Three Notes on Homer’s *Iliad*: The Proem; Hector and Andromache; Achilles’s Shield

Dr. Robert Zaslavsky

I. The Proem: Book I, Lines 1-7

Text:

Greek:

Μὴν ἂν ἔδειξε, θεά, Πηλημάδεω Άχιλής
ουλομένην, ἢ μυρί᾽ Ἀρχαιῶς ἀλγε’ ἔθηκε,
πολλάς δ’ ἱφθαίμοις ψυχάς Ἀδη προίσαψεν
ήρωων, αὐτούς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσιν
οἰωνοῖς τε δαίτα, Δίος δ’ ἐτελεῖτο βουλή,¹
ἐξ οὖ δὴ τὰ πρώτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαστε
’Ατρείδης τε ἀναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ διὸς Άχιλλεύς.

English:²

The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus-sired Achilles,
a destroying [wrath], which set myriad pains among the Achaeans,
and sent-off to [the realm] of Hades many strong souls,
[souls] of heroes, and wrought them [to be] preys to dogs
and feasts to birds, and Zeus’s deliberation was-being-completed
on-the-basis-of [the time] when indeed first, [after] having-had-strife, distanced-themselves
both the Atreus-sired lord of men [i.e., Agamemnon], and the Zeus-like Achilles.

The proem to the *Iliad* long has been recognized as a masterpiece of compression, a
brilliant condensation of a formidable mass of meaning into as few words as possible.
Such compression is both powerful and seductive. In addition, it forces one to think
about what one is about to read (or hear) with a depth and clarity that are rare in even
the best specimens of western literature.

¹ Here I follow Redfield (following Pagliaro) in restoring the presumed original reading of δαῖτα instead of the emendation (ταῖοι) enshrined in the manuscript tradition. See James Redfield, “The Proem of the *Iliad*: Homer’s Art,” *Classical Philology*, 74 (2), April 1979, 96. This essay is an invaluable, if sometimes over ingenious, contribution to the understanding of the proem, and its imprint will be evident to those familiar with the essay, for which reason I have eschewed noting each point of agreement.

² The translation is mine: it is as literal as possible to facilitate close analysis. Additions to the translations needed for clarity of meaning but for which no Greek word is stated are placed in brackets.
The first word of the poem, Ἄργις (wrath), states the poem’s subject. That subject is neither an act (cf. Paradise Lost) nor a person (cf. Odyssey) nor a tool (cf. Aeneid),3 but rather it is a passion, a force, the effluence of psychic spiritedness (θυμός). In the Iliad, that noun and its derivative verb (μηρίω) are used only of Achilles and the gods (especially Zeus and Apollo). Therefore, among humans, only Achilles shares this characteristic with the gods, i.e., in this respect, Achilles is the only human who merits the epithet god-like. This is why other humans might fear the wrath of Achilles as they would fear the wrath of a god. In addition, as the discussion of the tripartite soul in Plato’s Republic indicates, those characteristics that have their source in θυμός have an element of righteous indignation about them. Such a feeling is evoked by breaches in the perceived social order, and in great souled humans, the perceived breach is so shattering that it seems as if “Chaos is come againe.”4

The perceived breach is what Achilles regards as Agamemnon’s breach of faith, and the provoked wrath threatens to rain the destruction on the whole community that a god would inflict. The wrath of Achilles, then, is god-like, perhaps an inheritance from his goddess mother, Thetis.5 The wrath of Achilles would be his demigodhood.

Of course, Achilles also has a human parent, his father Peleus. In antiquity, the name Πηλεύς was taken to be derived punningly from πηλός (clay/mud). This would carry the genealogical suggestion that the wrath of Achilles is tainted by impurity (muddiness), and this is what causes it to turn against Achilles’s own community.

Therefore, in the first line of the Iliad, one is presented with the doubleness of Achilles, his intermediateness between god and human, an intermediateness in which his wrath participates, that makes his wrath ambiguous. That ambiguous status is the source of his tragedy.

