

## VARIA GRAECA ET LATINA

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### **“YOU STARTED THE DISPUTE” – AN ESSENTIAL ARGUMENT IN CONTROVERSIES TYPICAL OF ORAL CULTURES AND THE DISCOURSIVE BLUEPRINT OF THE *ILIAD***

The paper argues that in the imagery found in the narrative context of the *Iliad*, the image of public debates is involved. Especially the argument “you started the dispute” is emphasized because it is connected with the concept of blame attributed to Paris and all the Trojans. Under the influence of such works like Graeber and Wengrow (2021), that shed a new light on the prehistory of mankind, I postulate a change in the paradigm of the interpretation of the Homeric world. I believe it would be much more comprehensible if interpreted as expressing egalitarian relations. After all, social and political circumstances described in the *Iliad* correspond to the phase in which hierarchy is only an increasing tendency. Comparisons drawn from other egalitarian cultures indicate how significant it is who started the dispute and how this argument can be cancelled. In the blueprint of the *Iliad*, however, Paris’ blame defines the meaning of the Trojan story and, therefore, the indictment that it was Alexander who started the dispute plays a paramount role.

### **“TU AS COMMENCÉ LA DISPUTE” – UN ARGUMENT ESSENTIEL DANS LES CONTROVERSES TYPIQUES DES CULTURES ORALES ET LE SCHÉMA DÉCOURAGEANT DE L’*ILIADÉ***

L’article soutient que l’imagerie trouvée dans le contexte narratif de l’*Iliade* implique l’image de débats publics. L’argument “qui a commencé la dispute” est particulièrement mis en avant, car il est lié à la notion de faute attribuée à Paris et à tous les Troyens. Sous l’influence de travaux tels que Graeber et Wengrow (2021), qui jettent une nouvelle lumière sur la préhistoire de l’humanité, je postule un changement de paradigme dans l’interprétation du monde homérique. Je pense qu’il serait



beaucoup plus compréhensible s'il était interprété comme exprimant des relations égalitaires. Après tout, les circonstances sociales et politiques décrites dans l'*Iliade* correspondent à la phase dans laquelle la hiérarchie n'est qu'une tendance croissante. Les comparaisons avec d'autres cultures égalitaires montrent à quel point il est important de savoir qui est à l'origine de la dispute et comment cet argument peut être annulé. Dans le schéma de l'*Iliade*, cependant, la faute de Pâris définit le sens de l'histoire troyenne et, par conséquent, l'accusation selon laquelle c'est Alexandre qui a déclenché le conflit joue un rôle primordial.

**Mots-clés:** *L'Iliade*, Homère, discours oral, culture égalitaire, Pâris/Alexandre

**Keywords:** *The Iliad*, Homer, oral discourse, egalitarian culture, Paris/Alexander

**Słowa kluczowe:** *Iliada*, Homer, dyskurs oralny, kultura egalitarna, Parys/Aleksander

When Richard Martin recognized in 1989 that the language of the Iliadic heroes is agonistic and corresponds to the rules of conversation in oral cultures, the reasons why in oral cultures competitive and performative conversations take their particular form were unknown (Martin 1989).<sup>1</sup> It was only a matter of guessing that heroes vie for the fame and the title of “the best one” to climb up the hierarchy ladder. However, when we take this point of view, it is impossible to answer such simple questions as why Achilles, who is the best of the Achaeans, is not their supreme leader, or why Agamemnon, who is commander-in-chief, is at pains to get the mentioned title. In fact, these questions have never been asked, though I believe they should. Nevertheless, this state of affairs makes the impression that there were two separate hierarchies based on unclear rules. Agamemnon seems to be dissatisfied with his position, since he calls himself the best of the Achaeans, while Achilles seems to be not interested in being a factual leader, though he likes to be called the best one. As I have mentioned, this paradox has remained unnoticed because out of habit we all tend to think of the Homeric world in terms of hierarchical society.

In the meantime, anthropological, paleoarcheological and cognitive studies of the last thirty years have proposed a different view of the beginnings of human societies and the history of our species in general.<sup>2</sup> For more than 9/10 of their time, human societies have been oral and completely or basically egalitarian. These two aspects of human culture go hand in hand. Christopher Boehm explains the controversy between the human competitive nature and egalitarian relationships in human groups by the so-called “reverse dominance hierarchy,” which has constituted human society. On top are the rank and file who control every individual trying to intimidate or tyrannize them (Boehm 2001: especially 66, 79–88). In the

<sup>1</sup> The issue of the oral discourse in Greek culture, but only in the form of competitive games, is continued by Collins 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The change I mean is the perspective opened by Christopher Boehm (2001) in his study of the nature and function of political relations in human societies in the evolution of the species, later developed on a big scale by Graeber and Wengrow (2023).

history of mankind hierarchical cultures are neither evolutionary necessary nor do they represent any more developed structures rather than the egalitarian ones (Graeber, Wengrow 2023: especially 150–165, 328–336).

