασιλεύς* help to protect his countrymen, as I have pointed out earlier. Again Hektor sets a standard by giving his life in a doomed attempt to save his city. 'You were the

⁶⁵ Agamemnon's bad ideas are criticised subtly by Nestor (2.55–154, esp. 79–83); harshly by Diomedes (9.9–59, esp. 32–49) and Odysseus (14.64–108, esp. 83–102). Hektor is advised and berated by Poulydamas. Significantly, Hektor only accepts his advice in so far as it allows him to go on fighting (fully accepted: 12.61ff.; partly accepted: 13.726ff. – as proposed, men are gathered, but instead of a strategic meeting, there is an immediate attack). Proposals to retreat are violently rejected (12.211ff.; 18.243ff.).

⁶⁶ E.g. Finley, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 116–17; J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago, 1975), p. 154.

⁶⁷ Sarpedon and Glaukos bring fame to the Lykians by their 'fine strength': 12.318–21. Nestor and Odysseus are called 'great glory of the Greeks' (9.673; 14.42). Apart from protection and glory, one other form of 'repayment' is occasionally mentioned: by their peace-time role as judges, *βασιλῆες* – as long as they are fair – will ensure the prosperity of their community (*Odyssey* 19.109–14; *Iliad* 16.385–92).

protector [*ᾄνειαρ*] of all the Trojan men and women in the city, and they treated you as a god' (22.433–5).

In the *Iliad*, the poet paints an ideal world, in which *βασιλῆες* deserve their status.⁶⁸ It is significant that all the characters who dominate the scenes of battle in the *Iliad*, are introduced to the audience, in a catalogue, as *leaders* of hundreds or thousands of men. This is often taken for granted, as a suitable, conventional or arbitrary, position for the protagonists of the story. I would suggest that it is the other way round: to feature in the story as one of the greatest fighters is a suitable role for a leader.

Moreover, the poet deliberately forges a link between being the leader of a contingent and being its best fighter. Among the Paionians, the commander Pyraikhmes 'was the best man at fighting' (*ἀριστεύεσκε μάχεσθαι*, 16.292) and exactly the same is said of the leader of the newly arrived relief contingent of the Paionians, Asteropaios (17.351, cf. 21.154–6, 207), and of the Epeian leader Moullos (11.746). Sarpedon 'himself was the best at fighting among the many men who followed him' (16.549–51, cf. 521). Hektor is the 'best of the Trojans at fighting' (6.460–1). The man 'who was the best among the Thrakians' (6.7) turns out to be Akamas, one of their leaders (2.844–5). On the Greek side, Skhedios and Thoas are 'far the best' of respectively the Phokians and Aitolians (17.306–8 and 15.281–2) whom they command. More loosely, Akhilleus (e.g. 16.271–2), Agamemnon (e.g. 2.579–80), Aias (e.g. 2.768) and Diomedes (e.g. 5.414) are each called '(much) the best of the Greeks' (cf. 7.179–80).⁶⁹

The equation is also expressed in general terms. The neatest illustration of the tie between warriorhood and leadership is perhaps the way Odysseus creates order out of chaos. When all men are shouting and running, he goes round separating them into two groups. Those who are *βασιλῆες* and 'excellent men', who are not like *κακοί*, he tells to 'make the other men sit down' (2.188–91). Everyone else he tells to 'sit still and listen to others, who are better than you. You are no warrior and you have no strength [*ἀπτόλεμος καὶ ἀναλκίς*]. You are of no account at all in war, nor in counsel' (2.200–2). In other words, the right to command is reserved for good warriors – among whom the *βασιλῆες* are included as a group. The worse ones must simply obey. 'Not all of us Greeks here can be *βασιλεύς*, of course!' (2.203).

The Homeric world is near-perfect, too, in that discrepancies between the prowess of the leader and that of his followers are kept to a minimum. The poet, as we have noted, is fully aware of the importance of the multitude. If Sarpedon is a 'pillar' to the Trojans, that is not only due to his own qualities, but also to the fact that 'many men followed him' (16.549–51); and in the hope of gaining *kudos*, he has to call upon the Lykians for support (12.407ff.). One might imagine a leader unable to provide protection or earn glory, in spite of his strength, because his followers are too few or not brave enough. Not in the *Iliad*. The followers tend to be treated as if they were an extension of their leader's person. Agamemnon is introduced with the words 'by far the most and best men followed him...; he was outstanding among all the

⁶⁸ A world, too, in which the efforts of non-*βασιλῆες* on the battlefield are justly rewarded, as in the case of Aineias' companion Deikoon, 'whom the Trojans respected as much as the sons of Priamos, because he was quick to fight among the foremost' (5.533–6).

