

고대 그리스 역사의 소개

암흑시대

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🔊[0:00]

Our topic today is the Dark Ages and the world of Homer.

Of course, you have, as one of your reading assignments, a problem that deals precisely with that question that asks the subordinate questions: was there a world, a real world that Homer's poems referred to?

If so what world was it? Was it the world of the Mycenaean Bronze Age? Was it the world that succeeded that Bronze Age that we call the Dark Ages? Was it the world in which we tradition says Homer himself lived that we think of as the transition to the classical, well, first to the archaic and then to the classical period, the period in which we think about the dawn of the polis?'

That really is the question we are wrestling with and, of course, behind it all is the idea 'can we seek any historical information from Homer's poems at all?'

It would be a terrible blow to me and everybody else in the field if the answer was "no," because, just about everything we have to say about this period between the Bronze Age and the emergence of the polis, most of it involves inferences from our understanding of what the Homeric poems tell us.

But I think we need to take a hard look at what we can do.

And, I thought it would be worthwhile reading a sentence each from the introductory paragraphs that we provide for you in the problem to show you the range of opinion that is a pretty representative of what scholars think or have thought on the subject.

Moses Finley says if the world of Odysseus is to be placed in time as everything we know from the comparative study of heroic poetries, says it must, the most likely centuries seem to be the tenth, and the ninth, that is to say what we call the Dark Ages.

Anthony Andrews says it may be that the epic tradition had, at some stage, used as a model for the army before Troy, an idealized version of some of those bands of colonists who settled the coast of Asia minor in post Mycenaean times.

And, if you look at the whole story that he tells, that really means quite soon after the fall of the Mycenaean world, probably maybe a century earlier than what Finley suggests.

And then A. M. Snodgrass says “I offer this as a further argument against the existence of the historical Homeric society.”

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There isn't anything to be found is what Snodgrass says.

Ian Morris writes the balance of probability seems to be in favor of consistent basis to the society of the poems derive from Greece in the 8th century B.C., which would be at the end of the period we've been talking about; the transition to the world of the polis, Homer's own time when he lived and wrote.

And finally, Barry Strauss says ironically the more Homer exaggerates, the more authentic he is as a representative of the Bronze Age.

So what do we do? Well, all of these are learned and clever men. But I don't think that they're all equally right.

But, what I should also report to you is that I think there is a widespread consensus among most people who study this subject, that doesn't mean that consensus is correct, but not all of these opinions are shared by the same number, by no means of scholars.

Some of them are far out.

I would say that one that says you can't learn anything from this is an outlier.

The notion that this is about the Mycenaean world is an outlier.

And then, you get, I would say the largest consensus is something like Finley's consensus, but people verging in both directions from that.

What you will hear from me is essentially that consensus point of view.

It strikes me as being better supportive than the others.

But we really have to keep an open mind, because in this prehistoric period, I mean we are still in such a period, you have to be very modest about what you think you know about it.

Almost everything is inference and judgment, and very little is anything that you want to call proof. With those warnings, let me tell you sort of what I think most people think about this.

First of all, if you want to know about the Dark Ages, what sources do we have



available to us. And of course, I already mentioned the poems of Homer turned out to be a very large source for what most people look to.

Secondly, there are legends that the Greeks told about their early history of which come down to us in later sources. And, they are available to us to use as sources.

The great question is should we use them at all? And if we do, how carefully should we use them and so on.

This is a good time for me to make a confession, so that you'll know how to judge what I say all though the course.

 [6:09]

Beginning, well, I would say prior to the late 18th century, when a German scholar began to look at the Homeric poems, specifically very very carefully and then really very very skeptically, and to make all sorts of suggestions that the poems we have are really not to be thought of as the work of a single poet Homer, who had wrote them both out together, but who will begin to divide them up into the early and late elements which, I thought, drove the field of classics insane for about a hundred years while the folks argues about the unity of Homer, the unity or not the unity of one of the poems and so on.

But, it began a critical study of the poems for the first time, and critical methods are applied to the history for the first time ever really in early 19th century and thereafter.

And, it became common to reject any ancient story that wasn't really nailed down very, very firmly by some device to take a skeptical view, and the very interesting example of how things change.

If you look at people, say English, writing about Ancient Greece in the late 18th century, they tell the story of the early days based upon the legends as though the legends were reliable information to some degree.

When you get to, say the middle of the 19th century and the work of the great English historian in Ancient Greece George Grote, he begins a story in 776 with the Olympic Games. He does tell you all about the legends first, but he puts them aside and says they're just legends, now let's talk history.

And, he doesn't begin that until the 8th century B.C.. And, so, there is this critical scholar that says I won't believe anything unless it is proven to me.

At the other extreme, there's me. The most gullible historian imaginable. My principle is this. I believe anything written in the ancient Latin or Greek unless I can't.

Now, things that prevent me from believing what I read are; they are internally contradictory, or what they say is impossible, or different ones contradict each other and they can't both be right.

So, in those cases, I abandon the ancient evidence. Otherwise, you've got to convince me that they are not true.

🔊[9:01]

Now, you might think of this is indeed gullible.

Former colleague of mine put the thing very, very well. He spoke about, and I would like to claim this approach. The position a scholarship to which we call the higher naiveté.