In the Homeric studies, we must change, therefore, the hitherto paradigm. Just like the *Iliad*, which – contrary to what many philologists claim – was created at the time when oral tradition influenced the beginnings of literature much more than otherwise, the egalitarian culture affected the Homeric world more than any hierarchical structure. Thanks to this change of perspective, many things become clearer, like for example a high number of Phaeacian kings or the weak position of Odysseus on Ithaca, which until recently seemed incomprehensible. More understandable is also the background of the disputes in the *Iliad*. In egalitarian societies, there is a need to restrain individuals who impose their will on others. As a result, violent disputes erupt over conspicuous manifestations of selfishness and dominance. Egoistic and aggressive persons (referred to by Boehm as deviants because they violate the evolutionarily accepted system of social coexistence) have to hide their nature and the true goals of their activities and they must satisfy others as to their good intentions. If decisions are in the hands of peers (mostly males), everyone who enters into a dispute must convince the group that he does not want to gain anything at their expense and that he works for the common good.

Egalitarianism is not directly connected with means of production, so it cannot be assigned to hunter-gatherers exclusively (Graeber, Wengrow 2023: 256–257). The Homeric world consists of tribes which are an intermediate form between egalitarian bands and hierarchical chiefdoms, in which the power of chief leaders is not too strong and requires an active acceptance of the group. Warriors in tribes consider themselves to be equal and they are unwilling to obey anyone’s orders, so chieftains may “rule” only by setting an example themselves or using persuasion.<sup>3</sup> Both the Achaean and the Trojan societies correspond to what Durkheim called “segmental societies”, in which, according to Boehm, “each segment was egalitarian internally and [...] the segments also were equal politically. Thus, when two or more tribes came together for the purpose of uniting against a common enemy, one member of the coalition could not dominate another. [...] each local group can be considered a corporate ‘main political actor,’ one that gives up none of its essential political autonomy by agreeing to a cooperative endeavor” (Boehm 2001: 92; Durkheim 1933).

The egalitarian system means a vigilant control of would-be aggressors and dominators. The rank and file have at their disposal an array of means, from gossiping, through ridicule and open criticism, to many types of ostracism and eventually capital punishment (Boehm 2001: especially 112–122). Public disputes are

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<sup>3</sup> Boehm 2001: 92–92: “An effective warrior may have enormous prestige and may be chosen as chief of his village, but he cannot boss another man.” P. 141: “They are ‘equals’ who are willing to tolerate some ‘firsts’ – but only if such outstanding men do not try to take away the autonomy of the average main political actor.”

undoubtedly a substitution for physical fights, although they can end in hand-to-hand combat. Nevertheless, fights or bloodshed are purposefully avoided because they can easily lead to a split in the group. A major fracture is the most inadvisable event, threatening the survival of the group. This is why disputes follow many unwritten rules of what can be told and how it should be done to prevent an open quarrel. It is simply not true that in egalitarian cultures there are no internal conflicts; rather, they are avoided because of their danger to the whole group and to the individual.

The knowledge of the dispute technique is indispensable for anyone who dares to express his or her criticism against another person in public. His/her goal is to convince the watching and listening group to his/her reasons. An important element of the strategy is to indicate that the adversary is the one who started the dispute.

Egalitarian societies can kill unduly aggressive persons who impose their dominance at the harm of others, recidivist killers, or even extremely brutal persons. Therefore, the charge made by Agamemnon that Achilles is very quarrelsome (1.177) is really dangerous to the son of Peleus because it may end up expelling him from the community. Someone who starts a dispute is potentially dangerous and the charges he/she makes may be interpreted as an insult. That is why in egalitarian cultures open criticism is usually preceded by gossip, mockery, and taunts. This is a way of checking how powerful the aggressive individual is and whether he/she is willing to make concessions. The ability to restrain emotions is very useful in situations of public criticism because an individual prone to anger seems dangerous.

Richard Lee reports a dispute between two men, Bo and Debe, from the tribe of hunter-gatherers !Kung from Kalahari, which vehemently changed into bloody combat between the clans (Lee 1984: 93–95). Already several people had died on both sides, but one of the fighters still panted with revenge because his enemy's father was alive, whereas his father, Hxome, was dead. Kashe, who related these events, says: "I said, 'You are right. I'm going to kill Bo, **who started it all**.'" Bo is indicated as the one who initiated the conflict because it was he who refused to let Debe marry his sister-in-law and began a fight by shooting at Debe's sister.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Debe, to whom Kashe's words were addressed, answered: "No, Bo is just a youngster, but Gau is a senior man, a n!ore [waterhole] owner, and he is the one who has killed another n!ore owner, Hxome. I am going to kill him so that n!ore owners will be dead on both sides." The calculation, aimed at the wellness of the group and understood as a comprehensive balance, overcomes personal resentment. Moreover, Gau's clan had not done anything to prevent the killing of their member, who was shot before their eyes. The reason

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<sup>4</sup> The other party may have taken the opposite point of view: Bo may have felt provoked by Debe's aspirations to marry his wife's younger sister, whom he wanted to marry himself.

why they agreed to eliminate him is the fact that he had started conflicts in the past. The charge of starting conflicts is serious but it can give way to a more crucial cause.

