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Emblematic Eating: Reading the Feasts of the Iliad as Models for Social Order

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EMBLEMATIC EATING: READING THE FEASTS OF THE *ILIAD*
AS MODELS FOR SOCIAL ORDER

By

Erin Welty

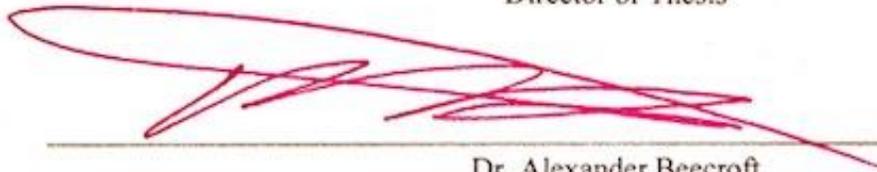
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Thesis Summary

This paper analyzes the *Iliad*'s feast scenes as sites that amplify the sociopolitical and economic tensions that permeate the wider plot of the epic. Through a literary analysis of the major feasting scenes of the *Iliad*, I show how the epic's presentation of the *dais* collectively displays particular emblematic values of social equity and fair distribution of resources that manifests in the formulaic language that repeats in each feast scene and produces a sense of stable social organization. At the same time, however, I display how the narrative contexts of the feasts and the narrative presentation internal to the scenes problematize these values, namely their implication in stabilizing the contested hierarchical dominance of a monarch. Using Walter Donlan's reading of the competing economic models of chiefly redistribution versus the sharing economy in Homeric epic, I connect the political implications of the feast scenes with the competing economic structures that drive the rhetoric of rivalry between Achilles and Agamemnon. Through these methods, I arrive at the conclusion that the feast scenes of the *Iliad* are narrative moments of deep thematic significance in which the most basic thematic problems in the epic are interrogated in the guise of formulaic repetition. I extend this reading to the relationship between the epic and its early audience in archaic Greece to surmise that the tension displayed in the epic feasts would have been mirrored and recognized in the changing sociopolitical climate that encompassed the festival feasts at which the epic was likely performed.

Introduction

Claude Lévi-Strauss writes that “the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure – or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions.”¹ The cooking of the Achaeans within the narrative of the *Iliad* is no exception. Feasts occur with regularity in Homer, and their formulaic qualities can entice scholars into assuming that the feast functions as a narrative break or lull in action rather than a response to and representation of the most urgent thematic questions of the epic.² In the *Iliad*, the distribution of wealth and the assertion of a single monarch leading a multitude of kings are problems that permeate the epic, most keenly in the feud between Achilles and Agamemnon. The *Iliad*’s representation of the social space of the feast connects the act of feasting to these very problems in profound ways, making the moments key for our understanding of the thematic meaning of the epic.

Reading the feast scenes of the *Iliad* as indicators of the structure of the poem’s social world yields a seemingly stable model of hierarchy that disintegrates within the context of Achilles’s rage against Agamemnon. Book 1 establishes the moment of the feast as both instrument and symbol of social reconciliation: Chryses feasts with Odysseus’s men to lift Apollo’s plague on the Achaeans (*Il.* 1.446-76) and the gods feast together to ease Hera’s anger with Zeus (*Il.* 1.584-611). Chapter one explains how the feasts of Book 1 resolve transgressions of social hierarchy by restating the supremacy of a monarchically powerful figure. Chapter two shows how feasts in Books 2, 7, and 9 contextualize this model to address the politics of

¹ Lévi-Strauss 2008: 43

² Sherratt 2004: 308 suggests that feasts “are, often, more or less formulaic punctuation points that, among other things, allow the bard to gather his thoughts and remember where he wants to go next.”

Achaean society. Agamemnon's leadership in feasts in Books 2, 7, and 9 addresses the social tension around his role in the redistribution of plundered wealth, setting himself up as rightful, generous king despite deep tension surrounding such an assertion of power (*Il.* 2.394-440; 7.313-353; 9.89-94).

The feast scenes' representation of the re-assertion of social hierarchy, however, is always set against Achilles's refusal to yield to the monarchical position of Agamemnon. In light of this overarching conflict, the stability of the feast's emblematic significance further breaks down. As Achilles takes on the role of the generous king in the feast at *Il.* 9.205-230, the kingly power of Agamemnon as the community's sole source of provision is indirectly destabilized. Achilles's refusal to eat (*Il.* 19.203-14) keenly manifests the dissolution of the political stability that feasts enforce, and this instability lingers past his time of fasting with his begrudging attitude toward the feasting at Patroclus's funeral (*Il.* 23.48-61). The final feast of the *Iliad* – Achilles's feast with Priam (*Il.* 24.621-42) – then serves as the site of Achilles's most radical transgression against Achaean social ties, while at the same time demonstrating a powerful example of social reconciliation through the act of feasting. Chapter three traces these representations of Achilles's rebellion through the lens of feasting to show how the narrative of the *Iliad* ultimately challenges the simplicity with which the political stability and social reconciliation ingrained into the formulaic language of feasting plays out in society.

This tension comes to life in the relationship between the epic's early audiences and the representation of the *Iliad*'s feast scenes in oral performance. If, as most scholars believe, feasts were the traditional occasions for oral poetry performance,³ then the audience's own experiences of social eating would have been particularly significant for their reception of the *Iliad*'s feast

³ Taplin 1992: 1-45; Sherratt 2004: 308; Revermann and Wilson 2008: 163-9

scenes and of the *Iliad*'s main themes in general. Chapter four discusses how an audience hearing the epic performed during the early Archaic period at a feast would have received the feast scenes in the *Iliad* as reflective moments to see themselves and their own turbulent political milieu represented in some form in the epic past. As a final and essential layer of meaning, the connection between the epic's feasting world and the audience's reality would have served as an opportunity for the feast scenes' complex emblematic meaning in the *Iliad* to become embodied and reconfigured into the realities of the listeners of its oral performance.

At the heart of my argument is the assumption that the narrative context of the formulaic feast scenes in the *Iliad* helps provide their thematic meaning. These premises implicate my argument within the wider history of the so-called Homeric question and Milman Parry's work on the orality of Homeric epic.⁴ The Homeric question revolves around the origins of Homeric epic, and the two basic competing sides contend whether the epics can be read as unified works or "amalgams of older and more recent layers of composition" – the Unitarians' view versus the Analysts' respectively.⁵ Parry upturned the basic framework of this argument by challenging the notion of *composition* that the Unitarians and Analysts were engaging with. His work on identifying the formulaic language of Homer – epithets, particularly – presented a case for oral composition dictated by the necessities of tradition and oral performance rather than narrative context.⁶ Students of Parry such as Albert Lord further pushed back against Homeric scholars' continuation in "apply[ing] the poetics of written literature" to oral composition,⁷ and thus what de Jong calls "the Parryan impasse" solidified in Homeric scholarship:

⁴ de Jong 1991: 405-8 provides a helpful summary of these questions and how Homeric scholars have engaged with them.

⁵ de Jong 1991: 406

⁶ Parry 1987

⁷ Lord 1968: 46; see also Lord 1960

[W]hile overcoming to a certain degree the impasse of the Unitarian-Analyst controversy, Parry's work itself created a new impasse with regard to interpreting the poems. As a result, literary studies of Homer were reduced to a small trickle in comparison with the vast torrent of formulaic studies. Only recently has the tide seemed to turn. Strictly formulaic research has reached a certain saturation point, and literary studies have become fashionable again. Instead of Lord's *Singer of Tales*, a title like *Homer, Poet of the Iliad* (Edwards 1987) crops up again.⁸

This turning of the tide toward a literary approach has yielded studies that are literary in nature – tracing meaning in narrative structure, repetition, or thematic continuity – but grounded in the vocabulary of formula and orality that Parry and his students established.⁹

My attempt at a literary study of the *Iliad*'s feasts participates in de Jong and Bakker's modes of negotiating with Parry's formulaic framework. de Jong builds a case for the application of narratological principles to oral poetry, specifically Homeric epic, to find meaning in repeated phrases without relying on the Unitarian assumption of a single writer or poet crafting intratextual connections.¹⁰ The basic tenet of de Jong's approach is that, even in its orality, Homeric epic is still narrative, and as narrative poetry it can be studied for the rich patterns that all narrative can yield. She references Ann Amory Parry as an early proponent of this idea, whose words are deeply relevant for my own project as I seek a pattern for the social values that the *Iliad* presents through feasting:

All narrative poetry presents characters, recounts actions, describes a world, implies

⁸ de Jong 1991: 407

⁹ de Jong 1991 and Bakker 2013 are the examples discussed here, although there are many others.

¹⁰ de Jong 1991: 417

values, and so on. At a certain level, it makes no difference to a critical interpretation whether a poem is written or oral.¹¹

Of course, the orality of the *Iliad* is still significant for my interpretation (as for de Jong's), but her approach treats formulaic phrases as both necessary instruments of oral performance and connected elements of a cohesive narrative.

Bakker's mediation of the orality-literacy debate in *The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the Odyssey* provides helpful nuance to my grounds for writing a literary study of Homeric feasting formula. Bakker claims that "not all formulas are distributed equally, for all kinds of reasons, semantic, thematic, and narratological" to develop what he calls a "scale of interformularity," which is to say, "a continuum or increasing specificity of formulaic expressions based on the memorability of the contexts in which they are uttered."¹² Based on this scale, Bakker is able to point to various degrees of thematic meaning in the repetition of formulaic phrases both within the *Odyssey* and also shared between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The relationship between these moments, Bakker elaborates, is subtly different than one of quotation or direct reference, as "the scale of interformularity does not code...*the likelihood of allusion or quotation*, but what is for the epic poet and his audience *specificity of the similarity of scenes to each other*."¹³ This usage of formula plays out in all language, which functions to identify similar situations with the same signifier. Thus, Bakker's examination of the symbolic meaning of meat as it plays out in the narrative of the *Odyssey* relies upon the notion that formulaic moments in narrative are tied together by a situation judged to be similar by the Homeric poet(s), and this situation's meaning replicates itself in different contexts across epic narrative.

¹¹ Parry 1971: 14

¹² Bakker 2013: 158-9

¹³ Bakker 2013: 159

On the basis of Bakker's negotiations with the orality-literacy debate, I make the claims that the various narrative contexts in which the formulaic feasts of the *Iliad* occur point to a general emblematic meaning of feasting, and likewise that these narrative contexts shape this meaning to complicate the value system set forth in the plot of the epic. Although I present the feasts that I am examining in chronological order from Book 1 to 24, it should be noted that I do not assume the feasts of the latter books of the *Iliad* to be 'quoting' those of the first books as would be assumed for a written composition. Rather, the body of feasting scenes that I have selected collectively present a certain set of values – namely, community reconciliation and solidarity through the stabilization of monarchical hierarchy. These values are encoded, in many ways, in the feasts' formulas, but also come to light through the feast scenes' agency in moving the narrative to new places.¹⁴ The fact that the feasts of the latter books happen to challenge those values in ways that the earlier feasts do not, as Achilles uses his own feasting table and his abstinence from feasting to reject his community and challenge Agamemnon's authority, informs my reading of feasting's thematic meaning *throughout* the *Iliad*, and not just in the specific narrative moments in Books 19-24. Since modern readers (including myself) approach the *Iliad* in a chronological manner from Book 1 to 24, the presentation of feasts in that order seems most beneficial for the clarity of my argument. As the layers of complexity in the meaning of feasts develop in the movement from chapters one through three, however, this complexity should not be limited to the feast scenes addressed in chapter three, as such a reading would limit the text by the terms of written composition. Rather, the *Iliad's* orality demands, or perhaps allows for, a

¹⁴ For example, the formulaic phrase of δαίνονται, οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδέετο δαιτὸς ἕϊσης (*Il.* 1.468; 1.602; 2.431; 7.320; 23.56) in itself presents a sense of communal harmony. This formulaic meaning is confirmed and strengthened, however, in the plot surrounding the feast, for example, of 1.468, in which the strained social ties between Chryses and the Achaeans are appeased and the plague of Apollo upon the Achaeans ends.

broader connectivity between feasts that is not linearly constrained by the order in which they appear in our written text.