The words “sing, goddess” sound like the conventional invocation of the Muse with which epics are expected to begin. However, this mode of address to the Muse is not the typical one. In the typical address, such as one finds in the Odyssey, the poet asks the Muse to speak, not to sing. Of course, the Muses are singers who sing to the gods as human poets sing to human listeners. They do not sing to humans. Instead, as daughters of Memory, they prompt the human poet with spoken reminders of accounts that would otherwise be lost. The one who sings these accounts to humans is the poet for whom the Muses have acted as guarantors of the truth of what the poet recounts to the human audience. Therefore, by asking the Muse to sing, the poet is, as it were, claiming for this story an authenticity because it is, so to speak, straight from the Muse’s mouth.

In addition, the poet addresses the interlocutor as “goddess,” not as “muse” (cf. Odyssey). This is a more familiar and intimate mode of address, such as one might find in the middle of an ongoing conversation with someone whom one knows and who knows herself to be the specific addressee. This makes this invocation less of a prayer and more of a casual interchange between familiar acquaintances. Consequently, the proem to the Iliad presents one with a conversation-in-progress between two beings who are engaged in a long-standing, pre-existing, and somewhat intimate relationship. In this way, to the goddess’s guarantee of the truth of the account is added the closeness

3 The tool is conjoined to a person, but the tool has the position of primacy.
4 Shakespeare, Othello III. iii. 106.
5 Her name literally means “setting[−down]” in the sense of setting down laws or possibly of setting (drawing) a line in the sand.
of the poet to that guarantee. What follows, then, is presented as something with a high degree of fidelity to its origins.

The first word of the second line is a participial adjective ("destroying") that modifies the first word of the first line ("wrath"). So, from the very beginning one is confronted with a certain circularity in construction: where one would expect a moving forward, one returns to the beginning. In the vast majority of its uses in Homer, this adjective is used to describe persons. By applying it to the wrath of Achilles, the poet personifies that wrath, thereby giving it a kind of life of its own. In addition, this word typically carries with it a pejorative connotation that suggests a kind of visceral repulsion on the part of the person using it of another. Therefore, there is a hint that the poet of the Iliad has some aversion to the subject of the poem, an aversion that is not present in the Odyssey.

This destroying wrath brought pains (ἀλγεία) to the Achaeans. This word shares with μῆνις that its chief applicability in Homer is to the gods (primarily Zeus, secondarily Apollo and Poseidon) but its chief human applicability is to Achilles. This usage gives support to the notion that the wrath of Achilles has a life of its own, almost a divine life, and that it somehow is using Achilles as its vehicle.

In the next two and a half lines, instead of the capsule summary of the events of the story that one might expect, one finds a capsule summary of the ways by which the pains meted out by the wrath were inflicted. They were inflicted when the souls of heroes were shipped off to the realm of Hades as the heroes were wrought to be prey (carrion) for the feasting of beasts. The way in which this is phrased is odd. The souls of the fallen warriors have the attribute of strength that one typically would associate with bodies. On the other hand, the fallen heroes (the antecedent of the αὐτῶν) as prey are to be seen in the contrast as synonymous with bodies. In other words, the souls of the heroes are given a vital physicality, while the heroes, whose souls these are, are seen as mere bodies, no more than slaughtered meat for the predatory feasting of dogs and birds. This soul (strength)/body (hero) disjunction reflects the duality of war, in which soldiers who are inspired (one could say, ensouled) by the splendor of honorable battle become reduced by that battle to lifeless pawns.

Another peculiarity that arises in connection with the leaving of the bodies of the dead to be devoured by beasts is that such a treatment of dead bodies—is that such a treatment of dead bodies—although it may be threatened—never actually takes place in the Iliad. Of course, the last third of the poem centers on the deaths of Patroclus and Hector and the disposition of their bodies in terms of ritual propriety or impropriety. Nonetheless, to spend such a large segment of the proem on what could be considered a kind of lengthy epilogue to the central action seems disproportionate. That is why this may be not only a preparation for those later events, but also—and more essentially—a comment on the central action itself.

