

# Thematic Inversion in the *Iliad*: The Greeks under Siege

James V. Morrison

IN THE CENTRAL BOOKS of Homer's *Iliad*, the Greeks come under Trojan attack. In Book 12 the Greek camp is assaulted; in Books 15 and 16 Hector threatens to burn the Greek fleet. With its walls and defenses, the Greek camp is in many ways like a city (*polis*), as previous commentators have noted.<sup>1</sup> I would like to make the stronger claim that the poet of the *Iliad* deliberately promotes the idea that the Greek camp—once under attack—should be thought of as a city under siege. The effect is to reverse the rôles traditionally assigned to Greeks and Trojans. The Trojans, who have been defending their city for ten years, go on the attack, while the Greeks are put into the position conventionally associated with the Trojans, that of defending a city.

This paper has two goals. First, I gather evidence suggesting that Homer consciously draws attention to this reversal in a number of ways: by giving an elaborate description of the Greek wall and its defense (echoing defenses of Troy), by introducing terms referring to the Greek camp that are specifically applicable to a *polis*, and by implicit comparisons (e.g. the story of Meleager). Some of this work has already been done elsewhere; but in collecting this material, I introduce some passages not previously noticed or sufficiently emphasized. The key point here is that for nearly half the *Iliad* (11 of the 24 books) the Greeks, not the Trojans, are subject to impending destruction. Second, I consider the significance of depicting the Greek camp as a besieged city, especially with respect to the historical circumstances of the *Iliad*'s composition. The historical context helps us to see the the point behind Homer's description of the Greeks on the defensive

<sup>1</sup> See Steiner's remarks in G. Steiner and R. Fagles, edd., *Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1962) 3f, and S. SCULLY, *Homer and the Sacred City* (Ithaca 1990: hereafter 'Scully') 26f, with reservations. Further references are given below, nn.21, 22, 26.

rather than the offensive, ultimately providing a distinctive view of not only the Trojan War but also the phenomenon of war as it affects his contemporary Greeks in the eighth century.

## I

The epic falls into three 'movements' that reflect this transformation into a besieged city:<sup>2</sup>

- I. No wall; the Greeks are safe (1.1–7.337).  
Transition: Building the wall (7.337–482).
- II. The Greeks are under attack behind the wall (8.1–18.368).  
Transition: Shield of Achilles (18.369–617).
- III. Achilles' vengeance (19.1–24.804).

For the first seven books, the Greek camp is secure and unchallenged. Although Troy is never assaulted, the Greeks are continually anticipating its sack.<sup>3</sup> In the second movement, following the Greek decision to build a wall in Book 7, the Greek camp comes under attack. Their thoughts are no longer bent on victory over Troy; instead, the Greeks put all their energy into defending themselves, for survival is at stake. What triggers this, of course, is that Zeus begins to fulfill his promise that the Trojans will gain the upper hand in battle. The third movement begins in Book 19, after the description of the shield of Achilles changes the focus of the narrative. The Greeks are no longer preoccupied with defense of their own camp; and Achilles' vengeance, not the sack of Troy, takes center stage. Still the city of Troy is not threatened: the death of Hector is Achilles' goal. Through all three movements, Homer never shows the city of Troy in flames, yet he anticipates the destruction of the city in mirror imagery, as fire threatens to

<sup>2</sup> These three movements do not necessarily imply three days of performance. For this argument (with slightly different divisions), see O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford 1992) 11–31; cf. K. STANLEY, *The Shield of Homer: Narrative Structure in the Iliad* (Princeton 1993; hereafter "Stanley"), who argues for a division between Books 17 and 18).

<sup>3</sup> In fact, scenes at the walls of Troy generally have little to do with the danger of attack: the elders look out over the battlefield, Andromache seeks Hector, or Priam and Hecuba appeal to Hector (*e.g.* 3.146–244, 6.388f, 22.33–91; cf. 21.526f).

consume the Greeks' previously unchallenged realm of sovereignty.

Initially the camp represents an area of control for the Greeks. Any approach by an outsider entails some risk. In the first scene of the epic, the priest Chryses comes to the Greek camp to ransom his daughter from Agamemnon. He carries the fillets of Apollo on a golden sceptre as a means of protection (1.14f). In rejecting his offer, Agamemnon tells the priest that if he returns to the Greek ships (=camp),<sup>4</sup> he will no longer be safe (1.26ff). A plague follows, and when the seer Calchas hesitates to reveal the reason, Achilles vows to protect Calchas, whatever he may say (1.88–91): so long as Calchas remains in the camp, he will have nothing to fear. The Greek camp thus becomes an area of sovereignty and safety.

This early confidence of the Greeks leads them to articulate time and again their goal of destroying Troy. Achilles refers to that time when they will divide the spoils of the city (1.127ff).<sup>5</sup> On occasion, that success appears to be in doubt—the duel between Paris and Menelaus may lead to a negotiated settlement (3.281–87), the death of Menelaus may cause the Greeks to return home without success (4.169–82)—but the Greeks are never seen as vulnerable and give little thought to defense.<sup>6</sup> The destruction of Troy recurs as a leitmotif, as all eyes look upon the ultimate prize of sacking the city. Although Achilles' request lies in the background, no threat of a Greek defeat comes about until Book 8.<sup>7</sup> In fact, we learn that in the previous nine years of battle the camp had never been threatened. Before Achilles' withdrawal from battle, the Trojans never ventured far from the city of Troy (5.789ff; *cf.* 9.352–55). The picture of the Greek camp in the first seven books is

<sup>4</sup> The use of "ships" and "ships and huts" to designate the Greek camp is discussed in n.48 below.

<sup>5</sup> On the Greek sack of Troy, see also the words of Odysseus, Nestor, and Agamemnon (2.286–332, 350–56; 4.163ff, 290f, 415ff). Even Hector admits the inevitable (6.447ff).

