

## AN HISTORICAL HOMERIC SOCIETY?

I BEGIN with two modern texts, both as it happens printed on the first page of earlier issues of this journal, and each, I think, expressive of a strong body of opinion in Homeric scholarship, at least in the English-speaking countries, at the time of their writing. First, Miss Dorothea Gray in 1954: 'Belief in an historical Homeric society dies hard'.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Professor Adkins in 1971: 'I find it impossible to believe . . . that the bards of the oral tradition invented out of their own imaginations a society with institutions, values, beliefs and attitudes all so coherent and mutually appropriate as I believe myself to discern in the Homeric poems. This aspect of the poems is based upon some society's experience'.<sup>2</sup> Miss Gray's prophecy, whether or not one shares the misgivings that it embodied, was thus soundly-based: the seventeen years between these two quotations have indeed witnessed a powerful revival of the belief that the social system portrayed in the Homeric poems, and with it such attendant features as the ethical code and the political structure, are in large measure both unitary and historical. One good reason for the vitality of this belief is the simple fact that it has been alive since Classical times. Another is that it has received support from several influential recent works: if pride of place should be given to M. I. Finley's *The World of Odysseus*, on whose conclusions Professor Adkins expressly says that he takes his stand,<sup>3</sup> a number of others should be acknowledged also. Whereas Finley located the social system of the *Odyssey* most probably in the tenth and ninth centuries B.C., A. Andrewes in his book *The Greeks* extends this type of inference when he argues for an historical origin in the 'migration period' of the twelfth and eleventh centuries for the Homeric political system.<sup>4</sup> As influences on the other side, one may mention T. B. L. Webster's work in isolating Mycenaean practices and features, whose divisive effect on the social pattern is apparent;<sup>5</sup> while G. S. Kirk has a significantly entitled chapter in his *The Songs of Homer*, 'The cultural and linguistic *amalgam*' (my italics).<sup>6</sup> Most recently, the early chapters in the German *Archaeologia Homerica*<sup>7</sup> have shown a certain tendency to discern a consistent and historical pattern in the allied area of the material and technological practices of the poems. It is true that in one chapter the author is led to conclude that the metallurgical picture of the *Iliad* is substantially earlier than that of the *Odyssey*, and that the date of composition of the former poem must accordingly be very much earlier.<sup>8</sup> But this is only because he is pressing the arguments for the 'historical' case one step further: the historical consistency of the metallurgical pictures in each of the two poems is, for him, so apparent and so precise that each can and must be given an historical setting, even if the two are separated by a long period.

Unity of authorship and background between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is indeed a quite separate issue, though an important one; the division of opinion here may cut right across the line of division as to whether Homeric society is historical or not. But it is an important element of Professor Adkins' argument that he maintains the identity of the social system as between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; and that he links the equally unitary Homeric ethical code with this social system. Not all scholars would agree with this; indeed the 'fundamental differences . . . in their social and ethical relations' were among the factors which led

<sup>1</sup> *JHS* 74 (1954), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *JHS* 91 (1971), 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *The Greeks* (1967), 45.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. *From Mycenae to Homer* (1958), chapter 4; and in *A Companion to Homer* (ed. A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings, 1963), 452-62.

<sup>6</sup> *The Songs of Homer* (1962), chapter 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Archaeologia Homerica* (ed. F. Matz and H.-G. Buchholz), Göttingen, 1967-.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Kapitel C, E. Bielefeld, *Schmuck* (1968), 65; cf. more fully *Gnomon* 42 (1970), 157-9.

Professor Page<sup>9</sup> to conclude that the same man did not compose the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I do not wish to enter this debate, since to do so would be to beg the question on which I wish to argue, namely whether the social system is consistent and identical *within* each poem. But, for what it is worth, my inclination is to fall back on the familiar observation that the one poem shows the heroic world on a war footing, while the other shows it at peace; and to attribute the differences rather to this than to any deeper dichotomy.

If, therefore, it seems reasonable to follow Adkins in speaking of a 'Homeric society' common to both poems, we can now proceed to the central question. Do the features of this society show the degree of coherence and mutual appropriateness that Professor Adkins sees, and which is perhaps a necessary precondition of that society's being historical?<sup>10</sup> First, there is a subsidiary question which may arise, since a precondition need not be a guarantee: even if the society is shown to be so cohesive, will that necessarily make it historical? Could there not be other explanations of such a picture, if it were shown to exist? Perhaps an oral poet of genius could construct a truly consistent society, by sifting and selecting the traditional material at his disposal, and shaping it to fit the elements of his own creation—one more consistent, indeed, than the untidy compromises which history often produces. At least one scholar<sup>11</sup> has pursued this line of argument, to arrive at the opposite conclusion to that of Adkins: Homer's society is idealised, and cannot represent any single historical society, because it is *too* cohesive and unmixed. Another approach is that of A. A. Long, who has both expressed doubt about Adkins' conclusion and challenged the basis for it; 'The plain fact is', he writes, 'that a consistent pattern of society does not emerge from Homer'.<sup>12</sup> This and other arguments lead him to doubt Adkins' assumptions that Homeric society has 'some autonomous existence, outside the poems', or that Homer is concerned to represent 'the life and values of any actual society'.<sup>13</sup> Faced with this bewildering conflict of views, one might be tempted to abandon all hope of reaching a conclusion. Let us, however, postpone such despair until it is forced upon us, and return to our primary question.