And, the way this works is; you start out, you don't know anything, you are naïve! You believe in everything. Next, you get a college education, and you don't believe in anything.

And then, you reach the level of wisdom, the higher naïve naiveté, and, you know what to believe even though you can't prove it.

Be warned. I am a practitioner of the higher naiveté.

So I think the way to deal with legends is to regard them as different from essentially sophisticated historical statements.

But, as possibly deriving from facts, which are obviously been distorted, misunderstood, misused and so on.

But, it would be reckless, it seems to me, to just put them aside and not ask yourself the question, "can there be something believable at the root of this?" And just to give you some small defense of that approach, I always like to ask "Suppose we didn't have a single historical record, no newspapers, no diaries, you know nothing totally reliable for what happened in the latter part of the 18th century in America.

Would we know anything about what happened? Of course, we would.

We would know that there was a revolution; it was against the Great Britain.

I am sure we would know that the French assisted in that.

I am certain we would know that George Washington was the commander of our forces in that battle. Those are easy. There is no getting around without those things, and then it gets more interesting as we speculate.

We would know as a fact that George Washington, threw a silver dollar across the Rappahannock River, except that is impossible, so we could dismiss that one.

We would be told that he was very honest and told his father he chopped down a cherry tree, which would be baloney.

But, we would be told that, too. But, I think we would be told also very many true



things, which came down to us.

So, the hard job would be to select among these legendary things to see what fact can be found that will never be easier or deadly certain. But, that's what I am talking about here.

Finally, there is the source that people who are skeptical most like to believe, because it's tangible.

I'm talking about archaeology, which is the discovery, an examination and evaluation of material evidence that is not in writing; the actual remains of places where they lived, the implements that they used, and so on and so on.

🔊[12:08]

And, the beautiful thing about that is you actually have it. It's objective. It's an object. It's not something that somebody imagined.

But, you shouldn't derive much confidence from it as a lot of archaeologists liked.

Because, it's only a thing until you say what it means, until you put a date on it, until you try to understand what it really is, what its function was, who brought it there, who left it there.

All of those things have to be reasoned out from all the evidence, all the information you can get.

So, there is still an astonishing amount of speculation involved in establishing this apparently rigorous objective technique.

We certainly need to use it and we need to use this carefully. That's my point. As carefully as we use everything else, but it is indeed very valuable in studying a world before our time, always.

Now, we mentioned how important the poems are, so need to take a look at the question of what they are and how we know about them and so on.

I mentioned to you that these Iliad and Odyssey were known in the western world continuously from the time that they were made available. So they were known and they were very important in the minds of those people who knew about it.

But, I also mentioned last time the impact of Schliemann's excavations which turned everything around.

The hyper skeptical point of view taken by scholars in Europe in the 19th century was eroded very sharply by the discovery of places that really convinced pretty much everybody soon, that they were Troy and that they were Mycenaean and so stories couldn't have been simple inventions and that began a new phase in the story.

And, again, to repeat what I said last time, there was certain stunning physical resemblances between what Homer said and what we could see.

The palaces were like the palaces that he described.

The world that they lived in was a world in which bronze what was used for implements, and weapons and such, not iron, and that squared with what was found in Mycenae, what was found in Mycenaean world, namely bronze implements, and fundamentally not iron ones.

Sometimes there was an interesting little problems that emerged.

One of those has to do with the use of chariots in warfare.

🔊[14:57]

Well, homer has his heroes using chariots and people... we know the chariots were used in warfare in the Bronze Age around the Mediterranean Sea.

We have hard evidence of that in Egypt, in Asia Minor, and the Tigris Euphrates Valley.

So, you would say, "Well, that's another place where Homer got it right, except for the fact that we also know how chariots are used in warfare and the closes analogy.

And the closest analogy, I think, is to think of chariots as tanks.

You know, one famous tactic is, if you have an infantry force coming forward, you send tanks in it to break up the line of the infantry so that you can defeat the infantry in that way.

And apparently that is the way you use chariots in ancient Bronze Age warfare.

You would send the chariot racing toward the line of infantrymen and the usual outcome was the infantrymen would panic in the face of being charged by these things.

And you would break their line and give the other side an opportunity to wreak havoc with their army.

Well, what do the Homeric heroes do with their chariots?

They used them as taxicabs.

Achilles or Patroclus, or whoever is on his chariot, there's a driver in front. He is driving.

He is riding from the ships or wherever he is from the camp to the battlefield.

He might pick up a missile of some kind, a spear typically, and fire it at somebody as he goes by.

This would be a drive by killing, but then when he really gets to where the action is he hops off, and gets in, and now we have some fighting.

And so the implication I think is that the memory of chariot warfare back in the Mycenaean days lingered; it was captured in the poetry that goes back, the bits of the poetry that goes back to the Mycenaean period.

But how they were used was forgotten, and so the poets in the subsequent years then thought, "How would I use a chariot?" never having seen a chariot fight in a battle, and that's the outcome.

So, Finley, particularly makes a lot of this as being rather indicative of how he pictures the poems work.

There are sorts of legitimate memories some of them going way back to the Mycenaean period, but which may be misremembered in some significant detail.

And then, of course, there's lots of stuff that doesn't have anything to do with the Mycenaean period.