Another story, narrated by Colin Turnbull, who lived for a long time among Mbuti Pygmies, shows a different approach to a similar accusation (Turnbull 1961: 116–125). Masalito, a hunter, felt offended by his brother’s wife and complained in public. Initially, the community sided with him against Aberi, his usually sullen and now irate brother. Aberi was even ridiculed when he fell on his face while simulating an attack with a spear against Masalito. Aberi, however, who also felt offended, did not stop blaming loudly his brother and demanded an apology. After some time Masalito became a target of taunts and criticism on many occasions. Whenever he complained about his brother, people shamed him in order to stop him from grumbling. At last, Masalito made peace with Aberi. In time, the question of “who started the dispute” was forgotten or lost its importance. A persistent conflict may result in a split in the group, which makes a hunt impossible. So the community is ready to criticise even a person who initially seemed to have been harmed and right in his/her complaints. We can conclude that the reminder who started the dispute was essential when the harmed party wanted to revive a conflict or keep it going. However, this might have been a daunting or even dangerous task because people want to live in peace.

In the *Iliad*, the charge: “You started the dispute” is expressed explicitly and implicitly but in all cases, it refers to the beginning of the story about the Trojan War. *Ipsa facto*, the problem of internal disputes is transferred to the space of international relations. If the issue of internal relationships in the Homeric society, which mentally remains egalitarian, has not been, speaking euphemistically, studied enough, international relations have received even less attention. However, it seems that in opposition to great apes, which are our closest kin, the human species is much more open to male strangers. Graeber and Wengrow suggest even that developing the possibility of welcoming a stranger into the community gave human beings an advantage over the other hominids (Graeber, Wengrow 2023: 289–290). The scholars draw our attention to totemic relationships, which sanction hospitality to ethnically foreign people if they belong to the same totem. Since at least neolithic times people have also been ready to enter into agreements and create federations going beyond ethnic ties. In the Homeric world, or rather in the whole Mediterranean region, international relations have their ritual forms, but somewhat different. Dining with a stranger, the custom which changes him into a guest, plays the paramount role; the stranger becomes a sort of the host’s *philoï*, i.e. belongs to “his own” people (see Robinson 1990; Zieliński 2021a: 69–71). This quasi-adoption gives the stranger safety and care in an alien territory. Having acquired this new status, the stranger is obliged to respect his host.

It is with the breaking of this obligation that Menelaos accuses Paris/Alexander when he prays to Zeus before the duel with him (3.351-354):

Ζεῦ ἄνα δὸς τίσασθαι ὃ με πρότερος κάκ' ἔοργε  
 δῖον Ἀλέξανδρον, καὶ ἐμῆς ὑπὸ χερσὶ δάμασσον,  
 ὄφρα τις ἐρρήγησι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων  
 ξεινοδόκον κακὰ ῥέξαι, ὃ κεν φιλότητα παράσχη.

Zeus, let me repay this [man] **who first harmed** [me] [*proteros*<sup>5</sup>],  
 the divine Alexander, and destroy him with my hand,  
 so that even people of the future generations are terrified  
 of harming someone who gives [them] hospitality and friendship [*philotēs*, the status of being  
*philos*].

Extending hospitality to Paris, i.e. accepting a stranger<sup>6</sup> as a *philos* (“one’s own”), who is expected to behave without hostility, is at the roots of redefining the international conflict into an internal dispute. Menelaos’ words indicate that the blame should fall on the first person who caused harm and that the harmed party has the right to revenge. Irrespective of what Menelaos did to his enemy, Alexander’s offense is so serious that it necessarily brings an act of revenge from a god, and Menelaos is only his tool. By killing Paris Menelaos and the god restore order in the world.

The clash of the powerful armies of the two tribal federations is reformulated into a dispute between two members of the quasi-community. Before the duel has been planned, the two armies are facing each other. Trojan troops are compared to cranes going to fight against Pigmies (3.6-9):

ἀνδράσι Πυγμαίοισι φόνον καὶ κῆρα φέρουσαι·  
 ἠέριαι δ' ἄρα ταί γε κακὴν ἔριδα προφέρονται.  
 οἳ δ' ἄρ' ἴσαν σιγῇ μένεα πνεύοντες Ἀχαιοὶ  
 ἐν θυμῷ μεμαῶτες ἀλεξέμεν ἀλλήλοισιν.