It is perhaps most fruitful to concentrate on institutions, where the arguments have a better chance of being of a factual nature. The field of marriage settlements has long proved an attractive one here. Homeric marriages present a number of apparently inconsistent features; but scholars have argued that these 'inconsistencies' are in part the result of misunderstanding,<sup>14</sup> or alternatively that, though real, they are nevertheless compatible with a single and historical social system.<sup>15</sup> Let us first look at the Homeric evidence. It is commonplace, in both poems, for a marriage to be accompanied or preceded by lavish gifts from the suitor to the bride's kin.<sup>16</sup> But alongside this picture of what E. R. Dodds has called 'women at a premium', we also have 'women at a discount'; again, instances of the situation in which a dowry is paid by the bride's kin to the bride and bridegroom occur in both poems.<sup>17</sup> Rather than simply asking whether both practices could co-exist in a single social system, we should do better to call in anthropological evidence on this whole matter. For a start, this will tell us that any simple division into 'bride-price' and 'dowry'

<sup>9</sup> *The Homeric Odyssey* (1955), 157.

<sup>10</sup> By 'historical', throughout this paper, I mean 'derived from one single period of history'; a conflation of features from a diversity of historical periods I prefer to call 'composite'.

<sup>11</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *A short history of Ethics* (1968), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *JHS* 90 (1970), 137, n. 58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>14</sup> M. I. Finley in *Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité* (3<sup>e</sup> ser.), 2 (1955), 167–94, followed in this important respect by W. K. Lacey, *JHS* 86 (1966), 55–69.

<sup>15</sup> G. M. Calhoun in *A Companion to Homer* (above, n. 5), 452.

<sup>16</sup> I give a bald list of those passages which seem to me to illustrate this: *A* 243, *N* 365 (where the 'price' is a feat rather than a payment), *II* 178, 190, *X* 472, *θ* 318, *λ* 281, *ο* 16, 231, 367, *π* 391, *τ* 529, *φ* 161.

<sup>17</sup> Again, while several instances are ambiguous, this practice seems exemplified by *Z* 191, 251, 394, *I* 147 = 269, *X* 51, *α* 277 = *β* 196, *β* 54, 132, *δ* 736, *η* 311, *ν* 341, *ψ* 227, *ω* 294.

practices is misleading. Human societies also show a third common practice known as 'indirect dowry', in which the groom pays over property to the bride, which is then used to endow the newly-established household. It is called indirect dowry because it shares with the plain dowry system this aim of conferring property upon the newly-married couple. But if marriage-settlements are described in careless or poetic language, there is a likelihood that *indirect dowry* and *bride-price* will become confused, since these are the two situations in which the bridegroom has to pay.

To return to Homer. It could be argued that the confusion just mentioned has happened in the interpretation of the Homeric poems; that some or all of the so-called 'bride-price' practices noted in Homer (above, n. 16) are in reality cases of indirect dowry; indeed a somewhat similar line of argument, although with very different terminology, was followed as long ago as 1912 by G. Finsler.<sup>18</sup> If this were true, it would much increase the likelihood that Homer's picture of marriage-settlements is unified and consistent, for dowry and indirect dowry were and are to this day often found together in the same society. But this explanation, although attractive in a number of cases, fails when it encounters a hard core of episodes which cannot be cases of indirect dowry, since we are explicitly told that it is the bride's kin (usually her father) who secure the suitor's gifts, and not the bride.<sup>19</sup> To cite three *Odyssey* passages: Eumaeus relates that King Laertes and his wife married their daughter off to someone in Same, 'Σάμηνδ' ἔδοσαν καὶ μυρὶ ἔλοντο (ο 367); then there is the story of Neleus offering his daughter's hand in return for the cattle of Phylakos (ο 231); again and most explicit of all, Hephaistos on detecting Aphrodite in adultery threatens to make her father Zeus hand back 'πάντα . . . ἔεδνα|ῶσσα οἱ ἐγγυάλιξα κυνώπιδος εἴνεκα κούρης' (θ 318). It seems more than likely that each of the three forms of marriage prestation mentioned above is present in Homer.

What is the likelihood of the co-existence of all these practices in a single society? It will probably be sufficient to concentrate on the two extreme practices of dowry and 'bride-price' (I retain the inverted commas for a reason that will shortly be explained), for a society combining these two might be expected to take indirect dowry in its stride. Theoretically at least, one and the same society could combine these two practices in one and the same marriage; or it could use them on different marriage-occasions in the same social milieu; or it could practise them in marriages at two different social levels. The third of these possibilities is the easiest to envisage, and is indeed well-attested in the anthropological record;<sup>20</sup> but it will not do for Homer, since the Homeric passages on marriage are almost exclusively concerned with the practices of one class, the *ἄριστοι*. There remain the other two alternatives. Of these the first possibility, whereby both practices take place together on the same occasion, has been advocated in another closely-argued study by M. I. Finley (above, n. 14). He believes that the so-called 'bride-price' in Homer is not a price at all, but a gift of goods passing from the bridegroom (and sometimes also from unsuccessful suitors) to the bride's father, which had its recompense in a counter-gift or dowry, from which he and his wife would benefit, and in the wife herself; together these would be equated in value, as far as possible, with the gifts passing in the other direction, to make a fair exchange. To this view there is at least one objection: that in all the Homeric references to marriages, there is only one doubtful case, so far as I know, in which the two contrasting practices seem to be associated with one and the same marriage. The possible instance is the marriage of Hektor and Andromache.<sup>21</sup> In X 472 we are told that Hektor won his

<sup>18</sup> *Hermes* 47 (1912), 414-21. The interpretation of ἔδνα as meaning 'indirect dowry' in certain passages receives notable support from the scholiasts, *ibid.*, 419.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Finley, *op. cit.* (above, n. 14).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Nur Yalman, *Under the Bo Tree* (Berke-

ley and Los Angeles, 1967), esp. chapter 8 and pp. 303-4.