🔊 [17:58]

His view is much if not most of what we are told about the Homeric world comes as he says, in the tenth and in the ninth centuries.

One other thing that he doesn't mention but I think is worth mentioning. Many a scholar are very reluctant to admit that there's any Mycenaean stuff here, whatever although they cannot fail to concede that some of the physical implements that are found at Mycenaean sites are precisely like what homer says.

But I think you can go a little bit beyond that.

Some scholars have pointed out that in Book2 of the Iliad in the section that we call, "The Catalog of Ships," the poets lays out just exactly how many warships came to Try from Greece, and just exactly how many came from each town.

And the names of the towns that are listed in that catalog of ships, first of all, are all legitimate in the sense every one of them we know did exist in the Mycenaean Period.

And perhaps no less significant is that there are also towns listed there that are Mycenaean towns, which disappeared after the Mycenaean Period.

In other words, they couldn't just have named towns that used to be Mycenaean, but were still around, so that's why they knew them.

No, some towns had disappeared, but the names of those towns show up in the catalog of ships.

There's just no way to explain that except to say that catalog of ships goes back to the Mycenaean Period.

Now the difference between what we find in the Homeric poems are also very illuminating, differences between that and what we know happened after the fall of the Mycenaean world.

For instance, one of the most striking things that you find in cultures, anthropologists and archaeologists live off this, is what they do with dead bodies.

Now, in Mycenae, it's obvious; they bury them in the ground as most of us do.

The graves in the circle, the shaft graves, and then the beehive tombs for the big shots, and even outside in the countryside, we find graves which have bones of people in them.

But we know that the Greeks in Homer don't do that.

The Greeks in Homer have incinerate the bodies of the dead.

You remember the Iliad ends with the actual cremation of the bodies of the relevant people.

So that's a very significant difference.

That memory had simply died out and it helps us to remember too that the tombs that we have seen now, they didn't see.

🔊 **[21:05]**

Whoever was writing the poems of Homer, whichever poets were contributing to that over the ages after the Mycenaean Period, they hadn't seen those Mycenaean sites.

They were buried.

There are also differences sometimes, in the shape of weapons that we find in the Greek World after the Mycenaean Period compared to what are described in Homer's poems.

I'm sorry. Homer described certain of these weapons, which don't fit what we find in the ground.

And here's another critical element in the story. We know that the Mycenaean, or at least some small number of them could write, because we have the Linear B script



which we can read.

There is no clue that there is such a thing as writing in the Homeric poems.

There's one very abstruse clue where somebody seems to know something about it, but fundamentally it's an illiterate society and that is a major difference between the world of Homer and the Mycenaean world.

Some other differences: Homer's kings, if you just see how they live, what they do, what their wives do, how they are treated by their fellow noblemen, they are, in a relative sense, very weak, very short on power and really quite poor compared to these Mycenaean kings, the results of whose work and lives we see at places like Mycenae.

Remember, I tried to emphasize how rich you would have to be to undertake the building of the temple, to undertake the construction of one of those beehive tombs.

You had to be very confident because it was going to take a long time, a fantastic amount of labor, a tremendous amount of money to do that.

There is no evidence in Homer that anybody had that kind of wealth or that kind of power.

What do the queens in Homer do in their spare time?

Or maybe it's not their spare time, maybe it's their regular time.

Well, one of the things that they do when the Homeric heroes refer to their wives- there are really only two places that they seem to be associated with.

One is the bedroom and the other is the loom.

What these ladies are doing is weaving cloth.

Now, that's not what queens do.

🔊[24:00]

I'm sure the Mycenaean queens didn't do that, but it's very, very interesting that that is what the Homeric queens do that.

Well, how are we to explain the discrepancies that are so great these worlds?

And the answer that almost everybody now accept without argument is that these poems were created orally, and passed on orally.

That they were not written down, so that what we have in the poems of Homer reflects centuries of bards passing on bits of the poem, or the poem in various



versions, being always creative.

I mean, any bard, if by analogy we know about bards in the modern world, we have some evidence on that.

Millman Parry, is a Harvard scholar back in the twenties, went to Yugoslavia to live in the mountains and the backwoods, and he lived with people who still had these bards around who created sort of epic narratives of considerable length, but nothing resembling Homeric length, I must say.

Nothing that long, but long enough in which they would tell the same stories in verses and music, and you could recognize the story as you went from bard to bard.

But every bard added and subtracted things to suit his own talents.

That's the idea of the game, and then Parry demonstrated by careful scholarship of the Homeric poems, that that is the way the Homeric poems were.

In fact, I want to use the word stitched together, because in the Ancient Greek world the people who sang, recited, created the poems of the Homeric epics were called *rhapsodes*, and that means stitchers of songs.

So, what you have to imagine is sometime back, I would argue in the Mycenaean Period, somebody began making up one of these songs, telling the story of Greeks going to attack the city of Troy.

And that for centuries thereafter, different rhapsodes repeated that but elucidated that, illuminated that, extended it, changed it, tried to improve it, and sometimes they added stuff they were alive in the tenth century.

Some of them were alive in the ninth and certainly some of them were alive in the time of Homer in the eighth.

🔊 [26:52]

So that what we have before us, is that kind of product and that will explain both the similarities and the differences, and that is what underlies our interpretation of how the poems got to be what they were.