Although my approach is directed toward the literary meaning of the *Iliad*'s feasts rather than the historical or anthropological knowledge they provide, the existing body of anthropological studies on feasting, ancient and otherwise, helps to guide my work's focus on social structure and hierarchy. Some of the foundational developers of structuralist thought including Mary Douglas, Roland Barthes, and Claude Lévi-Strauss engaged in 'reading' communal eating practices as a language into which the social structure of a culture was coded.¹⁵ The field of food studies continues to engage with similar questions across various times and places, and its burgeoning identity as a distinguishable mode of cultural criticism is proof of the dynamic readings that academic inquiries into food and culture can yield.¹⁶ With the rise of food studies, the study of food in the ancient world has emerged as a point of interest as well, but the topic has been dominated by historical studies of what and how ancient cultures ate.¹⁷ The study of ancient Greek feasts in an archaeological context has been particularly relevant recently with the release of James C. Wright's *The Mycenaean Feast*, a collection of studies on how the Greeks of Mycenae may have eaten.¹⁸ From a literary standpoint, however, the study of Homeric feasts has only started to unfold. More has been written on the *Odyssey* than the *Iliad*, in part because eating happens in the *Odyssey* so much more frequently and in more diverse ways.¹⁹ An

¹⁵ Douglas 1966; Barthes 2008; Lévi-Strauss 2008

¹⁶ For a thorough and lively overview of the field of food studies, look to *Food and Culture: A Reader* edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (2008).

¹⁷ Dalby 1996; Garnsey 1999; Dalby 2003; Alcock 2006; Wilkins and Hill 2006

¹⁸ Wright 2004; Susan Sherratt's contribution to this volume alone compares the feasts of Homer's epics with archaeological findings.

¹⁹ Examples of readings of the *Odyssey* through its food scenes include Herman 1978; Bakker 2013; Griffith 2016

in-depth literary study of the *Iliad* through the lens of its feasts, then, contributes to the growing interest in food studies both in and out of the classical academic sphere. Just as the consumption of food is a universal activity in the world, bridging all cultures and times, so also can the interpretation of food in ancient literature serve as a bridge between academic disciplines, contributing to the study of ancient literature but also reaching out to engage with the study of archaeology, history, sociology, and anthropology. In analyzing the literary meaning of the feasts of the *Iliad*, I hope to demonstrate that such interdisciplinary work is possible and fruitful.

Feasting as Social Restoration

It is easy to forget among the clamor of the *Iliad*'s lengthy battle scenes and grand speeches that the epic begins with the Chryseis episode, a short-lived conflict that finds its resolution, to some degree, within the first book. On the one hand, the episode provides expository space to introduce Apollo's opposition to the Achaeans and Achilles's perception of Agamemnon's greed, both of which persist far beyond the Chryseis episode. On the other hand, however, the crisis of the plague provides a relatively contained narrative of conflict that begins with Agamemnon's refusal to give up Chryseis, reaches a crisis point with the rising death toll of Apollo's plague, and concludes with Agamemnon's agreement to Chryseis's return and the Achaeans' appeasement of Apollo. The dual nature of this conflict as a site of ongoing thematic tensions but also a delimited model for conflict resolution establishes the complex web of social conflicts that permeate the epic. If we read the Chryseis episode as a conflict between Apollo and the Achaeans, setting aside the tangential feud between Agamemnon and Achilles, then the first feast of the epic at *Il.* 1.446-476 functions as a formal indicator of the resolution of the episode. Within the scope of the first book of the *Iliad* – in which the Chryseis episode appears to neatly conclude – the feast to appease Apollo presents a model for the restoration of broken social bonds.

Imagining the Homeric feast as a literary space to resolve conflicts rests upon the notion of sharing, a fundamental element of the Homeric presentation of feasting. Many scholars note that the common Homeric term for feast, δαίς, shares a root with the verb δαίζω, meaning “to distribute or divide,” which frames the act of feasting in terms of the communal distribution of resources.²⁰ The notion of the equal share is grafted into the formulaic language of a frequent

²⁰ Donlan 1982: 164; Rundin 1996: 186; Sherratt 2004: 309; Bakker 2013: 39

line in Homeric feast scenes, which appears five times in the *Iliad*: δαίνοντ’, οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδέετο δαιτὸς ἕϊσης; they feasted, and no appetite was lacking an equal share (*Il.* 1.468; 1.602; 2.431; 7.320; 23.56).²¹ Metrically, the line glorifies the act of feasting, as the spondee of δαίνοντ’ dramatically punctuates the start of the line. Similarly, the final cadence of the line fits neatly into ‘δαιτὸς ἕϊσης,’ which emphasizes the fairly-divided portion as the defining feature of the feast. Bakker points to the term δαίς as something different, in a literary sense, than other terms for the activity of eating: “The meal as *dais*...highlights the symbolic value of food, in particular meat, in opposition to such terms as *deipnon* or *dorpon*, which denote the meal as a mere act of food consumption.”²² The concept of the δαίς ἕϊση – “an equal share” or “a well-divided feast” – attaches an egalitarian sense to the symbolic value of the feast, which appears in stark contrast to the unfair distribution of war plunder that drives Achilles to anger. The recurring image of the δαίς ἕϊση amid such social turmoil suggests that feasting is the space to imagine the effective, uncontroversial sharing of resources.

The feast to appease Apollo represents a δαίς ἕϊση of communal harmony, as it provides a narrative break from the Agamemnon/Achilles feud to show the resolution of Chryses’s conflict with the Achaeans. The scene occupies space away from the contentious public arena of the Achaeans and omits the characters engaged in the Achaeans’ most bitter internal conflict – Agamemnon and Achilles. Rather, it is Odysseus who sails on behalf of the Achaeans to Chryse Island with his band of Achaeans to return Chryseis to Chryses, conduct the sacrifice to Apollo, and enjoy the feast (*Il.* 1.430-445). The feast functions in isolation from the ongoing tension between Agamemnon and Achilles not only narratively but also geographically, allowing the

²¹ Sherratt 2004: 309; Bakker 2013: 39

²² Bakker 2013: 39 citing Saïd 1979: 14.

restoration of the Achaeans' relationship with Apollo to shine through unobstructed. Away from intra-Achaean turmoil, the emotional landscape of the feast is one that suggests simple reconciliation. The instigation of the feast – the presentation of the cattle and the taking up of barley – is marked with Chryses's joy (*Il.* 1.446-9):

ὥς εἰπὼν ἐν χερσὶ τίθει, ὃ δὲ δέξατο χαίρων
 παῖδα φίλην: τοὶ δ' ὄκα θεῶ ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην
 ἐξείης ἔστησαν ἐϋδμητον περὶ βωμόν,
 χερνίψαντο δ' ἔπειτα καὶ οὐλοχύτας ἀνέλοντο.

After speaking Odysseus put her in his arms, and Chryses happily received his dear child: but quickly they set a holy hecatomb to the god in order around a well-built altar, and then they washed their hands and took up barley grains.²³

Chryses's joy then extends via his connection to the divine to the happy φρένα, heart, of Apollo as he listens to the hymns sung after dinner, a confirmation of the reconciliatory power of the feast (*Il.* 1.474). The scene of the *Iliad's* first feast, then, presents a geographical and social landscape that functions as an alternate space in which conflict resolves systematically, unlike the contentious Achaean council where Agamemnon and Achilles's feud persists.

To imagine that this conflict resolution rests wholly upon every appetite receiving its equal share, however, would not account for the changes in power dynamics before and after the process of the feast. In the Chryseis episode, the right relationship between gods and men is violated when the Achaeans mistreat Chryses and, by means of Chryses, also Apollo. After the feast, however, the mark of the resolved conflict is that Apollo is worshipped by the Achaeans, his place in power over men re-established. The feast scene operates as both restorer and ideal model of the divine hierarchy in which Apollo holds total power over the Achaeans. The feast serves as the agent of the resolution in that the prayer and sacrifice of the hecatomb to Apollo,

²³ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

instrumental elements of the feasting process, function as ritual acts to restore Apollo's favor (*Il.* 1.443, 458).²⁴ Beyond their ritual power, however, these elements and the rest of the feast that follows also put on display the hierarchical ordering that they are restoring. The process of the feast – the prayer, the careful steps of sacrifice, the communal eating, the drinking, and the singing of hymns – demands the visible enactment of man's submission to the divine. It is not the satisfaction of each man with his food that concludes the scene of the feast; rather, it is the satisfaction of Apollo with the men's hymns (*Il.* 1.472-4):

οἱ δὲ πανημέριοι μολπῇ θεὸν ἰλάσκοντο
καλὸν ἀεῖδοντες παιήονα κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν
μέλποντες ἐκάεργον: ὃ δὲ φρένα τέρπετ' ἀκούων.

And for the whole day they appeased the god through song,
singing the beautiful Paean, the sons of the Achaeans,
celebrating the far-working god: and, listening, his heart was delighted.

Such a conclusion implies that feast's power to resolve social conflicts lie in their effectiveness at restoring hierarchical order, even as the rhetoric inherent in their literary representation places focus on the egalitarian satisfaction of each participant.

As a representative of Apollo on earth, the figure of Chryses particularly displays how the process of feasting both restores and represents the hierarchical power dynamic between gods and men. In initiating the feast through prayer, Chryses gains a singular power within the scene as the connection point to Apollo, set apart from all of the onlooking crowd. Even as he takes up a posture of submission in relation to Apollo, he emerges as a leader in the social space comprised of the men around him. On the one hand, the words of Chryses instigate the ritual of

²⁴ Kirk 1985: 100-101 notes that *Il.* 1.447-68 presents the fullest description of the ritual elements of sacrificial feasting in all of the *Iliad*, and the most descriptive in all of Homer barring Nestor's sacrifice at Pulos (*Od.* 4.321ff). Kirk also delineates the first part of the feast scene here as 'ritual' and the second part, following the burning of the thigh pieces, as 'secular,' but he admits that this separation is only in the strictest of senses.

atonement by inclining Apollo's ear to his request: ὡς ἔφατ' εὐχόμενος, τοῦ δ' ἔκλυε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων; So, praying, he spoke, and Phoebus Apollo heard him (*Il.* 1.457). On another level, his actions also mark his power within the process of the feast: after the young men sprinkle the barley, kill and flay the victims, and prepare the meat of the thigh pieces, it is Chryses, named as ὁ γέρον, the old man, who burns the thigh pieces and makes a libation of wine over them (*Il.* 1.462-3).²⁵ Furthermore, since the only identifiers of human characters in the narration after the prayer ends are νέοι, young men, along with γέρον, the language also lends Chryses power within the cultural hierarchical notions of age as he leads the feasting process.²⁶ Chryses's power among the other men at the feast equates with the recognition of Apollo's power over the Achaeans, which serves therefore as a reinstatement of the divine's power over men in the social reality of the epic.

The reading of the Homeric feast as a literary moment of re-ordering hierarchy gains traction if we consider the second feast of the *Iliad*, which occurs on Olympus to resolve the conflict between Zeus and Hera (*Il.* 1.584-611). The conflict between Zeus and Hera in the first book serves as a parallel conflict to that between Apollo/Chryses and the Achaeans, particularly because the conflict revolves around a disruption of hierarchical power, namely, Zeus's power over the divine sphere. The fight between them, which begins with Hera asking Zeus what he's keeping from her – a typical Hera/Zeus exchange – escalates into Zeus' declaration of physical

²⁵ Sherratt 2004: 306 remarks in cataloguing the details of Homeric feasting practices that the description of thigh pieces being cut out, wrapped in fat, and covered with wine appears only in situations emphasizing sacrifice to a god. The action's sacrificial connotations further emphasize Chryses's power as priest on Chryse Island.

²⁶ For evidence of the respect held for elders in the Homeric world, see the language the epic uses to describe Nestor at *Il.* 1.247-53. For more detailed accounts of attitudes toward age disparity in Homer, see Yamagata 1993 and Querbach 1976.

power over Hera in an effort to reassert his sovereignty over not only Olympus but also their relationship (*Il.* 1.565-7):

ἀλλ' ἀκέουσα κάθησο, ἐμῶ δ' ἐπιπείθεο μύθῳ,
μῆ νύ τοι οὐ χραΐσμωνσιν ὅσοι θεοί εἰς' ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ
ἄσσον ἰόνθ', ὅτε κέν τοι ἀάπτους χεῖρας ἐφείω.

Listen to me and sit down, and obey my word,
lest at this time the gods who are on Olympus do not defend you
against my coming near, when I set my invincible hands upon you.