⁶⁹ Makhaon is 'being the best' (*ἀριστεύοντα*, 11.506) in battle. Teukros is mentioned as 'the best' several times, apparently with reference to his archery (13.313–14). Of the Trojan leaders, the sons of Merops (2.828–31) are the 'two best men of the *δήμος*' (11.328). Note, however, firstly, that there is no rigid hierarchy – Patroklos, Euphorbos and Periphas are 'best' of the Myrmidons, Trojans and Aitolians, too (18.10–12; 17.80–1; 5.842–3) – and, secondly, that references to the *ἀρίστοι* collectively do include names of men who are not said to be leaders.

warriors because he was the best man' (2.577–80). So is Hektor (2.816–18). Aias, 'by far the best of the men', is followed by 'dense, dark *φάλαγγες*' (4.274–82), 'many fine men, his companions' (13.709–10). Conversely, Nireus 'was weak. Few men followed him' (2.675).⁷⁰

Occasionally, the demands of the story upset the poet's ideals. To Agamemnon, as supreme commander, he has to assign the largest number of men. but while he can casually call him 'the best', he cannot consistently depict him as such, since that distinction must go to Akhilleus. Again, he must depict Aias as a great man, but also as the leader of a relatively small area, Salamis. Thus, while in battle scenes he is able to show him as surrounded by an indefinite mass of warriors, when it comes to listing the contingents in the Catalogue, he cannot convincingly give him more than a dozen ships, as compared to Agamemnon's hundred.

Such compromises apart, the *Iliad* describes a world in which, at least in this respect, things are as the poet thinks they should be. Men who enjoy power and privilege within a community are willing to offer protection and fame, the most worthwhile form of compensation he can conceive of, to the community. And more importantly, they are *able* to offer this compensation. Firstly, because they are always great fighters. Secondly, because followers always match the quality of their leaders.

At this point, we can understand why, although many men are involved, the poet narrates battles as sequences of great deeds by a dozen excellent fighters, who happen to be *βασιλῆες* and leaders of contingents. We can also see why he credits a single man with as much influence over the course of fighting as an entire army. A ruler can do something for his people only on the battlefield. But 'his people' are present and active on the battlefield themselves, like him trying to protect their community and gain fame. It is thus impossible for him to 'repay' them for what they grant him, unless his deeds are far more spectacular and have a vastly greater effect on battle as a whole than anyone else's. In order to maintain his view of legitimate exercise of power and justified enjoyment of privilege, the poet is bound to believe that they *are*, and demonstrate this in his accounts of combat.⁷¹

IV. CONCLUSIONS

I hope to have shown that in the battle scenes the *Iliad* presents, on the one hand, a consistent picture of a manner of fighting, and, on the other, what one might call a consistent ideology of fighting. I have also tried to show that the picture is strongly coloured by the ideology – which incidentally accounts for most of the 'orthodox' misinterpretations.

What consequences does this have for Greek history? Whether or not one regards the epic picture as a reflection of a historical form of warfare, my interpretation of it means that there is no literary evidence for the kind of aristocratic duelling envisaged

⁷⁰ Both Akhilleus and his 'close-fighting *θεράποντες*' regard themselves as 'far the best of Greeks' (16.271–2). Nestor seems to think of leaders and men being *κακός* or *ἐεθλός* as a *group* (2.365–6).