So, what is this world like that emerges from the world of Homer?

We don't have to make up our minds in advance whether it was a real world or a completely fantastic one, but at least let's see if we can describe what world it looks like.

And I'm going to focus my attention on what you might call the political side of that society as it reveals itself in the poems.

We hear about key individuals, and the last time I mentioned to you two words, I



think I did, but I'll mention them again this time.

The head of the expedition to Troy, Agamemnon, the sort of generalissimo of that expedition is calledanax.

When you drop the "w" as later Greeks dialects did, it becomesanax in later Greek.

He is, so far as I know, and I think I'm not forgetting, he is the only human being referred to in the poems in that way.

There are, however, many an individual in the poem who is referred to as a basileus, the plural is basileis, which is normally and regularly translated as king, and that's right.

For instance, in historical times, when the Greeks referred to the great king of Persia, who was a real king and a powerful figure, a king in every sense, the word they used for him was basileus.

But we quickly see that the people referred to as basileus in Homer are not like the great king of Persia.

But, we quickly see that the people referred to as basileus in Homer are not the great king of Persia.

They are much lesser figures. I will come back to that in just moments.

The Mycenaean kings we know, thanks to the Linear B tablets, we referred to, the singular once again is wanax, and the plural is wanaktes.

But in homer the term is reserved for Agamemnon or for gods, but not for any other human being.

And that raises the question, why is Agamemnon wanax?

And that, I think we have to understand as being because of his function in the situation, namely there is a multi-city invasion of Troy being carried on by these Mycenaean and Greeks.

🔊[30:00]

Agamemnon has been chosen as the generalissimo and that is what gives him temporarily the title of wanax.

I would imagine and very confident that after the war of Troy, if Agamemnon had been allowed by his wife to leave more than a few minutes after he set foot at home, he would no longer be called wanax, but would be called basileus like the other rulers of their local towns.

You remember I suggested that the in the Linear B tablets when there was a



reference to a basileus, he is clearly well below the wanax, and some scholars suggest, in persuasive way I think, that these basileus may have been village chieftains but that's as high as they got.

But it's very interesting that when you get historical Greece, as we shall see, there are no wanaktes, but there are, at least according to tradition basileis but this no basileus has anything like the clout that the Mycenaean kings did, and of course we don't hear of any of them who have even the temporary special power that Agamemnon has.

Nobody, no human being is referred to as wanax in the period of historical Greece.

And of course, the kings when we see them in Homer, do not have a bureaucracy, do not have scribes, how could there be scribes?

They didn't know how to write.

There are no inventories.

These are not rich guys with fantastic quantities of stuff that has to be cataloged and inventoried.

The kings by our standards for kings, are really poor.

What did they do in their spare time or in their time in general?

They themselves, engage in agriculture.

I don't mean they are dig in the ground, but they supervise it; but they think about it.

They are like people who are in charge of a plantation.

Their own plantation I mean.

So that's one of their activities, you cannot imagine the great kings of Mycenae doing that.

They would've had all kinds of subordinate officials taking care of that.

Another thing that these kings are seen to do, which is in a way even at a lower level, is to be herdsman.

Again, not themselves out there with goats and the sheep, but refer to as having these herds and having to cope with them.

Another very popular, I would say that the most popular activity among the kings popular with the kings was piracy.

That's what they brag about.



Achilles, my God, what a king he is!

He sacked twenty four cities.

Why do you sack a city?

🔊[33:00]

To steal what they have and, well, there are all kinds of wonderful examples of people in the Iliad and the Odyssey. Some stranger comes, this is in the Odyssey, and they ask him, "Sir, are you a pirate?"

And he says, "No, no, I'm not a pirate," just like they asked.

I mean, "Do you come from Chicago?"

He wasn't insulted.

"No, I am not a pirate, but I could've been, of course. We understand that."

But then later on, in the story that Homer tells in the Odyssey, Odysseus himself is such a newcomer.

He's taken to the beautiful city on the island of Scheria, Phaiacia, and is treated with great respect as you're supposed to in the Mycenaean world.

But after dinner, they do what they do to amuse themselves.

They have athletic contests and they ask Odysseus to participate.

And he says, "No, no, I'm too miserable wretched." and the guys says, "Oh, you must be some kind of a merchant"

And Odysseus says that was a black remark. And those are fighting words.

You can't call, we know Odysseus himself is a basileus, him a merchant.

Pirate, sure, but merchant, no.

Another thing that is interesting that when you look at the burials of Greeks in the post-Mycenaean period, in the Dark Ages, there's nothing resembling those grand tombs and the wealth that's buried in them for the dead.

You find that the tombs of noblemen are very much the same one as the other.

You're struck by the equality from the standpoint of riches of the dead nobility.

No great distinction, and no great riches either.



You dealing with a poorer world and a world doesn't have this kind of outstanding monarchy.

So, one of the things I think we learn is that the Homeric world of the kings, the role of the kings, the wealth of the kings, the power of the kings, the place of the kings is not taken from the Mycenaean period.

If it is describing anything that's real, it's describing very clearly a post-Mycenaean world in those Dark Ages that we have been talking about.

