

1 Work in Homeric Society

I TAKE THE TERM "HOMERIC SOCIETY" to mean that complex of institutions, relationships, and social values depicted in the Homeric epics. Some believe the Homeric poem is an artificial amalgam of widely scattered and disparate elements, and therefore useless as a historical source (Snodgrass 1974). Morris (1986b) argues that the poems depict the late Bronze Age–Eighth Century, B.C. Finley (1979) is convinced that Homer presents a coherent pattern of institutions qualified to be called a society or culture. Austin and Vidal-Naquet assert that:

What he [Homer] described was in all likelihood neither the Mycenaean world, nor his own time, but a world chronologically in between the two, namely the Greek world of the Dark Age in the tenth and ninth centuries, after the fall of the Mycenaean palaces, but before the development of the polis in the eighth century which ushered in a completely new period of Greek history. (1977, 38)

Finally, Redfield declared (1975, ix–x) that one can view "Homeric society as a functioning cultural system."

Homeric society was a class society written for and reflecting the viewpoint of the nobility (Humphreys 1978, 215). It was a simple, class society, not far removed from earlier tribal chieftainships. Its class nature is reflected in the differentiated access to economic resources available to the noble heads of households (Donlan 1982, 138). Based on Service (1962) and on Fried (1967), Donlan classifies Homeric society as a chiefdom with features of a ranked society retaining a number of egalitarian elements. It is a chiefdom in an imperfect, insufficiently integrated state, exhibiting a number of features which are survivals from the previous stage of a tribe (Donlan 1982, 138).

The key institution of the Homeric world was the aristocratic *oikos*, the household (Austin and Vidal-Naquet 1977, 40–41). The *oikos* was a family group residing on a landed estate and including father, mother, unmarried children, sons with wives, and grandparents. It also encompassed slaves, hired workers and craftsmen, retainers, guests, visiting relatives and allies, and strangers (mostly nobles from foreign lands).

The larger and more powerful the *oikos*, the greater the number of persons in its domain. The *oikos* was headed by an aristocratic male, whose family traced back to mythical warriors, and in some cases, such as Achilles, even to the deities—Achilles descended from the nymph/goddess Thetis (Iliad 1, 413). In the poems, only the nobles are given genealogies.

Finley (1979) summarizes the material base of the *oikos* as:

The base of the *oikos* was its land. . . . The primary use of the land was in pasturage. The households of the poems carried on a necessary minimum of ploughing and planting, especially on orchard and vine-land, but it was their animals on which they depended for clothing, draught, transport and much of their food. With their flocks and their labour force, with plentiful stone for building and with clay for pots, the great households could almost realize their ideal of absolute self-sufficiency. . . . If there was one thing which prevented full self-sufficiency that was the need for metal. (60–61)

Apart from land and flocks there was treasure kept in a locked store-room and accumulated through wars, raids, and gift exchange. This treasure was used both for utilitarian purposes and for gift exchange. Finley comments (1979, 65) that “no single detail in the life of the heroes receives so much attention in the Iliad and Odyssey as gift-giving.”

The theory of the gift owes much to Marcel Mauss (1967) who compares that institution among the Samoans, the Maori, the Andaman Islanders, Melanesia, Northwest America, ancient Rome, India, and early Germanic societies. The aim of the gift economy is accumulation for deaccumulation, a debt economy in which actors strive to maximize their ability to bequeath wealth as a sign of power. The aim is never to have debts paid off, but to preserve a situation of personal indebtedness (Morris 1986a, 2).

Donlan (1982) has analyzed gift-exchange and reciprocity in Homeric society. One type he calls *generalized reciprocity* after Sahlins (1972, 185–275). Generous giving creates prestige and loyalty, and indeed, Eumaeus, the loyal slave of Odysseus, tells how his master rewarded and cared for those who worked for him (Od. 15:330–335). Conversely, the suitors, who were using up the resources of Odysseus in his absence, were engaging in negative reciprocity, for which they are disapproved and eventually punished.

Sharing is another form of reciprocity, involving dividing the spoils of war or raid. The distribution agent can be the group or the leader. When the agent is the leader, control of the goods passes into the hands of one man and becomes redistribution. This question of sharing spoils is a central plot in the Iliad when Agamemnon, perceived as greedy and unsharing, risks losing his following (Iliad 1:122, 149, 231).

Chiefly, redistribution in the epic takes the form of the communal

feast presided over by the leader. The chief provides the food, distributes it, and acts as a priest making a religious sacrifice (Iliad 18:558; 23:29; Od. 3:5 309; 4:3; 14:249). Homeric nobles used the power of their *oikos* primarily in redistribution, but due had to be earned. Thus, Telemachus, son of Odysseus, was unable to assert the authority of his rank because he was too young and had not yet proved his merit through deeds.

Reciprocity in the epic also included friendship agreements, marital alliances, hospitality, gift giving, and gift exchange. A famous example was the agreement between Glaucus and Diomedes to stop fighting and exchange armour when they realized that their fathers were guest-friends (Iliad 6:215–230). Marital contracts in Homer are arranged by the male heads of the *oikos*, or between the bride's father and the groom. The main purpose was an alliance between households, with the direction of the gifts varying with each situation. Hospitality to strangers was of central importance in Homeric social relations. Hospitality to strangers who apply for food and shelter is divinely sanctioned by Zeus, called *the strangers' god* (Od. 9:269–270). When Menelaos appears before Telemachus, he is offered food and hospitality before being asked the purpose of the visit, and when he leaves he is offered a gift (Od. 1:123–125).