[cranes=Trojans] bring bloodshed and death to the Pigmies,  
 in the morning **they start a nasty dispute** [*kakēn erida proferontai*].  
 At the same time, the Achaeans went in silence panting with anger,  
 wishing [only] to defend one another eagerly.

The combat is here defined as a ‘dispute’ *eris*. The verb *propheromai* must have been used initially to define the ‘starting of a dispute by reprimanding some-

<sup>5</sup> The word *pro-teros* means “this one (out of two) who did something before”.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, the guest is not called *philos* but only is treated as someone of the *philos* status: the stranger and the guest are called by the same term *xenos*. The special treatment the *xenos* receives comes down to sharing with the guest food and property. That is why the guest receives a gift from his host. It is usually assumed that this custom presupposes that at a suitable occasion in the future, the gift should be reciprocated (e.g. Seaford 1994), but I do not think that it is the right explanation.

one, using insults’.<sup>7</sup> Even the time of day (morning), when the *eris* takes place, is appropriate to convene the court by starting a dispute.<sup>8</sup> The Trojans are presented as vociferous aggressors (3.1-2) by contrast with the Achaeans, who are silent and do not respond to verbal attacks (3.8). The Achaeans think only of how to support one another when defending themselves against charges. We cannot be sure of the connotations invoked by the image of the fight of cranes against Pygmies,<sup>9</sup> but in the background, there is the image of a public dispute, in which good people must fight for their good name against slanderous accusations.<sup>10</sup>

In egalitarian communities, everything important to an individual becomes a public matter. Grudges are expressed loudly, often with the intention of starting a row, so that everybody can hear. People go outside their houses and gather around those who are getting into a rumpus. Disputes are direct and boisterous, and many words are spoken. Turnbull is surprised to notice that, on many occasions, the argument that the dispute is too noisy, has a calming effect on people who are arguing. Old Moke calms angry Manyalibo involved in a dispute with young Kenge: “You are making too much noise – you are killing the forest, you are killing the hunt. It is for us older men to sleep at night and not to worry about the youngsters. They know what to do and what not to do” (Turnbull 1961: 119). The question if Kenge did anything wrong is not obvious but Manyalibo’s noisy behaviour was clearly wrong, because the noise he made could scare the game. Pygmies say, “A noisy camp is a hungry camp” (Turnbull 1961: 120). Nevertheless, having a loud voice can help gain an advantage over one’s adversaries and win a dispute.<sup>11</sup> To be too noisy, however, may be an argument against the loudly arguing individual. Therefore, the loud-quiet opposition in the above quoted passage (3.6-9) presents the Achaeans in a favourable light, particularly in context of the proper way of conducting a dispute.<sup>12</sup> It is so because the vociferous speaker is identified here with the aggressive brawler.

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<sup>7</sup> The verb in the active voice means (after LSJ Lexicon) literally ‘to bring before or to one’ but it is often used in the context of a dispute, in which words indicative of blame and accusation are the object of the verb ‘to cast reproaches in their teeth, bring forward, allege (in the way of reproach or objection)’, e.g. σφιν ὀνειδέα π. (*Il.* 2.251). So “bringing forward” refers to the situation when someone steps out of the crowd and addresses criticism to an individual. For more about the terms of insult and reprimand see Nagy 1999: 253–264.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Muellner 1990: 75, who translates ἤερίαι as “high in the air” or optionally “in the mist”, but to him it is the continuation of the same image as in the simile. See below footnote 10.

<sup>9</sup> However, see Muellner (1990), whose interpretation does not exclude mine, I suppose.

<sup>10</sup> For the listeners, the discourse marker ἄρα (3.6) is a clue that a change of the image is about to take place: the image of fighting cranes is replaced with the image of a court dispute beginning early in the morning. In the next verse (3.7), the same marker introduces a new image, of the Achaeans marching into battle. See Bonifazi 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Turnbull 1961: 33: “He [Kenge, a young hunter] had a powerful and penetrating voice, took an active part in any dispute, and usually managed to shout his opponents down, which is one of the chief ways the Pygmies have of settling a dispute.”

<sup>12</sup> In this comparison the Achaeans, marching to the battle against the Trojans, correspond to the Pygmies being attacked by cranes, but the image of dwarf-like Pygmies may seem deprecating and



It is not a coincidence that it is Alexander who leads the Trojans to the battle, because in the subsequent scenes he and the whole community of Trojans are blamed for causing the war. The image of Paris, who shows his enormous enthusiasm and challenges Achaean warriors to a duel, refers directly to the image of aggressive cranes. It is he who, aggressively and provocatively, starts brawling (3.19-20):

... Ἀργείων προκαλίζετο πάντας ἀρίστους  
ἀντίβιον μαχέσασθαι ἐν αἰνῇ δηϊότητι

he challenged the best of the Argives  
to fight face-to-face in a fierce clash.

