

Glory Of War in the *Iliad*

In one's memory, involvement into the military actions is always associated with pain, violence, suffering and losses. When participating in a war, an individual is placed into specific conditions where they have to make difficult decisions or even act contrary to their views. At the same time, those who have passed through the ordeal of a war obtain the right to be considered real heroes.

In Ancient Greece, participation in war was also associated with glory and fame. Homer makes the characters of his *Iliad* choose war as a way of bringing fame to them thus ensuring that their names will be remembered by the future generations – this is what the *Iliad* strongly emphasizes. The war itself begins because the Greeks wanted to regain their glory and honor after the wife of the Greek king escaped with a Trojan. The fall of Troy is hence viewed as a thing associated with glory that will never perish (Cochrane 2.324). Heroism in a battle results in one's political and social influence – this particularly refers to the moment when Odysseus utters an honorable fighter's remarks of not coming back home empty-handed (Cochrane 2.297). This utterance is welcomed while thoughts about giving up in the battle expressed by Thersites, a commoner, are disdained by the rest, which made him struck by Odysseus. Due to his continuous participation in war, Odysseus is respected and his arguments are not met with criticism especially by individuals of lower status or those who are less glorious warriors. It is remarkable that as a whole the poem does not criticize gruesome deaths, enslaving and violence. Instead, it views war as a reputable and noble way to solve a conflict.

One of the characters, Achilles, has to choose between returning home and gaining glory by participating in the war. He begs Agamemnon's envoys – Odysseus,

Phoenix and Ajax – to reinstate him in the battle, which indicates that he really prefers it (Cochrane 9.410-416). He understands well that participation in the warfare puts him at risk of being killed. At some moment, having been insulted by Agamemnon, Achilles refused from participation in the war. However, in the course of plot development, a reader learns that the character soon changes his mind and joins the warfare showing his courage and strength.

Evading a war was interpreted by ancient people as a sign of laziness and cowardice while participation in it was considered as a manifestation of respect to the self and the whole society and brings one admiration. The difference between behavior of Paris and Hektor illustrates this idea. Hektor is a brave respected fighter who aspires to win the glory for his family (Cochrane 6.444). On his death, he is mourned by many people, and gods protecting his body from further mutilation by furious Achilles. In turn, his brother Paris aspires to evade the war. Having initiated the military confrontation, he nevertheless prefers to stay aside and be fameless rather than expose himself to the fight (Cochrane 6.336). His family denounces him, and even his beloved woman Helen regrets leaving her homeland with him. Instead, she is beguiled by Hektor; Paris has nothing to offer to his family. Hector who is more resolute and courageous is ashamed of his brother Paris who becomes the object of disgrace and disappointment.

The abovementioned tendency is true for deities as well. The epic leaves the reader with admiration for deities who support war and their antics to ruin and fight, like Athena. Those who turn out to be cowards and evade demonstrating hostility seem comical, as illustrated with timidity of Aphrodite and Artemis.

The characters of the *Iliad* do not lose glory gained in the war even after they die. The killed warriors are glorified with decent burial, which also explains the fighters' zeal and courage in the face of death. After Achilles and Priam learned about death of people whom they appreciated, they wanted to have their bodies returned to them; however, this task turned out to be very difficult. For example, Achilles goes back to the battle despite Agamemnon's insult in order to fight and find Patroclus's body while Priam aspires to save the body of Hektor. In his revenge mission, Achilles tries to mutilate Hektor's body having intent to dishonor him (even after his death because he is a Trojan hero often referred to as the glorious Hektor (Cochrane 22.395). Priam in turn bends low and begs for his son's body demonstrating that he has enough mortification to kiss the hands that killed Hektor (Cochrane 24.505).

These examples illustrate how respect and social status was connected with one's bravery in a battle in the Ancient Greek society. A leading position is not inherited but rather earned through one's actions. In the same way, one may lose a leading position conceding it to another individual who is worth it. This implies that a leader has to fight bravely to defend his reputation while those who have lower ranks also inevitably need to work with diligence to earn glory, honor and respect. For instance, Agamemnon falters when he calls leaders to convince them to leave with their ships (Cochrane 9.27), which is met with contempt. He is challenged by Diomedes who is willing to stay and reduce the city of Troy to ruins (Cochrane 9.42). In turn, strong fighters motivate their people to follow them. Their energy inspires other soldiers and, therefore, strongly influences the outcome of any military operation. Greeks rate Achilles's decision to abstain from fighting a defeat.

However, stating that the *Iliad* is devoted to the issue of war only would be quite shallow. Homer's work touches upon life of humans and gods; it shows how fate challenges them with problems that they have to solve with courage and insistence. The *Iliad* is a poem about family life and relationships between men and women. However, behind these issues, the poem emphasizes Greeks' desire to immortalize their names with the help of glory conquered in a war. According to the *Iliad*, war is glory, and glory is life.

Bibliography

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