Guest-friendship is the institutionalized recognition of extended relationships beyond the *oikos*. This is foreign policy in its tribal/chieftain form of contracts not made by states but by powerful nobles. As in the marriage alliance, the guest-friend compact constitutes a bond. The guest-gift is the affirmation of the contract, but symbolic and material. When Telemachus leaves Sparta, he is told:

Wait then, until . . . Menelaos, famed for his spear, shall bring gifts . . . For a guest remembers all his days the host who shews him kindness. (Od. 15:51–55)

Reciprocity in Homer preserves orderly relations between persons and groups through the flow and exchange of gifts and hospitality. Goods and deeds are balanced and serve to mediate social situations which might have a potential for discord, as when Agamemnon offers to compensate Achilles for an insult (Iliad 9:127–157). They also serve to establish compacts between men uniting for common purpose, as when spoils are divided among noble warriors (Iliad 11:677–79; Od. 9:39–43).

SOCIAL GROUPS IN HOMERIC SOCIETY

“The society presented in the Homeric poems is a society divided into two distinct classes” (Redfield 1975, 241). There were also other groups intermediate between nobles and commoners.

The noble heads were the dominant class. Homer identified the nobles by name and gave them genealogies. The commoners he lumped, calling them *the multitude* or *plethus* (Iliad 11:299–309). The term *basileus* applied to both king and noble, the king being the greatest noble (Od. 1:394–396). Nobility was a matter of birth (Iliad 11:786), but when and how the powerful families accumulated their power and wealth was obscure. Upward mobility was difficult because land was already in the hands of the powerful, and marriages were arranged to preserve power and dominance through alliance with other noble households. The king was surrounded by noble families, a circle of *gerontes* or elders (Iliad 2:404).

Slavery existed during Homeric Greece. Treated as property and disposable at will, slaves were bought and sold and found or obtained through capture during war or raids. Scenes suggest that slavery could be more patriarchal than cruel (Od. 16:14–18, 31, 24). Dolius and his slave sons sit with their masters at the dinner table without any feeling of incongruity (Od. 24:411). A slave of Odysseus's, dissatisfied with his treatment by the suitors, talks of simply leaving and finding a new master (Od. 20:222). There was no manumission nor slavery for debt in Homeric times. Bought slaves were mostly captured women and children. Master and slave often worked together. But however mild Homeric slavery was, the Greek loved his freedom. Thus, the demoralizing nature of servitude was understood even by the well-treated Eumaeus, a slave of Odysseus's.

For Zeus takes away half his worth from a man, when the day of slavery comes upon him. (Od. 17:322–323).

Other than nobles and slaves, most members of Homeric society were presumably free peasants and herders with their own land, although we know little about them since Homer was primarily concerned with the nobility. The fundamental difference between nobles and small owners was the size of the *oikos* and the number of retainers and slaves supported. At sometime in the past, a separation had been created between nobles and others, and then frozen by family lineage. The attitude toward commoners is depicted in the scene in which Odysseus is exhorting the Achaians not to sail for home.

Whomsoever he met that was a chieftain or man of note, to his side would he come and with gentle words seek to restrain him . . . But whatsoever man of the people he saw, and found brawling, him would he smite with his staff and chide with words. (Iliad 2:188 ff.)

Commoners had some power. The Ithacan assembly could impose a heavy fine on Halisertes and could conceivably have sent the suitors into exile (Od. 16:192–93; 381–382). The Ithacan demos acted concert-

edly against the father of Antinous and would have lynched him but for the intervention of Odysseus (Od. 16:424–30).

Besides the nobles, slaves, and smallholders, there was a group called the *demioergoi*, those who work for the community. In reference to them, they are enumerated as prophets, healers of ills, workers of wood, wonderful singers, and heralds. They are not a class, but specialists who supply certain needs and are often strangers from outside the community. Vernant includes metal workers within the group (1983, 279). *Demioergoi* did not necessarily devote full time to their crafts—physicians and seers before Troy were primarily warriors (Iliad 2:858; 4:212–219; 6:76; 7:44; 11:832–835; 17:218). Epeus, the builder of the wooden horse before Troy, was one of the warriors, and is nowhere called a carpenter.

The least fortunate of the social groups were the *thetes* or unattached propertyless laborers who worked for hire or begged what they could not steal or take. Achilles in Hades, thinking of the lowest state of man, named the *thete*. As a man unattached to an *oikos* and, in this respect, worse off than a slave (Od. 11:489–491).