Zeus's threat of physical violence with ἀάπτοι χεῖρες, invincible hands, invokes the power of his role as king of the gods and demonstrates how Hera's opposition to Zeus challenges that power.

To resolve this tension, Hephaestus calls upon the reliable social pacification of a feast. As Hephaestus places the δέπας, the goblet, into Hera's hands, and she begins to laugh, the feast begins – and seemingly miraculously, the argument between Zeus and Hera dissolves from the narrative (*Il.* 1.595). The carefree feast of the gods lasts until Zeus and Hera lie down to sleep, concluding the first book of the epic. The moment resolves the domestic tension on Olympus, just as the sacrificial feast of men provides them reconciliation with Apollo. Hera's submission, however, is an inherent part of this resolution, so that the feast is a marker of Zeus' superior place reestablished in the hierarchy of Olympus.

The placement of the gods' feasts in the narrative so closely after the feast of men on Chryse Island suggests that the literary feast can be viewed as a model for the mechanisms of social reconciliation, and the shared details in the descriptions of the two feasts enforce this reading. One such detail is the emotional affectation described for the characters as the feasts begin: Hera's smile as she takes the δέπας from Hephaestus recalls the joy of Chryses that initiates the feast of men (*Il.* 1.595, 446). Both Hera's and Chryses's happiness marks an emotional transition from anger at Zeus and anger at the Achaeans, respectively. The

reappearance of Apollo in conjunction with the music of the Muses who sing until nightfall reinforces this new emotional milieu and further evokes the feast of men, which concludes with singing hymns to Apollo until the sun sets (*Il.* 1.603-4, 472-4). The most concrete commonality, however, is the reappearance of the formulaic line δαίνοντ', οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδέετο δαιτὸς ἔϊσης (*Il.* 1.602, 1.468). This line clarifies that the feast of the gods is the same basic activity as the feast of men, thus categorizing the two scenes together as a particular type of literary moment.

The fact that the first two feasts differ in considerable ways suggests that it is the very act of feasting in itself that functions to resolve social conflicts. The feast of men extends the narrative time by describing each detail in the process of meat preparation, a process which reappears in other scenes of Homeric feasting.²⁷ The feast scene of the gods, however, describes only a drink – γλυκὸν νέκταρ, sweet nectar – which, as Jenny Strauss Clay discusses, lacks the blood that provides mortals with blood/life.²⁸ Rather, the gods' diet produces ichor in their veins which Clay interprets as “bloodless blood” with reference to *Il.* 5.339-42, where Aphrodite is injured in battle.²⁹ The description of the nectar's preparation and consumption lacks as much substance as the meal itself, spanning only three lines from the moment Hera first grasps the cup from Hephaestus (*Il.* 1.596-8):

μειδήσασα δὲ παιδὸς ἐδέξατο χειρὶ κύπελλον
 αὐτὰρ ὃ τοῖς ἄλλοισι θεοῖς ἐνδέξια πᾶσιν
 οἰνοχόει γλυκὸν νέκταρ ἀπὸ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσων.

Smiling, she took in her hand the cup from her son,
 then he from left to right for all the other gods
 poured out the wine, drawing sweet nectar from the bowl.

²⁷ Kirk 1985: 100-101

²⁸ Clay 1981: 114-15

²⁹ Clay 1981: 115

Such a brief description appears in stark contrast to the extensive narrative of food preparation in the feast to appease Apollo. Not only does the gods' feast lack substantive food, but it also lacks the stakes of the feast of men, since the gods' feast appeases the tension of a marital disagreement between two equally divine figures rather than the plague of an angry god against mortals. The first feast requires elaborate ritual, prayer, and sacrifice to restore the relationship between Apollo and the Achaeans, but none of these elements are necessary to restore Zeus and Hera's good will toward each other. Rather, simply the fact that they feast – δαίνοντ' – seems to alleviate the conflict between Zeus and Hera. The reconciliatory power of the barely described second feast suggests that feasting in the *Iliad* creates and represents social reconciliation in its own right, whether attached to any specific ritual or not.

As in the first feast, the feast of the gods re-implements hierarchical social order to restore harmony, and although the nature of the hierarchy is more ambiguous than the power of gods over men, Hephaestus's role at the feast of the gods provides a sense of how hierarchy operates within Olympian society.³⁰ Social strata among the gods emerge beyond merely Zeus's primacy as king of the gods when the figure of Hephaestus takes on the position of servant, offering the wine while the other gods laugh at his limping gait (*Il.* 1.599-600). The words that Hephaestus offers to Hera as he hands her the δέπας articulate the constant threat of Zeus's physical power over the other gods and associate Hephaestus's relegated social position with Zeus's exercise of such power in the past (*Il.* 1.586-594):

τέτλαθι μήτερ ἐμή, καὶ ἀνάσχεο κηδομένη περ,
 μή σε φίλην περ ἐοῦσαν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδωμαι
 θεινομένην, τότε δ' οὐ τι δυνήσομαι ἀχνύμενός περ
 χραισμεῖν: ἀργαλέος γὰρ Ὀλύμπιος ἀντιφέρεσθαι:
 ἦδη γὰρ με καὶ ἄλλοτ' ἀλεξέμεναι μεμαῶτα

³⁰ See Allan 2006: 6-15 for a reading of the cosmic hierarchies at play in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, particularly Zeus's supreme power over gods and men.

ῥῖψε ποδὸς τεταγῶν ἀπὸ βηλοῦ θεσπεσίῳ,
 πᾶν δ' ἤμαρ φερόμην, ἅμα δ' ἠελίῳ καταδύντι
 κάππεσον ἐν Λήμνῳ, ὀλίγος δ' ἔτι θυμὸς ἐνήεν:
 ἔνθά με Σίντιες ἄνδρες ἄφαρ κομίσαντο πεσόντα.

Be patient, my mother, and endure although you are distressed,
 lest I see you who are dear to me stricken in my sight,
 for then, although I would grieve, I would not be able in any way
 to defend you, for the Olympian is difficult to oppose:
 already on another occasion, when I was striving to defend you,
 he seized me by the foot and threw me from the divine threshold,
 and I was borne down for a whole day, until, when the sun set,
 I fell in Lemnos, and there was little life in me:
 there, straightaway, the Sintian men began to care for me, since I had fallen.³¹

Hephaestus's speech places himself spatially lower than the other gods, as the final word of his dialogue – πεσόντα – resounds into the present moment; his position as he reaches up to serve wine to his mother is a fallen one still. He returns to the βηλὸν θεσπέσιον crippled, bearing the mark of Zeus's violence in the physical stature of his body.³² Hephaestus recalls the story of his past to remind Hera and the listening gods that Zeus has power over them as well: τέτλαθι μητρεῖ ἐμή...ἀργαλέος γὰρ Ὀλύμπιος ἀντιφέρεσθαι (*Il.* 1.586, 589). Thus, Zeus's power over the other Olympians is manifest both in the spectacle of Hephaestus's body and Hephaestus's direct speech. Even as the other gods confirm Hephaestus's lower social status with their laughter at his crippled body, they implicitly acknowledge their own need to obey the almighty power of Zeus.

The two feasts of Book 1 appear to neatly restore the broken relations between Apollo and the Achaeans and Zeus and Hera; however, at the heart of Book 1 – running in and around

³¹ Many scholars have addressed the troublesome fact that this account differs from the account of his fall that Hephaestus gives at *Il.* 18.394-9, in which he claims that Hera threw him from the mountain (Kirk 1985: 113; Braswell 1971: 20-21; Rinon 2006)

³² Purves 2004: 195-200 identifies the fall of Hephaestus as participating in the human action of falling and experiencing humans' relationship to time. Within Purves's framework, Hephaestus's fall would further tie him to the act of feasting, as eating is only physically necessary for humans who experience the time-constrained cycle of hunger and satiation. For more on Hephaestus's connection to the mortal realm, see Rinon 2006

its two conciliatory feasts – we find the raging struggle between Agamemnon and Achilles. A short scene describing Achilles’ anger is the only content separating the end of the Chryses problem and the beginning of the quarreling on Mount Olympus (*Il.* 1.488-492). Like the two conflicts that we do see resolved in Book 1, Agamemnon and Achilles’ disagreement represents a slippage in the political hierarchy. By publicly challenging Agamemnon’s decision about Briseis, Achilles challenges the king’s authority. Not coincidentally, this challenge is deeply invested in the issue of redistribution – Achilles claims that Agamemnon is unfairly dividing the wealth and taking all the best for himself (*Il.* 1.122). The other nicely resolved conflicts of Book 1 set the expectation that a δαίς ἔϊση – the well-divided share of a feast – will solve tensions like these.³³ As the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles doggedly persists, however, the model of the feast as restorer of social conflicts is called into question, and the narrative moment of feasting acquires more pointed tension with the egalitarian ideals that the language of feasting ostentatiously supports.

³³ Draper 2005: 115 suggests that “Homer uses the Chryses story to lead his audience to expect a similar resolution to the Achilles story, but he overturns these expectations in book 9 [when Achilles denies appeasement and Briseis’ return]” after pointing out the similarities between Chryses’ loss of Chryseis and Achilles’ loss of Briseis.

Feasting in Achaean Politics

The model of feasting that Book 1 presents requires a single figure of power at the top of all social life, and in the context of the Achaean army, Agamemnon occupies this role. The feasts at *Il.* 2.394-440, 7.313-359, and 9.70-94 are the three scenes of a δαίς that Agamemnon initiates and facilitates in the *Iliad*, and they each reinforce and represent his purported position as monarch over all of the Achaean armies, which is tied to a sense of Achaean solidarity against the Trojans. This solidification of Agamemnon's political position relies upon the typical 'generous king' image, since Agamemnon's role as monarch is to distribute resources among the group. The enactment of the feast holds bearing not only on Agamemnon's distribution of food to the masses but also, perhaps more importantly, on his distribution of war plunder. Set against Achilles's accusations of Agamemnon's greediness with war plunder, Agamemnon's leadership role in Achaean feasting operates in tension with Achilles's ongoing rejection of Agamemnon's power, and yet the feasts he facilitates still function as sources of Achaean sociopolitical order.

Agamemnon claims a position of supreme authority over the Achaeans, and in that sense his character bears semblance to Zeus on Olympus. Calchas's fear of Agamemnon's retribution for revealing the cause of Apollo's plague offers an example of Agamemnon's perceived power among the Achaeans (*Il.* 1.78-83):

ἦ γὰρ ὄϊομαι ἄνδρα χολωσέμεν, ὃς μέγα πάντων
 Ἀργείων κρατέει καὶ οἱ πείθονται Ἄχαιοί:
 κρείσσων γὰρ βασιλεὺς ὅτε χώσεται ἀνδρὶ χέρηϊ:
 εἴ περ γὰρ τε χόλον γε καὶ αὐτῆμαρ καταπέψη,
 ἀλλὰ τε καὶ μετόπισθεν ἔχει κότον, ὄφρα τελέσση,
 ἐν στήθεσσι ἐοῖσι...

For indeed I foresee that I will anger a man who rules
 mightily over all the Achaeans and whom the Achaeans obey:
 For a king is stronger when he is angered at an inferior man:
 Even if he swallows his anger for the day at any rate,
 He holds ill-will even from the past, to eventually bring to fulfillment,

in his heart...

Calchas's awareness of his inferior status in the army as a *χερείων ἀνήρ* makes him particularly vulnerable to Agamemnon's displays of power. His fear reflects the very real threat of physical violence against challengers to Agamemnon's power, and this violence is attached to Agamemnon's status as βασιλεύς. Odysseus's beating of Thersites on Agamemnon's behalf is proof of this physical threat to a *χερείων ἀνήρ* who challenges Agamemnon's authority:

...σκήπτρω δὲ μετάφρενον ἠδὲ καὶ ὤμω / πλήξεν: ὃ δ' ἰδνώθη, θαλερὸν δέ οἱ ἔκπεσε δάκρυ;

...Odysseus struck with a scepter his back and shoulders: and Thersites was doubled over, and a thick tear fell from him (*Il.* 2.265-6).³⁴ This dynamic between Agamemnon and his men recalls the caution surrounding Zeus's anger and physical violence reflected in Hephaestus's admonition to Hera at *Il.* 1.586-594. Just as Hephaestus's body and speech reveal Zeus's position of power to rest upon physical force, so also do Calchas's words and Thersites's beaten body point to the position of absolute power that Agamemnon expects for himself among the Achaeans.