🔊[35:49]

But another things that crops up is that in the Iliad and the Odyssey, you get a very clear picture really of what is the political structure of each society and you, by the way, you must keep in mind very important difference between the Iliad and the Odyssey.

The Iliad takes place at Troy.

None of these noblemen, none of these kings, none of these heroes is back home in his own town ruling it.

He is at war and he is serving under a commander, and so the behavior of these people towards one another is not precisely like what it would be and here you see in the Odyssey is what it likely be, and the place where you see it is back in Ithaca when Odysseus is there or when we're taken to see what's going on.

I think that's a very important distinction to make, but even when they're Troy and in this sort of none-typical situation, we still see the same institutions working and the same relationships being present as will be present at home although we have to watch out for the difference.

What do I mean?

How are decisions made?

Does the king simply say that "Do it" and it gets done?

Nothing like that.

The king has got important powers and Agamemnon as the chief out there in the Iliad,

He can call a meeting of the assembly but it turns out he is not the only one of, I should say of the council in a minute, but he is not the only one who can. Any nobleman who wants to can say,

"We ought to have a council."



And then that council will come together and do whatever business they wish to do.

The council, however, is limited to noblemen to these basileis.

Ordinary soldiers do not attend.

And one of the things I think we must grasp immediately.

The key line in this society of the Dark Ages appears to be certainly not between monarchy and everybody else, but between, nobility and commoners.

That's the really important, serious line--certainly politically and in other ways as well.

There is, however, in Homer, an assembly that consists of the men, in the case of Troy of course the fighting men who are there, but who are not basileus.

But also in the home, at home, the men of fighting age and condition.

They are the only ones who matter.

Of course, as in all of the rest of Greek history, women are excluded from the political realm, and of course, well, I'll just leave it at that, but so, too, there's obviously an age limit.

🔊[39:04]

You have to be of an age to be a fighting man.

It's not necessarily defined for us.

It depends, could have been 18, it could have been 20.

In Athens, in classical times it was 20.

Well, let me just remind you of some events that show you how these things work.

Remember, the Iliad starts because of a quarrel and the quarrel emerges from the fact that the Greeks are busily being killed by a terrible plague that has struck them.

They say, "We got to find out what's happening?"

They always assume that if something like that happened, it was some god or gods who was angry with them.

So, they get a seer who goes and is persuaded to try to find out what's happening.

And he finally does ascertain that Apollo is angry with the Greeks because Agamemnon took a maiden from her father, and that father was a priest of Apollo.



And so when this is ascertained, Achilles, the biggest, bravest, strongest, fastest hero on the Greek side, intervenes and says, "Well, look, why don't you give back the girl and then Apollo will stop killing us and everything will be okay?"

Agamemnon gets furious with Achilles and he says, "No, I'm not giving back my girl. I'm the boss here," as Edward G. Robinson used to say.

How many of you ever heard of Edward G.

Robinson? Just raise your hand, please.

Good, put me in my place.

It gets worse every year for me, and Achilles then speaks up and really lets him have it, chews him out, tells him what a bozo he is, and, you know, the very important thing is this.

How can you do that if this is a king?

And the answer is: you can do that because you're both kings.

There is nothing out of line in the sense of violating some kind of a real rule of the society, but it's not typical, and especially since Agamemnon has this position as the boss, the most kingly of the kings.

That's a word that Homer uses of him, *basileutatos*, the most kingly, and that's because of his position.

So, Achilles is not doing anything sort of illegal or intuitional, but he's doing something that's really out of line from a normal point of view, and finally Agamemnon says, "No, I'm not going to give back my girl, but I'll tell you what, I will give back my girl."

🔊 **[42:01]**

If I am given the girl you took from a different Trojan, and that'll be fine.

I'll have your girl and you won't have any."

So now, Achilles really blows his top and from the quarrel, and finally when he says, "Okay, if that's what you're going to do to me, I'm taking my armor and I'm going home."

And off he goes, and he sulks in his tent for the next nine books, and this turns out to be a serious problem for them.

But, what you learn from that is that the way decisions are made, important decisions are made, even in this army, is by discussion among the *basileis*, among the

noblemen, and you will try to reach a consensus about these things, and in an extreme odd situation like this, it would have to be that they would have to do what the commander says.

And probably back home there would be the implication that if you can't work things out among them with consensus, probably the king has some weight.

But what we have to remember is he can't give orders to anybody typically, although Agamemnon can get away with it on this expedition.

Well, that's one story.

Another story that we're told is that soon afterwards also in that same place in the Iliad, a dream comes to Agamemnon, because, you know, this is their tenth year.

They've been trying to take this city for nine years.

It's almost as bad as a rob, and people are the soldiers are tired of all of us if we can't take the city.

We ought to go home, and there is a lot of the spirit that says we ought to go home, and so a dream comes to Agamemnon

The god says to him, "Here's what you need to do. You need to try the spirit of your men, and to in that way to inspire them, to carry on until victory.

So, what you should do is to get up and speak to your soldiers and say that you are going to say Troy.

You might as well pack up and go home, and then they would say, "No king, no, we'll receive to do that. We insist on staying. We are going to re-up and do another term, and we are going to take the city."

So, Agamemnon said

"Great! I will do that," and he calls the troops together to battle, and he makes a little speech, and then I wish I can reproduce Homer I didn't take it along with me but the essence of it is a great roar and rumble emerged as the troops turned and began racing back to the ships to get the hell out of there.