<sup>6</sup> *Cf.* Hector's words before the duel with Ajax: either the Greeks will take Troy or they will sail home (7.71f). There is still no threat to the Greeks. The shift comes in Book 8 after the wall has been built and Zeus begins to help the Trojans. The only mention of Greek vulnerability is made sarcastically by Agamemnon (4.247ff).

<sup>7</sup> Homer reminds his audience of the coming defeat: see *e.g.* 1.240–44, 340–44, 409–12, 558f; 2.3f, 35–40.

consistent: this territory by the sea falls under Greek control; the Greeks feel safe there.<sup>8</sup>

A new development occurs near the end of Book 7. The previously secure camp at this point takes on aspects of a besieged city, in both its physical structure and the terms in which it is spoken of by the Greeks. It is worth pursuing this transformation in some detail, and then turn to its importance for interpreting the poem as a whole.

We begin with the physical structures of the Greek defense. After the first day of fighting, Nestor suggests building towers, a wall, and a surrounding ditch (7.337–43),<sup>9</sup> *i.e.*, he describes a structure that would defend a city. The Greek camp is not precisely a city: there are no permanent buildings, such as the palace or temples found in Troy, but there are certain key features of a city. In addition to the wall designed to protect the entire community, the Greek camp also contains an agora for assemblies and altars set up to the gods (8.249, 11.805–08). Guards are needed by night after the initial defeat in Book 8 (9.66f, 80–88; *cf.* 10.96–101, 180ff).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The only approach is by herald (*e.g.* 7.372–84). In the *Odyssey* Helen tells the story of Odysseus' entering the city in disguise. She realizes who it is, but Odysseus forces her to swear not to reveal his identity until he returns "to the swift ships" (*Od.* 4.252–55).

<sup>9</sup> Although the building of the wall is unmotivated at this point, it becomes an immediate necessity on the next day of battle when the Trojans gain the upper hand. See A. Thornton, *Homer's Iliad: Its Composition and the Motif of Supplication* (Göttingen 1984) 51f. This is to say nothing of Thucydides' remark (1.11) that the Greeks must have put up the wall soon after arrival. In response it should be said that Homer goes out of his way to show that there was no need for the wall until Achilles withdrew. The internally consistent picture given is that for nine years the Greeks are never threatened. On this controversy see D. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley 1972) 315–24; M. L. West, "The Achaean Wall," *CR* 19 (1969) 255–60; O. Tsagarakis, "The Achaean Wall and the Homeric Question," *Hermes* 97 (1969) 129–35.

<sup>10</sup> Homer describes the arrangement of the camp constituted by ships and huts: the ships are stretched out along the beach with the ships of Achilles at one end and those of Ajax at the other. The ships of Odysseus are in the middle (8.220–26, 11.5–9; *cf.* 16.284ff). For the Greek agora see *e.g.* 1.54, 490; *cf.* the Trojan gathering at 7.345. Scully (26f) points out that the Greek wall is not sacred: no hecatombs have been made to the gods (emphasized by Poseidon at 7.448ff). The destruction of the Greek wall appears to be linked with the fall of Troy (12.10ff; *cf.* 7.459–63). See the discussion by A. Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca 1992: hereafter 'Ford') 147–57. For the mythical importance of the wall, see R. Scodel, "The Achaean Wall and the Myth of Destruction," *HSCP* 86 (1982) 33–50.

When the Greek wall is attacked in Book 12, we find further detail. Besides the towers, the wall has projecting battlements and bolted double doors.<sup>11</sup> A corresponding structure at Troy echoes each of the numerous terms describing this bulwark. These include the wall (τείχος),<sup>12</sup> towers (πύργοι),<sup>13</sup> gates (πύλαι),<sup>14</sup> battlements (ἐπάλξεις),<sup>15</sup> door leaves (σάνιδες),<sup>16</sup> and bolts (ὄχηες).<sup>17</sup> The Greeks on the towers throw down rocks like snowflakes (12.154–60); a Trojan attacker drops from the wall like a diver (12.378–86). Then Sarpedon breaks off a projecting battlement (12.397ff; cf. the failed attempt at 12.256–64). With such vivid similes (see also 12.421–24, 433–36), the narrative of Book 12 is couched in terms of a song about the sack of a city.

At 12.436ff Zeus grants glory to Hector as the first to leap within the Greek wall:<sup>18</sup>

ὡς μὲν τῶν ἐπὶ ἴσα μάχῃ τέτατο πτόλεμός τε,  
πρὶν γ' ὅτε δὴ Ζεὺς κῦδος ὑπέρτερον Ἴκτορι δῶκε  
Πριαμίδῃ, ὅς πρῶτος ἐσήλατο τεῖχος Ἀχαιῶν.<sup>19</sup>

Hector then picks up a mighty stone, and Homer vividly describes his success in breaking through the wall (12.459–71):

<sup>11</sup> There is of course a patent contradiction between the need to put up the wall quickly in a single day and its elaborate description in Book 12.

<sup>12</sup> Wall (τείχος) — Greek camp: 7.436, 449, 461; 8.177, 533; 12.3–9, 12; 18.215; Troy: 6.327, 388, 434; 11.181; 16.702; 17.404; 21.536; 22.99.

<sup>13</sup> Towers (πύργοι) — Greek camp: 7.337f, 436f; 12.154, 258, 265, 332, 386, 430; Troy: 3.153f; 6.386, 431; 8.164ff, 518f; 16.700; 18.274; 21.526; 22.195.

<sup>14</sup> Gates (πύλαι): 7.339, 438; 10.126f; 12.120, 175, 223, 454; Troy: 3.145; 6.237, 307, 392; 8.58; 9.354; 16.712; 18.275; 21.537; 22.99.