Unlike Zeus, however, Agamemnon exercises his power over a society that poses more considerable challenges to his power than the realm of the gods poses to Zeus. The threat that Agamemnon poses to Calchas, for example, is neutralized by Achilles's promise of protection (*Il.* 1.84-91):

θαρήσας μάλα εἶπε θεοπρόπιον ὅ τι οἴσθα:
οὐ μὰ γὰρ Ἀπόλλωνα Διὶ φίλον, ᾧ τε σὺ Κάλχαν
εὐχόμενος Δαναοῖσι θεοπροπίας ἀναφαίνεις,
οὔ τις ἐμεῦ ζῶντος καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένοιο
σοὶ κοίλης παρὰ νηυσὶ βαρείας χεῖρας ἐποίσει

³⁴ Note that, unlike Zeus performing his own act of physical force in throwing Hephaestus from Mount Olympus, it is Odysseus, not Agamemnon, who enacts the violence against Thersites. It is also Odysseus who restores hierarchical order by leading the sacrificial feast at *Il.* 1.446-476 in Agamemnon's stead. This nuance suggests a denser political complexity among the Achaeans than what is shown among the gods, as the chiefs are expected to uphold not only their own honor but also the supremacy of Agamemnon's monarchical position.

σμπάντων Δαναῶν, οὐδ' ἦν Ἀγαμέμνονα εἴπης,
ὅς νῦν πολλὸν ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν εὔχεται εἶναι.

Be of great courage, and speak the oracle which you know:
for by Apollo, dear to Zeus, by whom you, Calchas,
reveal oracles to the Danaans through your praying,
no one, while I live and look upon the earth,
will bring heavy hands against you by the hollow ships,
no one of all the Danaans, even if you should name Agamemnon,
who now boasts to be best of the Achaeans by far.

Achilles's rhetoric reveals the precarious nature of Agamemnon's position as monarch.

Agamemnon, according to Achilles, boasts – εὔχεται – to be ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν, which implies that the actual ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν is up for debate. Achilles's physical ability to protect Calchas from any one of the Achaeans further undercuts Agamemnon's authority, since Agamemnon's power over Calchas depends upon his ability to harm him. The most basic difference between Agamemnon and Zeus – that Agamemnon can be killed – makes Achilles's opposition to Agamemnon more potent, as he presents a threat not only to Agamemnon's political life but also his physical life. Calchas's appeal to Achilles serves a key, then, into the instability of Agamemnon's place as king among the chiefs – an instability that is unique to the realm of mortals.

Amid the political slippage outside of the space of the feast, the model of communal feasting suggests a tangible display of social equity that holds considerable bearing on Achaean politics. As discussed in chapter one, the formulaic language of the Homeric feast is rich with the notions of portions and shares, particularly the equal share granted to all involved. The common egalitarian refrain, δαίνοντ', οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδέετο δαιτὸς ἕϊσης, holds considerably more potency in the context of precarious Achaean politics than it does for the more stable relationships of gods to men or gods to other gods. In the feast on Chryse Island at *Il.* 1.446-476, the satisfaction of each mortal's appetite with a δαίς ἕϊση appears to be a happy corollary to the

true reconciliatory purpose of the feast, which is to appease Apollo through the burning of the thigh pieces and libations of wine (*Il.* 1.462-3, 468).³⁵ Likewise, in the feast on Olympus at *Il.* 1.584-611, the satisfaction of each appetite likewise lacks significance when we consider that the gods are not eating to live – their *γλυκὸν νέκταρ* serves as mere pleasantries, much like the divine music they ‘consume’ with it (*Il.* 1.602-4). When Agamemnon calls for feasts among the Achaeans, however, his act layers the symbolic suggestion of communal equity with the physical necessity of satisfying one’s appetite, thus raising the stakes of feasting’s political implications.

The Achaeans’ communal feasts stabilize Agamemnon’s political power by providing an opportunity for him to exercise his role as resource distributor in what Walter Donlan calls an economy of “chiefly redistribution.”³⁶ Donlan’s study is one of multiple helpful analyses of the Homeric universe for the economies of resource distribution represented therein.³⁷ Donlan, Rundin, and Seaford each confirm and elaborate the basic point that the figure of the βασιλεὺς in Homeric epic shows the correlation of political power with agency in redistributing communal resources.³⁸ These readings are influenced by the work of anthropological investigations that tie economic structure to stages of political development in the formation of civilizations; chief among this work is that of Marshall D. Sahlins, who wrote that “redistribution is chieftainship said in economics.”³⁹ Communal feasting in Homer offers a prime example of an economy of redistribution, as the chief of the group acts as distributor of collective resources to each

³⁵ Furthermore, it is the smell of the meat and wine that wins over Apollo, not consumption of the food itself.

³⁶ Donlan 1982: 163-4

³⁷ Donlan 1982; Seaford 1995; Rundin 1996

³⁸ Donlan 1982: 158-9; Seaford 1995: 22; Rundin 1996: 182-3

³⁹ Sahlins 1968: 95 cited in Donlan 1982: 154 and Rundin 1996: 183

member.⁴⁰ Donlan identifies the political advantage for the chief inherent to the system of redistribution: “the *dais* is an occasion for rewards to subordinates which displays the chief’s generosity, increases his prestige, and is a means of further integrating the group under the chief’s control.”⁴¹ When Agamemnon acts as distributor of a communal feast, therefore, the satisfied appetites of participants from their equal share of food reflect back on Agamemnon’s generosity. Thus the act of the feast represents and enforces his generosity as chiefly redistributor and creates solidarity among the disparate Achaean armies by binding them under one leader.

The generosity that is inherently attributed to the distributor of a well-divided feast is thematically opposite to Agamemnon’s characterization as a stingy king elsewhere in the epic. Agamemnon’s refusal to return Chryseis in Book 1 spurs Achilles to make comments about Agamemnon’s poor kingly character – namely, that he is φιλοκτηανώτατε πάντων, the most covetous of all men (*Il.* 1.122). Achilles even calls Agamemnon δημοβόρος βασιλεὺς, people-devouring king, which frames Agamemnon as consumer of his people (and their resources) rather than provider of resources for consumption. When Thersites voices similar complaints at *Il.* 2.225 and 254-256, Agamemnon initiates a feast shortly after, which suggests that the feasts that Agamemnon distributes operate within the context of these accusations of greediness. Agamemnon’s enactment of feasts, however, does not appease Achilles’s anger at him – nor, for that matter, does the feast solve the insurrection of Thersites; rather, Odysseus’s beating does. Achilles’s ongoing rebellion, then, as I will elaborate upon in chapter three, forces our reading of

⁴⁰ Donlan 1982: 163-4; see also Pullen 2011 and Halstead 2011 for anthropological work on this topic in Aegean palatial societies

⁴¹ Donlan 1982: 163-4; see also Nakassis 2012 for an anthropological study of ancient feasting as a demonstration of the ‘generous king’ type.

feasts into a more complex space than that of the simple model for social reconciliation. As the epic presents the ongoing problematization of Agamemnon's rights of power, it also troubles the directness with which the equal shares of the feast can correlate to Agamemnon's prestige and control of the group.

Donlan's reading of the economic exchanges at work in Homer's worlds illuminates a possible economic reason for Achilles's discontentment with Agamemnon. Donlan identifies Homeric society as an inchoate chiefdom transitioning out of a sharing economy, meaning that most resources, especially war plunder, are shared by the will of the collective group.⁴² For example, in Achilles's complaint to his mother, he describes that the plunder from Thebe was well-divided by the Achaeans themselves and that the men gave Chryseis to Agamemnon as his share: καὶ τὰ μὲν εὖ δάσσαντο μετὰ σοφίσιν υἱεὺς Ἀχαιῶν, / ἐκ δ' ἔλον Ἀτρεΐδῃ Χρυσήϊδα καλλιπάρηον; And the sons of Achaeans divided the things well among themselves, and out of it they chose beautiful-cheeked Chryseis for the son of Atreus (*Il.* 1.368-9). Only occasionally, including the occasions of feasts, does a chief engage in the chiefly redistribution of resources.⁴³ This transition produces considerable tension between the chiefly redistribution process and a collectively-controlled sharing economy. Donlan writes:

The distinction lies in the competence to initiate and to control the process of distribution, and reflects, therefore, the presence of differing (or "shifting") systems of social organization. In the one (the vast majority of cases) we observe "true" sharing, that is, egalitarian, noncentralized, distribution, which is associated with the social organization of tribes; the other is actually a form of ranked distribution, characteristic of the

⁴² *Il.* 1.122-126, 161-162, 366-369; 9.138, 365-367; 16.56; 18.327 cited in Donlan 1982: 158

⁴³ *Il.* 9.330-334; 11.687-688, 704-705 cited in *Ibid.*

centralized economies of chiefdoms. The economic and political consequences of this shift are great.⁴⁴

Donlan's analysis of Homeric economies indicates a possible source for the instability of Achaean political structure in the *Iliad*. The feast, as one of the best examples of chiefly redistribution in Homer, operates in tension with the alternate – and, in Donlan's framework, more traditional – economy of sharing that the armies often engage in to divide their plunder. Therefore, the seemingly egalitarian δαίς ἔϊση actually functions in opposition to the more egalitarian system of wealth distribution that is articulated in the division of Achaean plunder.

Although Achilles refuses to succumb to the political supremacy enacted in Agamemnon's feasts for the chiefs, the hierarchy that the feasts present and enforce does hold bearing on forming a unified Achaean identity against the Trojans. The feast at *Il.* 2.394-440, for example, paves the way in the narrative for the Achaeans' first engagement in battle with the Trojans, and the meal's gathering of the most important kings under Agamemnon's power is a key part of Achaean martial preparation. This solidarity that the feast produces, however, functions horizontally across disparate Achaean armies rather than vertically across class strata, as demonstrated in the distinction between the men's δεῖπνον and Agamemnon's δαίς for the chiefs (*Il.* 2.398-404):

ἀνστάντες δ' ὀρέοντο κεδασθέντες κατὰ νῆας,
 κάπνισσάν τε κατὰ κλισίας, καὶ δεῖπνον ἔλοντο.
 ἄλλος δ' ἄλλω ἔρεξε θεῶν αἰιγενετάων
 εὐχόμενος θάνατόν τε φυγεῖν καὶ μῶλον Ἄρηος.
 αὐτὰρ ὁ βοῦν ἰέρευσε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων
 πίονα πενταέτηρον ὑπερμενεί Κρονίωνι,
 κίκλησκεν δὲ γέροντας ἀριστήας Παναχαιῶν...

They got up and, scattering, started toward their ships,
 And they made fires in their huts and took their meal.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Each one made sacrifice to one of the gods who live forever,
 praying to escape death and the struggle of War.
 But Agamemnon, the lord of men, sacrificed a fat ox
 of five years to the exceedingly mighty son of Cronos,
 and he summoned the chiefs, the best of all the Achaeans...

The usage of the term Παναχαιοί for the Achaeans exemplifies the sense of unity that Agamemnon's gathering of the chiefs represents.⁴⁵ Given the exclusivity of Agamemnon's δαίς, however, we should read its communal function as the specific task of ordering the various chiefs – kings in their own right – under the common banner of the Achaean force with Agamemnon as their commander. Kirk notes that the purposes of the sacrifices that the lower and higher class of men perform are different: the men pray for self-preservation in battle, but the leaders pray for success.⁴⁶ This nuance demonstrates the connotations of the δαίς for Achaean kingly politics versus the more practical implications of the δεῖπνον. Agamemnon's δαίς for the high-level leadership of the Achaeans shows how his political stability as commander of a unified Achaean army relies not so much upon his appearance of generosity for all the men, but rather his generosity toward the most important of men.

