LEADERS OF MEN?
MILITARY ORGANISATION IN THE *ILIAD*

I. INTRODUCTION

At a time when the Greek army is on the verge of annihilation, the *Iliad* tells us, two warriors have detached themselves from the fight. Idomeneus, having accompanied a wounded man back to the ships, and Mērionēs, on his way to fetch himself a new spear, meet at the former's hut. They stand and talk for a while, assuring one another that they are afraid of nothing and no-one, and finally decide to plunge into battle again, though only after discussing at some length whether to go to fight in the centre or at the left of the front line.[1] At first sight their behaviour might not seem particularly strange, but when one realises that the poet has told us more than once that these two are the leaders of the Cretan contingent, some four thousand warriors strong, one may begin to wonder. How could a poet, if he had even the slightest notion of what armies and battles were like, let these men behave as if they were alone on the field, leaving the fight for trivial reasons, re-entering it when and where it suits them, not even bothering to return to their own leaderless countrymen? Such doubts have led scholars to argue that, in fact, the poet did *not* have the slightest notion of what he was talking about.

Some seek to show that epic society is vague and unreal – 'Homeric kings are like the king and the prince in Cinderella – they reveal nothing about any social structure in the real world'[2] – and have suggested that the historian may dismiss it as literary fiction. Thus, inconsistencies in the organisation and behaviour of epic armies could simply be put down to poetic licence.

Through the bulk of the *Iliad* the army is essentially formless: if Homer had in his mind a distinct idea of how it was organised, he could never have treated it in the manner he does, inventing schemes of organisation for a momentary effect and forgetting them as soon as made.[3]

Others feel that Homeric society should be understood as a 'composite', containing Mycenaean, Migration and Dark-Age ingredients obtained from a long epic tradition, which the poet has mixed freely to create a world appropriate to his heroes.[4] From this point of view the oddities of epic warfare could be attributed to the conflation of two or more historical phases of real-life fighting.[5] Finally, there are those who hold

[1] 13.159–68; 210–15; 240–329.

[2] A. G. Geddes, 'Who's Who in "Homeric" Society?', *CQ* 34 (1984), 36.

[3] A. Andrewes, 'Phratries in Homer', *Hermes* 89 (1961), 138. As such 'schemes of organis-ation', dropped immediately after their invention, Andrewes lists: the five *stikhes* of the Myrmidons, the mention of *purgoi*, and the advice of Nestōr, all of which will be dealt with below; the five contingents formed to attack the wall around the ships (12.86–104) – a scheme which, in fact, is maintained thoughout the storming of the wall, the poet taking care to point out that he is switching to another point of attack when dealing subsequently with the actions of Asios, Hektōr and Sarpedōn (12.110ff., 195ff., 290ff.); the thousand watchfires of the Trojans and the Achaean patrols (8.562–3 and 9.80–8), which obviously must be dropped as soon as the night has passed and battle must begin again; and the armour-exchange and mass-retreat episodes (14.370–7 and 15.294–9), which are not organisational schemes, but temporary 'manoeuvres'.

[4] E.g. A. M. Snodgrass, 'An Historical Homeric Society?', *JHS* 94 (1974), 114–25.

[5] G. S. Kirk, 'War and the Warrior in the Homeric Poems', in: J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1968), see note 8. Compare P. Couissin, *Les Institutions militaires et navales* (*Paris*, 1931), 19.

that the society of the poems does reflect the reality of some period. For them the apparent chaos in armies and battles is a problem, to be explained perhaps by the poet's lack of interest in the details of this particular aspect of life.[6]

In view of the modern consensus that the battle descriptions as they stand are almost incomprehensible, it is odd that older literature on Homeric warfare does not appear to have noticed anything peculiar about them. Albracht, Lammert and Lammert, and Kromayer confidently reconstructed the tactics of Homeric battles.[7] Nevertheless, now that questions have arisen, they must be answered. I shall try to show that, in spite of the opacity of the battle scenes, there is a coherent treatment in the epic of the way the heroes are organised. Moreover, I will argue that their organisation is not a poet's fantasy, but is modelled on that of real armies.

II. PATTERNS OF LEADERSHIP

2.1. *A key to the solution*

The chief problem of Homeric warfare is sometimes thought to be the matter of scale. The course of battle appears to be determined by a few loosely connected individual combats, rather than by concerted effort. This seems incompatible with the presumed size of the armies. 'Either the Achaean expedition was a large affair [...] with a large army of free men, in which the exploits of the leaders would be comparatively inconspicuous; or it was a do-it-yourself venture on a very small scale [...]. In the latter case the great anonymous *laos* deployed in mass movements was a fiction'.[8] How could the poet introduce armies of tens of thousands of men and then proceed as if there were just a few dozen people involved in the Trojan war?

The answer is fairly obvious. The poet makes no attempt to offer a comprehensive account of the movements of battalions and armies, but, for literary reasons, focuses upon a small number of heroes, paying little attention to the 'countless' others.

For any story-teller it is necessary to select individuals for special attention, if he is to sustain any human interest in his tale. The poet of the *Iliad* is no exception. In fact, he himself frequently reminds the audience that he is describing no more than a fraction of all the fighting that is going on. Scenes of combat often start with 'there...', which obviously implies that more was happening elsewhere. Warriors would seem to fight in perfect isolation, but for phrases such as 'in the crowd' (*en homilōi*), 'among the foremost fighters' (*dia promakhōn*), or 'from under the flying missiles' (*hupek beleōn*), which are frequently inserted to correct that impression. References abound to advancing masses, numerous corpses stretched in the dust, the earth stained with blood.[9] Recognition of this technique of narration solves the apparent tension between the massive scale of fighting and the importance of individual heroics within it, and is essential to understanding Homeric warfare.

But at this point we find that the question of scale is not the key question after all. For example, Finley, though fully aware of the poet's descriptive technique, can still

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[6] M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*[2] (London, 1977), 74.

[7] F. Albracht, *Kampf und Kampfschilderung bei Homer* (Naumburg a.S; 1886 and 1895); E. and F. Lammert, 'Schlachtordnung' *RE* II.a.1 (1921), 436–81; J. Kromayer and G. Veith, *Heerwesen und Kriegführung der Griechen und Römer* (Munich, 1928). Other works that deal with aspects of Homeric warfare without doubting its plausibility are: A. Küsters, *Cuneus, Phalanx und Legio* (Würzburg, 1939); H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes* (Lille, 1939) and E. Mireaux, *La Vie quotidienne au temps d'Homère* (Paris, 1954).

[8] Kirk, op. cit. (n. 5), 113.

[9] In detail: J. Latacz, *Kampfparänese, Kampfdarstellung und Kampfwirklichkeit in der Ilias, bei Kallinos und Tyrtaios* (Munich, 1977), 83–5; Albracht, op. cit. (n. 7), 28.

see nothing but anarchy and chaos.[10] To return to the example of Idomeneus and Mērionēs, their behaviour seems peculiar, not because it does not suit warriors of a vast army, but because it does not suit *commanders* of a vast army. This, I think, is the real problem. All the major and most of the minor epic warriors are said to be 'leaders of men', yet the implications of this are completely disregarded. True, time and again the leaders assume *ad hoc* command over everybody fighting within earshot and ready to listen. At critical moments there is always someone at hand to set an example of bravery and encourage the fearful. Occasionally, someone may even manage to execute a tactical manoeuvre that saves the day. What is conspicuously lacking, however, is any trace of continuous leadership, exercised by the heroes over the hundreds or thousands of men who have followed them from their homes.

The study of Homeric warfare, then, first and foremost demands an explanation of this apparent neglect.

2.2. *The leaders and the other leaders*

The bulk of what we know about leadership in the armies derives from the Catalogue of Ships (2.484ff.). Here, we are informed that on the Greek side there are twenty-nine and on the Trojan side sixteen contingents consisting of people from particular regions. A few exact figures are given: the Boeotians, led by five men, are six thousand strong; the Myrmidons two thousand five hundred, with a single leader. The size of other contingents is only indicated by the number of their ships. This ranges from three to a hundred, forty being most common, and since the size of a ship's crew is likely to be fifty, one may assume that a medium-sized contingent comprises some two thousand men. They are usually commanded by one or two leaders.[11] This information implies a ratio of one leader to one or two thousand warriors.