<sup>21</sup> There is a further case where both practices appear to be associated with a hypothetical future occasion, the re-marriage of Penelope: contrast ο 16 etc. (apparent bride-price) with α 277 etc. (dowry).

wife 'ἐπεὶ πόρε μύρια ἔδνα'; while in *Z* 394 and *X* 88 Andromache is described as πολύδωρος. Both phrases are in some degree ambiguous: the former, a much-repeated formula, does not identify the recipient of the μύρια ἔδνα, and so could easily be seen as a description of indirect dowry rather than of bride-price; while the adjective πολύδωρος (with parallel words like ἠπιόδωρος) has a wide variety of possible meanings besides the favoured interpretation of 'richly dowered'. This latter, I admit, is the translation supported by the scholiasts; on the assumption that it is correct, I am more inclined to believe that we have here an instance of the commonly-attested (above, p. 116) combination of dowry and indirect dowry, than that this passage alone should be proof of the exchange of gifts on the same marriage-occasion. It is relevant, if hardly conclusive, to cite here the famous offer of Agamemnon to Achilles in *I* 146 (= *I* 288), where Agamemnon expressly renounces the one practice (apparent bride-price) in favour of the other (lavish dowry). I appreciate that Finley's type of exchange transaction would conform exactly to the pattern of gift-exchange whose operation, in a wide variety of other Homeric situations, he himself has so clearly demonstrated. But these other situations are in general 'open-ended' ones in whose field etiquette operates unfettered—hospitality, departure, diplomacy, payments for services rendered, desired or anticipated—whereas a marriage is a formal and contractual thing. A much more substantial point, to my mind, is that anthropological evidence shows the exchange of gifts at marriages, in the way envisaged by Finley, to be exceedingly rare in Eurasia and Africa at any time. Where it does occur (mainly in America and the Pacific), it is largely confined to the simpler societies which do not practise agriculture. For Homer's society, it would be unexpected and indeed inappropriate.<sup>22</sup> There is, besides, the argument to be considered below (p. 118): that bride-price and dowry are but respective parts of two contrasting modes of property-transmission. Both modes, together with other more or less closely associated practices, are clearly detectable in Homer, which should make it easier to accept that true bride-price is present too.

It remains to consider briefly the remaining possibility mentioned earlier: that marriages among the Homeric ἄριστοι were sometimes attended by bride-price practice, sometimes by dowry (with or without indirect dowry). If this were so, there would have to be factors influencing the choice of practice. The likeliest would perhaps be that, according to fine social gradations within the general class of the nobility, the relative status of the bride's family and the bridegroom's would decide in which direction the gifts passed. Marriage-settlements have often contributed to the nuances of social precedence dear to the hearts of aristocrats; the rationale is usually that the preponderance of gifts should pass from the less socially elevated side of the marriage to the more elevated.<sup>23</sup> But again we have to ask, is this true of Homer? And again the answer must be negative. By what rationale should Hektor, the eldest and most prominent son of the king of Troy, be required to offer a lavish bride-price (or indirect dowry) for the daughter of the relatively obscure king of Thebe? (*X* 472). Or the great Neleus of Pylos to do likewise for the daughter of a king of Orcho-

But the case is weaker because the identity of the bridegroom is undecided, and in any case I would apply here the same explanation (*mutatis mutandis*) as in the case of Hektor and Andromache. The marital fortunes of Penelope are indeed a constant embarrassment to those who believe in a consistent social pattern in Homer, since the ultimate responsibility is distributed between herself, her father and her son, and the political control of Ithaka is also implicated. Even Finley describes the case as an 'often self-contradictory amalgam of strands' [*op. cit.* (above, n. 14), 172, n. 19]. W. K. Lacey (above, n. 14, 61–6) has bravely striven to discern consistent principles

behind the various situations envisaged for Penelope; but his explanation seems to me to posit an improbable and indeed almost legalistic fidelity on the poet's part.

<sup>22</sup> See J. R. Goody, 'Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia', especially Appendix II, in *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology), ed. J. R. Goody and S. J. Tambiah, forthcoming.

<sup>23</sup> I think especially of the hilarious negotiations between Baron Ochs and the Marschallin's notary in the first act of *Der Rosenkavalier*.

menos? (λ 281). Conversely, why should King Ikarios offer his much-admired daughter Penelope to an unspecified nobleman from Dulichion, Same, wooded Zakynthos or rocky Ithaka with a large dowry, as it is repeatedly predicted that he will? (α 277 etc.). The explanation in terms of 'marriage up or down', it seems, will hardly fit the Homeric pattern. Nor, to be briefer still, will another possible way of rationalising different practices, namely the incidence of marriage abroad. There is no consistent differentiation between marriages contracted locally and those involving more distant families: each kind of marriage shows both kinds of practice.<sup>24</sup> For other potential bases of differentiation, the Homeric descriptions are not sufficiently circumstantial to provide the evidence.