<sup>15</sup> Battlements (ἐπάλξεις): 12.258, 263, 308, 375, 381, 397ff, 406, 424, 430; Troy: 22.3.

<sup>16</sup> Door leaves (σάνιδες): 12.121, 453, 461; Troy: 18.275; 21.535.

<sup>17</sup> Bolts (ὄχηες): 12.121, 291, 455, 460; 13.124; Troy: 21.537. The Greeks also have a ditch with stakes in it (τάφρος, σκόλοπες): 7.341, 440f; 8.336; 15.343ff.

<sup>18</sup> Yet Patroclus speaks of Sarpedon in these terms (16.558f).

<sup>19</sup> “The battles fought by both sides were pulled fast and even until that time when Zeus gave the greater glory to Hector, Priam’s son, who was the first to break into the wall of the Achaeans.”

All translations, with slight modifications, are from R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago 1951).

Hector smashed the hinges (θαυρούς) at either side, and the stone crashed ponderously in, and the gates (πύλαι) groaned deep, and the door-bars (ὄχῆες) could not hold, but the leaves (σάνιδες) were smashed to a wreckage of splinters under the stone's impact. Then glorious Hector burst in with dark face like sudden night, but he shone with the ghastly glitter of bronze that girded his skin, and carried two spears in his hands. No one could have stood up against him and stopped him except the gods, when he burst in the gates; and his eyes flashed fire. Whirling, he called out across the battle to the Trojans to climb over the wall, and they obeyed his urgency. Immediately some swarmed over the wall, while others swept in through the wrought gateways (ποιητὰς ... πύλας), and the Danaans scattered in terror among their hollow ships, and clamour incessant rose up.

The shift from the first to the second movement reinforces the fluidity of the situation as the Greeks abandon hope of taking Troy and seek their own survival.<sup>20</sup> Homer highlights the transformation by describing the Greek defensive structures in specific, concrete terms. As Schein puts it, “strong walls, with wide and numerous gates, are the sign *par excellence* of a major city in the *Iliad* and in the poetic tradition generally.”<sup>21</sup> Once the Greeks are under attack, the defense of their wall evokes images of a city under siege.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> It is possible to find a motive for the poet delaying the enactment of Zeus' promise to Achilles until Bk 8. Although the divine guarantee comes in Bk 1, it appears that Homer wishes to emphasize the invulnerability of the Greeks, so long as Achilles fought on their side. For two books (13–14) the defense is put on hold, but in 15 and 16 the Greeks are once again desperate. After a portion of the wall is demolished by Apollo (15.360–66), the ships and then Patroclus' corpse become the focal point (Bks 15–18). The illusion of the Greek camp as a city may be broken with the words of Ajax that the Greeks have no wall or city with towers to defend them (15.735–41).

<sup>21</sup> S. SCHEIN, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Berkeley 1984: hereafter 'Schein') 192 n.5. See ΣβΤ 12.175–81 for the ancient controversy on the number of gates.

<sup>22</sup> T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London 1958) 253, speculates: “I suggest that the Trojan storming of the Achaean Wall is a substitute for this [the capture of Troy] and that Homer remodelled it on an earlier story of the siege of Troy.” The same verb ἐπιβαίνω is used both for assaulting the towers of Troy (8.165) and for climbing upon the Greek ships (8.197; cf. 12.468, ὑπερβαίνειν, 13.86f, ὑπερκατέβησαν). Taplin (*supra* n.2: 95

In addition to the structures and the narrative that revolves around the battle at the wall, the Greeks' language to describe the camp—once its wall is built—is quite striking. Although the Greek camp is never explicitly called a *polis*, heroes going off to battle speak of their return to camp as a homecoming—to come back to the ships is to achieve a *nostos*. During their nocturnal mission Odysseus halts Diomedes' slaughter of the Thracians with these words (10.509f):

νόστου δὴ μνήσαι, μεγαθύμου Τυδέος υἱέ,  
νῆας ἔπι γλαφυράς.<sup>23</sup>

Although the enjambment at 10.510 makes the reference clear, *nostos* is a highly charged word in epic poetry: it refers to a hero's return to his home in Greece after accomplishing some great deed. Significantly, in the *Iliad's* second movement the term is applied to returning to camp, as though the camp were the Greeks' homeland.<sup>24</sup>

Achilles also twice utters a key phrase. When he describes his treatment from Agamemnon, he says that he has been treated as a “dishonored exile” (9.646ff, cf. 16.58f):

ἀλλά μοι οἰδάνεται κραδίη χόλω, ὅπποτε κείνων  
μνήσομαι, ὥς μ' ἀσύφηλον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν

n.22) points out that the verb ἐξαλαπάξω, used for destruction of the ships (13.813), is generally applied to the sack of Troy. Cf. also the verb σμύχω, which is only used twice, indicating the fire that may consume both the Greek ships and Troy. (9.653, 22.411).

<sup>23</sup> “Think now, son of great-hearted Tydeus, of return to the hollow ships.”

<sup>24</sup> In choosing Odysseus as a companion for his night mission, Diomedes says (10.246f):

τούτου γ' ἐσπομένοιο καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο  
ἄμφω νοστήσαιμεν, ἐπεὶ περίοιδε νοῆσαι.

(“Were [Odysseus] to go with me, both of us could return even from blazing fire, since his mind is best at devices.”)

The verb νοστέω is used elsewhere of Greeks returning from battle to the Greek camp: see 17.239, 636; 18.238; cf. especially the phrase ἐδέξατο νοστήσαντα at 18.238 used for Patroclus' return from battle and its echo at 18.329–32 (cf. 18.440f), concerning Achilles' actual homecoming to Phthia. Poseidon uses the verb to mean simply “return” (13.38). Of course, νόστος and νοστέω are most commonly used of a true homecoming, by Pandarus (4.103, 121; 5.212), Sarpedon (5.687), Hector (17.207, 22.444, 24.704ff), and Achilles (e.g. 9.413, 16.82; cf. 2.251ff, 8.499, 9.434, 13.232).