Between the commoners and nobility were an intermediate strata, the *therapontes* or retainers, some of whom were of noble birth, and exiles of princely extraction received by a king (Iliad 9:440, 607; 15:431–432; 16:573–574; 23:85–90). Heralds and body servants had functions which marked them as above the ordinary mass of people (Iliad 19:143–144, 316, 321–22; 24:396–397, 625). Besides being retainers, heralds had important functions. They summoned people to assembly and passed the scepter to those desiring to speak (Iliad 2:50–51; 9:10–12). Heralds were also used to convey messages between hostile armies and were considered to be sacred. The ordeal duel between Hector and Ajax was stopped by heralds, bearing royal scepters—one from the Greek and one from the Trojan side—which they held between the combatants, bidding them to cease fighting (Iliad 7:274–282).

The society depicted by Homer was male-centered and, on the Greek mainland, monogamous. Only Priam, in Asia Minor, had more than one wife. Noble women were in charge of the female slaves and worked just as they did, making clothes and even washing clothing for the family (Iliad 22:154–156; Od. 6:26; 7:234–235). A woman's life did not extend beyond the *oikos*, although her liberty of going and coming was not restricted. The status of women is portrayed when Telemachus tells his mother to attend to her womanly duties (Od. 1:356–359), and when he is advised to send his mother back to her father's household and *command* her to marry (Od. 2:113).

Homer and the Greeks created their deities in their own image. Zeus, the patriarch, has his *oikos*. Just as Homeric men and women did,

gods and goddesses performed manual work. Like Odysseus, Athena is wily and crafty. Homeric men and women believed that departures from the norm were the work of the deities. Errors of judgment—a moral blindness or damaged capacity that came over a person—were attributed to Ate (Redfield 1975,97). Mood changes, irrational acts, unsummoned thoughts, dreams, and lucky and unlucky events were all the work of the deities, as was fate, life, death, health, and sickness. The preoccupation with demons and the use of seers and oracles in the epics is comparable to the witchcraft, oracles, and magic depicted by Evans-Pritchard in his study of the African Azande (1937). Dodds also comments about Homeric religion.

I doubt if the early literature of any other European people postulated supernatural interferences in human behaviour with such frequency or over so wide a field. (1951, 13)

HOMERIC CULTURE—A BRIEF SUMMARY

It was a time when community and polis were in a formative stage. Disputes between families were settled by themselves. Noble households gave protection because community justice was undeveloped. Society was split into many small communities with the relationships among them resembling an armed truce, necessitating marital and political alliances. Raids were carried on to secure movable wealth. If men committed crimes and their families could not protect them, they had to flee and seek asylum in another community (Od. 15:272–278). Alliances were forged through kinship, gifts, and personal diplomacy. It was a decentralized society based on the power of nobles, first among equals. Warfare was important for the rise of chiefdoms and kingships. Seminomadic pastoralists tended to develop chiefdoms characterized by conflict and usurpation, and these Greeks of the epics showed signs that they were originally stockbreeders who later adapted to farming.

It is important to keep in mind that Homeric society, representing the oral traditions of perhaps five hundred years, had many possible permutations. Various elements of the world of Homer are derived from different periods. Oliver Taplin (1988, 67) states that, while iron was a rare metal, fighting weapons were bronze, indicating the metallurgy of the earlier Mycenaean Age.

On the other hand, the dead were cremated rather than buried, which is post-Mycenaean Iron Age practice. In some places, the heroes carried huge Mycenaean shields and, in others, the smaller type of the

later period were used. "The material world seems to come from different times, spread over many centuries, and as likely as not from different places also" (Taplin 1988, 67).

Basically, Homer was singing about his own Greek world, probably the eighth century B.C., because, as Taplin points out, he must have had an audience, people who were willing to pay attention to these poems and would know about the world of Ionia about the date of 700 B.C. (Taplin 1988, 69). It is also important to remember that the morality and values of the noble life depicted in the poems had an influence on the real life of the Greeks over the next five hundred years and beyond. The great tradition of Western thought and literature starts, in large measure, with the Iliad and the Odyssey.

WORK IN HOMERIC SOCIETY

In this section, I propose to enlist the aid of my previous study on work in nonmarket societies (1984a). Modifying categories to suit the Homeric data, I will use the following outline to present the discussion on work in Homeric society:

1. Work embedded in the cultural fabric of kinship, religion, and politics.
2. The communal nature of work.
3. Men's work, women's work, and the division of labor.
4. Work incentives.
5. Work as natural praxis.
6. Craft work.

I propose to illustrate that Homer's world is similar to the model of work in other nonmarket cultures in that work is embedded in all the activities of the society and therefore acceptable to all ranks and groups, nobles as well as commoners. There is the evidence that all sectors of the society participate in work activities, noblemen and noblewomen, as well as commoners.

Work Embedded in the Cultural Fabric

In industrialized cultures, the world of work is separated and divorced from the home, family life, religious life, and other diverse activities of citizens. In nonmarket, nonindustrial cultures, work is not a separate sphere of life. There is a unity between raising a family and hunting or

gathering; between making pots and training children; and between building houses and practicing one's religion. There is often no separate word for work. Gardening among the Trobriand islanders is a kinship obligation (Malinowski 1922). Cheyenne women build shelters for their family or lose prestige (Hoebel 1960). A Nuer woman without a cow to milk has no standing in her kinship group (Evans-Pritchard 1940).

In most nonmarket societies, the kinship group is the producing unit. This was true in Homeric times in the organization of the *oikos*. The herds of Odysseus furnished milk and meat. Their hides provided raw material for shoes, belts, bottles, helmets, and shields. Odysseus's sheep provided wool for clothing and his woods yielded lumber for building.