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It seems to me that another, altogether simpler explanation of the diversity of Homeric marriage-settlements is beginning to force itself upon us: namely, that Homer is describing a mixture of practices, derived from a diversity of historical sources. For such a conclusion there is, I think, some further support which emerges from broadening the scope of the anthropological argument; for marriage-settlement is, after all, but a part of the whole spectrum of inheritance, property and kinship patterns. Before calling on this evidence, however, let me freely confess to the dangers attendant on such a procedure; dangers which go beyond the invariable disadvantages of appealing to a different discipline in which one is not well versed. My justification for using this evidence is that I shall not claim that it is in any way decisive or final, for it manifestly is not; merely it seems to me to suggest *tendencies* which, taken together, appear to shift the balance of probability in favour of the tentative conclusion, reached above in the particular context of marriage-settlements, and capable of a wider application in the social system as a whole: that Homer's picture is composite.

From the enormous body of data tabulated in G. P. Murdock's *World Ethnographic Atlas*, which cover no less than 863 human societies from all over the world, and of many different stages of development, Dr J. R. Goody has in a recent paper extracted some interesting conclusions in the field of inheritance, property and marriage.<sup>25</sup> I am aware that a compilation such as the *Ethnographic Atlas* must present a simplified picture of human institutions, in which the various components have to be isolated and coded in a way that must gloss over many individual variants: to take an example, one of the features whose presence or absence is recorded is endogamy, which is extended to cover any tendency to marry within a certain range of kin, caste or local group—whereas one might argue that in reality these are not all merely variants of the same phenomenon. Nevertheless, when consistent and repeated patterns emerge from such data, it is surely legitimate to identify the patterns and to offer one's explanation for them. This is what Goody has done.

In categorising the societies, Goody shows that *transmission of property* is an important variable, often determining other practices in associated fields. He demonstrates this by dividing the societies into two categories based on property-transmission, and then testing the correlation of these categories with other variables. The results seem to me to be sufficiently positive to be significant. His first category consists of those societies which exhibit 'diverging devolution', whereby property is distributed among kin of both sexes; his second, of the 'homogeneous devolution' societies, where property passes through kin of the same sex only. In the first, diverging devolution category, there is a very strong association with the nuclear family; this, rather than any broader descent-group, is the emphasised

<sup>24</sup> Contrast Neleus and Chloris (λ 281, see above) with Odysseus and Nausikaa (hypothetical, η 314) for marriages abroad; Polymela and Ehekles (II 190) with Laothoe and Priam (X 51) for more local marriages.

<sup>25</sup> 'Inheritance, Property and Marriage in Africa and Eurasia', *Sociology* 3 (1969), 55-76.

social unit. Another very common form of diverging devolution is the system of dowry and/or indirect dowry,<sup>26</sup> a point particularly relevant to the previous section of this discussion. Again within the field of marriage, there is a further, if looser, correlation with the tendency to celebrate weddings with elaborate ceremonial.<sup>27</sup> But from this point on, Goody tests the correlation of diverging devolution with a number of quite diverse variables; they number a dozen or so, of which perhaps six allow for some sort of check with the Homeric evidence. I give these in order of the strength of the correlation with diverging devolution:

- A Monogamy.
- B The use of the plough.
- C A complex stratification by caste or by class.
- D A kinship terminology sufficiently complex to distinguish siblings from from cousins.
- E Alternative residence for married couples with either group of 'in-laws' ('ambilocal') or independently ('neolocal'), rather than automatic residence with either the wife's family ('uxorilocal') or the husband's ('virilocal').
- F Endogamy, as defined above (p. 118).

Goody's second category, that of the homogeneous devolution societies, naturally tends to be associated with the opposite features to the above. For example, such societies tend to allow wide freedom in the choice of spouse, and to practise polygamy (invariably in the form of polygyny on the part of the men); they are also often associated with 'classificatory' kinship-terminology, and with no elaborate social stratification. More important is their correlation with the reverse of the more or less definitional characteristics of diverging devolution which were mentioned earlier: homogeneous devolution societies are based on the patrilineal or matrilineal descent group, even though they may well retain the nuclear family within this; and (again important for our purposes) they practise bride-price rather than dowry or indirect dowry.

Where does Homeric society stand in relation to these two contrasting patterns? Hellenists will at once recognise several features of the first, diverging devolution type of social system as being familiar from Homer. A dowry system (with, less certainly, indirect dowry as well) is as we have seen present in Homer. Actual marriage ceremonial, to judge from the double wedding celebrated at Menelaos' palace in δ 3 ff., and from the scenes on the Shield of Achilles (Σ 491 ff.), is quite elaborate. Turning to the other variables listed above, it will probably be agreed that in its strict sense monogamy (A) is common practice for the Homeric hero (though not invariable, as will be shown below); perhaps the clearest case is that of Menelaos who, when it becomes clear that Helen can bear him no further children after Hermione, begets a son and heir by a slave-woman rather than take a second wife (δ 11). Use of the plough (B), it goes without saying, is familiar in Homer. As to kinship-terminology (D), it is certainly true that Homer once uses the word ἀνέψιος (I 464), thus making the distinction between cousin and brother (ἀδελφεός) in much the same way that later Greeks did; but here there is again some contrary evidence to take into account (see below). On the residence of married couples (E), there is perhaps enough evidence to show that Homer's picture corresponds once again to the diverging devolution pattern: for example, it seems that the presence of an heiress such as Nausikaa (ζ 244-5) or the daughters of Priam or Nestor (below, p. 120), could lead to an 'uxorilocal' marriage even though the general pattern may have been 'virilocal'. The remaining two variables, (C) and (F), I find it difficult to evaluate with respect to Homer. In many respects his society is very

<sup>26</sup> 'Inheritance, Property and Marriage in Africa and Eurasia', *Sociology*, 3 (1969), 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

highly stratified (C), and there seems to be a corresponding inhibition against marrying outside one's class (F); yet the forms of endogamy whereby marriage within a kinship or a local group is favoured seem largely foreign to Homer. But as hinted above (p. 118), there is perhaps a methodological flaw here in the compilation of the data. Overall, the evidence so far considered encourages the view that Homer's society is broadly of the diverging devolution type.