Agamemnon's gift to Ajax during the feast at *Il.* 7.313-359 further reveals how Agamemnon's feasts demonstrate Achaean solidarity in part by extending generosity to the kingly class of the Achaean army. This feast does not depict the rituals of a sacrifice for entreaty to a god – there is no indication of burning the thigh pieces, in particular – but rather, the feast is a celebration of Ajax's victory in single combat with Hector. Although the duel between Hector

⁴⁵ Kirk 1985: 157 notes that *Il.* 2.404 is the first occurrence in the *Iliad* of the verse-end formula ἀριστήεις (-ας) Παναχαιῶν, which appears eight more times in the epic.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; Kirk also notes here that Agamemnon's provision of an ox in prime condition operates in contrast with the men's unspecified meal. He relates the scene to the food disparity depicted on the Shield of Achilles at *Il.* 18.556-60, where the royal luncheon dines on an ox while the laborers eat porridge.

and Ajax ends in a truce, the Achaeans evidently interpret Ajax's shattering of Hector's shield (*Il.* 7.250-4) and survival of the fight as *νίκη*, or victory: *Αἴαντ' ἀθ' ἐτέρωθεν εὐκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοὶ / εἰς Ἀγαμέμνονα δῖον ἄγον κεχαρηότα νίκη*; The well-greaved Achaeans led Ajax back from the other side to godlike Agamemnon, rejoicing in victory (*Il.* 7.311-2). Indeed, the verse-end *κεχαρηότα νίκη* provides the essential narrative exposition to the feast that Agamemnon gives at his tent, since the next lines directly initiate the sacrifice for the feast (*Il.* 7.313-4). Thus, just as at *Il.* 2.394-440, the act of feasting with Agamemnon's provision is thematically tied to the unified Achaean war effort.

Agamemnon's generosity anchors this sense of Achaean solidarity, not only in his general role as provider of the ox and facilitator of its slaughter, but also in his rewarding of Ajax through a choice cut of meat. Interestingly, the fact that Agamemnon awards Ajax with the chine, the length of the meat along the backbone, is syntactically tied to the formula that describes everyone's equal share (*Il.* 7.320-2):

δαίνυντ', οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἕϊσης:
 νότοισιν δ' Αἴαντα διηγεκέεσσι γέραιρεν
 ἥρωσ Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὸν κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων.

They feasted, and no appetite was lacking an equal share:
 And Agamemnon honored Ajax with the long chine,
 Agamemnon the wide-ruling hero, son of Atreus.

The juxtaposition of the formula of the equal share with the extra portion allotted to Ajax brings the tension surrounding Agamemnon's methods of distribution to the fore, as on the one hand, the act displays Agamemnon rewarding socially lauded – heroic – behavior generously, but on the other hand, the prize is a visible instance of Agamemnon negotiating the distribution of resources in a setting that is supposed to be among peers. Rundin makes a compelling argument for this tension manifesting in the multiple meanings of *ἕϊσος*, since the term can mean 'equal'

but also ‘equitable or fair based on one’s status.’⁴⁷ Ultimately, even though the moment is supposed to honor Ajax with a special share of meat, it is Agamemnon whom the text praises most noticeably – ἥρωες Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων – which indicates the political gratification for a ‘generous king’ (*Il.* 7.322). Agamemnon modifies the model of the feast’s δαίς ἔϊση with his prize-giving into a brand of ‘equality’ in which, as Rundin puts it, “some are more equal than others,”⁴⁸ and in doing so he more dramatically enacts the redistributive power that he tenuously holds as chief among the Achaeans.

The third and final instance of Agamemnon providing a feast for the Achaeans occurs by Nestor’s encouragement when the Achaeans are close to ruin, and so it solidifies the idea that feasting is politically and socially necessary for the success of both Agamemnon’s rule and the Achaeans’ victory in war (*Il.* 9.70-94). Nestor, filling his common role as giver of advice, tells Agamemnon to give a feast because it is a seemly thing for him to do, particularly given the abundant stores of wine in his ship gained from his position as ruler over many (*Il.* 9.70-3):

δαίνυ δαῖτα γέρουσιν: ἔοικέ τοι, οὗ τοι ἀεικές,
 πλεῖαί τοι οἴνου κλισίαι, τὸν νῆες Ἀχαιῶν
 ἡμάτια Θρήκηθεν ἐπ’ εὐρέα πόντον ἄγουσι:
 πᾶσά τοί ἐσθ’ ὑποδεξίη, πολέεσσι δ’ ἀνάσσεις.

Give a feast for the chiefs: it is a seemly thing for you, not shameful.
 Your huts are full of wine which the ships of the Achaeans
 bring by day on the wide sea from Thrace:
 You have all the means to entertain guests, as you are lord over many.

The feast serves as an essential gathering place for the chiefs in this difficult time in the war, and while Nestor goes on to elaborate that the feast will serve as an opportunity for wise counsel to be given, his reference to Agamemnon’s πλεῖαί κλισίαι, full huts, indicates that the feast also

⁴⁷ Rundin 1996: 195-6

⁴⁸ Rundin 1996: 196

serves an unspoken purpose to re-establish Agamemnon's political position and good public image. Nestor's reminder points subtly to the political danger of appearing to be an un-generous king for a public figure whose rights to kingship are slippery at best.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the context of the war – namely, that for the Achaeans, it is going badly – firmly ties Agamemnon's image of generosity to the hope of victory against the Trojans. Nestor's advice demonstrates how the act of feasting serves as an essential stabilizing nexus for Agamemnon's visibly generous distribution of resources, the viability of Achaean unity under Agamemnon, and the success of the Achaeans in battle against the Trojans.

Ultimately, each instance of Agamemnon serving as distributor of a feast holds similar political consequences within the world of the Achaeans: Agamemnon affirms his generosity to others and asserts his power over the Achaeans. The narrative contexts and the language that characters use surrounding these feasts suggest that this crystallization of Agamemnon's position correlates to the success of the Achaean army against Troy. The stabilization of Agamemnon's power through the chiefly-redistributive act of feasting, however, is one fraught with difficulties, particularly among the other Achaean chiefs who also have claims on power and resources. Perhaps what still allows these feasts to function as stabilizers of Agamemnon's power is the absence of his fiercest political opponent – Achilles. This absence is painfully noticeable, however. As the epic develops and the Achaeans' fare in war turns bleak, Achilles's rejection of Achaean hierarchy becomes more pressing in the narrative. As the next chapter discusses, this rebellion deeply unsettles any suggestion of Achaean unity or political stability that the feasts of Agamemnon seem to represent.

⁴⁹ Of course, one could also read Nestor's injunction to Agamemnon as a self-invitation to the best party house masquerading as sage political advice. I think it is possible for both readings to be true.

Feasting (and Fasting) as Political Disruption

The reinforcement of political hierarchy and Achaean unity that the feasts examined thus far display always operates in the context of the epic's wider narrative, which includes the challenge of Achilles against Agamemnon's rule and the consequences of this challenge for the Achaean war effort against the Trojans. As I have mentioned in my discussion of these feasts, Achilles's rebellion against Agamemnon introduces thematic tension to the model of reconciliation, hierarchy, and unity that the feast seems to present. This tension so far has been read as a tacit force in the feasting scenes, since Achilles is neither present nor mentioned at the feasts of *Il.* 1.446-76, 1.584-611, 2.394-440, 7.313-353, or 9.89-94.

Achilles's rejection of Agamemnon's power takes on a more obvious significance to the feast scenes, however, when we consider his engagement with feasts and food in Books 9, 19, 23, and 24. In these instances Achilles subverts the expected political functions of feasting, whether by taking on the role of generous feast distributor (*Il.* 9.205-230), publicly refusing to eat (*Il.* 19.203-14), receiving divine food from Athena (*Il.* 19.349-56), begrudging having to eat at Patroclus's funeral feast (*Il.* 23.48-61), or, most pointed of all, hosting Priam for a meal in his tent (*Il.* 24.621-42). In many ways, these moments set Achilles against Agamemnon and apart from the unified body of Achaeans, which marks a turn away from the general political effect of the other feasts in the *Iliad*. At the same time, however, Achilles's feasts, particularly his meal with Priam, display the Homeric feast's emblematic values of social equality and reconciliation in more radical ways than the feasts of Agamemnon's seem to. Thus, the figure of Achilles proves the viability of the model of feasting as social reconciliation in the *Iliad* even as he challenges the model's contingency upon Achaean political hierarchy.

Achilles's feast for Ajax, Phoenix, and Odysseus at *Il.* 9.205-230 presents a political challenge to Agamemnon since it appropriates the position of chiefly redistributor to which Agamemnon holds a claim as Achaean commander. As discussed in chapter two, the economy of chiefly redistribution that feasting exemplifies correlates with the singular power of the distributing chief, particularly because the so-called equal shares of the meal grant the chief a public image as the 'generous king.' When Agamemnon facilitates feasts, they stabilize Achaean political structure by reinforcing Agamemnon's place as commander of all of the Achaeans. When Achilles takes on that role, in contrast, the moment is politically destabilizing, as his provision of an abundant feast demonstrates his own power and generosity rivaling Agamemnon's. Odysseus opens his appeal to Achilles with a direct comparison of Achilles's ability to provide a feast with Agamemnon's (*Il.* 9.225-28a):

χαῖρ' Ἀχιλεῦ· δαιτὸς μὲν εἴσης οὐκ ἐπιδευεῖς
 ἤμην ἐνὶ κλισίῃ Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἄτρεΐδαο
 ἥδ' ἐ καὶ ἐνθάδε νῦν, πάρα γὰρ μενοεικέα πολλὰ
 δαίνυσθ'...

Hail, Achilles: we are not lacking an equal feast-share
 in the hut of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
 nor now in this your hut, for in satisfying abundance
 you have provided this feast...

Odysseus's statement matches Achilles's abundance of resources and generosity with that of Agamemnon. On a surface level, Odysseus's comment serves the rhetorical purpose of satisfying Achilles's sense of pride to make his following argument that Achilles should join the war more persuasive. On another level, however, Odysseus's equation of Achilles's wealth and hospitality to Agamemnon's indicates an underlying politically nefarious possibility – that Achilles is just as capable of being the generous distributing chieftain as Agamemnon is. As Achilles takes on the

stance of feast distributor and is deemed to be worthy of such a position, Agamemnon's singular power as redistributor of Achaean resources is implicitly challenged.

Achilles shares the work of preparing the feast with named others, however, which disrupts Achaean hierarchical order on a more foundational level by presenting an image of shared power rather than monarchy. The preparatory labor is collective work shared among Achilles, Patroclus, and Automedon. The interdependence of these subjects is evident in the initial string of acts each performed by a different actor, as in succession Patroclus sets the fleshing-block and meat into the fire, Automedon holds the pieces, and Achilles carves (*Il.* 9.205-9):

ὥς φάτο, Πάτροκλος δὲ φίλῳ ἐπεπέιθεθ' ἑταίρῳ.
 αὐτὰρ ὃ γε κρεῖον μέγα κάββαλεν ἐν πυρὸς ἀγῆι,
 ἐν δ' ἄρα νῶτον ἔθηκ' ὄϊος καὶ πίονος αἰγός,
 ἐν δὲ συδὸς σιάλοιο ράχιν τεθαλυῖαν ἀλοιφῆι.
 τῷ δ' ἔχεν Αὐτομέδων, τάμνεν δ' ἄρα δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

When he had spoken thus, Patroclus obeyed his dear companion.
 he threw down a large block in the light of the fire,
 and on it he placed the back of a sheep and of a fat goat,
 and on them the chine of a fat hog, rich with fat.
 and Automedon held these things, while godlike Achilles cut them.

The rest of the preparatory work is only done by Patroclus and Achilles, but the syntax muddles a clear picture of who is performing which line of work, creating a sense of close teamwork

between the two friends (*Il.* 9.210-5):

καὶ τὰ μὲν εὖ μίστυλλε καὶ ἀμφ' ὀβελοῖσιν ἔπειρε,
 πῦρ δὲ Μενoitιάδης δαῖεν μέγα ἰσόθεος φῶς.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατὰ πῦρ ἐκάη καὶ φλόξ ἐμαράνθη,
 ἀνθρακιῆν στορέσας ὀβελούς ἐφύπερθε τάνυσσε,
 πάσσε δ' ἄλός θείοιο κρατευτῶν ἐπαείρας.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' ὤπησε καὶ εἰν ἔλεοῖσιν ἔχευε...

Then Achilles sliced the meat well and pierced it through on both sides with spits,
 and the godlike son of Menoetius kindled the fire to great light
 but when the fire had burned, and the flame had died out,

he scattered the hot embers and stretched the spits out over top,
and he sprinkled the divine salt when he had joined the spits to the cooking stones.
but when he had roasted the meat and placed it on platters...

It is only in the final lines of the preparatory work that the tasks of Patroclus and Achilles are separated from each other by their names, and their names open and close the couplet in a neat conclusion to the extended preparation scene (*Il.* 9.216-7):

Πάτροκλος μὲν σῖτον ἐλὼν ἐπένειμε τραπέζῃ
καλοῖς ἐν κανέοισιν, ἀτὰρ κρέα νεῖμεν Ἀχιλλεύς.