Taking all this into consideration, then, one even might be tempted to see the dogs and birds who prey and feast on the bodies of the heroes as a metaphor for the leaders who feed on the warriors as dispassionately as beasts do.

This makes the case for restoring δαίτα in the fifth line even stronger. Since such “feasts” in Homeric epic are the preeminent occasions of human communal bonding, the uncharacteristic use of this term to describe the glutting of carrion birds on fallen heroes is a striking way of suggesting—and doing so up front, as it were—the way in

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6 This tendency to rootless autonomy is characteristic of wrath or anger in general. Anger has the tendency to break free of what caused it and to become self-feeding, self-sustaining, and ultimately self-consuming.
which war blurs the distinction between humans and beasts. The mirror image of the perverted humanness of predatory birds is the perverted bestiality of predatory human warriors, even the best of them.\footnote{Homer’s similes never fail to remind one and to emphasize that in war, a human becomes a beast. The metaphorical dimension of the prey/feast image (4-5) suggests this analogy—dogs and birds : prey/carrion :: warrior X : warrior Y :: human : meat. This finds explicit expression later in the Iliad, when Achilles—just before he kills Hector—says, “For somehow I wish that my fury and spirit would drive me to hack your flesh off and eat it raw for what you have done” (22. 346-347; cf. the following lines up to 354). War, then, is a kind of cosmetized cannibalism.}

Such a notion is already implicitly enshrined by Homer’s titling his work the Iliad rather than the Achilleid or the Hectoreid. At the heart of this epic is not a heroic warrior in his splendid glory, but rather it is the paradigmatic city of Ilium (Troy) as the emblem of the human civilization that is the ultimate victim of such warriors. Such a collapse of civilization is the price that what Homer calls the gods, led by Zeus, exact for the cataclysmic events that were precipitated by what many would regard as the petty quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles.

This concludes the densely written and richly suggestive proem of this grand study of culture and civilization and its precariousness.

II. Hector and Andromache: Book VI, Lines 390-502

Hector’s pre-battle farewell to his wife Andromache\footnote{Her name literally means “the battle of a man,” which is a clue to her independence and assertiveness. She is a worthy wife for a warrior.} and his infant son Astyanax (Skamandrios) is one of the most poignant tableaux in the Iliad. Part of its poignancy derives from its having as its backdrop Hector’s visit to Paris (Alexandros) and Helen.

Hector is the best of the Trojan warriors.\footnote{To be precise, he is one of the two best. The other is Aeneas (cf. VI. 77-79). However, since Aeneas has one divine parent (Aphrodite), while Hector’s parents are both human (Priam and Hecabe), one can say that Hector is the best of the purely human warriors.} His brother Paris is one of the weakest of them. It grates on Hector that Paris has brought down upon Troy what Hector regards as an unnecessary war. The difference between the two men could not be more striking. Paris hangs back from fighting the war that he himself has caused; Hector is preeminent in fighting the war that he himself abhors as petty and pointless. Paris does not look beyond his private desire; Hector will not overlook his civic duty.

Before Hector approaches the living quarters of Paris and Helen to urge Paris into the fight from which he is hanging back, Hector concludes his conversation with his mother (280-285) by scorning Paris’s obstinacy and cursing Paris for having become a calamity (πῆμα) to his people (Τρωσί), to his father (Πριάμω), and to the future in the form of the children (παισί). Hector’s embassy to the house of Paris and Helen (313-368) is especially painful to watch, since we know Hector’s attitude to the war and the ultimate price that he will pay for participation in that war. Hector addresses his brother as “daimonic” (Δαίμων: 326), which here seems to carry a meaning close to our notion of “possessed” by malign impulses. He reproaches Paris for his ignobly reluctant spirit. Then he chides Paris for
being at home while his people is fighting to the death around the wall of the city in a war that Paris himself has provoked (327-329).