In the narrative, however, we come across other leaders not mentioned in the Catalogue. For example, among the Myrmidons Akhilleus 'created five leaders (*hēgemones*), whom he trusted, to give orders; he himself dominated with great strength'.[12] Earlier, when Akhilleus called upon the Myrmidon *hēgētores* and *medontes* to prepare for battle, they were said to 'stream together', which suggests that these five men were selected from among an even larger group of leaders.[13] This impression is strengthened by the fact that the poet frequently describes as 'leaders' minor figures who are not mentioned in the Catalogue or anywhere else in the poem. Hektōr leads the Trojans, but occasionally his brothers Kebrionēs, Paris, Helenos and Dēiphobos, his cousin Poulydamas, and three sons of Antenōr are described as *hēgemones* too. The Athenians follow Menestheus, and the Epeans follow Megēs, but four more Attic

    [10] Finley, loc. cit. (n. 6).
    [11] Boeotians: 50 × 120 (2.509–10), Myrmidons: 50 × 50 (16.168–70). The standard crew seems to consist of 50 men, plus two leaders. However, crews of 20 appear as well. Exceptions to the usual number of leaders per contingent are, apart from the Boeotians, the Epeans (4), and the Dardanians and Argives (3). Twenty-six groups have one leader only, and of the fifteen contingents with two leaders in eight cases these are brothers.
    [12] 16.171–97. There are two less explicit parallels to this: see section 2.4.
    [13] 16.164–6. Cf. section 2.4. In the Lycian contingent, too, there are *hēgētores* other than Sarpēdōn and Glaukos, the 'official' leaders (16.495). Finley's argument that 'hēgētores ēde medontes' is an empty formula meaning little more than 'the men' in general (*Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* [Harmondsworth, 1983], 220), does not stand up to closer examination. In most cases the phrase clearly refers to leaders, and of the less clear cases there is not a single one in which it *has* to be translated as 'men'. It is hard to see how a word with a meaning as obvious as *hēgētores* could be misapplied, anyway.

and three more Elean leaders emerge.[14] Finally, in a particularly fierce attack, Hektōr kills no fewer than nine Greek *hēgemones*, whose existence had not even been hinted at before.[15]

The impression left by these ephemeral appearances is of a large number of leaders within each contingent. The status of the other leaders is not immediately clear. In preparations for battle, they are clearly under the authority of the single leader, who 'dominates with great strength'. In other contexts, no distinction seems to be made between them and the 'supreme' leaders. All of them are indiscriminately called *arkhos*, *hēgemōn*, *hēgētōr* or *agos* – each of which means simply 'leader'. No-one distinguishes between major and minor leaders when, say, calling for support in the fight: Glaukos appeals to Poulydamas and Antenōr's son Agēnōr as well as to Hektōr himself; Poseidōn encourages Teukros and the shadowy figure of Dēipyros, as well as several major heroes.[16]

Whatever the differences between the leaders, one thing is clear: authority is vested in more than just two or three men within a contingent.[17]

2.3. *The shadows of the heroes*

Let us turn from the leaders to the followers. Most of the references to them are vague, telling us no more than that there were men who followed where leaders led,[18] but a few details emerge. Aias Telamōnios is said to be accompanied by 'many good men, *hetairoi*, who took over his shield from him, whenever he was overcome by exhaustion and sweat'.[19] There are a dozen cases of such good men giving service to their leader. When he kills an adversary, they carry away the corpse's armour. When he takes prisoners, they take them to the ships. When he captures horses, they lead them off.[20] Apart from this, there are the ubiquitous charioteers, holding the horses 'breathing on the shoulders' of their masters or keeping an eye on them at some distance. These men not only attend their leaders, but also engage in fighting.[21]

All this is generally recognised, and the 'companions' or 'retainers' have been dealt with at length in several studies.[22] These studies, however, do not draw the obvious conclusions concerning the interpretation of epic battle scenes.

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[14] The other Trojan leaders are mentioned at 12.196, 13.691, 15.337; in general, it is said that there are Trojan *agoi* apart from Hektōr, 12.61, 17.335. Athenian leaders emerge at 13.196, 691, 15.337, the Epean leaders at 13.692 and 15.519. Although the poet generally treats Megēs as *the* leader of the Epeans, the Catalogue of Ships gives him 'Dulichium and the Echinean Islands' only (2.625-6). Other 'uncatalogued' leaders are Hyrtios of the Mysians (14.512), Mentēs of the Cicones (17.73) and Iphitiōn of the Maeonians (20.383).

[15] 11.301-3.

[16] 16.532-5; 13.91-3.

[17] The presence of many leaders other than the main ones has, to my knowledge, been recognised only by Küsters (op. cit. (n. 7), 4) and Lammert and Lammert (op. cit. (n. 7), col. 438). Further explicit utterances on the subject come from Kromayer (op. cit. (n. 7)) and Couissin (op. cit. (n. 5), 16–17), both of whom deny the existence of any subdivision of leadership, apparently restricting their information to the Catalogue of Ships.

[18] 11.343-4; 12.330; 13.491-2; 13.800-1. There are many more examples.

[19] 13.709-18.

[20] 5.25-6, 48, 165, 325; 6.52-3; 13.641; 16.506, 665; 17.189; 21.32; and cf. note 26. *Hetairoi* are also often said to defend a wounded or dead man, or carry one out of the fight. In these cases it is not always clear if the followers of the victim are meant, or his *hetairoi* in general, including other leaders.

[21] Aias' men are implicitly said to be heavily armed and explicity to 'fight hard in front' (*prosthe marnanto*, 13.719-20). Akhilleus' *therapontes* are called 'close-fighting' (*ankhemakhoi*, 16.272, 17.165), and Patroklos in particular is by implication said to have fought hard at Akhilleus' side (16.244-5).

[22] Most recently in P. A. L. Greenhalgh, 'The Homeric *therapon* and *opaon* and their

Since logic demands that followers follow their leader at every move, and since the narrative only rarely mentions them, one has to assume that the poet is either taking their presence for granted, or else being inconsistent. I do not know of any scholar who has, in so many words, argued either way, but the general feeling seems to be that the former is *a priori* more likely. There is, in fact, clear evidence to support this view, in the many passages in which a handful of leaders is said to constitute a crowd, to fight intensely and to 'fall in heaps'. In a particularly striking example Odysseus and Diomēdēs are emphatically said to be the *only* two Greeks resisting a Trojan onslaught. Nevertheless, the enemy halts in front of them and 'they killed one another'. Since neither Odysseus nor Diomēdēs is killed and the Trojans are hardly likely to have started killing their own men, this must mean there are other Greeks with the two heroes.[23]

Twice only does a leader apparently *leave* his followers. It is proof of the poet's consistency that in both cases he carefully points out that others take over command during the hero's absence: first, when Aias, leaving to help Menestheus and promising to return soon, tells the other Aias and Lykomēdēs to stay put and 'encourage the men'; and again when Menelaos sends Antilokhos off on an errand and decides to put Thrasymēdēs in charge of the Pylians, rather than stay there and 'help' them himself.[24]

Our conclusion should be that the heroes are always assumed to be surrounded by a band of followers in battle.[25] When they are said to be 'alone', this means there are no other *leaders* near.

Next, we must note that it is not only the leaders of contingents who have their personal 'companions'; the minor leaders do, too. Agēnōr has a 'squire' (*therapōn*) at his side, Teukros has Pandīōn to carry his bow, Pouludamas has a charioteer and a man at hand to replace him when he is shot.[26] This essential fact has been consistently overlooked. Scholars have noticed only the retainers of the major heroes, and have either tacitly assumed that these make up the entire contingent, or thought that they form its core: a band of aristocratic warriors, distinct from the bulk of the men, supposedly 'commoners'.[27] On the former view we should have to assume that

Historical Implications', *BICS* 29 (1982), 69–80. Compare e.g.: M. P. Nilsson, *Homer and Mycenae*[2] (New York, 1968 [1933[1]]), 230–3; Jeanmaire, op. cit. (n. 7), 98–104; Mireaux, op. cit. (n. 7), 63 and 103; Finley, op. cit. (n. 6), 103–4; Kirk, op. cit. (n. 3), 113; Y. Garlan, *War in the Ancient World* (London, 1975), 24; and O. Murray, *Early Greece* (London, 1980), 54.