The entire household worked. Penelope, the wife of Odysseus and a queen among the Ithacans, wove garments. Laertes, the father of Odysseus, tended a vineyard. Odysseus himself boasted that he could cut grass with a scythe, drive a pair of oxen, and plow a clean furrow (Od. 18:336–380). On the *oikos*, the herdsmen had the important task of guarding the crucial source of wealth, the flocks. The work was not easy. They slept outdoors, near their beasts, on watch for robbers and wild animals (Od. 14:528–534). Harvesting was done with a sickle by men called *mowers* and, after the grain was cut, boys were given the work of gathering the grain for binders. While noblemen could and did work, if their estates were as large as that of Odysseus, they spent most of their time supervising, managing, and directing the work in the field (Iliad 15:556–557).

The performance of work in ancient Greece was more than an activity to satisfy material needs. It was a religious act. In most small-scale, nonmarket primitive cultures, magic and religion are appealed to in the wresting of a livelihood from the natural environment. Human beings see themselves as having a kinship with the natural world.

The merging of religion with every aspect of private and public life was a central feature of the Homeric epics (Vernant 1983, chapter 9; Dodds 1951, chapters 1, 2). Work on the land was part of the natural and divine order and required sacrifices to Zeus and Demeter (Hesiod 1983, 390, 415, 465–466). Plato later spoke of *kairos*, that divine moment seized by the worker if work is to be successfully performed which was like a demonic intervention beyond his reach (1968, 370b, 374c).

The myth of Prometheus was prominent in the lore of work among the ancient Greeks. Hesiod describes how mortal work was a consequence of the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus (Hesiod 1983, 47–59). Aeschylus elaborates on the myth of Prometheus and

how he bestowed upon man fire, art, technology, and the crafts (Aeschylus 479–529). The theft of fire helped mankind to craft tools. But the theft must be paid for and, henceforth, there will be no subsistence without work.

There is also the connection between religion and work in the Pandora myth. She is the goddess of the earth, presiding over fertility. She is also an artifact, the work of the craftsman god, Hephaistos, and the weaving goddess, Athena. Fertility and work are opposed and complementary, a duality which characterizes the human condition. Every advantage has its corresponding disadvantage. Wealth implies work. Birth implies death. Prometheus and Pandora do both good and evil.

As work in nonmarket cultures is embedded in kinship and religion, so is it also an integral part of political status. Indeed, in many nonmarket cultures leadership in work rests with political leadership. For example, among the Maori, political chieftains arrange for and lead communal work (Firth 1972, 221–224). Political leadership and hunting work merge among the Chukchi, Lapps, Naskap, Greenlanders, Montagnais, and Beaver (Paine 1971, 165–66).

To exercise leadership in work requires knowledge and skill, not merely status. A Maori leader is versed in technical skills and magic, thus combining work, politics, and religion. Odysseus was similarly skilled in the crafts—he is a builder of boats as well as his own bedroom—in the arts of politics and diplomacy, and is the noble head of a large household and a favorite of the gods, especially Athena. In his person, work, kinship, religion, and politics converge. Regarding politics, Ian Morris argues that it was decisive in determining wealth (1986a,4). There were a large number of items available only to those of high political status. These were treasured items created by skilled craftsmen, secured by nobles on raids, or acquired through gift-exchange.

The potency of goods in the prestige sphere in Homeric society was its reinforcement of the political status of noble households. Political rank and power not only enabled Homeric nobles to commission craftsmen, but they could also mobilize men for a work task. Telemachus secures the loan of a ship from a friendly nobleman and recruits twenty men—*hetairoi*—to do the work of rowing the ship (Od. 2, 212 ff.). They will gain nothing except wine and food en route, and hospitality later at the household of Nestor (Od. 2, 349).

The position and power of Odysseus reveals the state of Ithacan politics, which was probably typical of many Greek communities in the ninth and eighth centuries, B.C. Odysseus and Laertes before him, exercised a loose, but effective control in Ithaca, the neighboring islands, and the mainland immediately across the water. There were

other independent nobles with their own large *oikos*. The political arrangement was that of a chiefdom, not fully centralized and largely dependent on the personal competence of the chief or king. The base of the local chief's power was his *oikos*, the treasure stored there, and the number of men and women, both free and slave, whose work and labor he controlled. Political authority and control over the work of others formed an inextricable web in the power structure of Homeric society.

The Communal Nature of Work

The communal nature of work in nonmarket societies is a distinguishing feature of those cultures. Communal and cooperative work by all groups, sexes and ages, involving a wide range of tasks, has been documented in various ethnographic studies (Applebaum 1984a,65–198). Herskovits provides a representative example from the Dogon of West Africa.

It is clear that individual advantage . . . is not the sole force that causes men to work in the society we are studying. Each person is motivated, more or less consciously, in more or less indirect ways by the desire for the well-being, wealth and prestige of the community as a whole. (1952, 7)

In the Pacific (Sahlins 1962) and in Africa (Kuper 1963), communal work performed for chiefs and headmen is a social obligation, and those who refuse suffer ostracism or accusation of sorcery, a means for controlling shirkers (Harris 1975,363–65). The work debt owed to the chief is repaid by him in various ways—gifts, public feasts, redistribution of goods, and military security. All of this is portrayed in the Homeric poems. Redfield sums up communal obligations in Homeric society.