Ἄτρεΐδης, ὡς εἶ τιν' ἀτίμητον μετανάστην.<sup>25</sup>

In the phrase ἀτίμητον μετανάστην, μετανάστης refers to someone from a foreign land; ἀτίμητος indicates that this immigrant has no share in the τιμή (or honor) of the place in which he settles. The closest equivalent for the phrase in English is “resident alien.” Even while Achilles was a part of the Greek community, he implies, he was treated like an alien without rights. For ten years the Greek camp had become his homeland, yet he never enjoyed the rights accorded to a full citizen. In this instance he describes their wartime community as though it were a political body.<sup>26</sup>

We also find a conventional speech in an unusual setting. With the Greeks under attack, Nestor addresses the troops with words clearly suited to rallying the defense of a city (15.661–66):

ὦ φίλοι, ἄνδρες ἔστε, καὶ αἰδῶ θέσθ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ  
 ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων, ἐπὶ δὲ μνήσασθε ἕκαστος  
 παίδων ἠδ' ἀλόχων καὶ κτήσιος ἠδὲ τοκῆων,  
 ἡμὲν ὅτεφ ζῶουσι καὶ ᾧ κατατεθνήκασι·  
 τῶν ὑπερ ἐνθάδ' ἐγὼ γουνάζομαι οὐ παρεόντων  
 ἐστάμεναι κρατερῶς, μηδέ τρωπᾶσθε φόβονδε.<sup>27</sup>

In this exhortation, a leader tells the army that it must defend its wives, parents, children, and property (cf. Trojan sentiments at 8.56f, 15.497ff, 17.221–24). In a sense, this speech is strangely out of context—the Greeks are not defending a city—yet it fits the picture Homer is offering us. Apart from the adjustment to circumstances at the end of line 665 (οὐ παρεόντων), Homer

<sup>25</sup> “Yet still the heart swells up in anger, when I remember the disgrace that he wrought upon me before the Argives, the son of Atreus, as if I were some dishonored exile.”

<sup>26</sup> μετανάστης brings to mind Phoenix’s departure from home after his mother was dishonored (9.478–83; cf. 9.450) and the simile describing Priam (24.480–83; cf. 13.695ff, 23.84–88). J. A. Arieti, “Achilles’ Alienation in *Iliad* 9,” *CJ* 82 (1986) 1–27, translates μετανάστης as “one who has changed his dwelling” (23), “an alien who has been given no rights to τιμή by the society he has moved to” (24). For the history of the word, see his 23 n.31. Arieti goes on to say that Achilles “conceives of the Greek army as being a kind of polis” (24). Rights of citizens, an anachronism for Bronze Age Greece, may, as we shall see, have relevance for Homer’s own time.

<sup>27</sup> “Dear friends, be men; let shame be in your hearts, maintain your pride in the sight of other men. Let each of you remember his children and his wife, his property and his parents, whether a man’s father and mother live or have died. Here now I supplicate your knees for the sake of those who are absent to stand strongly and not be turned to the terror of panic.”



has transferred to the Greeks the sort of inspiring speech that the Trojans might have used when their city was under attack.

Now, a sceptic might ask: how else could Homer describe the camp under attack? Would it not be natural for the poet to adopt such conventional language in this somewhat unusual context? And it is true that each phrase or passage on its own may not evoke the conception of a besieged city. My argument rests in large part upon the cumulative evidence, as, I think, does Homer's picture. There is a dynamic involved: the camp was previously safe, Achilles withdraws, a wall is built, then the Greeks are attacked. Language not previously used is now introduced. We find consistency in the middle books of the epic: whether it is warriors in battle, Achilles remembering his treatment from Agamemnon, or Nestor exhorting the troops, the Greeks speak of their camp as a homeland or a city. Foley's idea of "metonymic referentiality" is worth introducing here.<sup>28</sup> Homer undoubtedly builds upon traditional expressions for describing defenders of a city to characterize the Greek camp, which an audience familiar with the epic tradition would recognize as such. In terms of metonymy, the wall of the Greeks (part) implies the city (whole). To attack a wall has its reference then not only within the *Iliad* but to the epic tradition as a whole. When Homer uses *nostos* in an epic poem, he knows that it chiefly signifies one idea. *μετανάστης* is quite unusual—Achilles' language is often remarkable, and this time it is especially noteworthy.<sup>29</sup> The way in which the Greeks speak of their camp taken together with the physical description of its defense (especially Book 12) leads to the conclusion that Homer is drawing attention to this transformation of the camp, and that his audience should think of it in such terms. Confirmation of this interpretation is found in the story of Meleager from Book 9, which anticipates the Greeks' defensive position on the long day of battle (Books 11–18).

In Book 9 the Greeks approach Achilles' camp seeking his return to battle.<sup>30</sup> Odysseus conveys an offer of gifts from

<sup>28</sup> J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art. From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington 1991), esp. 6–13, 22–29, 38–60.

<sup>29</sup> See J. A. Arieti, "Achilles' Guilt," *CJ* 80 (1985) 193–203.

<sup>30</sup> Achilles' withdrawal in Book 1 divides the Greek camp, sundering the area under the control of Agamemnon from Achilles' camp. When Briseis is taken from Achilles' ships, Homer highlights this split by saying they brought her "back to the ships of the Achaeans" (1.347; cf. 1.298–303, 328; 9.185). Whenever the Greeks approach Achilles' camp, heralds always take the lead.