Just to carry on some of the highlights that tells us a lot about the society.

🔊[44:55]

So, as they're roaring back, suddenly Odysseus, the slyest, the cleverest, the smartest of all of the Greeks, he goes racing among the troops who are heading back and he grabs one, and Homer says when he came to a gentleman, a Basileus.

He would say, "Sir, you are making a mistake. You don't understand the game that Agamemnon is playing," and he explains it to him, and the guy says "Oh, okay."

When he comes to one of the common sort, he says, "You bloody imbecile, get the hell back to where you belong."

That's a rough translation and everybody finally grabs enough of them and the thing turns around, everybody goes back and sits down and up steps one man.

Homer describes him as the ugliest man in the entire army.

So you get a clue as to what we're supposed to think about him, and he makes a speech which denounce all of the Basileus, Agamemnon ahead of any of them, and he says, "We ordinary soldiers have had enough and we would like to go home."

And up steps Odysseus and blasts him with his scepter, smashes him across the back, leaving a welt that could be seen by the entire army, and tears came to the eyes of this guy.

Are we supposed to feel sorry for him?

Well, the next lines in Homer say that one soldier popped up and said, "Of all the great thongs Odysseus has done for us here that was the greatest to shut up a big mouse idiot like Thersites."

Well, what Thersites had done that was wrong, of course the poet and Odysseus didn't like his policy, suggestion, but he had no right to speak at all.

The only people who could speak in the council or in an assembly were the nobleman, the basileus.

So, he had crossed the line as an ordinary soldier to rise and to say anything was a violation of the culture, and that's one of the places where you see where this sharp line exists.

They just take orders, but the gentlemen don't just take orders.

They can argue and sometimes they can win the argument.

So, what you see in this very brief and inadequate account that I've given you is that we really, in spite of the fact that we have basileus, and even in this case an Anax.

We really don't have a proper monarchical tradition.

When we think of monarchs, single rulers, we think of Hammurabi and we think of the Kings of Persia, and we think of Louis XIV.

🔊 [48:00]



We do not think of what we have here, which is a bunch of nobleman who are essentially equal, and the differences between them don't come from birth or rank as between them, but from wealth and power that they happen to possess.

It is, rather, not a royal society but an aristocratic society.

I think that's the main message, and it is matrix of all future political ideas and arguments in the Greek world that comes after this time.

I think you need to understand that what the Greeks in the historical period--once we start having written records by the Greeks themselves, the thing that is the standard position--what is this thing on the computer when you fall back to a position? What do you call that position?

What is it? Default, that's right.

Good, the default position in Greek political theory is aristocracy; that is the normal thing.

A very good example of that is what I've been telling you; that's really what happens. And here's another thing, if you go to the end of the Greek story, when you think about political theory, there's Plato, and when he lays out the ideal society in his view, in the Republic, we find there are multiple rulers.

And these, of course, turn out to be the winners of the Jeopardy contest playoffs, but it doesn't matter.

There's never one king.

It's always a group of people that is the best government, and they will be the best in this case defined chiefly by their intelligence, but other things too.

Well, anyway in this case, in Greek political thinking the aristocracy of birth is the default position.

Anybody who wants to argue for a different kind of political arrangement will have to make the case uphill against all tradition.

I hope that you'll have that in the back of your head when we get to the story of Athens and the invention of democracy, because it was off the wall from the perspective of Greek tradition.

And of course, anybody from time to time, there are individuals who thought that monarchy might be a fine thing.

They ran against something that was regarded with much more hostility by the Greeks.

🔊 [50:57]



When they're through and had reached their peak, their notion of monarchy is something fit for barbarians, but not for Greeks. A free man may not live under a monarchy, and the roots of that, I think, are visible in Homer.

In passing, I just want to say that Homer, of course, is the basic text, the basic document for all Greek thinking in every area that you can imagine throughout the rest of Greek history.

Over time, it becomes not the only one, but it never ceases to be the best known, the most influential, and the most powerful.

If it were a religious document primarily we would speak of it as the Greek Bible, but it isn't.

Well, some examples, later on in history there's a quarrel between Athens and Megara as to who controls the island of Salamis.

They decide to call in an arbitrator.

So, they call in the Spartans, and the Spartans say, "Okay, we'll decide," and they decide that it belongs to Athens.

Why? Well, if you look at the catalog of ships in Homer's Iliad, the island of Salamis had its ships lined up next to the island of Athens, Ballgame.

You have to realize how potent this is.

Well, let me turn to another aspect of the story of Homer and how the poems play into Greek society.

I want to talk to you about the ethics and values that emerge from the reading of the Iliad and the Odyssey. I mentioned religion and so we should take a look first at the gods.

We are talking, first of all, and remember about a multi-deity society.

Polytheism is what we're talking about. That is true of all of human societies that we know anything about down to the earliest possible exception, I suppose; well, it depends what you think is earliest.

You could say the Hebrews are the earliest, pure and simple, but depending on how you date biblical things, there's an outside chance that an Egyptian pharaoh in the sixteenth century B.C.

I think, might have claim to have some such state, but otherwise, there is no such thing.