Although Paris gives lip service to the justice of Hector’s rebuke, his explanation of his behavior involves a curious spousal role reversal: he says that he is wallowing in self-pity, while Helen is exhorting him to fight. Paris’s promise to Hector to return to the fight is half-hearted. He says that he needs to arm himself first, telling Hector in effect, “You go ahead; I shall catch up with you later.” Hector is understandably not encouraged by this response.

Helen adds insult to injury when she tells Hector that she wishes that she had been taken by a better man (ἀνδρός . . . ἀμείλονος: 350) than Paris. According to Helen (351-352), Paris lacks a human sense of shame, and this deficiency makes him a creature of unfulfilled intentions.

Helen, whom Paris has claimed to have been urging him to fight, now urges Hector to pause from fighting, which suggests that she is as much a creature of unfulfilled intentions as she claims her abductor to be.

Helen behaves with such inconstancy, even though she is aware that the chain of events in which they all are embroiled is the stuff of great poetry (357-358).

Hector chides Helen, and as he leaves, he urges her truly to exhort Paris to join the fight. He concludes by stating his intention to visit his own home on his way to a battle that he indicates may be his fatally last.

At his home, Hector is informed that his wife has taken their infant son to the wall of Troy to judge for herself whether—as she had heard—the battle is progressing to the detriment of her people, the Trojans. Her doing this separates Andromache, in her uniqueness, from all the other women of Troy, who either are waiting at home or are praying in the temple of Athena. Hector rushes to her side.

Now, Hector comes to Andromache in what both regard as perhaps their final farewell visit.

The contrast between the two couples (Paris-Helen and Hector-Andromache) is starkly revealing. There was a languor and inertia about Paris and Helen that is strikingly different from the assertiveness and energy of Hector and Andromache.

When Andromache sees Hector approaching her on the wall, she goes to him, followed closely by an attendant holding their cherished (ἀγαπητόν) infant son. As Hector silently smiles at the baby Astyanax, a tearful Andromache reaches out her hand to his. As the narrator puts it—in a way that stresses their organic closeness—she engrafted (φυί) her hand into his as she speaks his name. Then she addresses him with the same vocative that he had used to address his brother Paris: she calls him “daimonic” [Δάιμονις (407; cf. 326)], which here seems to mean possessed by passionate intensity (μένος), as opposed to the malignant lethargy that possesses Paris. She fears that the price that Hector will pay for his being possessed—of which the external emblem is the armor that he wears—is his life. As soon becomes evident, she has good reason to fear such a consequence, a consequence that she treats as a certainty (409-410). Indeed, part of the emotional power of this conversation is the enveloping awareness that Hector is a “dead man walking.”

Andromache proceeds to catalogue in devastating detail the toll that the war has taken and will take on her nearest and dearest, beginning and ending with Hector. Achilles already has killed Andromache’s father Eëtion and her seven brothers. Her mother’s mysterious death (immediately following Eëtion’s) is attributed to Artemis. Hector is now all the family that Andromache has left: Hector is now surrogate father
(πατήρ), mother (μήτηρ), and brother (κασιγνήτος), in addition to being her husband (παρακοίτης) (429-430). If he dies, he will be sentencing her to widowhood and their son to orphanhood.

Andromache now urges on Hector a strategy that seems meant as a compromise between his civic duty and his familial duty, without abandoning either. She exhorts him to fight from the wall of the city rather than outside its walls. In this way, he could fulfill his duties without putting himself in ultimate harm’s way.

Hector’s foreordained response is that his reverence for the opinions of his city and its citizens requires his stepping out into the thick of the fighting. He is motivated by his desire for fame, one of the guarantors of immortality. He claims that the root of his desire for fame is his concern for Andromache. He wishes for her to be the widow of the most excellent warrior of Troy, something that he regards as preferable to her being the widow of a lesser warrior (or even the wife of a lesser warrior who lived through the war). The tacit assumption behind Hector’s reasoning is that no Trojan warrior of worth will survive the war, and any warrior who survives is prima facie a lesser warrior.¹⁰

Before Andromache can respond, Hector in full armor turns toward his infant son, reaching out his arms to hold the baby. The baby’s response—however unaware of its significance his smiling parents may be—is an eloquent rebuke to Hector’s glorification of the warrior ethos. The baby shouts and shrinks away from Hector. Astyanax does not recognize his own father, to whom he reacts as he would to a terror-filled, alien, nightmarish figure. It is only when Hector removes his helmet that the child calms down in the recognition of this new fatherly figure.