He has been, however, seen by Menelaos, who is compared to a lion devouring its prey, oblivious of the dogs attacking him. The comparison manifests, on the one hand, Menelaos' power and his scorn for empty boasting of the aggressors, and, on the other, Paris' impotence. Noticing Menelaos, Alexander flinches and hides in the crowd (3.30-37). This image belongs not only to the realm of war but also to the one of public dispute.<sup>13</sup> The person who makes allegations steps out of

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inadequate to the warriors, favoured in the narrative of the *Iliad*. However, this image of the Pygmies, dwarfs, though not rare in the later tradition and possibly belonging to the myth existing in the earlier Greek tradition, seems secondary. The short stature of the Pygmies could be the result of (intentional or not) ambiguity of the term *πυγμαῖος* (*pygmaios*) which regularly means 'as large as a *pygme* (the distance from the elbow to the knuckles)', hence 'dwarf-like' (Beekes 2010: 1254). This meaning might have been easily fitted to the image of the fight in which birds could easily be dangerous to people. The name of Pygmies, however, may retain a different meaning of the word *pygmē*, i.e. 'fist, fist-fight' (although the only known adjective with this meaning is *pygmikos* 'belonging to a fist-fight'). *Pygmaios* could, then, mean 'fist-fighting', or more generally 'hand-to-hand combatant' (cf. Lat. *pugnare, pugna*; see Beekes: *ibidem*). In this case *Pygmaios* would be a name whose meaning seems to refer to the opposition of dance and battle, which – as Muellner (1990) indicates – is embedded in the epic. Muellner argues that the odd image of aggressive cranes corresponds to the image of Paris as a dancer, which is grossly inadequate to military circumstances. The dancers – warriors opposition appears again in the Phaeacians, who declare that they are "not good fist-fighters or wrestlers" but good runners, sailors and dancers (*Od.* 8.246-249). The Pygmies would, then, represent people who are not aggressive, yet ready to fight to defend their rights. It is possible that they could have played the role of antagonists in the dance competition of half-choruses (I mean the dance *geranos* 'crane', which – according to Muellner – is at the core of the imagery in this part of the epic). When the simile is based on the image of the debate, the brave or unyielding Pygmies are ready to use violence to assert or defend themselves against slanderous insults. This adequately describes the Achaeans, who arrive at Troy to regain Helen by force. Here, like in the scene of Thersites' beating, the author of the *Iliad* approves of an act of violence which puts a stop to undeserved verbal offenses.

<sup>13</sup> Suter (1993: 14) suggests that the image of Menelaos, who is glad to see Alexander and is compared to a lion suddenly sighting a deer or a goat, is one of the ways in which Paris is identified with Dionysos in the *Iliad*. In her opinion, Paris plays the role of a substitute for this god, who in mimetic iambic narratives was presented as a person reprimanding others and bringing reprimand upon himself. Personally, I am not quite convinced by Suter's hypothesis.



the crowd and takes the risk of accusing someone. In the eyes of the community, taking a step back means admitting that the charges are not true and the person is branded as insolent. Paris behaves, therefore, like Thersites, who attacks provocatively Agamemnon, but having been beaten by Odysseus he goes to sit down, crying (2.265-269). Thersites, whose name means “the insolent one”, loses the dispute and is ridiculed by the crowd. The anonymous taunts cited by the narrator suggest that it is not the first time Thersites has charged one of the chief leaders and he will certainly do it again, which means that he is quarrelsome and at every opportunity enters into dispute. Thersites is an archetype of someone who starts disputing without a proper reason and Paris challenging his opponents to a duel, is equated to him.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the scenery of battle, the image referred to is the one of the public dispute. Paris hides in the crowd but is publicly accused by his brother Hektor of being responsible for insults and contemptuous glances from the Achaeans (3.42). It is not clear who is really the object of the disregard: all Trojans or only Hektor, but the ambiguity is to some extent intentional. Hektor tries to influence Paris to act but in a way typical of the public dispute, i.e. by turning Trojan warriors against him. Alexander should be excluded and even killed collectively (3.56-57) because he brought shame unto his father, himself, and the entire community (3.50-51).

Alexander can defend himself in a very clever though risky manner by admitting that Hektor is right (3.58). Moreover, he believes he should not be blamed because he has found a way out that may purify him and others of charges: a duel with Menelaos can decide who is right and who should be blamed (3.58-75).

Hektor declares a truce and passes on the proposal put forward by Alexander “because of whom the dispute arose” (3.87). Then Menelaos takes the floor and specifies Paris’ role in the dispute (3.97-102):

κέκλυτε νῦν καὶ ἐμεῖο· μάλιστα γὰρ ἄλγος ἰκάνει  
θυμὸν ἐμόν, φρονέω δὲ διακριθῆμεναι ἤδη  
Ἀργείους καὶ Τρῶας, ἐπεὶ κακὰ πολλὰ πέπασθε  
εἵνεκ’ ἐμῆς ἔριδος καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ’ ἀρχῆς·  
ἡμέων δ’ ὀπποτέρῳ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα τέτυκται  
τεθναίῃ· ἄλλοι δὲ διακριθεῖτε τάχιστα.

