

Dusting off the Classics: Homer's *Iliad*

Richard Sacks – Spring 2022

Handout for session #4 (4/5/22)

Poseidon's defiant reply to Zeus' "cease and desist" order in book 15 of the *Iliad* (15.176-217)

Iris' message from Zeus and Poseidon's reply (15.176-217):

15.176 [Zeus'] command is that you must cease from warfare and battle,
15.177 and seek the gods' company, or go down to the shining sea.
15.178 But if you ignore his words, or fail to obey them, then
15.179 he threatens to come here in person, and to confront you
15.180 in man-to-man combat; and you should stay clear of his hands,
15.181 he says, since he far surpasses you in might,
15.182 **is, too, the elder by birth**—yet your heart does not hesitate
15.183 to rank yourself equal to him, whom all others dread.” Then to her,
15.184 much troubled, the far-famed Earth-Shaker responded:
15.185 “Look now, great though he is, he's speaking arrogantly
15.186 if he means to restrain me, his equal in honor, by force,
15.187 against my will! Three brothers were born to Rhea by Kronos:
15.188 Zeus and I, the third being Hādēs, lord of the dead.
15.189 All was divided three ways: each of us got his domain—
15.190 I was allotted the grey sea to dwell in forever when
15.191 the lots were shaken, while Hādēs obtained the murky darkness,
15.192 and Zeus won the wide airy firmament and the clouds;
15.193 but the earth and lofty Olympos remain common to us all.
15.194 **So I will in no way walk as Zeus is minded**—let him,
15.195 powerful though he is, stay at ease in his own third portion,
15.196 nor try to scare me with toughness, as though I were some
15.197 mere weakling: better for him to threaten with violent words
15.198 his own sons and daughters, those he sired himself,
15.199 who'll be obliged to obey him, whatever his commands."
15.200 Then wind-footed swift Iris answered him: “Is this
15.201 really the message, O dark-maned Earth-Encircler
15.202 that I'm to take back to Zeus—so forceful, so unyielding?
15.203 Or will you concede a little? Good men's minds can be changed—
15.204 **and you know how the Furies always side with the elder-born.**"
15.205 Poseidon the Earth-Shaker now answered her once more:
15.206 “Iris, goddess, your message you delivered correctly:
15.207 an excellent thing it is when the messenger knows what's right!
15.208 But there's this bitter resentment comes over heart and soul
15.209 whenever a person's minded to upbraid in angry terms
15.210 **one of like station, to whom fate's allotted an equal share.**
15.211 Still, for now, despite my indignation, I'll yield—
15.212 but another thing I'll tell you, and I make this threat in my rage:
15.213 if, in despite of me—and Athēnē the spoil-bringer,

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Mythic context(s) for the relative ages and authority of Zeus, Poseidon & Hādēs:

Homer, *Odyssey*, 13.139-142: Zeus trying to appease Poseidon

Od.13.139 Then in turn Zeus who gathers the clouds made answer:
Od.13.140 "What a thing to have said, Earthshaker of the wide strength.
Od.13.141 **The gods do not hold you in dishonor. It would be a hard thing**
Od.13.142 **if we were to put any slight on the eldest and best among us."**

Hesiod, *Theogony*, 453-472: Kronos swallowing his children as they were born

Rhea was subject in love to Kronos and bore splendid children, Hestia, Demeter, and gold-shod Hera and strong Hades, pitiless in heart, who dwells under the earth, and the loud-crashing Earth-Shaker, and wise Zeus, father of gods and men, by whose thunder the wide earth is shaken. These great Kronos swallowed as each came forth from the womb to his mother's knees with this intent, that no other of the proud sons of Heaven should hold the kingly office amongst the deathless gods. For he learned from Earth and starry Heaven that he was destined to be overcome by his own son. . . . **Therefore he kept no blind outlook, but watched and swallowed down his children: and unceasing grief seized Rhea. But when she was about to bear Zeus, the father of gods and men, then she besought her own dear parents, Earth and starry Heaven, to devise some plan with her that the birth of her dear child might be concealed, and that retribution might overtake great, crafty Kronos for his own father and also for the children whom he had swallowed down.**

Apollodorus, *Library*, 1.2.1: the 3 brothers dethrone Kronos & divide the cosmos