Then Hector prophecies (476-481) that his son will become even a better (ἀμείωτῶν) warrior than his father. One who knows subsequent events—as Homer’s audience did—knows that this will be a tragically unfulfilled prophecy.

The lesson to be drawn from this is that every choice that one makes requires that one pay a price. In Hector’s case, the price that he must pay for excellence as a warrior is the sacrifice of his paternal humanness. Hector will die, Troy will perish, and Astyanax will be killed before he reaches maturity. Therefore, Hector’s sacrifice for his community and family will be in vain.¹¹ It may be the stuff of great poetry, but it is not the stuff of familial and civic survival or perpetuation.

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¹⁰ This is a special case of the alternative that Achilles will face between a famous short life and a long life in obscurity. Both men embrace the former option.

¹¹ In today’s political climate, it is necessary to emphasize that to say that a soldier has died in vain (for a lost or meaningless cause) is not the same as saying that the soldier has died ignobly. One may perform and die nobly even in a meaningless cause.
Diagram of the Shield:

- Introduction (478-482) [ποιε...δαιδάλλων...ποιε δαιδαλα]

#### THE RIVER OCEAN

Fold 1: The Cosmos (483-489)

- Pleiades
- Hyades
- Orion
- Bear [= Wagon]
- heaven
- sea
- earth
- sun
- moon

Fold 2 & 3: The Two Cities of Mortal Humans (490-540)

- Marriage (491-496)
- Quarrel/Trial (497-508)
- Procession (491-493)
- Dance (494-496)
- Dispute in the Agora (497-502)
- Council of the Elders (503-508)

Fold 2: The City at Peace (491-508)

- The Armies (509-512)
- The City (513-519)
- The Ambush (520-529)
- The Rescue (530-532)
- The Battle (533-540)

Fold 3: The City at War (509-540)

- [ἐτίθει] Tilling (541-549)
- [ἐτίθει] Reaping (550-560)
- [ἐτίθει] The Vineyard (561-572)

Fold 4: Rural Life (541-589)

- [ποίησε] Lions Attack Oxen (573-586)
- [ποίησε] The Sheep Station (587-589)

Fold 5: The Choral Dance (590-606)

- Dance Floor (590-592)
- Dancers (593-598)
- Touch Dancing (598-601)
- Separate Dancing (602)
- The Spectators (603-606)

Fold 5: The Choral Dance (590-606)

- Dance Floor (590-592)
- Dancers (593-598)
- Touch Dancing (598-601)
- Separate Dancing (602)
- The Spectators (603-606)

The River Ocean (607-608)
The description of the shield that Hephaestus crafts for Achilles contains what one might call a global perspective on, a description of, the world as a whole within which the war in Troy occurs. It is literally a microcosm, although with respect to the events at Troy, it is the macrocosm of which that war is, in some sense, the microcosm.

Although some commentators have assumed that the shield is circular, the narrative description suggests a top to bottom array of horizontal bands that form a long, curved, rectangular shield.12

The verbs that the narrator uses to denote the “famous crook-legged”13 god’s activity in crafting the shield vary from section to section, adding nuances to the evaluation of what that activity crafts. In order, they are:

(1) ποιεῖω (to make: 478, 482) [governing lines 478-482];
(2) τεύξω (to work14 [past tense “wrought”]: 483) [governing lines 483-489];
(3) ποιεῖω (490) [governing lines 490-540];
(4) τίθημι (to put: 541, 550, 561) [governing lines 541-572];15
(5) ποιεῖω (573, 587) [governing lines 573-589];
(6) ποικίλλω (to variegate: 590) [governing lines 590-606];
(7) τίθημι (606) [governing lines 607-608];
(8) τεύξω (609, 610, 611, 613) [governing lines 609-613].