Kinship and community generate the institutions of the *oikos* and polis, household and city, and thus the whole fabric of the human world. (1975,102–103)

The communal nature of work is captured graphically in Homer's description of a rustic scene on the Shield of Achilles.

Therein he [Hephaistos, the craftsman god] set also soft fallow-land, rich tilth and wide, that was three times ploughed; and ploughers full many therein were wheeling their yokes and driving them this way and that. And whensoever after turning they came to the headland of the field, then would a man come forth to each and give into his hands a cup of honey-sweet wine. . . . Therein he set also a king's demesne-land wherein labourers were reaping, bearing sharp sickles in their hands. Some handfuls were falling in rows to the ground along the swathe, while others, the binders of sheaves were binding with twisted ropes of straw. Three binders stood hard by them, while behind them boys would gather

the handfuls and bearing them in their arms would busily give them to the binders; and among them the king, staff in hand, was standing in silence at the swathe, joy in his heart. And heralds apart beneath an oak were making ready a feast, and were dressing a great ox they had slain for sacrifice; and the women sprinkled the flesh with white barley in abundance, for the workers' mid-day meal. Therein he set also a vineyard heavily laden with clusters, a vineyard fair and wrought of gold; black were the grapes, and the vines were set up throughout on silver poles . . . and one single path led thereto, whereby the vintagers went and came, whensoever they gathered the vintage. And maidens and youths in childish glee were bearing the honey-sweet fruit in wicker baskets. And in their midst a boy made pleasant music with a clear-toned lyre, and thereto sang sweet the Linos-song with his delicate voice; and his fellows beating the earth in unison therewith followed on with bounding feet mid dance and shoutings. (Iliad 18,543–575)

This scene has all the ingredients of the communal nature of work—men and women, old and young, king and commoner, work and feasting, music and dance, and drink and work. Aristotle, with his special genius, connected community life with the feasting, sacrifices and sharing that accompanied the rural festival (1934 8:11, 1160a). Aristotle remarks that most ancient sacrifices and assemblies takes place after the work of gathering the harvest, for then there is time for leisure after the necessity of work.

Finley sums up the communal nature of work in Homeric society.

A man's work and the evaluation of his skills, what he did and what he was not to do in the acquisition of goods and their disposition, within the *oikos* and without, were all status-bound. . . . With respect to work and wealth . . . the determinant was always the particular social grouping to which one belonged, not the skills, desires or enterprise of an individual. (1979, 75)

Men's Work, Women's Work, and the Division of Labor

The communal aspect of work in Homer is based on the phenomena that, although performed by individuals, all productive work—even the raiding for booty—was carried on in behalf of the household as a whole. The final products were gathered and stored centrally in the locked and guarded storeroom, and were then redistributed by the *oikos* head when and to whom he deemed worthy and appropriate.

There was a division between household and field. The two settings were often separate with the house located in the town, not adjacent to the fields (Od. 16:329–331; 17:18–19). Noble households were usually built on high ground for protection. Women performed no work in the fields. In the house, they did spinning, weaving, carding, grinding corn, baking bread, making beds, cleaning, caring for clothing, and

general servant duties such as serving food, waiting on the mistress of the house, carrying torches, and bathing their master and their mistress. Most household labor in the large *oikos* was done by female slaves. However, noble women are also pictured weaving, spinning, and making garments (Iliad 6:23–24; 22:440–441; Od. 2:97). Work, even the washing of clothes, was not too menial for noble women. Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, asks her father for his wagon and mules to take her brothers' clothes to the river where she, along with her maids, washes them and lays them on the ground to dry (Od. 6:30–95). Noble women who were enslaved, such as Euryclea, received special treatment. Not only was she nurse to Odysseus and his son, Telemachus, but she was entrusted with the key to and the safe keeping of the important storeroom where Odysseus kept his treasure (Od. 2:346). She was also in charge of the other slave women in the household. Even the deities worked, emphasizing the fact that work was no disgrace in the Homeric epics. Athena was skilled in weaving and spinning as well as, along with Hephaistos, being a patron of the arts and crafts (Iliad 5:735; 14:179; Od. 231–233).

Male work was performed mainly in the field in heavy agricultural tasks—plowing, tending grape vines, clearing, herding, building walls, piling up dung, building fences, and guarding the flocks. There was no strict specialization as each man was able to perform a range of duties. Specialists, such as metal workers, were usually commissioned from outside the household to perform their work. Odysseus had different men for his swine, goats, and cattle, but they could have exchanged places. Although a swineherd, Eumaeus made his own shoes as well as built a wall (Od. 14:23–24). Odysseus himself performed carpentry work, could handle the sickle, drove a team of oxen, and plowed a furrow (Od. 18:366–376).

Males, both free and slave, also performed duties in the household. Some were carvers of meat. Others were pages or heralds. Still others, free men, were retainers, acting in various capacities serving the noble head of household. Probably the most honored of the males living in the great households was the honored bard who regaled the company of men at the great feasts with songs of the deeds of heroes and deities.