So, this is a polytheistic society with heroic characteristics. That is, this kind of aristocratic outfit, aristocracy of birth, which is legitimized by heroic behavior on the battlefield.

🔊[53:56]

Now, one of the things the Greeks believed, as we discover from a poem written by one of their major poets, is something so far as I know unique to the Greeks.

They claimed that they were of the same race as the gods, and I really don't know of anybody else who made that claim.

And so you will hear Homeric characters referred to by epithets, Homer, part of the technique of passing on oral poetry is by having epithets attached to the rulers to help with the meter.

Some hero will be called dios, meaning godly, god-like, diotrephe, reared as a god, isothesos, equal unto a god, and there are others as well.

Now, mind you, notice these are not people referred to as god-fearing or lovers of god, no. They are just about equal to the gods according to these terms.

Now, that on the one hand is this extraordinary claim that the Greeks make.

They did make amazingly powerful claims for human beings as opposed to divinity, compared to any society that I know anything about.

This is part of the arrogance that is characteristic of the Ancient Greeks, but at the same time, and right away at the beginning we're getting to such a very Greek thing, a Greek characteristic.

At the same time that he is this great thing almost like a god, he is also not a god in the most crucial way possible.

Gods do not die. Men die.

The mortality of the human being is a reality and it's of the greatest significance and importance, and of course men are not as strong and as powerful as the gods.

And indeed, as we shall see, well, the tragic view of life, which the Greeks invent and which characterizes their culture, is there right at the beginning in the Iliad and the Odyssey.

It says that at the same time as man is a remarkable, marvelous creature capable of all sorts of amazing things, even unto being almost like the gods, he is nonetheless mortal and dies, and he doesn't have the power that the gods do.

And what do you do about that?

Well, it's interesting, I think, to compare the Greek way of dealing with this human problem that we all have, the problem of death.

🔊[57:01]

How do we deal with the fact that we will die?

Well, there's what I like to call the Eastern solution that you find in many an Eastern religion and philosophy that says that man is, in fact, nothing. He is dust.

He is dung depending on which story you listen to.

So, of course you're going to die.

Who cares? Why should you care?

You were nothing to begin with; you'll be nothing when you're finished.

Relax.

Then there is what I would characterize as the Christian solution. You're worried about dying?

You need not die.

If you are a good Christian and you do all the things that you need to do to be a good Christian, you will not die.

You will have personal immortality.

So that's how you get around that problem.

No need to worry if you doing things right.

Well, somehow Christians continued to worry and we have a millennium of them killing each other about how you're supposed to worry about these things.

But if you can accept the purity of the statement I just made, it's at the root of the thing you have a solution.

But the Greek tragic view does not take either of these roots, which I regard as a relatively easy escape from the problem compared to the way the Greeks got stuck.

Man is great and they keep saying so. He is important. He is capable of great things.

He is of the same race as the gods, and the same time his life is short and death is final, and death is bad.

I ought to say a word about death, in order to comprehend what the Greeks thought.

You know, different people have had different ideas about them.

Sometimes the notion is that it is just terrible for everybody with actual pain and suffering, and others have a notion of a wonderful kind of a heaven in which marvelous things happen to you, sometimes spiritual, sometimes physical depending on the religion.

But for the Greeks, as I think for quite a few other people in the ancient world, death was nothing in the worst sense of the world.

You just went somewhere and there was nothing, there was darkness, there was nothing at all.

Some few people who had sinned terribly and earned the wrath of the gods would, indeed be tortured in some special and typically Greek interesting way.

[60:00]

You remember Tantalus. He had done a terrible thing and there he stood forever with his feet in the water below, and above him a tree with grapes hanging down, and dying of thirst.

And every time he went down to try to sip some of the water, the water receded, and anytime he reached up for the grapes, the grapes were pulled back.

That is a Greek idea of hell, where you got to keep trying and you always lose.

So, but that's the picture and the other, you have to realize that death is a bad thing.

In the Odyssey, Odysseus has reason to go down to Hades, and while he's down there he comes upon Achilles who has died.

And he says, "Well, it's good to see you, Achilles. Say you look fine. You must really be doing okay down here. I know that you are a judge down here and much respected. So, looks like you've beaten around."

And Achilles says, "Odysseus, don't say a word to me about the virtues of death. Better to be a serf, the lowest serf on the earth, than to be a king in Hades."

Now, that's as bad as it can possibly be.

The great Achilles, respected still in the afterworld would immediately turn it in to be a complete nobody on earth.

So it's very important. They faced without any real retreat the reality and the negative character of death, even as they refused to reject the significance of life or of mankind.



That is what I mean when I speak of the tragic view, and it's very important.

Now it seems to me we can eliminate that a little bit by comparing it with various modern approaches to the same sort of problems.

We haven't gotten rid of those problems yet, in spite of modern medicine.

There we live still, I think in what might be called the age of enlightenment.

That is the dominant sort of paradigm of what life is all about, at least in the western world and a good deal more of it where the west has had an influence.

At the core of it is a belief in progress, something that was essentially not present among the Greeks.

[62:54]

Progress in the eyes of the philosopher of the eighteenth century, though they would have been very angry to hear me say this, was something like the equivalent of the Christian hope for immortality.