In addition, another artisan hovers over the process of crafting the shield, namely Daedalus, who is mentioned later by name (592) and whose presence is hidden in the uses of the verb δαιδαλλαῖ (to elaborate) and its corresponding substantives.16

Hephaestus makes17 the shield as a whole, “elaborating it all over (πάντοτε δαιδαλλαῖ: 479). The shield produced by the god’s ingenuity consists of five folds, on each of which he makes “many elaborations.”

Of the five folds, one is a representation of the cosmos, while four are representations of life on earth. The most initially striking characteristic of the elaborated folds of the shield is the relatively minor attention that is given to war.18 After all, this is a weapon of war. The paradox is that so much of such a weapon is devoted to peaceful cosmic and terrestrial phenomena and activities.

The first fold (483-489) contains a representation of the cosmos by means of the four constellations most visible to humans at night and the earth together with the four natural entities that are most humanly relevant (the visible heaven [i.e., the sky], the sea, the blazing sun, and the moon becoming full). This vision of the cosmos is determined by the needs of human life. In other words, this is not what one would call a

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12 Whether or not such a shield is “historically” accurate is beside the point. The only consideration that matters is whether or not it is accurate in its poetic context. Most emphatically, it is.
13 Cf. 587, 590, 614.
14 This is “to work” in the sense in which one says, “The smith works the metal into shape,” not in the sense “to labor.”
15 The use of τεύξω (549) indicates that τεύξω is a hidden governing verb in this section.
16 Cf. the participle δαιδαλλόν (elaborating: 479), the noun τὸ δαιδάλον (elaboration: 482), and the adjective δαιδάλος, -ης, -ον (elaborated: 612).
17 The making of the shield as a whole is presented as a present tense activity (ποιεῖ: 478, 482). All other crafting is presented in the past tense.
18 In terms of the number of lines, it amounts to about twenty-five percent.
representation of the cosmos in itself, but rather it is a representation of the cosmos as experienced by humans, as needed by humans, especially in the activities of farming and seafaring.

The second and third folds of the shield are unified by their both being governed by the verb ποίησις (made: 490). The two folds contain a contrasting dyad: two cities, the first at peace and the second at war. However, both cities are beautiful (καλάς: 491). One could argue that the fourth and fifth folds constitute supplemental representations of the city at peace (or at least, the community untouched by war). The peaceful city is not without its share of violence, whether in the form of human murder (497-508) or in the form of beastly predation (573-586).

Nevertheless, the pride of place given to the peaceful social sphere on the shield suggests that peace is preferable to war, although war sometimes may be required to protect and defend that peace.

In the second fold, the portrait of the city at peace consists of two tableaux: (1) the marriage celebrations (491-496); and (2) the legal proceeding (497-508). This can be construed as a way of thematizing the civically important concerns of the perpetuation of the regime and the preservation of the regime, or of love and law, or of fertile youth and sagacious old-age.

The concurrence of many marriages suggests that this town (ἀστυ: 493) sets aside one or more days each year as a nuptial day or nuptial days. In this way, the marriages become emblematic of the whole community’s dedication to guaranteeing its perpetuation through procreation. The music and dancing that pervade the festivities connote that what these celebrations honor is the ongoing rhythm of the life of the town.

However, the life of the town is not all joy and harmony. The rhythm of the town can be shattered by violence. The trial scene shows how the town addresses violent eruptions so that the rhythmic order of the town may be restored.

What is striking about the legal process is how truly democratic and enlightened it is.