[23] 11.336–7. First a dual is used to indicate the resisting heroes, and later, when Diomēdēs has withdrawn, Odysseus is said to be alone (*oiōthe*), 'none of the Argives remained with him' (11.401–2). Shortly afterwards Aias seems to be annihilating the Trojans single-handedly, yet when Hektor rides to the rescue, he 'avoids Aias' and attacks 'the ranks of the other men' (11.540–2). In other cases a few leaders joining forces turn into 'strong *phalanges*': 13.91–3 with 13.126–35, 145–54; and 16.532–5, 553–5 with 16.563–6. That six Greeks oppose an *ethnos* of Trojans (13.478–9, 491–2), and that an unspecified number of *hēgētores is* an *ethnos* (11.587–95), points in the same direction. 'Falling in heaps', finally, occurs when leaders fight over the body of Patroklos (17.215–9, 248–61, 360–2).

[24] 12.331–72 and 17.702–6. In both cases the context makes it clear that they are not accompanied by followers.

[25] However, a group of leader and followers probably does not always stick closely together. The manner of fighting would seem to make for frequent fissioning and fusion of groups and for the occasional separation of individual warriors from them.

[26] 13.598–600; 12.372; 15.445–57. Dēiphobos has a charioteer as well: 13.535–7.

[27] With the exception of Greenhalgh, whose position, though argued along different lines, comes very close to mine (see n. 73). Of the others Nilsson, Jeanmaire and, presumably, Garlan opt for the first alternative, Mireaux and Murray for the second. Finley would seem to incline towards the latter, since he speaks of retainers in battle and at the same time claims that we do

the poet is imagining, say, six hundred men treading Aias' heels in order to take over his shield when he feels tired, or two thousand men accompanying Mēriones to fetch a new spear. The latter view implies that he thinks of the masses as unorganized and ignored by their leaders. Neither interpretation says much for the plausibility of epic warfare, and neither is correct. Within a contingent there are as many bands of followers as there are leaders, and there are evidently quite a number of those. Our second conclusion must be that a contingent is made up of numerous small bands of warriors, each with its own leader.

This brings us close to understanding such behaviour as that of Idomeneus and Mēriones. They are able to leave and rejoin the battle whenever they like, because they take their personal followers with them, and leave the other leaders of the contingent, each in the company of his own men, to carry on fighting.[28]

2.4. *The vanishing contingents*

A puzzling feature remains, however. Why do the commanders not even consider rejoining their contingents when they return to the fight?

This is not an isolated case: disregard for the existence of contingents pervades all the fighting. The very first actions in the very first battle illustrate this. Antilokhos, leader of the large Pylian contingent, kills an enemy, whereupon Elephēnōr, leader of the medium-sized Euboian contingent, grabs the victim by the feet and tries to drag the corpse to the Greek side.[29] Now, even if one supposes that the Pylians and Euboeans are fighting next to each other – which the Catalogue does not suggest –, the space occupied by the thousands of warriors of both regions ought to keep their leaders quite far apart. Yet they find themselves side by side, and so do many other leaders of contingents, fighting in pairs and in groups.[30] The poet is perfectly well aware of the great distances separating the men. In his account of the struggle over Patroklos, he vividly describes how clouds of dust rise to the sky where the fighting is fiercest, while elsewhere men are taking it easy, throwing an occasional javelin and enjoying the sunshine, *unaware* of what is going on around the corpse. Nevertheless, in the same scene he mentions four leaders, commanding forces totalling over 150 ships' crews, who are no more than a few feet apart: Mēriones and Menelaos carry Patroklos' body, while the Aiantes cover their retreat.[31]

There is no need to see this as a blatant inconsistency. We may simply conclude that the poet conceives of the heroes and their followers as being quite mobile, and not restricting their movements to the parts of the battlefield occupied by their respective contingents. It is not that they temporarily leave it to meet an emergency and rejoin it as soon as possible; rather, they ignore it from start to finish. Significantly, and in contrast to the care taken for the band of followers, no leader ever appoints anyone to lead his contingent while he is gone.

not know how (the rest of?) the army was recruited. Kirk, too, perceives noble bands, plus a mass of commoners, but argues that these are incompatible forms of organisation. Those who have not recognised the existence of followers imagine that the contingents are indivisible units under single leadership, except Küsters, who thinks that the contingents consist of tactical units of about 50 men, each under a leader. These fight in 'deep column' formation. The king is supreme leader and does not lead a particular unit. References in n. 22.

[28] Indeed we are told that Idomeneus left the field with unspecified *hetairoi*, though not that they returned with him. Also, it may be more than a conventional epithet when the poet says 'thus Idomeneus and Mēriones, leaders of men (*agoi andrōn*) went into battle' (13.304–5). The existence of other Cretan *agoi* is proved by 3.231.

[29] 4.457–65.

[30] Pairs are e.g. Antilokhos and Menelaos: 5.561–89; Menelaos and Aias: 17.113–24, 11.463–89; Aineias and Pandaros: 5.166–310; Diomēdēs and Odysseus: 11.312–400. Groups of leaders occur at e.g. 13.91ff., 478ff., 16.532ff.   [31] 17.366–80; 715–54.

One will immediately object that this view itself does not make sense. If all leaders feel free to go wherever they please, it is obviously impossible for a contingent to remain a unity in battle: its bands will inevitably disperse and intermingle with those of other contingents. This is true. Remarkably, on closer scrutiny one finds that, in fact, *nowhere* in the *Iliad* is there any unambiguous reference to a contingent fighting as a unit. True, the poet occasionally refers to battling 'Lycians' or 'Thracians' or the like, but that is not the same as describing contingents in action. When, for example, Peiroos falls surrounded by '*hetairoi Thrēikes*', one canot be sure who these men are. Are they '*the* Thracians, comrades', meaning his entire contingent? Are they 'Thracian *comrades*', meaning his personal followers among his countrymen? Or could they possibly be '*Thracian* comrades', as distinct from, say, his Trojan friends?[32]

One encounters the same ambiguity everywhere. Only rarely can one be certain that contingents are *not* meant – as when 'Ionians', said to be fighting, are later described as 'picked men of the Athenians'[33] –, and never is it beyond doubt that they *are*. The nearest thing to a contingent actually fighting as such are the Locrians who sling stones and shoot arrows 'at the back', unlike anyone else.[34] This is not a matter of choice or tactics, but necessitated by their lack of the armour and weapons needed to fight man-to-man, and their leader, who apparently does have the proper equipment, leaves them behind when he goes to fight at the front. The Locrians may form something of a unit, but that is because they are an exceptional group within the Greek army.

As far as descriptions of fighting go, then, we find no sign of confusion. Leadership in battle is exercised exclusively over small and highly mobile bands of followers. There are no larger units, there is no higher level of command.

Before battle, however, we do find both larger units and higher levels of command. The Myrmidon contingent provides the most explicit example. Having decided to send the men into battle, Akhilleus summons the *hēgētores* of the Myrmidons, who assemble around him with their followers. He then sorts out the warriors, 'dividing them well' among five *hēgemones* he has appointed 'to give orders'. Finally, after an encouraging speech, he takes his place at the head of the contingent, with his personal followers at his side, and starts the advance to battle.[35] Nestōr likewise arranges his *hetairoi* around five men, while encouraging them to fight.[36] Of others we hear in more general terms that they draw up, 'inspect' and inspire their troops.[37]

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[32] 4.532–3.

[33] 13.685: '*Iaones helkekhitōnes*'; 689: '*hoi Athēnaiōn prolelegmenoi*'. [34] 13.712–18, 721–2.

[35] This is my interpretation of the scene described in 16.155–220. Part of the leadership is provided by Patroklos, but normally all would be Akhilleus' responsibility. My reading of the passage involves taking *hēgētores* (164) literally; assuming that, as usual, their (and later Patroklos', 218–20) followers are present by implication; and further assuming that the *hēgemones* around whom the men are placed 'well-divided' (*eu krinas*, 198–9), are the leaders mentioned immediately before (173, 179, 193, 196–7).

[36] 4.293–6. At 12.139–40 the contingent of Asios, too, is said to advance around him and five others, and at 3.1 all men are said to be drawn up 'with the *hēgēmones*'. It is generally recognised that the further details of Nestōr's arrangements (4.297–300) and the content of his speech (301–10) seem inappropriate in the context of Homeric warfare. Although even on my interpretation the passage is awkward, it does become possible to fit Nestōr into the general picture. One might assume that his arrangements – the chariot(s) ahead, the men on foot behind them – apply to *each individual band* of warriors, rather than to the contingent as a whole. Thus, when he advises the charioteers 'not to fight alone, ahead of the others, nor to fall back', 'the others' (*alloi*) would refer to *the other members of the band*, rather than to the other charioteers of the contingent.