Agamemnon that Achilles rejects. Phoenix then attempts to change Achilles' mind by telling the story of Meleager. Phoenix recounts how Meleager also withdrew from battle in anger. Meleager's city, Calydon, was under siege, but when he was approached by townsmen, relatives, and friends offering gifts, Meleager rejected their pleas for help. Finally he responded to his wife's appeal and returned to battle to save the city. But the gifts that had previously been offered were no longer Meleager's for the taking. The moral for Achilles is that he should return to battle now, while Agamemnon's offer is still good (9.524–605).

This episode is a pivotal one for the epic. In Book 1 Achilles sought the defeat of the Greeks; in Book 8 the Greeks begin to lose; in 9 they bring an offer of compensation for Achilles. Yet even Phoenix is unsuccessful: Achilles will not return to battle. On the next day the Trojans drive the Greeks to their ships, and Patroclus is sent to face Hector with tragic consequences. The similarities between Meleager's situation and that of Achilles are of course evident. So long as Meleager fought, we learn, there was safety for his city (9.550ff). The same was true for the Greek camp, so long as Achilles fought. Both Achilles and Meleager withdraw from battle in anger, both are offered compensation for returning. Most notably, from our point of view, Phoenix has chosen to approximate the Greeks' dire circumstances by describing a city under siege. The crisis in the exemplum is meant to correspond to the Greeks' situation at Troy.<sup>31</sup> Just as the Calydonians are facing a siege and desperately

---

Achilles has seceded from the Greek community with no apparent concern for his former allies. In Book 9 when Odysseus and others attempt to persuade Achilles to return to battle, Achilles' final answer is that he will not rejoin battle until the Greek ships are fired and his own camp is in danger. When Hector gets here, Achilles says, he will then be stopped (9.649–55). Following Achilles' withdrawal then it is possible to distinguish the camp of the Myrmidons from the Greek camp dominated by Agamemnon.

<sup>31</sup> In common with Troy and Homer's description of the Greek defenses, Calydon under siege has the essential attributes of a city: wall (9.551f), gates (9.573), and towers (9.574, 588). It is interesting to note that the trouble for the Calydonians stemmed from a failure to sacrifice, echoing the Greeks' omission when building their wall (9.533–37; cf. 7.448ff). On the interplay between narrative and paradigm, see M. L. Lang, "Reverberation and Mythology in the *Iliad*," in C. A. Rubino and C. W. Shelmerdine, ed., *Approaches to Homer* (Austin 1983) 140–64. Bibliography on the Meleager story is immense: for the parallels see J. Rosner, "The Speech of Phoenix. *Iliad* 9.434–605," *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 314–27.

need Meleager's help, so the Greeks—driven behind their wall—are in need of the services of Achilles. The story of Meleager makes such a powerful point: because of the Greeks' defensive position, they, too, see themselves as besieged.

The picture of the Greeks under attack is consistent. We are meant to view the Greek camp as a city under siege. In Book 7 the wall is built, in Book 8 the Greeks begin to lose, in Book 9 the story of Meleager recapitulates the Greek predicament; in Book 12 the wall is attacked, in Book 15 Nestor's speech echoes a cry for a final defense.<sup>32</sup> The Greek defeat following the request of Achilles makes up the central third of the *Iliad*;<sup>33</sup> *i.e.*, the effect of Achilles' leaving not only turns the Greeks toward defeat, but according to this reading the Greeks must suffer what the Trojans were destined to suffer. Homer highlights this reversal by evoking the image of a besieged city, a traditional theme in epic poetry.

## II

Steven Scully has recently argued that the focus of the *Iliad* is Troy, the sacred city.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as we have seen, in Books 8–18 the Trojans are attacking the Greek camp, the only 'city' attacked in the *Iliad*.<sup>35</sup> In the second part of this paper, I wish to build upon this reading and explore the significance of the poet's transformation of the Greek camp into a city in its historical context.

<sup>32</sup> The recurring idea of a city under siege appears in Nestor's story to Patroclus (11.711–62; *cf.* 10.336).

<sup>33</sup> Without giving undue weight to this episode in the middle of the work as a whole, Ford (149) rightly says that the building and defense of the wall "acutely symbolizes Greek losses," which constitute the substance of Achilles' original plea to Zeus. An illuminating parallel between the structure of epic and artwork may be not only Geometric design (on which see C. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* [Cambridge (Mass.) 1958] but also pedimental sculpture, which focuses on the center, not the left or right (the 'beginning' or 'end' of the narrative). For discussion and bibliography of the form of the *Iliad*, see Stanley 29ff and 320f nn.83–96.

<sup>34</sup> Scully 116f: "The *Iliad*'s true center is Troy, the point where the threads of events crisscross and the metaphysical place upon which the fiction turns."

<sup>35</sup> The only exceptions are the brief assaults upon Troy by Patroclus and Achilles (16.698–711, 21.515–49) and the previous attack recollected by Andromache (6.433–39). Voltaire (*Candide* ch. 25) rightly characterizes Troy as "the city that is always besieged but never taken."

The *Iliad* was most likely composed in the second half of the eighth century. This date is important for a number reasons. Scully argues that the idea of a city under siege would have resonated powerfully in the early archaic period when Homer was singing. In fact, Scully thinks that the emergence of walled cities on the Ionian coast in this era provided a timely inspiration for the *Iliad*.<sup>36</sup> I am in basic agreement with this thesis: the *Iliad* cannot be understood outside the context of an emerging urban culture.