Patroclus, taking up the bread, distributed it on the table
in beautiful baskets, then Achilles dealt out the meat.

Although Achilles's work indicates his ultimate superiority since it is most connected to the preparation of the meat, the fact that Patroclus and Automedon are emphasized in the narrative as contributors to the preparation sets this scene apart from other feast preparation scenes in the *Iliad*. When Agamemnon gives a feast, there are usually helpers implied by third person plural verbs, but they always remain nameless.⁵⁰ The cooperation of Achilles, Patroclus, and Automedon hints, albeit imperfectly, at the collective power over resources that occurs under a sharing economy rather than a system of single-ruler redistribution.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See *Il.* 2.402-30 and 7.314-9, where it is said that Agamemnon slays the bull, but the rest of the preparatory work is carried out by others. At *Il.* 9.89-90, where the description of the feast is highly condensed, Agamemnon alone is said to set out the feast, further erasing those who help prepare the food. The practicality that more men would be needed to prepare the larger feasts that Agamemnon facilitates, and thus cannot all be named, does not negate the distinctive power dynamic that the narrative at *Il.* 9.205-230 establishes with its emphasis on the presence of Patroclus and Automedon in Achilles's feast preparation.

⁵¹ For further evidence of Achilles's association with shared power rather than monarchy, see Achilles's promise to Phoenix that, upon abandoning service to Agamemnon, he can join Achilles and rule beside him as an equal, sharing half the honor: ἴσον ἐμοὶ βασίλευε καὶ ἡμισυ μείρεο τιμῆς; Rule on an equal level to me, and receive as your portion half of my honor. (*Il.* 9.616).

Since Achilles's feast for Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix occurs at the height of his rebellion against Agamemnon, it is reasonable that it might represent a disruption of the distributive politics that enforce Agamemnon's rule. However, even after Achilles publicly reconciles with Agamemnon in Book 19, he remains a problematic figure within the feasting life of the Achaeans. Indeed, for much of the rest of the epic, he refuses feasting point-blank, declaring a fast until he slays Hector (*Il.* 19.203-14). In doing so, Achilles refuses Odysseus's recommendation that Agamemnon host Achilles in his hut for a reconciliatory feast (*Il.* 19.179-80), which disrupts the model of reconciliation that the Chryseis episode establishes in Book 1.⁵² Achilles pronounces a public appeasement to his anger at Agamemnon, but his refusal to participate in the expected reconciliatory ritual of feasting disallows a return to stable Achaean political hierarchy. Although Achilles rejoins the Achaean army in fighting the Trojans, his return to a subservient place within the Achaean hierarchy remains incomplete. Achilles fights on an individual basis, fighting to kill only one person – Hector – and driven by revenge for one friend – Patroclus. It is not for the sake of Agamemnon, Menelaus, or the cause of the Achaeans at large that Achilles returns to the fight. Achilles's continued denial of Agamemnon's sovereignty over the chiefs and a refusal to submit his individual desires to the agenda of the Achaean community is manifested, then, in his choice to fast rather than feast.

Achilles's language as he encourages the Achaeans to go to battle without eating suggests an alternate understanding of the concept of the *δαίς* that is based in his personal grief for Patroclus rather than a concern for the communal needs of the Achaeans. Although it is *δαίς* that

⁵² Nagy 1979: 127-37 ties Achilles's troublesome relationship to the *dais*, including this refusal to share in a reconciliatory feast with Agamemnon, to his overall distinguishing problem of gaining the proper share, *moira*. This quality factors into the figure of Achilles's values as a Panhellenic figure rather than a local cult hero.

Odysseus calls for between Achilles and Agamemnon (*Il.* 19.179), Achilles's response frames the bidding to be merely practical – ὑμεῖς δ' ἐξ βρωτῶν ὀτρύνετον; you two urge us toward meat (*Il.* 19.205). Such a turn shows a complete rejection of the ideology and social implications of the δαίς, which is as much a social ritual as it is a practical meal. Achilles even ignores the possibility of a δαίς in the even that Hector is killed, as he only suggests that a μέγα δόρπον, a large, practical meal, should be prepared for the Achaean men (*Il.* 19.208). Indeed, it is only in his reference to Patroclus's cleaved body – δεδαῖγμένος, divided up – that he comes close to addressing the concept of the δαίς with his usage of the verb δαίζω.⁵³ Set against his staunch avoidance of feasting, Achilles's description of Patroclus as δεδαῖγμένος functions as an ironic turn on the notion of division. In lieu of the divisions of plentiful meat from a generous king, Achilles sets his attention instead on the violent division of Patroclus's broken body.

When Achilles receives sustenance in the form of godly nectar and ambrosia from Athena (*Il.* 19.349-56), the instance demonstrates a near-opposite form of eating from the communal feast. Achaean meals are times for social bonds to form and re-form, but Athena's gift of nectar and ambrosia reaches Achilles alone. Achilles himself does not even realize that Athena is feeding him. Such a method of eating, if one can call it that, is starkly isolated, bearing no traces of the deeply social eating habits of the Achaeans.⁵⁴ Furthermore, I have shown repeatedly how feasts in the *Iliad* are times for the political hierarchy of a group to be displayed and justified through visible signs of generosity, but this act is invisible. Although the narrative voice of the epic reveals the meal and thus indicates Achilles's special favor with the gods, the

⁵³ Edwards 1985: 259 notes that Achilles's phrase, δεδαῖγμένος... / κείται, echoes κέαται δεδαῖγμένοι, a common phrase for the slain.

⁵⁴ See Hammer 1997 for a reading of Achilles as a model of autonomy in opposition to hierarchy in the *Iliad*.

act is not meant to be seen, and the rest of the Achaeans rushing to war around Achilles take no notice. The source of the provision – Athena – receives no reciprocal reward or increase in reputation for being the provider. Indeed, the invisibility of the meal renders it essentially apolitical. Thus, the moment of Achilles’s nectar and ambrosia meal frames his fast as an even more drastic opposition to the values and expectations of the Achaean δαίς.

Achilles’s participation in an Achaean feast at last at *Il.* 23.48-61 – Patroclus’s funeral feast – would notionally resolve the social tension that builds from his fasting; however, the moment fails to fulfill the communal, reconciliatory expectations of feasting. Patroclus’s funeral feast is a highly condensed moment with no description of its preparation and barely any account of its consumption (*Il.* 23.55-6):

ἔσσυμένως δ’ ἄρα δόρπον ἐφοπλίσσαντες ἕκαστοι
δαίνυντ’, οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς εἴσης.

Hurrying, each got ready the meal
and they feasted, and no appetite was lacking an equal share.

Just as the adverb ἔσσυμένως responds to Achilles’s tone of urgency,⁵⁵ so also does the quick narrative pacing, which briskly glosses over the details of the preparation of a meal of such a scale. Achilles’s willingness to participate in the feast is equally limited, as seen in his deeply begrudging instigation of the event: ἀλλ’ ἦτοι νῦν μὲν στυγερῆ πειθώμεθα δαιτί; but now let us be persuaded to this abominable feast (*Il.* 23.48). Although Achilles concedes to eat since Hector has been killed and Patroclus revenged, the funeral feast still refuses any full sense of communal restoration between Achilles and the rest of the Achaeans because of his open resentment of the meal. Rather, it is Achilles’s individual grief standing out from his community that powerfully closes the scene, as all of the Achaeans go back to their own hut, but Achilles remains groaning

⁵⁵ Richardson 1985: 171

on the shore of the sea ἐν καθαρῷ, in an open space (*Il.* 23.57-61). Such a conclusion to the feast rejects the re-stabilization of social bonds and communal reconciliation that feasts repeatedly display in the *Iliad*.⁵⁶ Instead, the social isolation that Achilles embodies with his fast persists through Patroclus's funeral feast, as the feast produces not a communal movement to sleep but rather the lone wakefulness of Achilles.⁵⁷

Achilles's denial and resentment of the communal feasts among Achaeans functions as a refusal to reconcile fully to the Achaean community and their collective goals, but in a spectacular turn in the final book of the *Iliad*, Achilles finally participates wholeheartedly in a deeply reconciliatory feast with Priam, king of Troy. In one of the most emotionally stirring moments of the epic, Achilles's agreement to relinquish Hector's body to Priam to be returned to Troy leads to a deeply intimate feast between Achilles and Priam that ultimately results in Priam breaking his own fast of grief (*Il.* 24.601-42). This moment serves as an essential concluding scene to the epic that finally resolves Achilles's μῆνις – the rage that functions as the driving source of conflict in the epic from its first line – and addresses his grief over Patroclus. Achilles and Priam's feast exemplifies perhaps more than any other feast of the *Iliad* how the feast type-scene cannot be read as merely a transitional moment between scenes or a meaningless conglomerate of formulaic language; rather, the feast scene serves as essential space for exemplifying the thematic direction of the epic at large.

⁵⁶ See *Il.* 1.446-76, where the feast closes with a day of the Achaeans joyfully singing hymns to Apollo; *Il.* 1.584-611, where Hera and Zeus, reconciled for the time being, go to sleep together in their golden bed; or *Il.* 2.394-440, where Agamemnon's feast rallies the Achaean troops to fight again against the Trojans.

⁵⁷ When Patroclus's ghost appears soon after the feast, of course, Achilles stops being a lone figure. In this visitation, however, Achilles participates in a communal moment that operates in the spirit world rather than the earthly realm of roasted meat and Achaean politics, and thus remains oppositional to the social values of the Achaean feast.

On one level, the feast between Priam and Achilles marks a particularly dramatic return to the model of social reconciliation that the first feasts of the *Iliad* set up as the expectation for these scenes. Just as the feast at *Il.* 1.446-476 marks the restored relationship between Apollo and the Achaeans and the divine feast at *Il.* 1.584-611 marks a resolution to Hera and Zeus's disagreement, the feast between Achilles and Priam serves as a marker of Achilles's decision to return Hector to Priam as well as the implicit assurance that Priam is not in danger in his hut (*Il.* 24.599-601). Unlike the brief, unsatisfying feast that Achilles calls for among the Achaeans at Patroclus's funeral, the language of this feast utilizes familiar feasting formulas,⁵⁸ which further associates the moment with the expected communal values of feasting (*Il.* 24.621-7):

ἦ καὶ ἀναΐξας οἶν ἄργυρον ὠκύς Ἀχιλλεύς
 σφάξ': ἔταροι δ' ἔδερὸν τε καὶ ἄμφεπον εὖ κατὰ κόσμον,
 μίστυλλον τ' ἄρ' ἐπισταμένως πεῖραν τ' ὀβελοῖσιν,
 ὄπτησάν τε περιφραδέως, ἐρύσαντό τε πάντα.
 Αὐτομέδων δ' ἄρα σῖτον ἐλὼν ἐπένειμε τραπέζῃ
 καλοῖς ἐν κανέοισιν: ἀτὰρ κρέα νεῖμεν Ἀχιλλεύς.
 οἱ δ' ἐπ' ὀνειάθ' ἐτοῖμα προκείμενα χεῖρας ἴαλλον.

So then swift Achilles sprang up and slaughtered a silver-white sheep
 and his companions skinned it and busied themselves well in good order.
 They sliced it knowingly and pierced it with the spits,
 and roasted it very skillfully and drew everything off.
 Automedon, taking up the bread, distributed it on the table
 in beautiful baskets: then Achilles dealt out the meat.
 And they put forth their hands to the prepared food before them.

The feast between Achilles and Priam, therefore, serves as a confirmation of the viability of the model of social reconciliation that feasting presents at various points in the epic. Although Achilles rejects this sort of reconciliation with Agamemnon, his willingness to offer a feast to Priam serves as a definite and powerful resolution of the conflict between Achilles and Hector that dominates the thematic landscape of the epic after the death of Patroclus.