[37] Drawing up: 2.525, 558, 704, 727. Inspecting: 3.196; all of the army is 'inspected' by

It should be noted that the troops are not drawn up in a tidy formation of lines and columns. For example, before the battle the Myrmidons crowd together so enthusiastically that their shields and the plumes of their helmets touch.[38] Curiously, this passage has usually been interpreted as meaning precisely the opposite: that they were drawn up in a very tight and strict formation. But the context shows that the men are fired by Akhilleus' speech, and that those standing at the back spontaneously and eagerly press forward to form a dense mass of warriors. Columns, lines and manoeuvres hardly suit the situation.[39] Again, an 'inspection' is a rather informal walk round the forces, during which the leader praises those who seem ready to fight and scolds those who appear reluctant.

Preparations for battle, then, do not seem particularly elaborate or sophisticated. The only thing a commander does, apart from exhorting his men, is to divide them among a number of leaders. Now, we should not assume that the Myrmidon and Pylian contingents both consist of only six bands of warriors: those led by Akhilleus, Nestor and the five leaders appointed by each. Such bands would be too large, and Akhilleus would not need to 'appoint' people to give orders to their own followers. Rather, as suggested earlier, the five must have been selected from a larger number of leaders within the contingent. What 'supreme' commanders do, then, is to divide their forces into five 'sections', each comprising several leaders and their bands, and appoint one leader to command each section.

In battle, such sections seem to disappear as tracelessly as the contingents do. There is no indication of anyone exercising leadership over them. Indeed, we find one of those appointed by Akhilleus offering his services as charioteer to Automedōn, the stand-in leader of the contingent, which would be very unwise if he was still in charge of his section.[40]

Thus, in the preparation for battle we find a hierarchy of bands, sections and contingents, all with their respective commanders. On top of this there is a commander for the army as a whole: Agamemnon inspects all the Greek contingents. But in the battle itself the entire structure disappears, and only the leaders of the smallest units are visible.

2.5. *Columns and segments*

At this point one might object that in the narrative the fighting is often said to be done by '*stikhes*' and '*phalanges*', which have been thought to be units of leadership. If so, one may wonder how they fit into the picture sketched above.[41]

Agamemnōn, 4.231, 250. And cf. the figurative use of the expression in 11.264, 540. Encouraging: 2.589, 4.254. Menestheus and Nestōr are commended for their consummate skill in these matters, 2.552–5.

[38] 16.210–7.

[39] This passage, with two others, has been taken as the 'hard core' of so-called hoplite passages. Supposedly, it is an 'interpolated' description of a classical phalanx (T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* [London, 1958], 214–20; G. S. Kirk, 'Objective Dating Criteria in Homer', *Museum Helveticum* 17 [1960], 194). This, of course, could only be true if there *were* ordered columns and lines. Another objection is that the Myrmidons are only standing and waiting in this way – not marching or fighting, which is essential to hoplite warfare. When they move, they do so 'in throngs' (*aollees*, 16.276).

[40] 17.466ff. Asios' five leaders (cf. n. 36) are all mentioned again when they die (12.193; 13.506, 545ff., 560ff.). Of the Mymidon leaders, Phoinix plays a part in the non-fighting events, but none of the others ever reappears. Nor do Nestor's men.

[41] Küsters (op. cit. (n. 8), 4–5 and 171 n. 57), Lammert and Lammert (op. cit. (n. 8), col. 438), and F. Lammert, 'Phalanx', *RE* XIX.2 (1938), col. 1626, think of *stikhes* and *phalanges* as tactical

The case of the *stikhes* is, at first sight, plain enough. Each of the sections into which commanders split their contingents is called *stix.[42] But if sections are *stikhes* it does not necessarily follow that *stikhes* are sections. We gather from the battle descriptions that *stikhes* stand and sit, move forward and flee, are destroyed and killed, warded off and attacked, 'broken' and encouraged. In none of these references is there anything to show that a number of distinct units, with commanders, is meant. They are all but one in the plural, all very vague, and could in their contexts be understood as simply 'the men' or 'the army'.[43] In one particular case fighting units are definitely *not* meant: when Aineias passes by 'many *stikhes* of men, and many of horses',[44] he certainly does not encounter now a *stix* of infantry, now one of cavalry. Since 'men and horses' are not separate arms, 'many *stikhes*' can mean nothing more specific than 'a great mass'. Even on the one occasion when a *stix* does appear by itself, in the singular – when Akhilleus boasts that he will fight his way 'all through a *stix*' – there is no further indication that he is thinking of any particular unit of the Trojan army. On the contrary, the first few victims of his attack include a Maeonian and a Dardanian as well as a Trojan.[45]

We should, therefore, assume that '*stix*' does not indicate a tactical unit, but that it has a wider meaning, which happens to include one such unit, the 'section'. I would suggest that any actual or hypothetical cross-section extending from the front to the rear of the assembled army could be referred to as a *stix*. A suitable translation might be 'column', taken in a broad sense.[46] Thus, any mass of warriors would be thought of as an aggregate of 'columns'. Any part of an army's front might be regarded as the 'head' of a column. One might speak of e.g. 'slaughtering the enemy's columns', meaning no more than 'the enemy's men', analogous to the vague way in which we might refer to 'the enemy's ranks' or 'lines'.[47] At the same time one might use the word to indicate a *particular* part of the army front, where a particular leader is in

units. Kromayer (op. cit. (n. 7), 23) equates *phalanx* with regional contingent. A very different view is taken by Latacz (op. cit. (n. 9), 45–67). He argues that both are single lines of men, not units of leadership at all. This comes close to the classical military use of the words. It should be noted, however, that this usage only emerges with Xenophon. Before him, formations are called '*taxis*' or '*lokhos*'. From the argument below, it will be evident why I think none of these interpretations is correct.

[42] The first of the five Myrmidon section-commanders is said to lead 'the first *stix*'; the others lead simply 'the second, the third' etc. (16.173ff.). The word *stix* does not, by the way, actually occur in this nominative singular form. The same meaning of the word is appropriate in other passages: Skhedios and Epistrophos 'draw up the *stikhes* of Phocians' (2.525). *Stikhes* are present in the contingents of Odysseus (3.196, 4.330), Pandaros (4.90) and Makhaōn (4.202) when these are standing ready for battle. As long as Akhilleus refuses to fight, the Myrmidons are not led 'into *stikhes*' (2.687). *Stikhes* are inspected by Odysseus and Agamemnōn (cf. n. 37).

[43] The references are, in the order cited: 4.90, 201, 330; 7.61, 65; 4.221; 11.412; 17.107; 5.166, 746; 8.390; 11.188, 203; 17.510; 20.353; 13.680; 15.615; 5.461. *Stikhes* and leadership are associated once in 17.107: 'meanwhile the *stikhes* of the Trojans came closer; Hektōr led (them)'. This only shows that Hektōr led the Trojans in general. As 'supreme' leader he would not be leading a particular *stix*, anyway.

[44] 20.325–9.

[45] 20.362. The victims are Iphitiōn (382ff.), Dēmoleōn (395ff.) and Polydōros (407ff.).

[46] In a broad sense, because 'any cross-section from front to rear' does not necessarily imply a section of greater depth than width, let alone a single file, which is the more usual meaning of 'column'. As far as etymology is concerned, I think it quite probable that *stix*, related to *steikho*, 'to move forward', could mean something like 'a group of men, facing and moving towards the enemy'. Cf. Küsters' '*Marschkolonne*' (op. cit. (n. 7), 171 n. 57).

[47] Referring to the men as *stikhes*, then, would have a different nuance from, say, *ethnos* or *laos*: it implies a certain structure within the mass. The expression *kata stikhas*, used when somebody sees or shouts something 'through the *stikhes*', does in fact in two or three cases

command, A *stix*, then, though it may coincide with a unit of leadership, is a conceptual, rather than an actual division of the army.