So listen also to me now, because it is me whose heart  
is in pain the most. I am already willing to accept the verdict of the dispute  
between the Argives and Trojans, as you have suffered many miseries  
because of my dispute and **because of Alexander’s beginning** [*archē*].  
Which of us is destined for death and fate,  
let him die, but you, the rest, let settle that dispute as soon as possible.

<sup>14</sup> Thersites and Paris, the only ones among characters in the *Iliad* (2.275, 11.385), are endowed with the epithet *λωβητήρ* ‘foul slanderer,’ i.e. ‘someone who insults (wrongly)’ but, at the same time, who is ‘subject to disgrace, marked with disgrace,’ and so ‘someone who deserves to be insulted’ (see 3.42). Priam uses also this term relative to an unspecified group of Trojans (24.239) with the implied meaning ‘worthless, wretch.’

According to Menelaos, Paris is the man who started the dispute. So he is not only involved in it, as Hektor put it. Both phrases seem to be equivalent: the one referring to Paris τοῦ εἵνεκα νεῖκος ὄρωρεν ‘because of him the dispute arose’, and the one referring to Menelaos εἵνεκ’ ἐμῆς ἔριδος ‘because of my dispute’; the dispute is as much Paris’ as Menelaos’ – the difference is in emphasizing Paris’ “beginning.”<sup>15</sup> For Menelaos then, Alexander’s deed is tantamount to the insult expressed in public to start a dispute with him.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the war against the Trojans is a justified reaction not to Paris’ deed but to his verbal abuse. Menelaos strives to suggest to the gathered warriors of both sides that it is he who is right by stating that all the pains they suffer from the effects of the war are the consequences of the first move made by Paris. Insults expressed in public can take away the value of a man, therefore such a man is forced to respond to the affront. In this way, Menelaos suggests his right to revenge.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the indication of the one “who started” is only an argument in the oral discourse, which may or may not work at that particular moment. The problem is that the group that listens to it is ethnically heterogenous, so in this case, the group as a whole, passing a verdict, will not take the side of the same person. It does not mean that Menelaos words are negligible, they affect both the Achaeans and Trojans, who would be willing to respect his right. However, there is no point in carrying on the verbal confrontation. The actual guilt will be decided by the duel, hence the death of one of the parties settles the dispute.

Though a physical assault should not be a response in a public confrontation, yet to some extent, it may be justified when one side seems clearly in the right. However, we can observe that, like in Thersites’ case, one can validate one’s point by violence. The author of the *Iliad* is at pains to justify it by describing both Thersites and Paris in an extremely unfavourable light, so it seems that they get what they deserve (Zieliński 2023: 204, 208–209, 304). Someone who starts a dispute

<sup>15</sup> The *lectio ἀρχῆς* ‘of the beginning’, found in manuscripts, is supported by the authority of Aristarchos, and seems much better than the *lectio ἄτης* ‘of the madness, fault’ read by Zenodotos, see Kirk 1985: 277.

<sup>16</sup> Suter (1993: 6–7) indicates the common pattern of the scenes with Thersites, beggar Iros and Paris: the one who first reprimands is reprimanded by someone else. The beginning of the dispute, in her opinion, is Paris’ challenge to Menelaos to a duel. But let us notice that Menelaos suggests that this provocation took place much earlier, when Alexander abducted his wife (“you have suffered for a long time because of the beginning of Paris”). In other words, Menelaos *points out* Paris’ deed in the past as the attack which initiated the dispute.

<sup>17</sup> I cannot agree with Kirk (1985: 312) that Paris is “the sole offender” in the conflict. The British scholar follows propagandist suggestions in the *Iliad* as to the right conclusion the audience should draw from the narrative. It is far from obvious, who is in fact guilty of starting a war in the real world, and neither is it obvious in the Homeric world. Both sides suffer from the war and this is the basic and traditional epic theme (see 3.127–128). Menelaos and the author of the epic strive to persuade the listeners that it is Paris who should be blamed. That is why, in my opinion, all the means are employed to convince us of it.

is seen as aggressive, insolent, shameless, and not adverse to slander. Such an image must have been dictated by the fear of a split which threatened the survival of the community.<sup>18</sup>

An aggressive military action becomes justified due to reframing its nature into a verbal public confrontation, where the aggressor is transformed into an innocent party who has to defend himself against false and despicable allegations. This change of meanings enables the author of the *Iliad* to present the Trojans as an aggressive and mean party guilty of the calamity of the war (Schein 1984: 24; *id.* 1997: 353–354). The truce is backed by special sacrifices and curses for the side that dares to break it. Nevertheless, when the duel has been unresolved for a supernatural reason (at the last moment Aphrodite saves Paris), it is the Trojans who treacherously break the truce. Individual guilt is transferred to all Trojans according to the logic of collective responsibility: the guilt of the individual makes the entire community impure; if the community does not punish or get rid of such an individual, the god’s wrath falls on them all. In the ring composition of the *Iliad*, the events narrated in Books 2 and 3 refer to the initial events of the macro-story. Accordingly, the events narrated in Books 23 and 22 foreshadow what happens at the end of the war (the death of Achilles and the fall of Troy) (see Whitman 1958: 268; Schein 1997: 345–348; Finkelberg 2015: 126–130; Zieliński 2023: 84–93). The beginning and the end of the war are inscribed in the paradigm of crime and punishment.