Once we turn to the contrasting pattern of homogeneous devolution, however, we find equally positive correspondences with Homer. These begin at the most basic level. The *oikos* is the hub of Homer's whole social system, as champions of the historical Homeric society like Finley<sup>28</sup> and Adkins<sup>29</sup> have rightly insisted. But what are the characteristics of the Homeric *oikos*? In most of the cases where we have explicit description, it is no more nor less than the patrilineal extended family of the homogeneous devolution pattern in ancient dress. The nuclear family, although known to Homer, is to say the least not his general norm. It might seem possible to explain away the extravagantly diffuse *oikos* of Priam, which includes fifty sons and their wives, and twelve daughters and their husbands (*Z* 242 ff.), as a piece of foreign exoticism contrasted with Achaean practice. But then we find that Nestor's *oikos* similarly includes both sons and sons-in-law (*γ* 387 etc.); that Menelaos' son (though not his daughter) is apparently destined to live at home after marriage (*δ* 10 f.); and that the less conventional ménage of Aeolus (*κ* 5-12) also represents a larger descent group under one roof. As Finley writes,<sup>30</sup> 'Normally, the poems seem to say, although the evidence is not altogether clear and consistent, the sons remained with their father in his lifetime'—and the same is frequently true of the daughters. Here then we seem to find a basic characteristic of homogeneous devolution represented in Homeric society. Nor is it the only one. As we have seen, bride-price is apparently embedded in the Homeric tradition. Polygamy rears its head in Troy, where Priam is resolutely polygynous (*X* 48 etc.); the temptation may again be felt to treat this as conscious exoticism, but the example of Priam's *oikos* (see above) does not encourage such an explanation. Next, under the heading of kinship-terminology ((D) on p. 119), let us note the curious occurrence of *κασίγνητος*, a word frequently used elsewhere to denote a sibling, in the sense of 'first cousin' in *O* 545;<sup>31</sup> this imprecision contrasts sharply with the usage of *ἀνέψιμος* noted previously (p. 119). Finally, if it can legitimately be counted as a feature of homogeneous devolution, let us recall Homer's apparent avoidance of certain important forms of endogamy (above).

On the criterion of property-transmission, therefore—and I stress that this is the basis of the dichotomy employed here—it appears that the Homeric social system has characteristics of two different patterns of society. How much does this imply? The two patterns are opposed; not, however, totally inter-exclusive. I am not for one moment claiming that all the features so far noted could not be *observed* in one and the same society; anthropological laws are not so inflexible as that. Nor, incidentally, in the matter of marriage-settlements, are linguistic laws sufficiently restrictive to prevent the same society from using the same word, such as *ἔδνα*, along with its cognates, to cover every possible form of marriage-prestition—bride-price, dowry, indirect dowry—as seems to be the case in Homer. In all such cases, a degree of overlap between different systems would not be unexpected, and such overlap would most naturally occur in the circumstances either of a geographically marginal, or of a chronologically transitional culture, between opposed norms. There is little to prevent anyone from explaining the Homeric picture in such a way, and thus seeking to preserve its unitary and historical quality. The evidence, as I said at the outset, is not finally decisive; I have rehearsed it simply because, cumulatively, it seems to me difficult

<sup>28</sup> E.g. *The World of Odysseus* (1956), 66 f.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. *Merit and Responsibility* (1960), 35 f.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, n. 28), 72.

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Mrs S. C. Le M. Humphreys for this and several other valuable observations.

to reconcile with the belief that Homer's society is unitary and historical. The evidence is naturally strongest where Homer seems to portray, as *normal* features of his society, practices which are not often combined in reality. To give one example, homogeneous devolution features such as bride-price and the patrilineal descent-group are seldom found together with diverging devolution features such as monogamy;<sup>32</sup> in this particular instance, of 344 homogeneous devolution societies in the *Ethnographic Atlas*, monogamy was present in only 29. Yet Homer, it seems to me, presents all the three features mentioned as being normal in his society. Even here, I concede that there is subjectivity involved in assessing what is 'normal' for Homer; and in these circumstances it would be unwarranted to try to press this evidence any further. I will leave it to exert such persuasive force as it may possess on its own.

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To return briefly to the matter of marriage-settlement with which we were originally concerned, it may be thought significant that the marriage practices of each of the main types are described by Homer in strongly formulaic language. One may cite the repeated formula for bride-price or indirect dowry, 'ἐπεὶ πόρε μυρία ἔδνα' (the subject of πόρε being the bridegroom), and the pair of lines twice used of the bride's kinsmen in the dowry situation, 'οἱ δὲ γάμον τεύξουσιν καὶ ἀρτυνέουσιν ἔδνα | πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔουκε φίλης ἐπὶ παιδὸς ἔπεσθαι'. This fact, however, will hardly be used by Homeric scholars these days as an argument for the great antiquity, still less the historical contemporaneity, of the practices so described. On the latter point at least, it must now be accepted that formulae relating to the same area of activity could and did originate in different periods of the growth of the Epic. In another article, Miss Gray showed<sup>33</sup> that, for example, the traditional shield-phrases 'ἀσπίδος εὐκύκλου' and 'ἀσπίδος ἀμφιβρότης' should derive from two different historical stages in the development of the shield.