But beyond the phenomenon of walled cities in the Aegean, the eighth century was a period of many changes. Following a significant rise in population, there is an upsurge of colonization and trade.<sup>37</sup> As the Greeks spread around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea encountering many non-Greek peoples, they came to recognize their own 'Greekness'. For all their political disunity, the Greeks shared a common heritage. They thought of themselves as Greek not only linguistically, but also in terms of a shared culture. They celebrated their kinship by worshipping together and competing at such shrines as Delphi and Olympia. Homer was composing the *Iliad* in a period of increasingly self-conscious Panhellenism.<sup>38</sup>

Homer—whether he was from Chios, Smyrna, or Colophon—was most likely an Ionian. He would have come into contact with Lydians, Phoenicians, Phrygians, Carians, and

<sup>36</sup> Scully 96: "The reemergence of walled cities might well have provided the context, and indeed the inspiration, in which Dark Age episodic poetry could be reinterpreted, and rewritten, around themes familiar to the old Mycenaean. For the Ionian audiences in particular, such themes would again have had a genuine immediacy, or vividness, in their concrete detail."

<sup>37</sup> See A. M. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment* (Berkeley 1980) 15–84, esp. 32–47 on fortification walls and the polis.

<sup>38</sup> The *Iliad* may well have been performed on one of these religious occasions. On the eighth-century date see I. Morris, "The Use and Abuse of Homer," *CLAnt* 5 (1986) 81–138, esp. 94–115; R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in the Epic Diction* (Cambridge 1982) 228–31, dates the *Iliad* to 750–725. On Panhellenism in Homeric epic see G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore 1979) 7ff and *passim*. Features of the eighth century are found in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The joint expedition of Greeks is glorified in the catalogue of ships; the competition at Olympia may lie behind the funeral games for Patroclus in Bk 23; Odysseus' journeys on the seas may well reflect the tales of Greek sailors who explored the Black Sea and the western Mediterranean.

other non-Greek peoples.<sup>39</sup> Given the rise of Panhellenism, it would have been natural for such a poet to glorify the heroic deeds of Greek warriors. A 'patriotic' rendering of the story of the Trojan War might have highlighted the valor of Greeks united in battle against the Trojans, as a faceless enemy. Yet in the *Iliad* Homer paints a far different picture. He chooses not to celebrate the glorious deeds of men by telling of the Greeks sacking a city. The poet of the *Iliad* never shows the city of Troy in flames, or even under attack; the crowning achievement of the Greeks is never told. Homer not only avoids showing the sack of Troy; there are few scenes of the Greek army at the walls of Troy. Instead he has given us a tragic perspective: he emphasizes that for every victory and city sacked, there will be an Andromache led off to slavery or an Astyanax hurled from a tower to his death (6.450–65, 24.732–39).<sup>40</sup> That is, Homer offers us a view of war where death and tragedy afflict both Greeks and Trojans—that is, Greeks and non-Greeks.

Homer's distinctive perspective on the war is brought out most powerfully in the final book of the *Iliad*. Achilles finally relinquishes his wrath not through reconciliation with the Greeks but rather in meeting with Priam, the king of the Trojans, who seeks the corpse of Hector for burial. Priam begs for his son's body, and when Achilles looks at the old man, he sees not the face of an enemy: he sees the face of his own father Peleus (24.507–12):<sup>41</sup>

Priam spoke and stirred in the other a passion of grieving  
for his own father. Achilles took the old man's hand and  
pushed him gently away, and the two remembered. Priam sat  
huddled

<sup>39</sup> In his *Chrestomathy* Proclus mentions Colophon, Chios, Smyrna, Iete, and Cyme as cities claiming Homer as a native son. On the importance of Greek contacts (both from Ionia and Euboea) with Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean, see M. L. West, "The Rise of the Greek Epic," *JHS* 108 (1988) 151–72; W. Burkert, "Oriental Myth and Literature in the *Iliad*," in R. Hägg, ed., *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation* (Stockholm 1983) 51–56.

<sup>40</sup> O. Taplin, "The Shield of Achilles within the *Iliad*," *G&R* 27 (1980) 1–21, puts it this way (16): Homer "shows how for every victory there is a defeat, how for every triumphant killing there is another human being killed."

<sup>41</sup> Priam succeeds in getting Achilles to recall his father, whereas Odysseus earlier had failed: see 9.252–59, 24.486–92; cf. Nestor's success with Patroclus at 11.765–90.

at the feet of Achilles and wept on and on for manslaughtering  
 Hector  
 and Achilles wept now for his own father, now again for  
 Patroclus....

And in his myth of the two jars of Zeus, Achilles articulates his realization that all men receive a share from both: evils have come from Zeus to both Priam and Peleus. As the epic closes, the audience knows that after the burial of Hector the war will go on. Troy will be sacked. Yet Homer does not end on a note of triumph, and by the end of the epic no one in his audience is induced to cheer this glorious deed of the Greeks. The *Iliad* is in a sense a national epic, yet Homer does not address his Panhellenic audience with a boast of superiority. Rather he calls for the recognition of the humanity of non-Greeks as well, and by implication of the non-Greeks in his own time. This point is driven home by putting the Greeks into the position of victim, as they fear destruction within their own walls. In this epic the dominant experience of the Greeks—whose perspective Homer's audience would be likely to share—is military defeat and fear of annihilation.

The significance of transforming the Greek camp into a besieged city should be understood in such a context. It is not enough to have the Trojans enjoy success and the Greeks to suffer defeat. Earlier poets sang of the Trojan War and the sacking of cities.<sup>42</sup> Some undoubtedly sang of setbacks for the Greeks, yet Homer appears to have turned the story upside down by putting the Greeks into the rôle traditionally assigned to the Trojans—that of defending a city. Hector is now the attacker, who gains glory by being the first to leap within the Greek wall. Attacking a city's walls was undoubtedly a scene sung by Homer's predecessors, but I think it likely that in other versions such scenes were set at the walls of Troy with a Greek as the attacking hero. In the *Iliad* we find an inversion of the rôles of attacker and defender of a city. Thematic inversion consists of displacement (the 'city' under attack is now the Greek camp) and rôle reversal (the Greeks are now the besieged).