The legal process is presented as having three stages. First, there is an attempt by the contending parties to reach a just agreement concerning the appropriate penalty. This stage, the court of first resort, as it were, takes place among the people (δήμω: 500) in the marketplace (ἀγορᾷ: 497). Second, if no resolution can be reached in the presence of the populace as a whole, an impartial referee (ἱστορῷ: 501) is consulted. Third, if this fails too, appeal is made to the council of elders, the court of last resort (perhaps a kind of Supreme Court).

The representation stops short of showing what the ultimate decision was. This suggests that what is important is the process and that the process can be trusted to reach “the straightest justice” (508).

The degree of enlightenment in the process is remarkable. Killing is regarded neither as an occasion for private revenge nor as a capital crime. In addition, the series of appeals provides evenhandedness, and the solidarity of the community keeps mob violence in check.

However idealized this portrait of the non-warring city may be, it stands here as an ideal to be desired.

\[19\text{ Cf. λαοί (throngs) at 497, 502.}\]
The third fold presents the city (τὴν . . . πόλιν: 509) at war. The sequence of scenes is reminiscent of, but not identical to, the situation at Troy.

The first scene (509-512) shows that around a city, an army is laying siege and preparing to initiate war. The attacking or besieging army is divided over how to handle the situation. The point in dispute between the two factions of the army seems to be whether simply to attack and destroy the city or to offer terms to the city, promising to raise the siege on condition that the city hands over half its wealth.

In the second scene (513-519), while the debate within the besieging army is progressing, the besieged city is shown to be far from thinking of surrender. On the contrary, the citizens are preparing a counterstroke in the form of a raid to capture the herds on which the besiegers are depending for their food. The raiding party is led by the gods Ares and Pallas Athena. The besieging army is presented as godless.

In the third scene (520-529), the raiding party sets up an ambush and sends out two scouts to warn them of the approach of the herd. When the herd arrives, the raiding party kills the herdsmen. Unfortunately, this attack causes the cattle to low in distress.

In the fourth scene (530-532), when the besieging army hears the noise of the cattle, it rides after the raiders and comes upon them at the ambush site.

In the fifth scene (533-540), a pitched battle takes place between the besiegers and the city’s raiding party. The raiding party had been led out by Ares and Athena, but those two gods are not said to be present at the battle itself. On the other hand, the besiegers are supported by what might be considered a trio of minor divinities, although these seem more like personifications of their own worst impulses. The divinities are Strife (Ἑρίς), Confusion (Κυδιομος), and Death-dealing-bane (Κηρ). Although Ares and Athena were clothed in gold, this ghastly trio is clothed only in blood.

Confusion is central, so central that there is no distinction between an unwounded person, a still living wounded person, and a corpse (cf. 536-537). However, Death-dealing-bane is preeminent, apparently holding one person under each of her arms and dragging a corpse behind her by the feet.

Strife is the least prominent, presumably because it represents the cause of the battle, and once the battle is under way, the battle takes on a life of its own, the cause receding into the background, perhaps even forgotten.

These divinities fought like “living mortals” (539). This suggests that the humans in the fight are merely like bowling pins, and when they are knocked over, they turn in actuality into the corpses that they already apparently were the moment that they entered the fight. This vividly represents the dehumanizing effect of war, the reduction of humans to things to be knocked down and dragged away like toy soldiers.

The indictment of war here is harsh and unflinching. Although Hephaestus has poured his utmost ingenuity into this engraving, and although the invincibility of the shield cannot be doubted, it seems as though it is meant as an exhortation—to those against whom Achilles fights—to seek peace.

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20 Cf. πολίθρον (512). The peaceful locale is called an ἄστυ (town), while the warring locale is called a πόλις (city). This suggests that when a community grows in size, there is engendered the danger of war, both defensive and aggressively imperialistic.

21 This would not have been an unusual approach. Even Hector (22. 111-121) toys with the notion of offering the besieging Achaeans half the wealth of Troy as the price of their terminating the siege. Of course, he rejects the possibility.

22 Achilles himself, in battle, sees only the back of the shield, which leaves him untouched by what it presents.
The fourth fold presents a panorama of georgic life that spans the agriculturally productive part of the year, from tilling through reaping, with supplemental insets that focus on animal husbandry.