When the household is the productive and consumption unit combined, cooperation and reciprocity between men and women is decisive for the smooth functioning of the household. Women's work is viewed within the context of communal work and receives its due recognition. Even though the Homeric world is male-dominated, Homer devotes a great deal of the poem to describing women's work. Besides the goddesses, there are numerous women who are treated sympathetically and

admiringly—Euryclea, Nausicaa, Arete, Hecuba, Andromache, and even Helen at times. (Pomeroy 1975, 30).

Slave labor, as with free labor, was divided by sex. There is no indication that there was anything resembling “slave work” and “free work.” Male and female slaves, even of the same family—as with Dolios and his sons and daughters—were assigned different tasks according to the sexual division of labor (Od. 17:321; 18:322; 24,387). Slave and free did the same work, the difference being that slaves worked under constraint while the free could choose where, how, and when to work. This is a significant difference, to be sure, but one not related to the type of work.

Finley sums up the distinction between slave and free work.

A line between those who, though they worked, remained more or less their own masters as independent herders and peasants, and on the other side, the thetes and slaves who labored for others, whose livelihood was not in their own hands. (1979, 71).

Work Incentives

Securing one's subsistence is the major incentive to work in all societies. However, this does not exhaust the incentive to work. Force of tradition, the desire for approval, securing of peer cooperation, and the seeking of prestige for work well done are all additional incentives. There are also others. Herskovits comments on the prestige factor in work. The prestige that accrues to the hard worker, the fast worker, the careful worker, the competent worker, is thus a significant factor in motivating labor in most societies. (1952, 123)

In nonmarket cultures, people do not choose work according to idiosyncratic preference. They are born into a social system which requires them to play particular roles as part of their social environment. For noble heads of households in Homeric society to maintain their social position, they had to provide economic management of the *oikos*, leadership in war and raids, and display of their wisdom in the political assembly of their peers. Odysseus tells Penelope:

the blameless king, who with the fear of the gods in his heart, is lord over many mighty men, upholding justice; and the black earth bears wheat and barley, and the trees are laden with fruit, the flocks bring forth young unceasingly, and the sea yields fish, all from his good leadership. (Od. 19:20)

Good leadership in work, family and community—such were the motivations of the rich and powerful in the Homeric epics.

In the large, noble household, economic fate was collective. The small farmer, however, could not rely on reciprocity nor redistribution,

and, thus, fearing hunger, debt, or loss of land, his motivation for work was pure necessity. In the Homeric epics, the pressing need for food is manifest among out-of-town beggars, fugitives, outcasts, strangers, and unwanted guests. Later, in the works of Hesiod (983, 311; 476–478; 493–497), we see that, for the independent small farmer, warding off starvation is the motivation for work. Hesiod preaches that work is no disgrace, and that idleness is a disgrace. Through work, one avoids the loss of one's land, provides for one's independence, and guarantees against poverty. A full barn and the proper organization of work will provide the means for one to be truly free.

Regarding motivation of work for renown craftsmen, prestige, in addition to subsistence, was the main factor. A shieldmaker or chariotmaker might supply his labor in exchange for a certain number of cattle or sheep. For something special and prestigious, such as the shield of Ajax, someone special such as Tychius, the leatherworker, was summoned (Iliad 7, 219–223).

On the surface, it would appear that slaves had no motivation for work. But there is no evidence for this. Slaves were part of the *oikos* in which everyone's work counted for something. The best evidence of this is Eumaeus, a slave who is treated well and rewarded for his hard work with responsibility, care, and even love. Eumaeus declares:

For verily the gods have stayed the return of him who would have loved me with all kindness, and would have given me possessions of my own, a house and a bit of land, and a wife . . . even such things as a kindly master give to his slave who has toiled much for him, and whose labour the god makes to prosper, even as this work of mine prospers, to which I give heed. (Od. 14:62–68)

Incentives to work are illustrated in the behavior of the Achaean chieftains at Troy. Accustomed to hard work, the Achaeans rowed their own boats, built their own barracks, and cared for their own arms, armor, and horses. They killed, dressed and cooked their own meat. Achilles himself, with the aid of his comrades, Patroclus and Automedon, cooked mutton and pork for his guests (Iliad 9:207).

The incentive to work was part of the incentive to perform important social activities in Homer's world. The dignity of work was upheld for men and women, old and young, slave and free. To perform manual labor involved no loss of self-respect. On the contrary, work incentives were part of life's social incentives.

Work as Natural Praxis

Work in nonmarket cultures is viewed as part of a natural process. Subsistence is often seen as the gift of nature, from the earth and in the

form of animals. Man's handiwork is inspired by natural forms in shape and function. Human beings are deemed to possess natural capacities. Odysseus as the false Cretan says:

Such a man was I in war, but labour in the field was never to my liking. . . . Wars, and polished spears and arrows . . . those things . . . were dear to me, which a god put in my heart; for different men take joy in different works. (Od. 14:221–227)

Polydamas expresses the same idea.