⁵⁸ Richardson 1985: 342

Ironically, the feast between Achilles and Priam displays a level of social reconciliation that actually surpasses the expectations of the sort of conflict that feasting can resolve. To use the feast of the gods as an example of a typical feast, the conflict addressed is a minor spat between Zeus and Hera, and it is solved by glossing over the problem at a rather superficial level; as seen in the rest of the epic and indeed, the tropes of Olympian mythology, Zeus and Hera's relationship is by no means repaired permanently in this moment of feasting. The process of reconciliation between Achilles and Priam, however, operates on a deeper relational level. The conflict's resolution involves Priam kissing the hands of the man who killed his son - ἀνδρὸς παιδοφόνοιο ποτὶ στόμα χεῖρ' ὀρέγεσθαι; I have put to my mouth the hands of the man who killed my son (*Il.* 24.506) – and an ultimate recognition of shared grief that leaves both men weeping together (*Il.* 24.509-12):

τὼ δὲ μνησαμένω ὃ μὲν Ἑκτορος ἀνδροφόνοιο
 κλαῖ' ἀδινὰ προπάροιθε ποδῶν Ἀχιλῆος ἐλυσθείς,
 αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς κλαῖεν ἐὼν πατέρ', ἄλλοτε δ' αὖτε
 Πάτροκλον: τῶν δὲ στοναχὴ κατὰ δώματ' ὀρώρει.

And the two men remembered. The one remembering man-slaying Hector wept thickly, crouching before the feet of Achilles, while Achilles wept for his father, and then again for Patroclus, and their groaning rose throughout the house.

This common grief not only permeates the feast between the two men, but it also instigates the eating, as Achilles persuades Priam to eat with him by likening Priam and himself to grieving Niobe, who takes time to eat after her twelve slain children are finally buried ten days after their death (*Il.* 24.602-20). The feast that marks such an intense relational transformation is a deeply intimate moment of recognition for the two men, as is evidenced by the narrative's extension of the moment in which they inspect and admire each other's' faces after eating (*Il.* 24.628-32):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο,
 ἦτοι Δαρδανίδης Πρίαμος θαύμαζ' Ἀχιλῆα

ὄσσοις ἔην οἴος τε: θεοῖσι γὰρ ἅντα ἐόκει:
 αὐτὰρ ὃ Δαρδανίδην Πρίαμον θαύμαζεν Ἀχιλλεὺς
 εἰσορόων ὄψιν τ' ἀγαθὴν καὶ μῦθον ἀκούων.

Then, when they had put away from them the desire for food and drink,
 Priam, son of Dardanus, marveled at Achilles,
 how great he was and what sort of person he was, for he seemed like the gods up close.
 But Achilles marveled at Priam, son of Dardanus,
 as he looked upon his good face and listened to his words.

Such a moment is a much more drastic sort of reconciliation than the other feasts of the *Iliad* exemplify, and its narrative presentation emphasizes the personal, emotionally charged reconciliation rather than collective or institutional appeasement. Thus, even as the feast between Achilles and Priam confirms the basic model of social reconciliation, the feast also bends expectations for the emotional context in which this reconciliation plays out.

The feast between Achilles and Priam poses a more considerable challenge to the established model of the feast when we consider the sociopolitical implications of their eating together as enemies of war. Priam's presence in Achilles's tent entirely transgresses the geographic and social boundaries of the Achaean community, as he sneaks through into their camp with the help of Hermes and is granted safety by Achilles (*Il.* 24.440-67, 80-84). It is an understatement to suggest that Achilles's hospitality towards Priam is oppositional to the sociopolitical priorities of the Achaean army in their war effort against the Trojans.⁵⁹ The social bond created by the feast that they share – and the emotional intimacy that their feast represents – collapses the violent antagonism between the opposing identity categories of “Achaean” and “Trojan” that develops in the context of wartime. I have demonstrated extensively how the feast's power of social reconciliation and unity depends on its visible reproduction of

⁵⁹ Hermes's help in maintaining the secrecy of Priam's visit indicates the extent to which Achilles's hospitality deviates from good Achaean behavior. If any other Achaean were to find Priam in their camp, his life would be in danger.

hierarchical order, particularly in the context of Achaean society. In a way that recalls Achilles's godly supply of nectar and ambrosia, however, this meal is invisible to all but Achilles, Priam, and Achilles's closest subordinates, which renders it outside of the competing political sphere in which Agamemnon performs generosity for the Achaeans. At the same time, Achilles's and Priam's reconciliation dramatically subverts the Achaean hierarchy that places Achilles under the command of Agamemnon and necessarily opposed to Priam. Thus, the feast between Priam and Achilles starkly upturns the function of feasting to create Achaean solidarity against the Trojans; rather, the feast destabilizes the border between Achaeans and Trojans created by their opposition in the war.

The final feast between Achilles and Priam is a complex culmination of the values that are modelled in the repeated patterns of the *Iliad's* feasting scenes and the values that Achilles demonstrates in his opposition to Agamemnon. On the one hand, the healing of Priam's and Achilles's relationship recalls the model of social restoration that feasts present in earlier parts of the *Iliad*, indicated by the oft-repeated formulaic language representing social bonds and satisfied appetites. On the other hand, the feast amplifies Achilles's opposition to the general Achaean political agenda that Agamemnon uses feasts to enforce. These functions contradict the pattern of the other feasts of the *Iliad*, where social restoration is entirely contingent upon the re-establishment of strict sociopolitical hierarchy. Indeed, all of Achilles's engagements with eating – his feast for Agamemnon's emissary, his fasting, his participation in Patroclus's funeral feast, and his feast with Priam – mark the thematic development of Achilles's political opposition to Agamemnon. In these instances Achilles embodies an economic model that is opposed to a monarchical redistribution system and subtly suggests a more collective sharing economy. The fact that this tension in fact manifests the premiere narrative conflict of the epic is indicative of

the extent to which the *Iliad's* feast scenes ground the thematic scope of the epic. The next chapter will demonstrate how the repeated scenes of the feast would have served as a keen site of self-identification and reflection for early Homeric audiences as they experienced a time of intense sociopolitical transition at the start of the archaic period in Greece.

The Feasting Audience

If we consider the text of Homeric epic to have evolved from a long oral tradition into a written form,⁶⁰ then the *Iliad*'s meaning cannot be considered properly outside of the context of its history of oral performance. Thus, my mining of the literary significance of the *Iliad*'s feasts leads now into a stretching of the scope of a conventional literary analysis to include the matter of early performance. Performance and audience reception is a particularly essential component to consider for the feast scenes because of the common idea that epic poetry was in fact performed at feasts.⁶¹ Certainty about the occasions of the *Iliad*'s performance is impossible, but the prospect of an audience of the *Iliad* sharing a meal together as they listen to the feast scenes described in the epic is a compelling enough image to consider at length. Such a moment would have produced a meta-narrative to point to the audience's own experiences with the distribution of resources in a complex sociopolitical environment.⁶² Thus, the feasts of the *Iliad* would have served as a bridge for the early, listening audience between the world of the epic and their own lived experience as feasters in a particular sociopolitical environment. This relationship between early audience and narrative is an intrinsic part of the text as we now read it, since the written text is a product of this very relationship being re-produced countless times over centuries in oral performance. The audience may find traces of their own experience among the elements of social reconciliation, sharing, and communal satisfaction that permeate the *Iliad*'s feast scenes, but so also might they find themselves engaged in the epic's thematic tensions concerning resource distribution, monarchy, and conflicting group interests that the feasts manifest and emphasize.

⁶⁰ Nagy 1996

⁶¹ Sherratt 2004: 308; Murray 2008: 163-9

⁶² Sherratt 2004: 308 refers to this quality as the "reflective aspect" of Homeric feasting.

In referencing the early audience's relationship to the *Iliad*'s feasts, I have specified my investigation to the audience in the early Archaic period, which begins in the middle of the eighth century BCE.⁶³ The question of dating the first written text of the *Iliad* is an impossible question to answer, but we could do worse than operating under Nagy's model of the text's evolution, which has the *Iliad* remaining in an oral state until after the early Archaic period.⁶⁴ Nagy marks the mid-8th through mid-6th century B.C.E. as a formative, pan-Hellenic period in which the Homeric texts were still transmitted entirely orally, with no written text.⁶⁵ Even if this time span included a written text, as West suggests,⁶⁶ it is still easy to imagine that Homeric epic was still often appreciated in the context of a bard's performance. There is also advantage to a study of narrative reception in the early Archaic period because, unlike the historically obscure Dark Ages, it is possible to identify elements of the social and political climate that would have provided context for the audience's reception of the narrative. The early Archaic period was a time of intense sociopolitical transition that would in time move Greece into a system of the polis, or city-state.⁶⁷ Such a drastic change does not occur without considerable tension as new systems of economics and politics supersede the old, however, and the early Archaic period was no exception.

The establishment of the polis system was a culmination of a broader movement toward a system of *synoikismos*, or settling together, which marked a distinct shift from the basic organizational unit of the *oikos* that seems to have defined the social structure of Dark Age

⁶³ Bryant 1996: 41

⁶⁴ Nagy 1996

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 69-71

⁶⁶ West 2011

⁶⁷ Finley 1983: 110; Bryant 1996: 41

Greece.⁶⁸ This movement took place amid a flourishing of material prosperity, enormous population growth, and the colonization of foreign lands.⁶⁹ In the sphere of religious practice, this shift led to a growing sense of communalism that came to overtake the domestic and personal concerns.⁷⁰ Donlan refers to the evolution into the polis system as a move away from a “kinship-and-loyalty” tribal system, and thus, he claims, the transition “undercut the traditional bonds of social integration” with “institutionalized political authority.”⁷¹ The leaders of the most powerful lineages formed an aristocratic class that came to hold political power in the polis, and the figure of the *basileus*, the traditional chief of a smaller communal unit, lost its already crumbling power.⁷² Military innovations followed as well, most notably that the strategy of the phalanx came to replace the loose, sparse fighting such as that which the *Iliad* depicts.⁷³ These shifts were all implicated within the altering understanding of whom one’s community entails, as the Archaic period hearkened the units of social groups expanding considerably.

The Archaic period ultimately culminated in these changes becoming the new norm for Greek society, but the transition into these altered communal states – the early Archaic period – would have been a time fraught with contradicting understandings of duty and community. Ian Morris identifies early Archaic participation in tomb cults associated with Mycenaean figures as a turn to the past to regain a sense of social stability.⁷⁴ Members of tumultuously changing eighth century communities emphasized tomb cults to express contradictory ideologies, both the ideal

⁶⁸ Bryant 1996: 42

⁶⁹ Donlan 1999: 37

⁷⁰ This trend expands further to manifest as pan-Hellenic religious festivals during this period, in contrast with local cult activities.

⁷¹ Donlan 1999: 38

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Morris 1988

of the polis and the more traditional ideal of the smaller communal leaders. Hammer is right, however, to push back against Morris's reading of archaeological evidence as either anti-polis or pro-polis ideology, as to do so imposes a dichotomy that is not evidenced in the historical record.⁷⁵ Morris's assertion of intense social tumult and the need for cultural stability must certainly be true; however, Hammer's critique points to the essential fact that this tension manifested in contradictory, complex forms. On analyzing sociopolitical tensions, Hammer concludes:

Difference and conflict certainly develop in the archaic world. The problem with Kurke's and Morris's framework is that they do not give us the tools for understanding either the nature or the extent of that conflict. Lost in Kurke's and Morris's analysis is any sense of politics as more than simply who has dominance. It is also an activity in which the fundamental problems of the organization of community life are shaped, challenged, and understood. If we are to understand this activity, we must do more than import a grammar of opposition. We must be attentive to the symbolic processes by which individuals and groups talk to, and understand, each other as they shape and give meaning to community life.⁷⁶

In approaching the social tumult of early Archaic Greece, then, it should be done with a mind for the complexity with which social tensions play out in communities, with the lines between old and new ways often blurring uncomfortably.

I see a similar, narrativized version of the complex manifestations of social tension that Hammer describes playing out in the feast scenes of the *Iliad*, as various sociopolitical

⁷⁵ Hammer 2004: 481-6

⁷⁶ Hammer 2004: 506

implications about the right of Agamemnon to rule other chiefs, the generosity of his chiefly redistribution, and the duty that Achilles owes to the unified Achaeans are expressed simultaneously. The *Iliad*'s feasts display conflicting political meanings on a variety of levels: 1) Even as the feasts' formulaic language suggests egalitarian-minded equal shares among a well-bonded community, the source of those shares is a single person who gains power within the social hierarchy by enacting his role as distributor; 2) The feasts that Agamemnon facilitates frame him as a 'generous king' and thus unite the Achaeans for war, but they also mark a shift away from the sharing economy displayed when the troops divide their plunder with collective agency; 3) Achilles's ongoing opposition occasionally manifests as feasts, in which he displays the same opulence of resources that he begrudges Agamemnon having the rights to and engages in the same method of social bonding, but his feast with Priam shows how Achilles builds community with the wrong person – an Achaean enemy – abandoning his duty to benefit the Achaean social organization. These interlocking tensions make it impossible to pinpoint any feast scene – or, even more so, the type scene of the 'feast' in the epic at large – as a model supporting either one form of political-economic structure (Agamemnon's supreme chieftainship and redistribution of resources) or the other (Achilles's tribe-based, sharing economy). Rather, the feast scenes are the repositories for contradictory value systems to be expressed in multiple, often simultaneous, forms.