Since there are many tillers of the field (542), one can assume that the field described is one of those that belong to the community as a whole, one of the common fields. Since the tilling of the field is presented as a whole community event, it parallels the marriage celebrations of the second fold. Just as the marriages consecrate and guarantee the human fertility on which the community depends for its continuation and perpetuation as a community, so too the tilling consecrates and guarantees the natural fertility on which the community depends for its existence as a living organism. All participate, either as laborers or as providers of refreshments for the laborers.

At the end of the description of the tilling, as if the narrator recognizes that the vivacity of the description is such as to make one forget that one is being told about engravings on a shield, the narrator reminds the listener or reader of the artistry that has produced these images (549).

In addition, as the narrator suggests, this is the wonder of art: true art makes one forget that it is art, makes one think that one is in the midst of life itself. In other words, true art is holographic.

In the description of the reaping (550-560), the scene shifts to the field of the king. However, even though this is the king’s field, it too is worked by the community for the benefit of the community. Furthermore, the use of the word έρημει (laborers: 550) suggests that those who work in the field are paid for their work.

The presence of the heralds here (558), together with the mention of a scepter (557), is reminiscent of the legal proceeding of the first fold (cf. 505). Therefore, the reaping is as parallel to the second scene of the first fold as the tilling is to the first.

The description of the vineyard (561-572) again echoes the marriage tableau of the second fold, although it is what today would be called a prequel to that scene. The gatherers of the grapes are designated “virgins and bachelors” (567), i.e., not yet married young women and men. The scene is a joyful one. However, lurking on the edge of the joy is darkness. The darkness is suggested by the Linos-song (570) that the boy playing the lyre sings to the grape pickers. Songs called λινοι were dirges composed to honor the untimely death of Linos at the hands of a pack of dogs. Apparently, then, youths—like grapes—can be crushed. This shadow of violence will emerge more fully in the next scene.

The scene of the lions attaching the oxen is the longest subsection (14 lines) of the fold that has the longest total description (49 lines). This scene harks back both to the ambush of the third fold and to the Iliad as a whole. Its connection with the Iliad as a whole is suggested by the adjective “straight-horned” (573), the same adjective that was used earlier in the eighteenth book (18. 3) to describe the Achaean ships in front of which Achilles sat brooding over the death of his friend Patroclus. Perhaps the two lions draining the life blood of the ox represent Achilles and Hector, who—as the exemplars of the two opposing armies (the impotent dogs)—are draining the life blood of the civilization that they ostensibly claim to defend.

In the brief description of the sheep station (587-589), the narrator again evokes the artisan of the shield to remind the hearer or reader that this—analogous to the Iliad as a whole—is a work of art. Perhaps, then, a work of art is, to those who hear or read it, what a shelter is to the sheep, namely a protection (a shield) against the vicissitudes of life (weather and violence).
The fifth (and final) fold presents the performance of a choral dance.

In this section, the hidden presence of Daedalus becomes overt (592). The dancing floor is modeled on the famous labyrinth that Daedalus built at Knossos for Minos’s daughter Ariadne. Here the dancers are designated identically to the grape pickers: they are “bachelors and virgins” (593), which suggests that this scene is parallel to the third scene of the fourth fold.

Since the bachelors carry knives (597), there seems to be an analogy between stylized dancing in a maze from which there seems to be no exit and war.

Therefore, the description of the fifth fold as a whole may be construed as suggesting that war is like a dance led by two acrobats or tumblers (605) whose tumbling or somersaulting makes the world a topsy-turvy, labyrinthine arena whose apparent order hides the confusion that is its inner ruling principle.

This concludes the sequence of folds.

There remains only the rim of the shield (607-608), a representation of Ocean. Therefore, the world of the shield falls back into the Ocean that is simultaneously its origin and its outer boundary.

War, then, is like the wax wings of Icarus: if war takes flight among humans, they will plunge to their own destruction.