⁷¹ One may note the unique case in which the Myrmidons fight without their leader. There is a danger, here, seen by Akhilleus, that Patroklos and his other followers will do equally well in battle without their *βασιλεύς* (16.242–5). He asks Patroklos not to go too far, in order not to make his leader look superfluous and, therefore, 'less respected' (16.87–96). In the event, his men do more than he wanted them to. But they cannot really do without their leader: when Apollo causes a change of fortune, the only one who can save them is Akhilleus, and he does so by himself (although supported by Athena).

by many historians. The earliest testimony we have already shows a 'multitude' engaged in combat. In this, then, my analysis agrees with that of Albracht, Latacz and other 'heterodox' scholars. I should like to point out, however, that one ought not to assume too easily that the social status of this multitude is that of 'the masses'. Their numbers are considerable – the most common and average size of a contingent being forty ship's crews, i.e. some 2000 men – but how far down the social scale membership extended in the poet's mind obviously depends on an unknown variable: the size of the communities he was thinking of. The contingents he gives to Sparta and Athens, for example, would by early fifth-century standards have comprised less than a third of those with hoplite status and might have been considered an élite.⁷²

A more important conclusion, perhaps, is that we find a notion of decisiveness in battle which is at odds with the usual assumptions of scholars. Whether 'orthodox' or 'heterodox' in their assessment of the decisive factor, they rely on the straightforward premiss that a battle is decided collectively by all those 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 a 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.

Even if there *had* been a change in military manpower, this would not necessarily have brought about a change in people's perception of who determines the outcome of war; even when there is *no* change in manpower, perceptions of the decisive factor may change and be adapted to changed power relations. A close historical parallel to the Homeric view may be found in the Hellenistic view of the role of the βασιλεύς in battle: he, too, must excel as a warrior, and is credited with great influence over the course of battle. In this instance, scholars do not, on the whole, seem to think that the king *gains* power by being a warrior. Sensibly, they tend to think of it as a form of legitimation.⁷³

But similar notions of the relation between strength in battle and power in the state occur at other times in Greek history, and they have been fully accepted by modern historians. The theory of the development of the 'hoplite democracy', with which I began this paper, is one. It is based on the notion that those who have the right to

⁷² At Plataiai, in 479 B.C., the contingents of Sparta (with Lakedaimon) and Athens (with Salamis) comprised respectively 10,000 to the *Iliad*'s 3000 (i.e. 3.3 times as large) and 8000 to 3100 (i.e. 2.6 ×). These are the only directly comparable regions. In other cases one must divide the size of the *Iliad*'s contingent (= number of ships × 50 men) by the number of cities it is said to comprise. All the Greek contingents in the *Iliad* together comprise $1136 \times 50 + 50 \times 120 = 62,800$ men from 150 localities (counting groups of islands and areas not divided into towns as 1 each), i.e. an average of 419 men. At Plataiai the assembled army consisted of 33,700 hoplites (not counting the *perioikoi*) from 25 towns, i.e. 1348 men on average, which is 3.2 × as many). Arkadia is exactly average: $60 \times 50 = 3000$ men from 9 towns ~ 333 men; of these towns only Tegea (1500) and Orkhomeos (600) are represented at Plataiai, i.e. an average 1050, or 3.2 × as many, men. The only other possible comparisons are the contingents of Euboea, at Plataiai 1.2 × as large as in the *Iliad*; Argos, 1.3 ×; and Mykenai, no less than 6.1 × larger at Plataiai! The differences are in fact even greater, since the numbers for Plataiai must be doubled to allow for the light-armed men, who are presumably included in the numbers of the *Iliad*. These calculations do not, of course, prove that Homeric warriors are an élite: that depends on how much larger than the communities envisaged by the epic poet those of fifth-century Greece were.

⁷³ See the discussion by M. M. Austin, 'Hellenistic Kings, War, and the Economy', *CQ* 36 (1986), 450–66.

participate in city politics are those who are able to carry arms and defend the city, because they are the only people to *deserve* this right, and to feel they deserve it.

The 'radical democracy' is another. As the Old Oligarch puts it:

My first point is that it is right that the poor and the ordinary people [in Athens] should have more power than the noble and the rich, . . . because it is these people who make the city powerful, much more than the hoplites and the noble and respectable citizens (1.2; transl. J. M. Moore).

Such views have been counted as explanations, and form the basis of much modern thinking on the development of Greek states. But, in fact, they are only a variation on the two Homeric themes that those who rule *ought to* justify themselves by fighting and that they are *able* to justify themselves in this way. This is not to say such views have no relation at all to political structures and political change. But it may need pointing out that, as explanations, they have a strong ideological colouring and might need re-examination.⁷⁴

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