As for the *phalanges*, we find that they 'one after another, relentlessly marched to war. Each of the leaders commanded his men'. This seems to suggest that *phalanges* have leaders, but it is not unequivocally stated that they do, and there is no other evidence for leaders of *phalanges*.[48] Most of the evidence is as vague as that on *stikhes*, and suggests no more than that a contingent can be said to consist of *phalanges* and that these engage in fighting, are destroyed, 'broken', attacked, encouraged and so forth. Like *stikhes*, too, the word is almost invariably used in the plural, and usually means 'the men' or 'the army'.[49]

However, the words are not simply synonyms. Since the *phalanges* move 'one after another', 'like the waves of the sea', and since there are 'foremost' as well as 'hindmost' *phalanges*, they could hardly be juxtaposed 'columns'.[50] Furthermore, in marked contrast to *stikhes*, they appear to be very mobile. They take their place in the battle order; during the battle itself they withdraw to take rest and then return with renewed zeal to the front line.[51] Their range of movement is not restricted to forwards and backwards, but they move sideways as well, following Hektōr as he moves along the front.[52] Further evidence of their mobility is that at particular points on the battlefield a concentration of *phalanges* may occur.[53]

definitely mean looking or calling to one's left or right, rather than forwards or backwards (11.343, 17.84; 15.353 is less clear; 5.590, 11.91, 16.820 are inconclusive). Likewise, when Aineias passes by 'many *stikhes*' this means he moves a great distance along the front (he ends up 'at the very edge of the battlefield', 20.328), rather than away from the front to the rear. Finally, when Akhilleus says he will penetrate 'a *stix*' this means he will not fight in the usual manner, attacking only the men first in line along the front, but intends to press on until he reaches the enemies' rear.

[48] 4.427–9. In two other passages (5.591 and 11.344) *phalanges* are said to 'follow' Hektōr. This is as vague as the statement that he leads *stikhes* (n. 43), or, e.g. that he leads Trojans 'advancing in throngs' (13.136).

[49] There are *phalanges* 'of the Athenians' (2.558), within the Cretan contingent (4.254); and 'with the Aiantes' (4.280–1). The other references are 8.279, 11.503, 19.152, 6.6, 7.141, 11.90, 12.718, 15.408, 13.806–7, 4.254, 6.83, 13.90. Furthermore, *phalanges* can start to fight (4.281, 332, 427; 19.158). They can be stopped (3.77, 7.55, 11.567), 'cut through' (16.394), brought into disorder (5.93, 96; 11.148; 15.448; 16.280), 'strengthened' (11.215, 12.415; 16.563), and scattered (17.285). The only time *phalanx* (singular) occurs is 6.6, when we hear it is 'broken' by Aias – nothing else.

[50] '*Prōtas phalangas*', 16.394; '*pumatas phalangas*' contrasted with *promakhoi*, 4.254; '*epassuterai*', 'like the waves of the sea', 4.427–9 (cf. n. 48).

[51] *Phalanges* taking their place in the battle order: 2.558; withdrawing, 13.83–90; and subsequently moving into the fight again: 13.126–35. The translation of 13.126 and 13.90 may be stretched to give these lines a different meaning from the one adopted here. The verse '*amphi d' ar' Aiantes doious histanto phalanges*' (13.126), which I translate (quite literally) as '*phalanges* went and stood around the two Aiantes', might be more freely interpreted as 'they went and stood around the two Aiantes (in the form of) *phalanges*'. Cf. C. Michel, *Erläuterungen zum N der Ilias* (Heidelberg, 1971), 43, 45. The phrase '(Poseidōn) *krateras ōtrune phalangas*' (13.90) – 'encouraged the strong *phalanges*', in my translation – might in the same way be taken to mean that he 'encouraged the (Greeks, so that they formed) strong *phalanges*'. Cf. K. F. Ameis (bearb. C. Hentze), *Homers Ilias* (Leipzig, 1888), ad 13.90). While my version implies that *phalanges* were existing entities in both situations, the alternatives imply that they were not, and had to be formed from a disorganised mass of people. I prefer my version not only because it is more literal, but because I suspect the freer translations to have been inspired by the commentators' preconception that the *phalanx* must be a formation of some sort, and cannot be anything else.

[52] See n. 48. In these two passages it is clear from the context that the movement is to the left or right (*kata stikhas*, cf. n. 47).

[53] There are places where 'most' (*pleistai*, 11.148) or 'by far the most' (*polu pleistai*, 15.448) *phalanges* are present.

Obviously *phalanges* must be something similar to the bands of leaders and followers. Such bands would presumably not all have been drawn up next to each other, but rather some in front and some behind them, and so would have advanced 'like the waves of the sea'. More importantly, the freedom of movement followers and *phalanges* enjoy is also similar. In fact, on two occasions a number of heroes and their implicit followers are described as *phalanges* – but again this does not prove that a band of warriors is a *phalanx*.[54]

The etymology of the word, though it cannot by itself be considered evidence, could support the meaning 'band of followers'. It is sometimes taken to be derived from the sense of '*phalanx*' as a large, rounded piece of wood, a log – suggestive of a certain steamroller-like quality –, but there are other senses, including 'a spider with particularly long, jointed legs' and 'the inflexible part of a finger'. The latter is called phalanx even in modern biological terminology.[55] The common element in the last two usages, and maybe in all three, is that of a 'segment' of a larger entity, and the military meaning of *phalanx* may well be related to that notion. The groups of leaders and followers may have been conceived of as 'segments' of the army. At the stage of preparation, when the contingent is divided into sections, the analogy between *phalanges* in 'columns' and joints in fingers (notice the number five!) would be remarkably close.

I would not hesitate, therefore, to say that *phalanx* is the Homeric 'technical' term for a leader and his band of followers, were it not for the lack of any unambiguous reference to someone *leading* a *phalanx*. This leaves room for *phalanges* being, like *stikhes*, a conceptual, not an actual, part of the army.[56] In that case, '*phalanx*' would denote any relatively small 'segment': it might coincide with a band of followers, or with two or three or more, but, rather than a definite group or formation, it would signify some part of a larger whole.[57]

Whichever answer one may prefer, it should be clear that 'segments' and 'columns' can be easily accommodated within the organisational structure which the epic army has been shown to possess.

The poet's view of leadership in battle, then, turns out to be internally consistent. It is not a jumble of various organisational schemes made up *ad hoc* or derived from tradition. The main reason for the general failure to recognise this is, I think, the inclination to attach great importance to the information found in the Catalogue of Ships. Considering its prominent position at the opening of the story and its apparent clarity, this is quite excusable. But unfortunately the expectations it raises about the organisation of the warriors in the battles to follow, are not fulfilled, and thus it leaves one thinking that epic battles are pure chaos.

[54] 13.125ff., cf. 13.91ff.; 16.563ff., cf. 532–5 and 553–5.

[55] The etymology is discussed in Lammert (op. cit. (n. 41), col. 1625), who gives all the relevant passages. The 'log'-interpretation is in Küsters (op. cit. (n. 7), 171 n. 57) and Latacz (op. cit. (n. 8), 53).

[56] Since *stikhes* and *phalanges*, on the latter interpretation, are very close in meaning, one might suspect that they are, after all, synonyms, and that the apparent differences between them are merely differences in formulaic usage. I am not able to judge to what extent metric requirements may have led to the choice of one word rather than the other. Only one established formula – '*kata stikhas*' – is used in the passages that constitute my evidence for the differences between the two. In any case, my argument is not affected even if they *are* synonyms.

[57] Yet another etymological argument is slightly in favour of interpreting *phalanges* as bands of followers. The later change to the singular to indicate the entire army (cf. n. 41) could reflect an organisational change: the epic army with its independent leaders and their *phalanges* has been replaced by an integrated city-state army, which constitutes a single phalanx under central leadership. The transition is not so easy to explain when one takes *phalanx* as 'part of a whole'.

Closer study, however, reveals that actually the organisation falls into *two* consistent patterns. In the first there are spatial arrangements for the troops, and hierarchical arrangements between the leaders; in the second, the warrior bands enjoy full freedom of movement and their leaders enjoy independence of command. The former occurs before, the latter during battle. And since they never occur simul-taneously, one cannot point to any logical inconsistency in the epic account.

III. FACT AND FICTION IN HOMERIC LEADERSHIP

3.1. *The credible army*

Having thus, I trust, achieved the first objective set out in the introduction, it is worthwhile to pursue the further question: are these organisational patterns the product of poetic imagination or do they reflect the conditions of warfare as it was practised by a historical society?

First of all, it should be noted that it was not only the poet who had a clear conception of what army organisation was like. His audience must have known too. In the *Iliad* almost everything essential is left implied: after the deceptively explicit Catalogue of contingents we are landed on a battlefield where, instead of these, we can only discern the movements of shadowy bands of followers, and the presence of vague entities, called *stikhes* and *phalanges*. The narrator felt no need to explain any of this. Surely, were this army organisation the brain-child of the poet or a succession of poets creating the *Iliad*, he or they would have added a few lines of clarification for the benefit of the audience. We must assume that, from the start, poet and audience shared a conception of the nature of an epic army. In the heroic tradition at large, in other poems and possibly in folk-stories about the heroes, a consistent but fully imaginary form of organisation might have developed. But it would seem to be *a priori* more likely that such a commonly accepted model of the heroes' leadership in war was derived from actual warfare.