The issue of guilt generated in Paris and the other Trojans is the bedrock for the discursive blueprint of the *Iliad*. Therefore, it is not surprising that the theme of the Trojan blame returns at the beginning of the last book. It opens with the image of Achilles unable to find consolation in defiling Hektor’s body. The humiliation of the Trojan prince symbolically refers to the consequences of his brother’s infamous behaviour which brought about the war (in the *Iliad*, Hektor is Paris’ substitute and as a scapegoat suffers the consequences of his deeds) because the motif of the fall of Troy invoked by the image of Hector’s death also appears in the narrative pattern of crime and punishment. When the gods, indignant at Achilles’

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<sup>18</sup> Both parties to the controversy have their arguments but both are viewed with equal reluctance because disputes always are laced with aggression which can break out and spill all over the group, taking a bloody toll. Turnbull (1972: 156) contrasts the disputes of the Pygmies, a cooperative community that respects altruistic values, with the Ik of western Uganda, a community that cultivates extremely selfish behaviours: “When the Pygmies, who are no angels, become involved in disputes, they manage to settle them without stigmatizing anyone as a criminal, without resort to punitive measures, without even passing judgment on the individuals concerned. Settlement is reached with one goal in mind, and that is the restoration of harmony within the band, for the good of the whole. If there is one thing that is surely wrong in their eyes, it is that the dispute should have taken place to begin with, and to this extent both disputants are to blame and are held in temporary disfavor. All this, too, the Ik lack, for while their disputes rarely reach the stage of physical violence, their violence is there, deep and smoldering, scaring each man and woman, making life even more disagreeable and dividing man against his neighbor even further.”

lack of restraint, are arguing, the poet hastens to explain why Hera and Athena are angry with the Trojan people and wish Troy to be ruined (24.27-30):

ἀλλ' ἔχον ὡς σφιν πρῶτον ἀπήχθετο Ἴλιος ἱρή  
καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης,  
ὃς νεῖκεσσε θεὰς ὅτε οἱ μέσσωλον ἴκοντο,  
τὴν δ' ἦνῃσ' ἦ οἱ πόρε μαχλοσύνην ἀλεγεινίην.

But they [Hera and Athena] persisted in hatred, because since the beginning they have hated the holy Ilion, and Priamos, and the people **because of the fault** [*atēs*, but perhaps *archēs* ‘the beginning’?] **of Alexander**, who reproached them [Hera and Athena], when they came into his homestead, but he praised the one who proposed him debauchery which gives pain.

The explanation is explicitly moral but quite difficult for modern commentators. Paris’ choice is presented as definitely wrong and bringing evil consequences for him, his family, and the whole community of Troy. The Trojan prince chooses not the most beautiful Helen but debauchery, morally wrong behaviour, which evidently stigmatizes him as a blameworthy villain. His choice is not called here, as is traditionally done a *krisis* ‘resolution (of the dispute)’, a term derived from the verb *krineo* ‘to divide’, which means that the judging procedure was aimed at finding a compromise. However, Homer’s description of the event points to the opposite. By pointing to Aphrodite, Paris praises her (praise means the acceptance of her proposal, expressed in the best possible way<sup>19</sup>). But his praise of one goddess is tantamount to the reprimand of the others. However, it may still seem surprising why Hera and Athena are angry at the judge. If the goddesses are submitting to the judgment, it means they have accepted the terms, i.e. only one of them can be chosen, and two rejected.<sup>20</sup> Yet, they feel offended. The narrator explains it by suggesting that Paris *neikesse* ‘entered in a dispute with them’ or downright ‘blamed them; reprimanded them using offensive words’. However, this is a very curious situation. It makes one assume that the judge by passing a verdict favourable to one party can offend the other one. Naturally, it is possible that one side does not accept the verdict. Nonetheless, the judge should have authority based on the assumption that the persons submitting to his judgment will respect his ruling and will not try to seek revenge. If the compromise is not satisfying, the parties

