

Warfare and Society in Ancient Greece

Lecture 4

The World of the Homeric Hero II: How



The arming of Agamemnon

Homer, *Iliad* 11.15-46

But the son of Atreus shouted aloud, and bade the Argives array them for battle, and himself amid them did on the gleaming bronze. The greaves first he set about his legs; beautiful they were, and fitted with silver ankle-pieces; next he did on about his chest the corselet that on a time Cinyras had given him for a guest-gift. For he heard afar in Cyprus the great rumour that the Achaeans were about to sail forth to Troy in their ships, wherefore he gave him the breastplate to do pleasure to the king. Thereon verily were ten bands of dark cyanus, and twelve of gold, and twenty of tin; and serpents of cyanus writhed up toward the neck, three on either side, like rainbows that the son of Cronos hath set in the clouds, a portent for mortal men. And about his shoulders he flung his sword, whereon gleame studs of gold, while the scabbard about it was of silver, fitted with golden chains. And he took up his richly dight, valorous shield, that sheltered a man on both sides, a fair shield, and round about it were ten circles of bronze, and upon it twenty bosses of tin, gleaming white, and in the midst of them was one of dark cyanus. And thereon was set as a crown the Gorgon, grim of aspect, glaring terribly, and about her were Terror and Rout. From the shield was hung a baldric of silver, and thereon writhed a serpent of cyanus, that had three heads turned this way and that, growing forth from one neck. And upon his head he set his helmet with two horns and with bosses four, with horsehair crest, and terribly did the plume nod from above. And he took two mighty spears, tipped with bronze; keen they were, and far from him into heaven shone the bronze; and thereat Athena and Hera thundered, doing honour to the king of Mycenae, rich in gold.



The tusk helmet

Homer, *Iliad* 10.261-270

And Meriones gave to Odysseus a bow and a quiver and a sword, and about his head he set a helm wrought of hide, and with many a tight-stretched thong was it made stiff within, while without the white teeth of a boar of gleaming tusks were set thick on this side and that, well and cunningly, and within was fixed a lining of felt. This cap Autolycus on a time stole out of Eleon when he had broken into the stout-built house of Amyntor, son of Ormenus; and he gave it to Amphidamas of Cythem to take to Scandea, and Amphidamas gave it to Molus as a guest-gift, but he gave it to his own son Meriones to wear; and now, being set thereon, it covered the head of Odysseus.



The tower shield

Homer, *Iliad* 15.644-647

He it was who then yielded to Hector the glory of victory. [645] For, as he turned back, he tripped upon the rim of the shield that himself bare, a shield that reached to the feet, a defence against javelins: thereon he stumbled and fell backward, and about his temples his helm rang wondrously as he fell.



Bow: the weapon of the coward

Homer, *Iliad* 11.385-390

“Bowman, reviler, proud of thy curling locks,¹ thou ogler of girls! O that thou wouldst make trial of me man to man in armour, then would thy bow and thy swift-falling arrows help thee not; whereas now having but grazed the flat of my foot thou boastest vainly. I reckon not thereof, any more than if a woman had struck me or a witless child, [390] for blunt is the dart of one that is a weakling and a man of naught.



The first mass encounter of the Iliad

Homer, *Iliad* 4.446-456

Now when they were met together and come into one place, then dashed they together shields and spears and the fury of bronze-mailed warriors; and the bossed shields closed each with each, and a great din arose. Then were heard alike the sound of groaning and the cry of triumph of the slayers and the slain, and the earth flowed with blood. As when winter torrents, flowing down the mountains from their great springs to a place where two valleys meet, join their mighty floods in a deep gorge, and far off amid the mountains the shepherd heareth the thunder thereof; even so from the joining of these in battle came shouting and toil.



History's first hoplite battle?

Homer, *Iliad* 16.210-220

So saying, he aroused the strength and spirit of every man, and yet closer were their ranks serried when they heard their king. And as when a man buildeth the wall of a high house with close-set stones, to avoid the might of the winds, even so close were arrayed their helms and bossed shields; buckler pressed on buckler, helm upon helm, and man on man. The horse-hair crests on the bright helmet-ridges touched each other, as the men moved their heads, in such close array stood they one by another. And in the front of all two warriors arrayed themselves for war, even Patroclus and Automedon, both of one mind, to war in the forefront of the Myrmidons.



Individual fighting

Homer, *Iliad* 5.37-68

Each one of the captains slew his man; first the king of men, Agamemnon, thrust from his car the leader of the Halizones, great Odius, for as he turned first of all to flee he fixed his spear in his back between the shoulders and drove it through his breast; and he fell with a thud, and upon him his armour clanged. And Idomeneus slew Phaestus, son of Borus the Maeonian, that had come from deep-soiled Tarne. Him even as he was mounting his chariot Idomeneus, famed for his spear, pierced with a thrust of his long spear through the right shoulder; and he fell from his car, and hateful darkness gat hold of him. Him then the squires of Idomeneus stripped of his armour; and Scamandrius, son of Strophius, cunning in the chase, did Atreus' son Menelaus slay with his sharp spear, even him the mighty hunter; for Artemis herself had taught him to smite all wild things that the mountain forest nurtureth. Yet in no wise did the archer Artemis avail him now, neither all that

skill in archery wherein of old he excelled; but the son of Atreus, Menelaus famed for his spear, smote him as he fled before him with a thrust of his spear in the back between the shoulders, and drave it through his breast. So he fell face foremost, and upon him his armour clanged. And Meriones slew Phereclus, son of Tecton, Harmon's son, whose hands were skilled to fashion all manner of curious work; for Pallas Athene loved him above all men. He it was that had also built for Alexander the shapely ships, source of ills, that were made the bane of all the Trojans and of his own self, seeing he knew not in any wise the oracles of the gods. After him Meriones pursued, and when he had come up with him, smote him in the right buttock, and the spear-point passed clean through even to the bladder beneath the bone; and he fell to his knees with a groan, and death enfolded him.



Chariots in Homer

Homer, *Iliad* 4.293-309

Then found he [Agamemnon] Nestor, the clear-voiced orator of the Pylians, arraying his comrades and urging them to fight, around mighty Pelagon and Alastor and Chromius and lord Haemon and Bias, shepherd of the host. The charioteers first he arrayed with their horses and cars, and behind them the footmen, many and valiant, to be a bulwark of battle; but the cowards he drave into the midst, that were he never so loath each man must needs fight perforce. Upon the charioteers was he first laying charge, and he bade them keep their horses in hand, nor drive tumultuously on amid the throng. "Neither let any man, trusting in his horsemanship and his valour, be eager to fight with the Trojans alone in front of the rest, nor yet let him draw back; for so will ye be the feebler. But what man so'er from his own car can come at a car of the foe, let him thrust forth with his spear, since verily it is far better so. Thus also did men of olden time lay waste cities and walls, having in their breasts mind and spirit such as this."