The notion of contradictory values being simultaneously expressed at a given moment in the *Iliad*'s feast scenes seems likely to have resonated with the sociopolitical situation of early Archaic Greeks as they listened and potentially feasted alongside their own fraught communities. But what do we know about these occasions of reflection? The basic concept that early audiences listened to oral poetry at feasts is a troublesome one if we look to the model of the *Odyssey* as an

example.⁷⁷ As Nagy points out, “the epic poetry of Homer refers to epic poetry as a medium that was performed in the context of an evening’s feast. Yet we know that the two epic poems of Homer, by virtue of their sheer length alone, defy this context.”⁷⁸ Nagy refers to a festival such as the Panathenaia as a more likely location, and Murray confirms in the vein of Oliver Taplin that the *Iliad* itself is structured for a full performance at a large, three-day festival of such a sort.⁷⁹ Such an event would necessarily include eating together, as Sherratt remarks: “[G]iven the probability that they were elaborated and performed at festivals at some supraregional sanctuary such as Delos, a context of large-scale religious feasting is almost assured.”⁸⁰ When the audience feasted, their experience would have fallen into line with the *Iliad*’s problematization of the boundaries of political entities and social bonds in its feast scenes.⁸¹ That such reflexivity would be imposed at a Pan-Hellenic festival implies a setting that inherently challenged older, more atomized social structures. The setting of such a festival, by nature of its association with the polis structures and the expansion of the communal unit in early Archaic Greece, would lend particular poignancy to the conflict of alternate social structures that plays out in the *Iliad*’s feasts.

A clear image of what sort of tensions may have been recognizable in the audience’s setting through the reflective element of the *Iliad*’s feast scenes is impossible to surmise, so I

⁷⁷ See *Od.* 4.15-18, 9.5-10, 13.26-28, 17.358, 22.351-352 for examples. The meals are often examples of palatial hospitality, in which a singer stands before a room of dinner guests.

⁷⁸ Nagy 1993: 6

⁷⁹ Nagy 1993: 6; Murray 2008: 168-9; Taplin 1992: 1-45

⁸⁰ Sherratt 2004: 308

⁸¹ Dalby 1995 and Davies 2005 emphasize the lack of realism that the Homeric, particularly the *Iliad*’s, feasts portray, so I will add here that, of course, no audience would take their meal in the exact, or even remote, form in which the characters of the *Iliad* enact their feasts. Still, however, the occurrence of social eating is universally recognizable in the epic as something that all cultures do, regardless of detail, and it would have been a moment in which the audience could recognize some semblance of themselves and their communities.

will go no further in attempting to read into the situation from within which an early audience may have been operating. Rather, suffice it to say that the thematic tension in the *Iliad*'s feasts that I have identified in the layers of contradicting sociopolitical values and economic systems would not have been isolated to the narrative's feasts. In an early Archaic Greek audience's experience of such a scene's performance, the tension in the narrative feasts would mirror the tension that their own social eating habits must have embodied. The alternate system of polis-based pan-Hellenic society that incorporated large-scale religious festivals and sacrificial feasts presented a challenge to the more nuclear, *basileus*-centered traditional system that was primarily focused on localized, domestic religious practice. Listening to an oral performance from such an environment, the *Iliad*'s earliest listeners would have joined me in recognizing feast scenes as tense, politically charged moments in the epic, because their own feasts were so.

Conclusion

To read the feast scenes of the *Iliad* is anything but a repetitive endeavor, despite the fact that the formulaic language used to describe each scene is markedly similar. The emblematic value to feasts that the most regular formulas present is deceptively simple: the Homeric feast is consistently a δαίς ἕϊση, making the time a model for the equal sharing of resources. The contexts of the feasts in the first book of the *Iliad* establish the feast scene as a nexus between equal division of resources, social reconciliation or conflict resolution, and the enactment of a stable hierarchical order. The association of the equal share with social re-stabilization and hierarchy is relevant for each feast scene in the epic, not just those of the first book, as these values are in many ways dependent upon the recurring patterns of the feast type-scene. The tendency of feasts to be in connection to a religious sacrifice implies the religious hierarchy being invoked in an act of reconciliation with the gods, but the social spheres of equal cosmological beings – either the society of the gods or of men – also undergo returns to an ordered hierarchy, if only for the span of the feast. This dynamic is contextually derived but also formulaic, since the language of feasts highlights a single facilitator and tends to name the distributor as ‘slaying the animal’ for sacrifice even when others are almost always involved in the preparation.

In this underlying connection between the equal share and hierarchy, the foundational political and economic tension of the feast scenes comes to light: feasts affirm the values of an egalitarian sharing economy, of the type that Achilles embodies and advocates for, with the importance of the satisfaction of each participant at the feast regardless of social position, but at the same time display a visible representation of a successful chiefly redistributor, a role in the

anthropological understanding of economies that Walter Donlan sees at play in the *Iliad*.⁸² The facilitator of the feast, either Agamemnon or Achilles in the *Iliad*, takes on a singular role in his social group as provider, which elevates his status politically and lends him credence as a ‘generous king’ within the social group at hand. But at the same time, the satisfaction of each participant grates harshly against the failure of a single-headed redistribution system that plays out with Agamemnon’s greediness in the plot of the epic.

In the context of the *Iliad*, then, the tension of the feast reiterates the overall thematic problem presented in Achaean society, which is the threat that Achilles poses to Agamemnon’s political role as commander of the other Achaean chiefs. This opposition is based upon the accusation that Agamemnon has failed to correctly fulfill his role as chiefly redistributor. The feasts that Agamemnon gives function, as seen in their context and in their internal logic, to solidify a common sense of Achaean unity that relies upon his own position as commander over the disparate armies. This sense is undercut, however, by the overall rebellion of Achilles. Achilles’s opposition to Agamemnon is impossible to separate from all the feast scenes of the *Iliad*, as his absence is tacitly understood in the feasts that Agamemnon gives for the Achaeans. In line with the structure of the first book of the *Iliad* –in which the narrative presents the feast of men, the complaining of Achilles, and the feast of the gods in succession to close the book – the wider thematic concerns of the epic surround the feast scenes, permeate the boundaries of the scene in tacit ways, and frame them as responses to the deepest political and economic questions of the epic.

As Achilles reverts, toward the end of his epic, out of his rebellion stage, the feast maintains its place as a problematic site in which the epic’s conflicts play out. Achilles’s refusals

⁸² Donlan 1982

to partake in a reconciliatory feast with Agamemnon extend the opposition that he poses to Achaean hierarchy despite his assent to fight for them once more, and when he does finally join in a feast at Patroclus's funeral, the scene lacks many of the expected details and narrative focus that such a moment might be expected to warrant. Thus, his relationship to feasts marks the extension and development of Achilles's dissatisfaction with the Achaeans that shifts from being projected onto Agamemnon's distribution of resources to the cost of lives – namely, Patroclus's – that Agamemnon's agenda in the war against the Trojans allows for. Achilles's final feast with Priam is an incredible marker of his ultimate refusal to join his will to Agamemnon and the unified cause of the Achaean army. Achilles's and Priam's feast applies the power of feasting to resolve conflicts in an unconventionally emotional and private realm of reconciliation. Achilles and Priam manifest their grief and anger at their respective losses of Patroclus and Hector and reach a point of forgiveness and understanding, represented by their meal together. The feast functions not to reconcile Achilles to his initial political enemy, Agamemnon, but rather to reconcile him to the other side of the war and the personal grief that comes to define his character in the latter half of the epic. This turn applies the model of the feast to a situation that is counter to the well-being of Achaean social organization and even defies any strict notions of hierarchy, which severs the function of social bonding in feasts from the purpose of political hierarchical stabilization that appears elsewhere in the epic's feasts.

As oral poetry in a setting such as early Archaic Greece, the complexity and contradictions that the *Iliad's* feast scenes embody would have been rich reflective moments for audience members, as they themselves may have been feasting as they listened. This reflection would have been in a setting of intense sociopolitical change, as the Greek mainland transformed from an oikos-based social structure to that of the polis, in which a Pan-Hellenic understanding

of identity began to take shape for the first time. This transition was a time of competing social values, as the organization of the polis struggled against lingering oikos values and understandings of who had the right to gather resources, define communities, and provide for the needs of a social group changed considerably. The notion that the *Iliad* was performed at Pan-Hellenic religious feasts, a marker of the newer social system, would have reflected the sociopolitical tensions represented in the *Iliad*'s feasts back onto the audience in a pressing manner, as they too ingrained themselves in competing social and political values by their participation in a communal feast.

In light of Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion that cooking is a cultural language that either reveals a society's structure or manifests its contradictions, the *Iliad* proves true resoundingly for the latter scenario. In seeming to serve as respite from the narrative conflict, the feast scenes deceptively engage with the underlying political and economic conflicts in the epic. The comforting returns to some of the most repetitive formulaic language that the feast scenes provide present a model that, in its irreconcilability to the larger image of Achaean social and economic structure, problematizes its own basic truths of equal shares and communal satisfaction. The added layer of the Homeric epics' performativity at feasts in their oral stage is an angle that expands the usual approach of literary food studies beyond the limitations of written literature. The element of performativity to a specific context is essential to oral poetry, but the approach could be useful for purely written literature as well. All audiences to any text or cultural media in any historical time period are guaranteed to have a relationship with food and cultural eating practices, and therefore the framework of reception studies would be a fascinating trend to watch grow in the study of literary representations of food.

The fruitfulness of a literary study of the feasts in the *Iliad* confirms what the growing field of food studies is already discovering, and what Lévi-Strauss has already established – the site of the communal meal is perhaps the richest, most tangible expression of social, political, and economic structure that we can find. Rundin’s and Donlan’s work drawing out some of the economic and social structures identifiable in Homeric feast scenes provides a solid foundation for scholars to further explore the topic in the context of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁸³ Bakker’s work with the feasts of the *Odyssey* and mine with those of the *Iliad*, however, suggests that feasts can be essential sites for reading the themes and concerns of specific works. The continued study of Homeric feasting, considering the epics both together and separately, is a generative topic for future scholarship, as it provides a foundation for future scholars to address how later ancient writers represent social eating in response to the established patterns of Homeric feast scenes.

On the other hand, amid the politics and boundaries of academic disciplines, the *Iliad*’s feast scenes offer a δαίς – a share, a portion, or, indeed, a feast – of cultural material to feed the intellectual pursuits of various modes of inquiry in contemporary academia. Those seeking to understand wider cultural trends in the consumption of food and its representation in cultural media will find eating in ancient literature to be a unique field of study that presents specific challenges but also displays some of the political and social implications for eating that have persisted up to the present historical moment. Like the Achaeans feasting under Agamemnon’s redistributive power, we too stabilize political and economic entities through our eating habits, whether consciously or unconsciously. The question of who distributes our food to us under the conditions of globalized capitalism remains a pressing one for understanding the political and

⁸³ Donlan 1982: 163-4; Rundin 1996

economic structures of communities and nations, and the images that market food to us, whether from a corporate superpower or a local farmer's market, rely on certain ideologies to enforce economic patterns of distribution. Amid our own collective experiences choosing what it is we will eat and how we will eat it, Achilles' eating habits in the *Iliad* present an opposition to the sociopolitical status quo that can serve as an opportunity for personal and collective reflection on alternative visions for society's usage of resources and, by extension, its political and economic structures. The power of the bard singing to the *Iliad*'s earliest listeners about the feasts of the Achaeans and creating an opportunity for identification and reflection on their own sociopolitical situation has morphed with the passage of time, but it persists still. Even today, the feast scenes of the *Iliad* serve as a powerful opportunity for collective reflection on the food systems and eating practices that form and reform the fabric of social life.

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