

The Relation between Agamemnon and Achilles in the Iliad by Homer and the Movie Troy by

Wolfgang Petersen

Biröl Çapa

Electric Electronic Faculty

040060450

Topics in Literature and Society: Ancient Civilizations

İřtar Gözaydın

January 17, 2010

Abstract

Iliad is a kind of Achilles' epic. It starts with Achilles' anger. This anger makes Achilles not joining the war. Iliad develops its story by using Achilles. Until his best friend dies and Agamemnon tries him to join the war by giving honour shares and prizes, Achilles does not join the war. That kind of treatment of Achilles is based on the power struggles between two heroes. Achilles represents the honour based system and also he is the best warrior of Akhaians, therefore he has a legal superiority. On the other hand, king of kings Agamemnon represents fixed system based on a monarch. He thinks warriors fight for him, and also he gets the sovereignty from Zeus. As a result, he has a legal superiority. Two heroes wants power, however, kingship is not a kind of property that can be divided. In conclusion, the relation between Agamemnon and Achilles locks that power struggle.

The Relation between Agamemnon and Achilles in the Iliad by Homer and the Movie Troy by
Wolfgang Petersen

Homer's Iliad tells the fifty one days of ninth year of Trojan War. All war is not explained in this epic. The subject of epic is bounded. It starts with Achilles' anger at Agamemnon. Due to his anger, he gives up fighting in the war. Until his best friend dies and Agamemnon tries him to join the war by giving honour shares and prizes, Achilles does not join the war. After these events happen, his anger starts to get lost. Therefore, the epic can be thought about Achilles' epic.

The movie Troy is interested in Achilles' like Iliad. It is started by Achilles' "disrespectful" treatment to Agamemnon. The developing story is like in Iliad. However, in some manners, film and epic are different from each other. The reasons for his anger and the results of that anger are told differently. Achilles' anger and the results of his anger differ between Iliad and Troy due to politics, government, warfare and diplomacy.

First of all, in Iliad, Achilles and Agamemnon represent different social organization types. Achilles represents an honour based system; because he is a king of Myrmidons moreover he is the greatest warrior of his time. On the other hand Agamemnon represents a traditional monarch. Therefore, one of the sources of Achilles' anger bases on the power struggle between monarch and warrior figures (Dumézil, 1956). Donna F. Wilson states that, the quarrel arises because of a contradiction in the social organization which contains a fixed system, in which Agamemnon shows his legal superiority and a fluid, honour system, in which Achilles can claim to be the best of all Akhaians (2003, p. 55).

These organization types are not suitable to each other. Agamemnon claims that he is the king; therefore he also says Achilles is dependent to him. In addition, Achilles the greatest

warrior becomes regular in Agamemnon's thought. As a result, a leader warrior who cannot be ruled means a danger for a kingship.

In Iliad, these regimes fight by using Briseis. Firstly, Agamemnon takes Khryseis' girl. Khryseis is the priest of Apollo. Khryseis gives ransom to Agamemnon for taking his daughter back. Agamemnon does not leave girl. Then, he and his army are cursed by Apollo. Due to rescuing from the plague which is given by Apollo, Agamemnon has to give up the girl. Consequently, Achilles wants Agamemnon to give up the girl. He says if Agamemnon gives up girl, he and other Achanians three and four times over repay for him (Homer, I.127-29). Nevertheless, this propose means Achilles' threat to Agamemnon. Because of Achilles' generosity, Agamemnon's position in the fixed system namely his kingship is threaded by Achilles, the opposite system (Wilson, 2003, p.56). Moreover, if Agamemnon accepts that propose, it means that he accepts depending to Achilles. Moreover, spoil is given by Achilles: A king cannot look at lips of a warrior even if he is Achilles.

This politic situation makes Agamemnon taking another decision. He threatens the other kings by taking their honour shares (Homer, I.135-40). That threat provokes Achilles, the quarrel between them gets bigger. Finally, Agamemnon want Achilles honour share for giving up Apollo's priest's girl.

Achilles gets angry due to this situation, because losing an honour share means losing honour. In Iliad, Achilles come to Troy coasts because of his honour and honour share. He wants honour share from Troy. However, the political situation and government types cause contradictories. Agamemnon claims that, he is greater than Achilles. Achilles listen his anger firstly and think killing Agamemnon (Homer, I.139). While he is thinking like that Athene comes and prevents him killing Agamemnon. Achilles makes diplomacy in other words. He obeys Athene and does not give up his honour share actually. From now on, his honour share depends gods especially Zeus. He makes gods giving him the honour share.

In the movie Troy these scenes is not like Iliad. Firstly, Troy don't interested in Apollo's priest's girl. Audience cannot see anything about that. Moreover, Athene cannot be seen in Troy. Briseis takes Athene's role in that situation. In the film Briseis calls out: "Stop! Too many men have died today. If killing is your only talent, that is your curse. I don't want anyone dying for me."(Troy). These sentences control Achilles and he is affected and stopped by Briseis. Therefore, that scene makes a slave girl so powerful like a goddess Athene.

After Achilles obeys Athene's decisions, he swears that one day, when the Achanians are being slaughtered by Hector, they will long for him (Homer, I.240-44).