The hope of the Voltaires of this world was that they could make the world better constantly by their efforts, and this would be rewarded in a kind of a way, because progress in the future after they were gone would redound to their credit for having brought it about.

And that in some sense they would live on in this society which had they had improved and made a better thing.

Another aspect that is very important in this sort of an enlightenment approach is individualism, that the core of everything is the single individual person.

As we shall see, this is very different from the Greeks.

Now the Greeks were very much concerned with individual and this is especially true of the democrats in Athens.

But even their most potent spokesman and leader placed the goals, and achievements, and everything else of an individual behind something that they thought was more important, which was the community at large, which in historical times was the polis.

Well, that's not the way it is with the modern world and that's not the way it comes out of the enlightenment, the individual is the ultimate.

The enlightenment, if you go back to its roots in the 17th century with the likes of Hobbes and Locke, what is the ultimate place you go to, it is the rights of individuals.

You may not stamp out the rights of individuals.

They are inherent in everything. Either you believe, as our founding father said that we were endowed with them by our creator.

They didn't say god because, of course, the enlightenment thinkers were not so sure they believed in god, but they still seemed to believe in something they wanted to call a creator.

So, or if you didn't believe in god, this was just a natural right.

Nature gave each individual the right to life, liberty, property, and nobody could take these away legitimately.

Well, the Greeks had no concept of natural rights, or of rights that human beings were given by the gods.

That is a very important difference that was, you had to act in such a way as to make life possible and decent, and for the Greeks that always meant being part of a decent community, the polis.

🔊 [66:04]

But the modern world, to get back to that, to this enlightenment world, individualism and a key aspect to that is hedonism.

That is to say, it is legitimate and proper to search for pleasure, for each individual to attempt to please himself however he can.

And it turns out that there if you could take it to our own day, there are no limits pretty much to what he can do to gain pleasure.

I would argue that there is a direct line from the enlightenment philosophy to nihilism, that is to say a philosophy that says there are no limits to what human beings may do.

What turns out to be the practical fact is that he who has the power and the will to do what he wants will be able to do so, and he who has not will be forced to suffer whatever the powerful impose on him.

And this is seen by the original nihilists as an good thing.

What's his name, Nietzsche, of course said, "Some of us are better than others. Some of us are supermen, and it is quite wrong and wicked for us to be treated as though we were ordinary fellows, and therefore do not tie us down with these ridiculous codes of ethics, and morals, and other things which are simply the weapons by which the weak hold down the strong."

This was an interesting idea but it wasn't new.



There's a Greek in the fifth century who says the same thing.

There is no definition of goodness for this modern approach, no definition of happiness.

Each individual decides for himself what is good, what is happy.

What it really does is to evade the question that I'm talking about.

Is this all okay? If we're all going to die then does it really mean that we should just do the best we can at anybody's expense while we're alive?

Is that a satisfactory outcome? Will we indeed be happier, better off while we're alive?

If we do that, the Greeks would have said, "That is stupid and absurd to think for 10 seconds you'll realize that's no good."

Now the Greeks, on the other hand, had a powerful belief in the dominance of chance.

The accepted, again, what is a very modern idea now, that in fact there is no divine force of divine forces who oversee what happens to mankind on earth.

But, rather, things happen simply in a random way according to no particular rule and that's the way it is.

It is not virtue or merit that determines the quality of your life.

🔊[69:03]

It is chance, and there are several places in the Iliad and the Odyssey that emphasize that point.

Well, that leaves the Greeks with something like this question.

In the light of human mortality, the disinterest of the gods, the chanciness of life, what can man do to achieve happiness and immortality?

Because he still doesn't feel happy about his mortality.

Though he accepts that this is a problem, it's something that he still hankers after.

It's inevitable that people should, and part of the answer is very Homeric. It is the heroic ethics.

At a certain place, I think a couple of places in the Iliad, Achilles tells us "Why did you come here to fight a Troy?"



We know the legend says that Achilles was told before he came that if he did not go to Troy and fight in that war, because his mother was a goddess, he had partial divinity in him, he would be immortal. He would never die.

But, on the other hand, he would not be great and famous.

His memory would not be carried forward into the future.

If he went to Troy, he would die, but his memory as the greatest of the Achaeans would be immortal forever.

Well, you know the choice he took and you know that it turned out to be right.

We still know about Achilles, don't we?

And when we're all gone, people will know about Achilles.

So, we should take the Greeks very seriously on that score.

Well, anyway, sometimes he's asked, "What made you come here in spite of that?" and his answer was, "Well, when my father sent me here, he told me a number of things that I'm supposed to do, but the most important of these was the Greek words, *aien aristeioi*, always be the best."

The best doesn't mean morally the best in anything like our sense. It means the greatest, the strongest, the ablest, the most admired. That is what you want to be.

Well, you can only do that if you are in a contest. You can only be the best if somebody is not as good, and the Greek word for that kind of contest is *agon*, and so it's fair to think about the Greeks, I think it's very necessary to think about the Greeks as having a particular *agonal* society.

🔊[72:00]

A society filled with competition, in which if not everybody, lots and lots of people are constantly striving to be the very best, whatever the definition of best is in the context that's relevant.

Now I guess I'm out of time.

So I'll pick up the story next time with the story about this heroic ethic and the impact that it had on Greek society.