Those who maintain that Homeric society is unitary and historical are bound to ask themselves the question, to what time and place that society belongs.<sup>34</sup> The two answers which might seem, *prima facie*, to be the likeliest, can be shown to be improbable on other grounds: namely the historical period in which the story of the poems is ostensibly set, the later Mycenaean age, and the period in which the poems reached their final form and in which the historical Homer most probably lived, the eighth century B.C. A fully Mycenaean setting is rendered almost impossible by the evidence of the Linear B tablets, whose picture has been shown, by Finley more than anyone else, to be quite inconsistent with Homer, especially in the field of social and political structure. A purely contemporary origin, though it may not be excluded by the ubiquitous and pervasive presence of formulae, affecting social life as much as other aspects, would surely be in utter conflict with the other evidence that we have for eighth-century society, from Hesiod and from archaeological sources. It is a surprise to encounter such primitive features as bride-price and polygamy in Homer at all; that they should have been taken, as normal features, from the Greek society of his own day is almost unthinkable. This means that, if one is set on an historical explanation, the likely models are narrowed down to two periods, the 'Age of Migrations' between the fall of the Mycenaean citadels around 1200, and a lower date in the region of 1000; and the ensuing two centuries, a more settled period which in my view forms the central part of the Dark Age.

In inclining as he does towards tenth- and ninth-century Greece as the historical basis for the world of Odysseus (see n. 34), Finley makes a telling point. 'If it is to be placed in time', he writes, '*as everything we know about heroic poetry says it must . . .*' (my italics), and so on.

<sup>32</sup> Goody, *op. cit.* (above, n. 25), 62-3 with Table V.

<sup>33</sup> *CQ* 41 (1947), 109-21, esp. 120-1.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Adkins, *JHS* 91 (1971) 1; Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 55.



I concede the general truth of this. Finley's favoured comparisons are with the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Nibelungenlied*, of which this is evidently true; and to these one could add a parallel not used by him, the 'Ulster Cycle' of prose epic about which my Edinburgh colleague Professor K. H. Jackson has written with such authority. 'This whole picture of the ancient Irish heroic way of life', he concludes,<sup>35</sup> 'as it is seen in the oldest tales is self-consistent, of a very marked individuality, and highly circumstantial. One can hardly doubt that it represents a genuine tradition of a society that once existed'. This is independent and striking confirmation for Finley's view. But there is a well-trying counter to such analogy between Homer and other Epic: this is to say that the qualitative distinction between Homeric and most other, perhaps all other Epic is such as to invalidate these analogies.<sup>36</sup> The argument may perhaps be too well-worn today to carry the conviction that it once did, without detailed substantiation of a kind that I am not competent to provide. Nevertheless I firmly believe that it is soundly based. In support of this whole position, I wish now to draw some analogies, not outside but within the Homeric Epic, that is with topics other than the social system.

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Inevitably, it is with the material aspects of culture that we have the most secure external evidence. I wish to discuss briefly certain aspects<sup>37</sup>—specifically, metal-usage, burial-practices, military equipment and temples—which figure in the cultural background of the poems, and which may provide valid analogies with the social features.

For metal-working, it should be generally appreciated, as a result of Miss Gray's article with which I began (see n. 1), that Homer's picture is a very curious one. His exclusive use of bronze, for every sword and every spearhead mentioned in both poems, is the point of greatest significance; for these are the two supreme weapons of the Epic. There is no period of Greek history or prehistory, later than the first half of the eleventh century B.C., of which such a picture would be representative. Professor Kirk rightly observes<sup>38</sup> that afterwards bronze continued to be used 'often enough, for spear- and arrowheads and even for axes'. But for Homer, arrowheads and axes are of secondary importance; and for Homer bronze is used, for the two prime offensive weapons, not 'often enough' but always. Such a culture never existed after the end of the Bronze Age; the formulae on which the picture is based—although the language is not exclusively formulaic—can only have originated in either the full Mycenaean period or its immediate aftermath. But this simple assertion at once faces us with the other aspects of Homer's metallurgy which conflict utterly with this: first and foremost, that iron is not only known to Homer as a working metal and a trading commodity, but is actually the normal metal for his agricultural and industrial tools. Historically, iron for tools was adopted, if anything, rather later than iron for weapons; it follows therefore that no historical society, at least in the relevant part of the ancient world, ever showed even fleetingly the combination of metal-usages found in Homer. The central era of the Dark Age, the tenth and ninth centuries, is in some ways the least appropriate of all periods to look to for an historical setting for Homer's metallurgy, for at this time the dependence on iron reached its peak, to recede a little in the eighth and seventh centuries and give way to that partial recourse to bronze which prompted Professor Kirk's statement quoted above.

On burial-practices, there is no unanimity today, any more than in the past. To quote two very recent books, Professor Finley in his *Early Greece* still holds that 'The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* remain firmly anchored in the earlier Dark Age on this point (*sc.* burial rite)'; while

<sup>35</sup> *The Oldest Irish Tradition* (1964), 28.