The crisis between two heroes becomes uncontrollable. Therefore, Nestor tries taking control of the quarrel. He states that Agamemnon and Achilles should listen to Nestor, because mightiest warriors of earlier generation consider his thoughts and obey his suggestions:

*I fought
for my own hand among them. Not one man
alive now upon earth could stand against them.
And I repeat: they listened to my reasoning,
took my advice. Well, then, you take it too.
It is far better so.
do not deprive him of the girl, renounce her.
The army had allotted her to him.
Akhilleus, for your part, do not defy
your King and Captain. No one vies in honor
Lord Agamemnon,
with him who holds authority from Zeus.
You have more prowess, for a goddess bore you;
his power over men surpasses yours.
But, Agamemnon, let your anger cool.
I beg you to relent, knowing Akhilleus
a sea wall for Akhaians in the black waves of war (Homer,I.275-84).*

However, Nestor speech' is a thought from Agamemnon's system. He accepts that Agamemnon is powerful than Achilles. Consequently, Achilles has to obey Agamemnon. On

the other hand, Achilles is a valuable soldier, and then Agamemnon should not continue to angering a warrior so important to the war effort (Wilson, 2003, p.63).

Agamemnon has fear, because there is a man who cannot be ruled. He has to take action. Therefore, he cannot accept Nestor speech:

All you say is fairly said, sir, but this man's ambition, remember, is to lead, to lord it over everyone, hold power over everyone, give orders to the rest of us! Well, one will never take his orders! If the gods who live forever made a spearman of him, have they put insults on his lips as well? (Homer, I.287-295).

These words are really about Agamemnon's dominance.

Achilles cannot accept Nestor's thought too, because if he accepts that propose, it means that he accepts the dominance of Agamemnon. Moreover, it means Agamemnon is powerful than him. Therefore, there is no solution between them. At that point, Achilles states that:

Give your commands to someone else, not me! And one more thing I have to tell you: think it over: this time, for the girl, I will not wrangle in arms with you or anyone, though I am robbed of what was given me; but as for any other thing I have alongside my black ship. you shall not take it against my will. Try it. Hear this, everyone: that instant your hot blood blackens my spear!" (Homer, I.298-307).

Achilles surrenders the girl. He cannot keep the girl anymore, because he knows Agamemnon has right to take or give her which he cannot afford to do.

In contrast Iliad, Achilles is stopped by Briseis. The movie tells like that, if Briseis wants him to rescue her from Agamemnon, he is going to kill Agamemnon. By the way, Achilles does not anything, but he swears at Agamemnon like in Iliad.

In both movie and epic, Achilles withdraws from fighting. He has nothing to do against Agamemnon. After his withdrawing, in contrast epic trend, Menelaus is killed by Hector; Akhaians get in trouble in the war. Agamemnon understands he cannot win the war without Achilles. Therefore, he agrees to return Briseis to Achilles.

In Iliad, Achilles wants Zeus to give his honour share back. Wilson says that: "Instead, he elects a strategy of *métis* (cunning intelligence) based on deferral and even risking public

disgrace as a maneuver for winning without recourse to bié (force). This strategy controls the plot of the Iliad all the way to the death of Patroklos.” (2003, p.61). As Wilson says, Achilles continues his diplomacy until Patroklos death. In Iliad, after Patroklos is killed by Hector, his decision changed. Until that time, Agamemnon gives Briseis and other spoils and honour shares to him to join the war, but he continues his diplomacy. However, when he learned Patroklos’ death, his decision is changed, but he takes all Agamemnon’s proposes too, before he joins the war.

In contrast, Troy is different in that manner. In Troy, Agamemnon’s request for Achilles is not seen as much as in Iliad. The honour share is shown only Briesis. The other gifts from Agamemnon are not seen in Troy.

In conclusion, the relation between Achilles and Agamemnon is based on a power struggle. Achilles is the greatest warrior of his time, therefore he has to have biggest share due to his honour share system. Agamemnon is a king. He leads other kings. Warriors fight for him. His kingship system accepts that legal superiority is belongs to Agamemnon. All other kings and also warriors have to obey his rules, even if the warrior is Achilles. Agamemnon sees Achilles as a thread of his kingship. On the other hand, Achilles thinks he has to take more power than Agamemnon, because the war is carried by his talents. However, kingship is not a kind of property that can be divided. The quarrel and relation between them is not only two powerful heroes’ struggle but also two social organization system’s struggle. That struggle causes many Akhaians lives. Contradictory between their thought causes Achilles anger and withdrawing from the war. In conclusion, Agamemnon accepts he needs Achilles; on the other hand Achilles understands although he is the greatest warrior, Agamemnon is powerful than him.

References

- Homer. (2005). *Ilyada*. (A. Erhat and A. Kadir, Trans.). Istanbul: Can Yayinlari.
- Homer. (1974). *The Iliad*. (Robert Fitzgerald, Trans.). New York: Anchor Press.
- Homer. *The Iliad And The Odyssey Of Homer*. (Lang, Leaf, and Myers, Trans.) New York: Globusz Publishing.
- Troy*. Dir. Wolfgang Petersen. Perf. Diana Krugger, Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom, Eric Bana. Warner Home Video, 2004. DVD.
- Dumézil, G.(1956). *Aspects de la fonction guerri`ere chez les indo-europ`eens*. Paris.
- Donna F. Wilson (2002). *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad*. Cambridge Universty Press.
- Pomeroy, B. S. (1975). *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York:Schoken Books.