Although the only city placed under attack in the narrative of the *Iliad* is the Greek camp, one other city is assaulted: the city

<sup>42</sup> Artistic renditions of an attack by sea upon a city go back to the fifteenth century: S. P. Morris, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Miniature Frescoes from Thera and the Origins of Greek Poetry," *AJA* 93 (1989) 511–35.

at war depicted on the shield of Achilles. In Homer's account of the marvelous shield Thetis obtains from Hephaestus, with the entire universe upon it, two cities are prominent: one is at peace, the other at war (18.490–540). The description comes at a pause in the epic, taking us away from the action on the battlefield. For eleven books the Greek camp has been under attack, its wall breached, its people threatened. In the books that follow Thetis' errand—the third movement of the epic—the focus will shift once again to Troy.<sup>43</sup> The description of the two cities on the shield helps us redirect our attention from the Greek camp to Achilles' confrontation with Hector and its consequences for Troy. Yet the dual image of peace and war is presented only after we have witnessed the Greeks, who will ultimately be victorious, in the desperate position of enduring a Trojan attack. As on the shield, the two possibilities of peace and war are universal and come to all peoples. The two cities of the shield are of course anonymous; neither is designated as Greek or Trojan. But like them, both the Greeks and, inevitably, the Trojans suffer the fear of annihilation within city walls.<sup>44</sup>

If Homer was not a pacifist, he does offer a realistic picture of the experience of war. Glory is won, but there is corresponding suffering. In deciding to return to battle, Achilles expresses this balance (18.121–25):

Now I must win excellent glory,  
and drive some one of the women of Troy, or some deep-  
gridled  
Dardanian woman to lift both hands to her soft cheeks  
and wipe away her tears of lamentation,

<sup>43</sup> For the shield as a turning point see T. K. Hubbard, "Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles," *Arion* SER. 3 2.1 (1992) 16–41, esp. 19–24. Of course the shield indicates that war is only a part of human experience, thus putting the importance of the events at Troy in some sort of perspective, on which see Taplin (*supra* n.40) 11–18; Stanley 3f, 189f.

<sup>44</sup> Taplin argues (*supra* n.40: 6) that the city at war is Troy ("Here we have the *Iliad* and its belligerent deities"), but later says (7) says that "The city on the shield stands for every threatened homeland." Hubbard (*supra* n.43 30) remarks that "This city is clearly the model for Troy." The idea of reversal is contained in the *Aeneid* (Book 9) as well, when the Trojans (previously besieged at Troy) attack the city of Latinus and find their camp under siege by the troops of Turnus.

as she learns that I stayed too long out of the fighting.

The glory Achilles wins, as he recognizes, will bring grief to the families in Troy.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the second movement of the epic, however, it is the Greeks who fear dying and bringing grief to their families.

Recent works have emphasized the capacity of the singer to revise and reshape traditional material.<sup>46</sup> Schein goes so far as to call the plot of the *Iliad* a “digression in the story of the entire war.”<sup>47</sup> Throughout, my own analysis assumes that the reversal of rôles and engineering of a Greek defeat underlies Homer’s innovation. Speculation about Homeric invention, of course, is a tantalizing enterprise. The question whether the Trojan assault upon the Greek wall is new with the *Iliad* is unlikely to receive a conclusive answer.<sup>48</sup> Clearly the Greek defeat is fully integrated into the *Iliad* as we have it. In fact, the main effect of Achilles’ anger is to drive the Greeks within their walls and to suffer what the Trojans will suffer. The suggestion that the Greeks are in a besieged city only accentuates that this experience is shared by both sides. Another aspect of the Greek defeat appears to support the idea that Homer

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the simile at *Od.* 8.521–31, where the sacker of Troy, Odysseus, weeps like a woman who laments over the body of her dying husband and is led off into slavery. For the view that poets in the oral tradition before Homer had depicted the Trojans as arrogant, warlike, and uncivilized, but that Homer (or his near contemporaries) has given them a sympathetic portrayal, see W. M. Sale, “The Trojans, Statistics, and Milman Parry,” *GRBS* 30 (1989) 431–410, and “The Government of Troy: Politics in the *Iliad*,” *GRBS* 35 (1994) 5–102.

<sup>46</sup> L. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad* (Berkeley 1991) 1–6, emphasizes the elements of interpretation, selection, and revision on the part of the poet. For other approaches to the question of Homeric invention, see e.g. J. Griffin, “The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer,” *JHS* 97 (1977) 39–53; M. M. Willcock, “Mythological Paradeigma in the *Iliad*,” *CQ* n.s. 14 (1964) 141–54; on the motivation for such innovation, see M. Griffith, “Contrast and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry,” in M. Griffith and D. Mastronarde, edd., *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (Atlanta 1990) 185–207.

<sup>47</sup> Schein 19; Ford (152) says that the wall “mark[s] a great ritardando in the larger story of the sack of Troy.”

<sup>48</sup> This idea goes back to antiquity: see Arist. fr. 162 Rose (=Strab. 13.1.36), ὁ πλάσας ποιητῆς ἠφάνισεν, and Σ bT 12.3–35, ἀνέπλασε τὴν τεichoποιάν ὁ ποιητῆς.



deliberately inverted elements of the epic story. I would like to consider briefly this possibility of a second reversal.