<sup>37</sup> Some of these points are discussed in my book

<sup>36</sup> *Cf.*, on methods of composition, Kirk, *The Dark Age of Greece* (1971), 388–94.

*Songs of Homer*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> *The Songs of Homer*, 182.

Dr Kurtz and Mr Boardman are equally sure that Homer's picture 'is almost wholly in keeping with Geometric and later Greek practice', which is not at all the same thing.<sup>39</sup> My own view, predictably, is that Homer's burial practices are not firmly anchored in, nor wholly in keeping with, anything. His heroes cremate each other, maybe, because that was the rite with which Homer was most familiar. But from this point on, historical verisimilitude disappears. For it is not true that at any one period all Greece, nor even all Ionia, cremated. In Homer, the heroes are cremated singly or *en masse* according to the dictates of the story. When, as regularly happens, a tumulus is erected over a single cremation (whereas historically the tumulus almost always contains a multiple burial), we may again suspect that the requirements of the plot are the overriding factor. A few elements of the funerary practice may be culled from the Bronze Age: the fairly lavish provision of possessions for the deceased, the occasional use of horse-sacrifice, the idea of cenotaphs, possibly the funerary games. Although it is agreed that the great Homeric funerals are among the most magnificent set-pieces in the poems, it seems certain that no Greek ever witnessed in real life the precise sequence of events narrated in Patroklos' funeral. Life may imitate art, but it cannot match it.

What need be said about Homeric fighting-equipment beyond the fact, today I hope accepted, that it is composite and shows internal inconsistency? To illustrate this, it may be enough to recall that the same hero repeatedly sets out to fight with a pair of throwing-spears and is then found in action with a single heavy thrusting-spear (*cf.* e.g. *I* 18 and 338; *A* 43 and 260; *II* 139 and 801). But there is another conclusion to be drawn from Homeric weaponry and armour: this is, that whatever conspicuous item of equipment we choose to focus our attention on—the fairly common bronze corslets, bronze greaves, and bronze helmets, the pair of throwing-spears which is clearly the hero's regular armament, the occasionally metal-faced shield, the silver-studded sword-hilt—argument may rage as to whether their historical origin lies in the Mycenaean period or in the improved equipment of the poet's own day, the eighth century; but the one period at which virtually no evidence for their existence is to be found is the tenth and ninth centuries, and it could be added that there is but slight indication of their presence in the preceding Age of Migrations.<sup>40</sup>

Something of a pattern may thus be emerging from the categories of material culture that we have been considering. The historical models for each feature can be looked for either early (that is in the full Bronze Age) or late (that is in the poet's own times). They show a remarkable reluctance to reveal themselves in the intervening four centuries, between about 1200 and 800. The same lesson is provided by the study of the Homeric temple. There are now free-standing religious buildings, worthy of the name *νῆος* and conforming to the Homeric references, known from Bronze Age Greece. I would cite the structure found by Professor Caskey at Ayia Irini on Keos, and the temples of Mycenaean date at Kition in Cyprus which Dr Karageorghis has recently excavated. There is also the smaller shrine which Lord William Taylour has uncovered at Mycenae. At the other end of the time-scale, the revival of the temple in historical times, in the light of the latest chronological evidence, can barely if at all be traced back before 800 B.C. on any Greek site. Of the earlier so-called temples that have been claimed, either the identification as a temple, or the ascription to the ninth century (occasionally the tenth) is doubtful—sometimes both.<sup>41</sup>

This archaeological evidence has, I fear, been rather summarily presented here. But my aim is the fairly limited one of showing that, in certain aspects of the material world he

<sup>39</sup> M. I. Finley, *Early Greece: the Bronze and Archaic Ages* (1970), 84; D. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (1971), 186.

<sup>40</sup> I refrain from introducing chariots into this question, since the widespread assumption that Homer's chariotry is a half-understood memory of

the true Bronze Age practice has been questioned by J. K. Anderson (*AJA* 69 (1965), 349–52). But it remains true that, for chariots as well, the tenth and ninth (and indeed the eleventh) centuries in Greece have little or no evidence to offer.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *The Dark Age of Greece*, 408–12, 422–3.

portrays, Homer, besides in some cases combining features from different historical eras, also displays certain tendencies in the choice of those eras. The reasons for these tendencies may be of the simplest kind—perhaps that the poet's desire is to portray a materially impressive culture, and that this inevitably leads to the choice of either the Mycenaean world which had been impressive in this way, or to the contemporary world which was becoming so, but to avoid the less well-endowed intervening periods. But a question remains: would similar factors operate in the more intangible world of social relations?

Professor Finley again has a ready answer to such suggestions:<sup>42</sup> 'The comparative study of heroic poetry shows, I think decisively, that the society portrayed tends to be relatively (though not entirely) 'modern', for all the pretence of great antiquity and for all the archaism of the armour and the political geography'. I would disagree with him over one point: what we have in Homer is surely not just archaism in material culture, but artificial confluents of historical practices, a few features such as the provision of twin spears being probably of decidedly recent origin. But this must not be allowed to distract us from the fundamental question: is it possible to have social institutions operating quite independently of material culture in a literary world? I wish to argue, not that it is quite impossible, but that it is unlikely to have happened with Homer.