To one man hath God given the works of war, to another the dance, to another the lyre and song, and in the breast of another Zeus . . . putteth a mind of understanding. (Iliad 13:726–36)

The ancient Greeks looked upon farming as submitting to the laws and rules of nature as much as applying a technique to the soil. Agriculture was a form of morality, involving daily struggles with nature which must be performed at the appointed time and in the right way (Hesiod 1983, 780). Hesiod's message was that, through work, man entered into contact with nature and divine power and became more dear to the immortals (1983, 309). The Greek view that the earth was a goddess wedded the subject of agricultural work with nature. Work on the land was a noble way of life, which bred robust bodies and men of high repute (Xenophon 1970, 6:9).

In the Homeric poems, work on the land was not viewed as acting upon nature in order to transform it, but rather participation in a natural and divine order that is superior to man. There is little evidence of the commercial aspect of work. The fruits of the earth are consumed in the household. Consumption and the giving of gifts is set in opposition to commerce and trading. The worse insult that could be hurled at Odysseus was the accusation that he was some type of trader (Od. 8:145–164).

All work in the Homeric poems was seen as part of a natural process, with the gods putting into mortals the abilities to carry on the crafts of spinning and weaving, or carpentry, or metal working, or other skills. Agricultural work particularly established a personal contact between the skills of the farmer on the one hand and nature and the gods on the other.

Craft Work

With work oriented toward the natural order, there is little stress in non-market cultures on the intensified subdivision of work or time efficiency with increased production as a goal which are the hallmarks of industrial society. There is some specialization, which varies from soci-

ety to society. The primary division of work is along sex lines with men and women knowing how to perform the work traditionally assigned to their sex. Certain men might specialize in ironworking, carpentry, or leatherworking. Certain women might concentrate on making pots. They might specialize in a particular product, so that one woman might make pots for everyday use and another for religious use. However, it would be rare for the division of labor to reach the point at which one would gather clay, another mould it, a third fire it, a fourth glaze it, and so on. Whatever specialization exists is craft specialization, the purpose being to increase the skill of the craftsman with a view to producing a finer quality product (Finley 1982, 186–187).

In Greek culture, there was a separation—even an opposition—between agriculture and the crafts, which expressed itself politically, at times, with farmers and artisans competing as distinct groups. Aristotle thought artisans should be excluded from citizenship, since craft work which enjoined a man to sit indoors all day was contrary to a free nature and was a servile occupation (1946, 1330a, 25 ff.). In earlier, Homeric times, however, there was no such prejudice since noblemen and noblewomen engaged in craft work. It is interesting that Plato considered the development of specialization work as the basis for the development of the polis, the city state (1968, 369b–383a). It is also significant that both the polis and specialization were underdeveloped in Homeric times.

The four principle materials used by craftsmen in the Homeric epics were wood, clay, metal, and leather. If a specialist did the work, the materials were furnished by the user, as when Nestor furnishes gold to the metalworker to wrap the horns of a heifer which he wishes to sacrifice (Od. 3:436). No special payment is mentioned for craftsmen and few could earn their keep solely as craftsmen. A trained artisan would have little to do in a society where almost everyone on the *oikos* or on the small peasant farm could perform most of the tasks.

What crafts existed in the Homeric epics? The general name for a skilled workman is *tekton*, a wright, not yet specialized. He could build houses or ships, make furniture, adorn it with silver and ivory, fit doors and thresholds, or join and smooths horns to make a bow (Od. 18:56; Iliad 4:106–110). Smiths worked in gold, iron and bronze (Od. 3:425, 432). There were potters who used wheels (Iliad 18:601); wagon makers (Iliad 4:485); leatherworkers (Iliad 7:221); and seamen who were also probably fishermen (Od. 12:251; 13:187; 24:419). Tanning, curing, and the stretching of leather was done on the farm (Iliad 17:389).

The *demioergoi* or workers for the community (Od. 17:383) were itinerant craftsmen, including such intellectual crafts such as bard, seer, or healer. Their recompense is not spelled out. They were clients who probably received room and board and gifts from their patron.

Specialists such as the renown Tychius might receive a number of cattle or sheep for his work. Many craftsmen were not full-time. Helenus, the seer, was also a warrior, as was Ennomus (Iliad 2:858; 6:76; 7:44; 17:218). Epeus, the builder of the wooden horse, called himself a boxer and a spearman (Iliad 23:670).

The tools of the *tekton* were the axe, the adze, the augur, and the plumbline (Od. 5:234, 237, 246; Iliad 2:765). The *tekton* probably had a hammer, a tool associated with the smith (Od. 3:434) No mention is made of a saw. In building his raft, Odysseus used wooden pegs and fastenings to hold it together.

The smith—*chalkeus*—was a worker in bronze (Iliad 4, 187). The term also applied to workers in iron and gold (Od. 3:425; 9:392). The smith's workshop and house was semipublic, places where a vagrant or beggar could seek warmth and shelter (Od. 18, 328; Hesiod 1983, 493–494). Hephaistos's workshop, probably typical of mortals as well as the craftsman/god, is described as having hammer, tongs, anvil, bellows, and smelting pots, kept in a chest (Iliad:413–477). Hephaistos made tables, brooches, necklaces, silver bowls, armor, and a throne (Od. 15:115; Iliad 2:101; 14:239). Metals were used to adorn chariots, furniture, doors, thresholds, and leather belts. Bronze is mentioned far more frequently than iron in the poems. Weapons were predominantly bronze. They were frequently blunted or turned away by shields or helmets. Iron weapons would have made a difference. During the period 1200 B.C. to 700 B.C., the Aegean shifted from predominantly bronze to iron for weapons and tools (Snodgrass 1971, 213, 228). But long after iron was introduced, bronze continued to be used, even into the classical period.