Let us look at the organisational structure of Homeric armies to see if there is anything distinctly unhistorical about it. At the basic level there are leaders, followed by men somehow personally attached to them, their 'companions', their 'retainers'. This relationship definitely needs closer study, but it is enough for our purposes to note that bands of warriors, each tied personally to a leader in one way or another, are a common feature of, among others, feudal armies and fighting street-gangs. I will cite a particularly close parallel, to be found among the Philippine Tausug, who have 'alliance groups of young men who fight together', of 'overwhelming importance in Tausug society'. It is

common to refer to the group by the name of the leader, as in the phrase 'Hamid will help in the fighting', in which it is implied that Hamid will not come alone, but will be accompanied by an unspecified number of followers. [...] These can be called *minimal alliance groups* because they are the smallest localised units for purposes of conducting military activity. [...] More complicated feuds and larger battles are occasionally fought between *medial alliances* consisting of a union of these minimal groups. Within the medial alliance the constituent minimal alliance groups do not lose their separate identities, but retain identification with their respective leaders. [...] Each minimal alliance group operates as a unit, so once a battle begins there may be very little communication between leaders.[58]

[58] T. Kiefer, *The Tausug* (New York, 1972), 71–3; 80. Kiefer also mentions, as things of the past, 'maximal alliances', aggregates of 'medial' ones (ibid. 74): this would parallel the epic aggregate of contingents, but see below. With respect to feudal armies, it may be noted that Nilsson (op. cit. (n. 33), 229ff.) and Jeanmaire (op. cit. (n. 7), 28–30, 111) go so far as to claim that the Homeric bands are in fact based on feudal obligations towards the leader.

Small groups of men, identified with their leader to a point where the presence of followers is only implied when leaders are referred to, united to form an army, but fighting independently within it: this is exactly the way in which Homeric warriors are organised.

At the next level there are leaders of sections, who are specially appointed 'to give orders', only for the short period during which the army advances to battle. At first sight, this is rather odd. Nevertheless, there could be a sound military reason for it. Given that an army has to advance some way from the spot where it is arranged in battle order to where it actually meets the enemy and given that it does not cover this distance in a tight formation, it would seem to be in danger of falling apart. Some bands might advance more slowly than others, some might loiter in the hope that others will be prepared to take all of the risks. In Agamemnōn's inspection of the army, groups of men who are slow or reluctant to get to grips with the enemy are his main worry.[59] In any case, to prevent 'columns' on the move from attenuating and breaking is recognised to be a general problem of warfare.[60] Organising the bands of warriors in sections and setting leaders over them, presumably to see that they do not hang back, and more or less to chase them into battle, seems a plausible attempt at resolving this difficulty.

At the upper two levels of command there are the great heroes leading their regional contingents, and Agamemnōn and Hektōr leading the great heroes. Since the regions of Greece and the 'allied nations' of Asia Minor are apparently independent political units, with 'kings' of some kind, we would *expect* them to have their own armies and commanders. What could be more natural than for each commander to retain authority over the warriors of his region, while ceding the control over the enterprise as a whole to the most powerful among his fellow-leaders?

There appears, then, to be ample justification for the existence of these top levels of leadership. But if so, why do they disappear in battle?

3.2. *Vanishing contingents revisited*

Much to the surprise of modern scholars,[61] the 'natural' division of the armies into regional contingents seems to be a source of some embarrassment to the poet. It is remarkable that, in contrast to the *Iliad*'s general lack of explicitness about organisational matters, the number, size and leadership of the contingents are very clearly described. It is even more striking that the poet deems it necessary to preface his account of the contingents of both sides with explanations for their existence.

The Trojan case is the most transparent: before the Trojan forces draw up, the watchman Politēs runs up to warn Hektōr of the coming of the Greeks and to give him some excellent advice.

Hektōr, I urge you above all to do as I say. In his great city Priamos has many allies. But these foreigners all talk different languages. Let each man give orders to those whom he leads, and, drawing up his countrymen, let him lead them into battle.[62]

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[59] Agamemnōn deals with those he thinks too slow in moving towards the enemy (Odysseus, Menestheus and Diomēdēs, and their men) in harsh terms, 4.327–422. It is a problem at any time during the battle, because there are always men who stay away from the real fight, but one can see that the problem would be most acute during the advance.

[60] Cf. H. H. Turney-High, *Primitive War, its Practice and Concepts* (Columbia S.C., 1971), 43–4.

[61] E.g. Andrewes, op. cit. (n. 3), 132.

[62] 2.802–6. 'Those' is emphasized: *hoisi per*. See section 3.3.

In the catalogue that follows the foreigners are indeed separated from one another and from the Troians. Now, though we might think this perfectly sensible, there is elsewhere in the poems no indication of differences in language, or even of dialect. The 'problem' is introduced here, and only here, for no other reason, it seems, than to provide an excuse for dividing the army into contingents.

It is almost the same with the introduction to the Greek catalogue. Here it is Nestōr who suggests a division of the army:

> Sort out your men, Agamemnōn, into tribes (*phula*) and phratries (*phrētrai*), so that phratry may help phratry and tribes tribes. Such dispositions, if the troops adhere to them, will show you what cowards you may have among the *hēgemones* or among the ranks, and what good men. For they will be fighting among their own people (*kata spheas*), and you will soon find out whether it is the will of the gods that stands between you and the sack of Troy, or the cowardice of your soldiers and their incompetence in war.[63]

Again we find that the poet feels obliged to produce a reason for the division – and this is *not* that people from the same tribe and phratry always fight together (nor could language be the reason in this case, of course). The excuse is that this grouping together might prove that the expedition was unsuccessful because particular groups and their leaders were too cowardly. Or, on an alternative interpretation, that by putting together people who belong to the same phratry and therefore know each other, it might be easier to identify the cowards and the brave men. Both reasons appear far fetched, and it seems to me that the poet was rather desperate to find a rationalisation for his division of the army.

It has been objected that Nestōr's advice cannot be aimed at forming contingents, since, in contrast to the advice the watchman gives the Trojans, it is not in any way followed up in the narrative.[64] This is not quite true. It is said emphatically that at Nestōr's instigation, Agamemnōn and the most prominent leaders 'go around the army together', and, while the warriors are pouring out from the ships, they are busy 'sorting out the men'. They 'separated them in an orderly way, here and there'.[65] Clearly the suggestion of dividing the army into groups is taken up, and the obvious conclusion is that Nestōr's 'tribes and phratries' somehow denotes contingents.

I would suggest that the phrase 'so that phratry may help phratry and tribes tribes' indicates that Nestōr is proposing the division of the army into *groups* of tribes, rather than single tribes. If this is correct, it seems reasonable to equate these groups of tribes with the regional contingents. In classical times, at least, the population of regions such as Attica was, for administrative and cult purposes, organised in tribes and phratries. Assuming that the poet has this type of organisation in mind, it would certainly be appropriate for him to describe each of his regions as an aggregate of tribes. What else could he have called them? No other single concept was available. '*Polis*' would not have been suitable because the regions seldom comprise a single city only. '*Ethnos*' did not mean anything more specific than 'a mass'. '*Purgos*', which is

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[63] 2.362–8.

[64] Küsters is, it seems, the first to state that Nestōr's advice is not followed (op. cit. (n. 7), 4). Finley (*Early Greece. The Bronze and Archaic Ages* [London, 1970], 84–5) agrees, and so does Andrewes, who finds the advice 'not...appropriate' and supposes it to reflect the military organisation of the time of the poet, 'an intrusion' in an otherwise more ancient type of organisation (op. cit. (n. 3), 131–2). He considers this a 'natural guess', and a guess it is, though 'natural' only within a particular tradition of Homeric scholarship. Moreover, as far as I can see, there is no evidence for a tribe-and-phratry army organisation at any time in Greek history (see. n. 74).

[65] 2.439–46 (*krinontes*); 474–7 (*diekosmeon entha kai entha*).

commonly thought to be a technical term for 'contingent', seems to me to have been used only in a metaphorical sense.[66] The poet, then, chose to describe his regions as groups of tribes, and added phratries to remove any ambiguity about the rather flexible meaning of *phula*.[67]

On this interpretation, the awkwardness of both the motivation and the wording of Nestōr's proposal[68] can be seen as confirming the theory that the division of an army into separate contingents is a notion with which the poet is not really at ease.

This hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that on several occasions the poet casually simplifies the multi-divisional organisation of his massive armies to the structure of a single contingent. The most explicit case is the almost spontaneous reorganisation of the Trojan army just before it storms the wall around the Greek ships. The Trojans and their allies draw themselves up in five groups. These in no way correspond to the regional organisation, which supposedly existed before, but their number and purpose – a united, massed advance – are clearly reminiscent of that of the sections constituted before battle.[69] More subtly, a fivefold division under the command of one supreme leader surfaces in the scene where the Trojan army is said to be marching against the Greeks for the major battle of the *Iliad* 'around Hektōr and Poulydamas and Aineias [...] and the three Antenōridēs: Polybos, Agēnōr and Akamas'.[70]

[66] That '*purgos*', literally 'wall' or 'tower', is a word for 'contingent', has been assumed by Lammert and Lammert (op. cit. (n. 7)), Kromayer (op. cit. (n. 7), 23), Couissin (op. cit. (n. 5), 17), Küsters (op. cit. (n. 7), 4–5), Latacz (op. cit. (n. 8), 52). There is one scene only in which the word *purgos* seems to be used in this sense, twice. Odysseus, Menestheus and their men are 'standing and waiting for the moment that another *purgos* of the Achaeans would attack the Trojans...' (4.333–5). Agamemnōn abuses them for holding back: 'Gladly would you just watch, even if ten *purgoi* of the Achaeans would be fighting in front of you' (4.347–8). From these contexts it is not absolutely clear that contingents are meant. I think *purgos* is used in a metaphorical sense: a leader (and his men) might be called a 'wall' or 'tower' of the Greeks, in the sense of being their 'bulwark'. This is in fact what we find in the *Odyssey*: the Greeks lamented the death of Aias, since he was 'such a *purgos* to them' (11.556). Here, the metaphor is clearly understood; the poet does not even need to say '*like a purgos*' (cf. Kallinos 1, 20). Furthermore, when the phrase '*purgēdon*' is used, it does not mean 'by contingents' as one would expect on the current interpretation, but just 'like a wall' (12.43; 13.152; 15.618).

Inscriptions of later date (*CIG* 3064, 3081 et al.) attest to the existence on Teos of geographical or social units called *purgoi*. Here, a *purgos* is some section of a community, but in the Homeric context, where Odysseus and Menestheus and the others are (still) leading entire contingents, this meaning would be inappropriate.

[67] In the epic the word sometimes takes on a very broad sense, meaning almost 'races', and at other times may mean a descent-group as small as a single family. Cf. Andrewes, op. cit. (n. 3), 132.

[68] Another explanation of the relation between 'tribes and phratries' and 'contingents' is to equate each contingent with a single tribe, and to assume that it was subdivided into phratries (Eustathius, ad 2.362; Couissin, op. cit. (n. 5), 17; presumably Kromayer (op. cit. (n. 7), 23), too). Of this subdivision, however, there is no further trace, unless one assumes with Glotz (*La Solidarité de la famille en Grèce* [Paris, 1904], 13, 89–90), that phratries are the bands of followers. This interpretation would suit my view of army organisation rather well, but unfortunately there is nothing in the epic to support the equation of *phrateres* and *hetairoi*.

[69] 12.86–7 (*pentakha kosmēthentes ham' hēgemonessin*). In the subsequent description we find that the fourth 'column' corresponds to Aineias' contingent in the Catalogue (12.98–100; 2.819–23). The first group, led by Hektōr and others, may correspond to the original Trojan contingent (12.88–92; 2.816–18). The second group, however, contains more Trojans and more Dardanians (12.93); the third group still more Trojans, and the men who in the Catalogue formed Asios' contingent (12.94–7; 2.835–9); and the fifth group consists of the 'allies' (12.101–4), which means about a dozen of the Catalogue's contingents! Their massed advance: 12.105–6.

[70] 11.57–60. Hektōr is said to be giving orders, now in front, now in the rear (61–5), which

Finally, the *epipōlēsis*, Agamemnōn's grand inspection tour of the forces, betrays the poet. He tells us all the contingents are visited – referring to these as '*stikhes*', which, in the context of men being drawn up, would rather suggest that Agamemnōn is inspecting a single contingent. But more remarkable is the fact that the poet, while having the leader-in-chief meet nine other leaders, who represent seven of the contingents in the Catalogue, puts these men together in a way that entails only *five* stops for Agamemnōn.[71] I do not think this was done on purpose, but it is not a coincidence either. It is just that the poet finds it hards to imagine even Agamemnōn leading anything other than an undivided army, only temporarily arranged in 'sections'.

Thus, whereas the modern reader may feel that a division of the army into contingents is natural, and its subsequent neglect rather puzzling, the poet apparently feels the opposite. He is reluctant, or even unable, to envisage a battle fought by separate contingents, and at a loss to explain their existence. We must conclude that contingents and their leaders disappear in battle because they are alien to the poet's conception of army organisation.

3.3. *The historical model*

If this is accepted, one must draw several important conclusions.

First of all, we see that contingents are brought on stage for one reason only: they are needed to provide each of the major heroes with something to draw up. To quote Politēs' advice again: 'Let each man give orders (*sēmaineto*) to those whom he leads (*hoisi per arkhei*), and, drawing up (*kosmēsamenos*) his countrymen, let him lead them into battle'.[72] This is not merely tautologous: to the poet, leading the warriors of a region does not involve issuing orders concerning the arrangements for battle as a matter of course. He feels that regional leaders could only be regional commanders, so to speak, if special measures were taken. The forces would have to be split up into regional armies.

It follows that, to his mind, an 'ordinary' army is an undivided force, in the sense that the authority to draw up the troops for battle lies with one leader, and one only. It also follows that it is inconceivable to him that a regional leader should *not* have this authority – or else why would he have taken the trouble to invent some feeble excuses for the introduction of separate contingents, the only purpose of which is to *give* them that authority? Constructing a little syllogism, we conclude that the poet's model is an army in which there is *only one regional leader*. In other words, in his conception, the bands of warriors constituting an army would ordinarily be recruited from a single region, be drawn up by the most prominent leader of that one region, and be free to move around the battlefield without worrying about the unity of their contingent, because their contingent is the only one present.

If this is true, one further conclusion is inescapable. The story of the Trojan war requires precisely those gigantic armies and those regional contingents that are alien to the view of epic army organisation shared by the poet and his audience. Their

would be in accordance with the idea that he is the supreme commander, taking his place outside of the main body (cf. 2.4), while the other five lead sections.

[71] *Stikhes*: 4.231 and 250. The 'stops' are: one, Idomeneus and Mērionēs; two, the two Aiantes; three, Nestōr; four, Menestheus and Odysseus; five, Diomēdēs and Sthenelos (4.251–419).

[72] 2.805–6. On the Trojan side we have only this general statement of the effect of the measures proposed, no individual examples. On the Greek side we have no general statement, but many examples of this effect: see n. 42.

notion of an 'ordinary' army, therefore, cannot have originated in traditional heroic fiction. There is only one other source: real life.[73]

The epic army, then, is an organisational compromise. If the poet had wanted to retain the real life unity of the army under one man's authority, he would have had to forget about regional leaders and the notion of regions as political entities. This would have meant, first, a serious loss of status for all the great heroes. Aias, Diomēdēs, Sarpedōn and Aineias would be left with no authority over anyone but their personal followers. Second, it would have meant imposing political unity both on heroic Greece and on Asia Minor – a rather bold move. If, on the other hand, he had wanted to retain the legendary regions and regional leadership, he would have had to forsake the unified command and divide the army – or, rather, *construct* a divided army by putting several ordinary armies side by side, and adding an imaginary level of command for the most powerful of the commanders. There would have been no need to adapt the model of leadership apart from finding something for the new leader-in-chief to do. For the rest, it would have been necessary to offer some explanation for the separation of contingents and to ignore or consciously obscure the effect such a separation might have on a battle.

The remarkable pattern of Agamemnōn's inspection of the troops, the peculiar advice offered by Nestōr and Politēs, and the lack, or at best the extreme ambiguity, of references to contingents as units in battle, all show that the last, least painful, compromise was chosen.