For consider certain of the characteristics of Homeric society that Finley and Adkins have described so well. It is strongly success-orientated and strongly materialistic; among its most pervasive features are the ceremonial exchange of gifts in a wide variety of situations, in which it insists on the actual exchange value and not merely the aesthetic or sentimental value of the gifts, and also the equally ceremonial feasting. These are activities whose successful operation demands quite a high material standard of living: for kings to exchange mean gifts is not merely unheroic from a literary point of view, it is socially ineffective in real life; for a host to entertain an uninvited group of long-term guests on skimpy fare is, equally, not merely unheroic but historically improbable. A society that cannot afford to perform such ceremonial lavishly will not practise it at all. Now all the evidence yielded by the archaeology of the settlements and graves of the earlier Dark Age suggests that here, at any rate, was a society that could afford nothing of the kind. Precious metals are for long totally unknown; bronze utensils and other large metal objects are exceedingly rare; while in one particular field, that of the funerary feasts, we are luckily able to make a precise comparison between Homer and archaeology. We find differences not only in degree, but in kind. The quantities of animal bones found beside Dark Age graves are relatively modest, and represent cut joints of meat rather than Homer's whole carcasses; furthermore, the beef and pork so prominent in Homer are far eclipsed by the cheaper mutton and goat's meat.<sup>43</sup> If challenged on the validity of archaeological evidence in such contexts, I would point not only to the obvious contrast with Mycenaean Greece, but to the example of a contemporary society in another part of Europe, the Urnfield Culture of East Central Europe, whose cemetery-sites produce evidence of just such a lavish society as we would expect from Homer's description: graves with quantities of elaborate bronzework, and with the accoutrements of feasting and of war particularly conspicuous. Another instance could be found in the rich tombs of the eighth century at Salamis in Cyprus.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, therefore, it is possible for archaeological evidence to match up to a literary picture thus far.

If, on the other hand, the objection were made that Homer's picture, though glorified by poetic licence, is yet fundamentally rooted in the historical society of the Dark Age, then one could indicate other qualities in the archaeological record of the period, which would have required Homer not merely to exaggerate but positively to contradict. There are, for instance, signs of drastic depopulation, and of the interrupted communications which naturally accompanied this. Homeric society does not admit of either circumstance.

<sup>42</sup> *Historia* 6 (1957), 147, n. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *The Dark Age of Greece*, 379–80 and n. 20.

<sup>44</sup> As was kindly pointed out to me by Mr V. R. d'A. Desborough.

Another point about the centuries of the Dark Age is that their memory was not retained, let alone treasured, by any Greek writer of whom we know. Hesiod regarded the era as one of unrelieved disaster; later Greeks found themselves embarrassed by their total ignorance of these years. It is fair to ask how this happened, if Greek society of that period possessed anything resembling the striking qualities of Homeric society, its self-reliance, its extreme competitiveness, its prodigious acquisitiveness and generosity, the functional simplicity of its ethics. If such a society had flourished at so relatively recent a time, would not its ideals and values have inevitably seeded themselves more widely in early Greek thought?

In the later part of this paper I have concentrated on one particular period, roughly the tenth and ninth centuries B.C., in order to assess its claim to have provided the model for Homeric society. It may be felt that the preceding Age of Migrations, for example, has escaped scrutiny in this connection. But I hope to have made clear that some at least of these arguments apply to any identification, of whatever period, of an historical society which might be faithfully reflected in Homer. For it seems to me that such identifications involve, in one respect, a certain derogation from Homer's artistic standing. If Homer really preserved, like a faded sepia photograph, a faithful image of a real society that belonged, not to his own times nor to the period which had provided such historical background as there was for the actual events he described, but to the period which happened to be most influential in the formation of this aspect of the Epic tradition; then indeed he was on a footing with the forgotten and anonymous authors of the *Chanson de Roland* or the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* or any one of the numerous epics and sagas of normal type. For an oral poet who adopts, entire, from his predecessors of a certain period, something as pervasive as a social framework, becomes in my view not merely traditional but derivative. To an important extent, he can make his characters behave in the way that people actually behaved at that time, and in no other way. The scope for creative contributions is sharply inhibited. If he does extend this social pattern himself, he must do it with such scrupulous care as to obliterate his own tracks completely. This is no doubt one reason why no author's name has survived for the *Nibelungenlied*, the Ulster Cycle, the Icelandic sagas and those others of even the finest non-Homeric epics in which such social and historical verisimilitude is to be found. By contrast, a poet who is also traditional, and ultimately just as indebted to predecessors, but who depends on predecessors of *many* periods, and admits elements from his own experience and imagination into the bargain, is far freer. He can select, he can conflate, he can idealise. Unless he is pedantically careful, minor inconsistencies will creep in, of the kind we have been discussing; but his scope for creativity, even though the picture he paints is not truly fictional, will be greater. This is a subjective argument to end with, but the fact that the Homeric poems are attached to a name, and that, even if we doubt the existence of an eighth-century poet called Homer, we are nevertheless aware, in reading the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, of being at least intermittently in the presence of poetic genius, is a strong hint that Homeric Epic conforms to the second of the two pictures sketched above, and not the first. At all events, I offer this as a further argument against the existence of an historical Homeric society.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> An earlier version of the paper was delivered to the Oxford Philological Society on May 12, 1972. It would be invidious to single out any of the numerous members from whose contributions to the subsequent discussion I benefited. But on the anthropological side I gratefully acknowledge my

debt to Dr Jack Goody and my colleague, Professor James Littlejohn, much as I fear I have oversimplified their views on complex subjects; while among Classical colleagues I owe a special debt to Mr D. B. Robinson.