From the scene of Eumaeus cutting oxhide to make himself a pair of sandals (Od. 14:23–24) and the description of the stretching of leather on the *oikos* (Iliad 17:391–394), it can be deduced that leather work was done mostly within the *oikos*. For something special, such as the shield of Ajax, a *skytotomos*, one skilled in leather, might be called. Pottery was also mostly made within the *oikos*, with each family making its everyday utensils. People not possessing clay would turn to a potter, “who makes trial of his wheel” (Iliad 18:601). Later, in Hesiod's time, the potter's craft would develop to the point where the poet could refer to the jealousy of potter for potter (Hesiod 1983, 25).

The presence of craftsmen in the epics might be deceiving, regarding the extent of development attained by the specialized crafts. The reality of social life, the strength and relative self-sufficiency of the *oikos*, and the widespread knowledge and practice of craft work, imposed conditions which made specialization in crafts extremely limited.

Workmanship, along with the achievement of man-made things,

appealed to Homer (Vivante 1982, 119). He continually dwells on details of workmanship, such as Odysseus making his own bedchamber (Od. 23:185–203), or on work in the fields, such as the scenes on the Shield of Achilles (Iliad 18:543–605). The epics are filled with analogies from work and with the usefulness of human effort in peace and in war. There are numerous characterizations on the beauty of form and the utility of man-made objects. Homer was interested in how men and women performed work and in what they made and he illustrated in great detail men and women at work in the fields and at their crafts (Bowra 1972, 170).

CONCLUSION: WORK IN HOMERIC SOCIETY

In the Iliad, Homer is concerned with men and women trying to preserve or destroy the social, moral, and religious bonds between humans and between humans and their deities. Its main theme is the conflict which ensues from the breaking of the social code. The Odyssey, on the other hand, revolves around the theme of negative reciprocity on the part of a group of haughty nobles and their ultimate punishment by a warrior/hero, Odysseus. In the Iliad, Homer deals with the aspirations and sufferings of the Trojans in Asia Minor as well as the Achaeans from the Greek mainland. In the Odyssey, he takes Odysseus on travels among different cultures, describing ways of life contrastingly different from that of the Achaeans. In this interest in the ways of life, values, habits, and cultures of a people other than his own, Homer may be said to have had an anthropological perspective. Indeed Kluckhohn argued that the Greeks were the first anthropologists (1961, 27).

Work in Homeric society as a natural part of the social fabric of both nobles and commoners and as a part of the culture of the household, the *oikos*, is similar in many ways to the perspective of work in other nonmarket societies, both past and present. The household was the unit of both production and consumption and—through the collective work of retainers, servants, slaves, free hired craftsmen, and family members—achieved a large measure of self-sufficiency. The Homeric culture as a whole was small-scale and decentralized, with local kings and nobility acting in concert exercising leadership over the community.

All people in Homeric society—both commoners and aristocrats—performed work and did not despise the manual arts. Agricultural pursuits in Homer and throughout Greek and Roman history had a high place of honor. Farming work was considered good training for the citizen/soldier to defend his city-state. It was also a means of fostering the

habits and values of honesty and discipline considered to be important traits for the worthy individual.

Besides farming and pastoralism, there were the crafts, respected by the society and patronized by the deities, particularly Athena and Hephaistos. Craftsmen who worked for the community—*demioergoi*—travelled to the household of a patron to work in wood, metal, leather, or clay, and to receive as recompense room and board or a valuable gift. Articles which could not be procured locally or obtained through raids and war were traded for or commissioned to be made by a specialist. Specialists were few. There was some trade, mostly through the agency of the Phoenicians, but traders were despised for their profit-seeking and gain at the expense of others. Gift exchange, reciprocity, and hospitality were the means whereby social obligations and ties were established. Alliances were forged for security, mutual protection, and collective help for going to war or on raids. Deities were acknowledged as an integral and inseparable part of life and were appealed to through sacrifices and rites at meals and on all important occasions when humans sought their help for their enterprises.

Later in Greek history, with the development of the polis, markets, trade, and money, society would be transformed. The demos and the public authority would take the place of the *oikos* in providing security and justice. Slavery would become more prevalent and more necessary for manual occupations. The aristocracy would no longer deign to perform work, considering the release from work as the precondition for the good life. Work in agriculture would retain its standing because it was conceived as in tune with nature, as work performed without constraint when practiced by the free independent farmer, and under the control of free men blessed with citizenship.

The study of work in Homeric society provides one with a functioning cultural system which can be compared with other and later societies in the history of western civilization. If Greece represents the beginning of western civilization, then Homer represents the beginning of Greek civilization. Therefore, the study of work in Homeric society provides the base from which to trace the concept of work from the ancient world though the middle ages into the present.