<sup>19</sup> On the meaning of praise, see Elmer 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Davies (2003) suggests the folk motif of a bad choice made by a stupid or evil young character. It means, however, that there was no good option for Paris. Is it possible? I think it is also very doubtful whether rational reasons given by Apollodorus (*Epit.* 3.2) or Euripides (*Tro.* 924–931) reflect pre-Homeric tradition. For the influence of the Near East tradition, see Fries 1903: 394; Gresseth 1975: 14; Burkert 1992: 96–99; Andersen 1997; West 1997: 476–477; Currie 2016: 173–178. For the judgment of Paris in the perspective of Dumézil’s trifunctional model, see Littleton 1970: 233–234.

may look for another judge.<sup>21</sup> In the *Iliad*, the offended goddesses do not respect rules, but surprisingly it is not their but Paris’ behaviour that is seen as immoral. *Ipsa facto*, Paris becomes a party in the dispute; from the perspective of the losers he was offensive to them, i.e. it is he who started the dispute.<sup>22</sup>

One might think of it as an interpretation of a familiar story by Homer, who adds the background to the dispute with the exchanged roles: the aggressor is presented as a harmed victim of the insult, and conversely.<sup>23</sup> What seems to be an important addition is the moral criticism of Paris.<sup>24</sup> Once again the mechanism, in which the loser turns out to be the aggressive party starting the dispute, is activated. The assessment of Paris’ judgment as inappropriate is arbitrary, but it is in tune with the general interpretation of Paris as a shameless villain in the *Iliad* (Nickel 1997; Zieliński 2023: 255–258). Instead of being the victim of the gods’ games, he becomes a culprit who should be banished or killed. His role as the scapegoat in the *Iliad*, parallel to the role played by Thersites and Achilles, corresponds to the way how overaggressive individuals striving for dominance are excluded from egalitarian communities (Zieliński 2023: 425).

According to the author of the *Iliad*, Paris is blameworthy because he started the dispute, which is equal to being guilty of starting the war. This is the most probable cause of why Helen is whitewashed in the epic or her blame is ambiguous at least (Zieliński 2021b). Pointing to the Trojans as the aggressors, i.e. the guilty party, entails the presentation of the other side as innocent victims who had to defend themselves. That is why the actions of the Achaeans received a distinctly positive moral evaluation. The metaphor of the dispute, when applied to real military combat, shifts the blame, suggesting that the Achaeans have no choice but to defend themselves against aggressive, insolent, and false allegations.

This Homeric reinterpretation is possible because accusations (despite their usefulness, when addressed against real offenders) were perceived as dangerous. We could suppose that they were dangerous to ordinary people, because

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<sup>21</sup> The *Iliad* gives a picture of a trial, in which judges compete for a reward (18.496-507, Collins 2004: 171–172). It implies the passing of a verdict that would suggest a compromise acceptable to both sides.

<sup>22</sup> The only saved *lectio* is Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ’ ἄτης (24.28), but the resemblance to the formula Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ’ ἀρχῆς (3.100) may suggest that, initially, there could have been the *lectio archēs*, which was replaced by *atēs* because the meaning was incomprehensible, just like it was in the case of Zenodotean version in 3.100.

<sup>23</sup> The reinterpretation is obviously an immanent part of oral tradition, not something placing the epic beyond the tradition. So it should be assumed as a permanent process in the performative practice. The presentation of the Trojan War as a dispute may be also a traditional motif, see Nagy 1999: 218–221, but the motif is subject to reinterpretation in a particular song.

<sup>24</sup> See Zieliński 2021a: 77. Blaming Paris for his wrong behaviour at the “beginning” seems to correlate with Muellner’s interpretation (1990: 77–90), according to which in the Illiadic image of Paris there are elements of the image of a dancer and lover of the goddess Aphrodite, which disqualify him as a warrior.

everybody could be a target of a verbal attack. Given that, however, egalitarian communities use criticism to limit excessive behaviours of dominating individuals, it rather seems that they were dangerous to the hierarchical order. Such a view of the accuser (as a man of ill intentions and morally reprehensible) might have provided an effective propagandist argument for the hierarchy which, step by step, increased its importance at that time.<sup>25</sup> The Homeric narrative fits into the propaganda of hierarchical tendencies – the tendencies, let me add, which were never completely and constantly accepted in Greece.

In oral narratives, it is of paramount importance to indicate the point where the story begins. This technique is present in stories narrated by Homeric characters, but it also plays a pivotal role for the epic singer as it helps him to find a suitable place for an episode in the epic macro-story, such as the Trojan War. The singer may choose a point of departure for his story in any event of the macro-story which is suitable to his intention (Zieliński 2023: 113–114, 125). We can see that the argument “you started the dispute”, typical of controversies in oral culture, in the *Iliad* is used to give a specific meaning to the technique of marking the beginning of the described events. The beginning of narration is to the moment from which all events that happened later are its necessary consequences in moral terms. The author of the *Iliad* seems to indicate Paris to the listening community and say: “He is guilty of all of this misery because he started the dispute.”

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<sup>25</sup> Graeber and Wengrow 2023: 143: “The real mystery is not how chiefs or even kings emerged, but rather when they could no longer be ridiculed.”



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