The means of denoting the Greek camp bears on the problem of innovating traditional material. Homer uses traditional formulae, “the ships” or “the ships of the Achaeans” to locate the Greek camp.<sup>49</sup> In fact, Parry calls the system of formulae for ships not only sufficient in extension to prove it is traditional in its entirety, but speculates that “the importance of ships in epic poetry is responsible for the formation of what is without doubt the most complex of all formulary systems created for common nouns.”<sup>50</sup> Regarding the broad epic tradition, we think of the sailing adventures of Odysseus or Jason and the Argonauts. Indeed, the lengthy catalogue of ships reminds the audience that this began as a naval operation (2.493–760). The natural function of ships as vessels of transportation takes on ominous tones in the *Iliad*. Ships interrupt peace, they bring war and death to cities, and are the means of leading women into slavery. This is epitomized in the words of Idomeneus (13.453f):<sup>51</sup>

νῦν δ' ἐνθάδε νῆες ἔνεικαν  
σοί τε κακὸν καὶ πατρὶ καὶ ἄλλοισι Τρώεσσιν.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> W. M. Sale, “The Formularity of Place-Phrases in the *Iliad*,” *TAPA* 117 (1987) 21–50, remarks (24 n.11) that “νῆς *denotes* a ship, but in the plural, in context, and (usually) with a preposition, it *connotes* the camp. The *reference* of νῆς is the ship, the *sense* of the phrase is ‘the Greek camp’.” By studying the formularity, which measures the relative frequency of Homer’s use of formulae in a particular situation to express a certain idea, Sale suggests that we can get a rough sense of when a given essential idea was taken up by the epic tradition. In looking at the ways in which Homer says “in Troy” or “from Troy,” however, Sale finds very low formularity (32% and 0%); thus few or no formulae were available to say “in Troy” or “from Troy” when Homer was composing the *Iliad*. Sale hypothesizes that presumably earlier poets had little interest in presenting scenes in Troy and goes on to attribute the bulk of the *Iliad*’s Trojan scenes (33 in all) to Homer’s invention.

<sup>50</sup> M. Parry, “The Traditional Epithet in Homer,” in A. Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford 1971) 109; on extension see 105, for his discussion of ships, 26–29, 109–13; see also B. Alexanderson, “Homeric Formulae for Ships,” *Eranos* 68 (1970) 1–46.

<sup>51</sup> See also 2.303f, 351f; cf. 4.237ff; 8.164ff, 528; 16.830ff, 24.731f, 9.401ff; see also the ships of Paris (5.62ff, 22.115f). Achilles describes twelve cities the Greek sacked by ships and eleven taken by land (9.328f). For the earlier peace at Troy see esp. 22.147–56, 24.543–48.

<sup>52</sup>

“But now the ships have brought  
evil here to you and your father and the other Trojans.”

In the *Iliad*, however, the ships of the Greeks serve a very different function: they are stationary (the only trip is to Chryse in Book 1) and serve by metonymy to designate the Greek camp.<sup>53</sup> In the central books the ships become the object of destruction for the Trojans. Hector seeks to destroy the fleet by fire, yet to destroy the Greek camp (=ships) is to destroy the Greek homecoming.<sup>54</sup> Homer calls attention to the natural function of the ships at the very moment of their likely destruction with similes describing Hector at the ships. The Trojans resemble a wave crashing over the side of a ship (15.379–84).<sup>55</sup> Later Hector leaps about with fire like a wave onto a ship of panicked sailors (15.623–29). All this indicates that Homer may be making a further inversion. The ships, which have brought trouble to Troy, have been marked for attack and annihilation in the *Iliad*; this in turn would destroy the homecoming of the Greeks. Although ships—both in epic song and in the eighth-century Aegean—may more commonly signal a threat to peoples living by the sea, in this narrative they are transformed into the target of an invading army.<sup>56</sup>

In another age of scholarship, the *Iliad* was dissected into early and late layers; certain episodes were the work of poet A, others of poet B or C. The building of the Greek wall and its defense were invariably classified as late and certainly “un-Homeric.” The fight at the wall was seen as an intrusion, originally deriving from a separate poem.<sup>57</sup> Even now, there is a residual anxiety concerning these middle books.<sup>58</sup> Edwards, for example, omits discussion of Books 7 and 12 in his more

<sup>53</sup> Even as the Greeks are dragging their ships to sea in a premature departure (2.151–54), the phrase “the ships of the Achaeans” is still used to designate the Greek camp (2.168, 187).

<sup>54</sup> Odysseus and Phoenix among others express this fear: e.g. 9.244ff, 434–38; 11.817f; 16.80ff

<sup>55</sup> See Σ bT 15.381.

<sup>56</sup> This inversion in the second movement may be echoed in the phrase  $\omega\varsigma$   $\nu\acute{\upsilon}\nu$   $\eta\acute{\mu}\epsilon\rho\alpha$   $\eta\delta\epsilon$   $\kappa\alpha\kappa\acute{\omicron}\nu$   $\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\iota$   $\text{Ἀργείοισι}$  (13.828).

<sup>57</sup> For a quick survey of stratification theories perpetrated upon Homer (and an alternative metaphor), see C. G. Thomas, “The Homeric Epics: Strata or a Spectrum?” *Colby Quarterly* 29 (1993) 273–82.

<sup>58</sup> Taplin (*supra* n.2: 162) comments that the section from 11.1–16.112 is “not the part of the *Iliad* which appeals most obviously to modern taste.”

detailed commentary, which is limited to “the most important books of the *Iliad*.”<sup>59</sup>

What do these central books have to do with the story of Achilles’ anger? My argument is that the picture of the Greek camp under siege is critical to the plot. The effect of Achilles’ anger is that the Greeks experience what the Trojans are destined to suffer. The withdrawal of Achilles brings about an inversion of the rôles played by Greeks and Trojans. Homer depicts the trauma of undergoing a siege by showing his audience that experience, but he does so from the Greek point of view. Rather than exult in the glory of sacking a city, Homer offers an alternative perspective in the *Iliad*, as the besiegers of Troy have become the besieged in their own city.

CENTRE COLLEGE

*January, 1994*

<sup>59</sup> M. W. Edwards, *Homer Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore 1987) xi.