3.4. *The terminus ante quem*

Can one assign a date to the features of Homeric army organisation that appear to be based on real life? The only positive evidence is that in seventh-century poetry, as in the epic, '*phalanges*' are 'thrown into confusion' and 'made to turn about'.[74] As a dating criterion it is not much to go on. Apart from this, the best we can do is to

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[73] P. A. L. Greenhalgh, 'Patriotism in the Homeric World', *Historia* 21 (1972), 528–37, also argues that 'the Panachaean War is both conceptually and practically alien' to the world depicted in the epic (531, 533). His arguments differ from mine, and unfortunately they do not seem to me to be valid. He thinks the Panachaean organisation is Mycenaean, and that the poet shows his ignorance of the Mycenaean feudal system by (i) providing a vague (and mistaken) explanation for the obligation of the lesser kings to follow Agamemnōn; (ii) not explaining the latter's right to a very large cut of the spoils; and (iii) disregarding the distinction between *wanax* and *basileus*. This does *not* prove the Panachaean army is a conception alien to the poet, it only proves that he does not think of it as organised in a Mycenaean and/or feudal way. Indeed, Greenhalgh himself states that, actually, Agamemnōn's 'relation to the Panachaeans in the matter of obligation is, on a grand scale, exactly the same relation as that of the king to his own citizens in the single-state situations' (533). This form of organisation is evidently not alien to the poet at all. The question, of course, should be whether such obligations ever really *existed* on a Panachaean scale, and Greenhalgh's only argument against this is that they seem 'overstrained' (op. cit. (n. 22), 81). Nevertheless, Greenhalgh's view of the organisation of real-life warfare (which he would date to Geometric times) is, by implication, more or less the same as mine.

[74] Hesiod, *Theogony* 935; Tyrtaeus 12.21; Mimnermos 14.3. Later it appears only once, in a story about Troy told by Bacchylides (15.40–3), where *phalanges* of the Trojans are called to the 'army-receiving' *agora*. Those who think that Homeric armies are organised in tribes and phratries might see another bit of positive evidence in Tyrtaeus' reference to the three Dorian tribes (1.12). This verse, however, is hardly good evidence for their contemporary role in war (cf. N. G. L. Hammond, 'The Lycurgean Reform at Sparta', *JHS* 70 [1950], 51). Athenaeus' reference to phratries at the Karneia (4.141ef) is worth even less. Tribes *are*, of course, army units in Athens, but these are Kleisthenes' ten tribes, and hence they date from 501 B.C. – a very late *terminus ante quem* for Homeric warfare.

try to establish when epic features did *not* exist. There are two phenomena to be
considered: the development of phalanx-tactics and the emergence of symmachies.

It is generally held that the 'classical' phalanx was a massed and very strict
formation. On this interpretation, the men were all identically armed, arranged in
straight lines and columns, and were supposed never to leave the position assigned
to them. Such tactics seem to preclude the existence of independent leaders with small
groups of retainers to serve and support them, and certainly rule out any mobility
on their part, Phalanx-warfare would therefore provide a clear-cut *terminus ante
quem*, were it not that it needs dating itself. Some historians believe that the massed
phalanx was introduced at a stroke around 700 B.C., while others argue that it must
have emerged gradually and reached its final form around 650 B.C. Yet others have
advanced the rather heretical suggestion that fighting in rigorous formation was
typical only of the Macedonian phalanx, introduced by Philip in the 350s, and was the
product of developments starting no earlier than the Peloponnesian war. This is not
the place to decide the issue, but it must be pointed out that the evidence for either
700 or 650 B.C. is very thin indeed. In fact, it boils down to three Corinthian
vase-paintings and Tyrtaeus' exhortations to the Spartans to 'stay together' in battle,
and it seems to me that even here a 'phalanx'-interpretation is open to question.[75]

Homeric warfare should also pre-date the development of symmachies. In times
when battles were regularly fought by alliances of states, each contributing its own
contingent and its own commander, no poet would have had any conceptual
difficulties with the organisation of the Greek army before Troy. From the Dorian
migration to the Peloponnesian war, Thucydides tells us, wars were essentially
conflicts between single neighbouring cities, although there were exceptions, most
prominently the Lelantine war (Thuc. 1.15). Unfortunately, we cannot tell whether
in that or any other 'exceptional' war the allies contributed contingents to joint forces
or fought by themselves. As far as I can see, the joining of allied forces for battle is
first attested for the Peloponnesian League, and presumably started with the
Spartan–Tegean treaty of *c*. 550 B.C.[76]

We must conclude, therefore, that the evidence on army organisation is too insecure
to warrant any definite opinion on the date of Homeric warfare, other than that there
is, so to speak, 'room' for it in Greek history.

4. *A hopeful summary*

Far from being 'anarchic', the Homeric army has many active leaders; far from being
'chaotic', the representation of the way they exercise leadership is absolutely
coherent; and far from lacking plausibility, the organisation of leadership seems quite
credible. It appears that there is only one peculiarity about epic army organisation:

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[75] For the 'at a stroke' theory, see H. L. Lorimer, 'The Hoplite Phalanx', *ABSA* 42 (1947),
76–138. For the 'gradual development' theory, see A. M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and
Weapons* (Edinburgh, 1964); idem, 'The Hoplite Reform and History' (*JHS* 85 [1965], 110–22).
The suggestion that the development of the 'true' phalanx started only in the late fifth century,
is George Cawkwell's (*Philip of Macedon* [London, 1978], 150ff.), labelled 'heresy' by
A. J. Holladay in his attempt to refute it ('Hoplites and Heresies', *JHS* 102 [1982], 94–7).

[76] The Lelantine war is conventionally dated to *c*. 700 B.C. Another early 'exception' would
be the First Sacred War (*c*. 600 B.C.) by the Delphic Amphictyony versus the Krisaians.
Amphictyonic Leagues were established at early dates, but unlike symmachies, they rarely
engaged in warfare. The Peloponnesian League's battle order was well established in 479 B.C.
at the latest. In this year the Tegeans were able to claim a *traditional* place in it, next to the
Spartans (Herodotus 9.25–6).

the early disappearance of the regional contingents. This phenomenon is not to be attributed to the poet's carelessness. On the contrary, contingents disappear precisely because he has a clear conception of leadership in battle which is maintained throughout, and in which regional units can play no part. The real problem, therefore, is the *introduction* of contingents. Here the solution is not to be found in poetic licence, nor in the contamination of traditions, but in the demands posed by the heroic tale. Contingents were introduced as a compromise between contemporary reality, in which an army was recruited from a single political community, and the legendary world in which an army could be a Panachaean or Panasian force.

Stripping away this fictional layer, we can discern features of the army of some period of Greek history. It consists of many small bands of warriors. In battle, the leaders of these bands act independently. Their authority is based on a personal relation to those who follow, rather than being derived from, and exercised within, an institutionalised hierarchy of command. When coordination of their actions is required, the most prominent among the leaders is, apparently by consensus, authorised to gather the army and command the advance into battle. He shares this authority with a number of other leaders, probably the next in order of prominence, each picked by him to supervise the advance of a 'section' of the army.[77]

I should point out the limitations of this article. It gives no more than an outline of leadership in war. It does not deal with the sources of power and authority from which this leadership springs. It does not deal with the means by which this leadership is exercised. These are subjects very much worth studying, the more so if my conclusions are accepted: Agamemnōn's relation to the other leaders would most probably reflect the type of relation that, at one time or another, existed between the military leaders of a single Greek community. Equally, this article does not claim to solve *all* problems concerning the consistency and plausibility of Homeric warfare. One may still argue that dragging corpses through the turmoil to rob them of their arms, and beating off attacks in a shield-to-shield formation, are incompatible styles of fighting. And one may still feel that the Homeric use of the chariot is an outrage to military common sense.

The conclusions about army organisation presented here can do no more than clear the ground for further investigation. If they achieve that aim, they could take us nearer to a reconstruction of Homeric society, in which facts are disentangled from fantasies.*

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[77] For convenience, I have mostly referred to a single 'supreme' leader. His tasks, however, can be shared by two, and possibly more, men, as is shown by Idomeneus, who leads the men in front, while Mērionēs commands the rear *phalanges* (4.253–4). The number of 'section'-leaders seems to be five, but I suppose that this varied with the size of the army. Though the number of five occurs quite frequently in the epic, judging from Germain's study (*Homère et la mystique des nombres* [Paris, 1954], 37, 49, 59), it does not have any specific mythical, ritual or social connotations that might explain its appearance here. Maybe this implies that the number of five sections is more or less realistic.