[W]hen Zeus was full-grown, he took Metis, daughter of Ocean, to help him, and she gave Kronos a drug to swallow, which forced him to disgorge first the stone and then the children whom he had swallowed, and with their aid Zeus waged the war against Kronos and the Titans. They fought for ten years, and Earth prophesied victory to Zeus if he should have as allies those who had been hurled down to Tartarus. So he . . . loosed their bonds. And the Cyclopes then gave Zeus thunder and lightning and a thunderbolt, and on Pluto they bestowed a helmet and on Poseidon a trident. **Armed with these weapons the gods overcame the Titans, shut them up in Tartarus, and appointed the Hundred-handers their guards; but they themselves cast lots for the sovereignty, and to Zeus was allotted the dominion of the sky, to Poseidon the dominion of the sea, and to Pluto the dominion in Hades.**

15.175-217 continued:

15.214 and Hērē, and Hermēs, and Lord Hēphaistos—he spares
15.215 steep Ilion, and proves unwilling to lay it waste,
15.216 or to concede to the Argives their great victory, then
15.217 let him know this: that between us will be bitterness without cure.”

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2

The structure of the shield made for Achilles by Hēphaistos (18.483-608)

1 (18.483-489): "the earth, the sea, and the heavens ... and every constellation"

18.483 On it he fashioned the **earth**, the **sea**, and the **heavens**,
18.484 the unwearying sun, the moon on its increase to full,
18.485 and every constellation with which the heavens are crowned
18.486 the **Pleiadēs**, the **Hyadēs**, the majesty of **Orion**,
18.487 and the **Bear**, that's also known to mankind as the Wain,
18.488 that revolves in one place, keeping a watchful eye on **Orion**,
18.489 and alone never sinks into the baths of Ocean.

2 (18.490-508): city #1—the so-called city of peace

18.490 On it he also fashioned two cities of humankind,
18.491 fine ones: **in the first there were marriages and banquets**,
18.492 with brides being led from their quarters by flaring torchlight
18.493 through the city to the accompaniment of **many a wedding song**,
18.494 and young **men aw whirl in the dance**, while for them the pipes
18.495 and **lyres** played on without stopping, and the women stood
18.496 at their doors, admiring spectators. There was a crowd
18.497 of citizens drawn to the meeting place: **a dispute had arisen**
18.498 between two men, at loggerheads **over the blood-price**
18.499 **of a man who'd been killed...**
18.501 ...and both were determined to win the arbitrator's verdict...
18.503 ...the elders were sitting
18.504 on polished seats of stone in the sacred circle...
18.507 ...and there between them were set two talents of gold,
18.508 to go to the one who delivered the fairest verdict.

3 (18.509-540): city #2—the so-called city of war

18.509 But **around the other city there lay two bodies of troops**,
18.510 **aggleam in their armor, divided by two competing plans—**
18.511 **should they lay the place waste, or share between both sides**
18.512 **all the wealth that this lovely city contained? However,**
18.513 **the besieged would have none of it**, were arming for an ambush.
18.514 **The ramparts were manned by their dear wives and children,**
18.515 **and along with them such men as were crippled by old age...**
18.516 but the rest were out after action...
18.535 ...and Strife and Tumult mixed with them, and the baneful Death-Spirit,
18.536 seizing one man alive, but wounded, another without a wound,
18.537 **yet another dragged through the turmoil, dead, by the feet;**
18.538 and the shift **Strife** wore round her shoulders was scarlet
18.539 with men's blood...

4 (18.541-549): "a broad field of rich plowland"

18.541 On it he also fashioned a broad field of rich plowland...

5 (18.550-560): "a royal estate"

18.550 On it he also fashioned a royal estate...

6 (18.561-572): "a vineyard"

18.561 On it he also fashioned a vineyard, lush with clusters...
18.566 ...the grape pickers went to and fro when harvesting the vines...
18.569 ...while in the midst of them a boy **with a clear-toned lyre**
18.570 made sweet music, and accompanied his own **singing—**
18.571 soft and exquisite of the **Linus** Song...

7 (18.573-586): "a herd of straight-horned cattle"

18.573 On it he also set a herd of straight-horned cattle:
18.574-7 the cows...went / eagerly, lowing... // ...the herdsmen accompanying...
18.579-80 ...But among the...cattle **two fearsome lions** / had got hold of a noisy bull...
18.582 **The lions had ripped up the great bull's hide and were**
18.583 **gobbling its innards and black blood...**

8 (18.587-589): "a large pasture of white-fleeced sheep"

18.587 On it **the far-famed lame-of-both-legs god** made a pasture
18.588 in a charming glen: a large pasture of white-fleeced sheep

9 (18.590-606): "a dancing floor like the one in spacious Knossos"

18.590 On it **the far-famed lame-of-both-legs god** subtly
18.591 inlaid a **dancing** floor like the one in spacious Knossos [= *city in Krētē*]
18.592 that long ago **Daidalos** fashioned for fair-tressed **Ariadnē**.
18.593-4 [and] young men, with maidens worth many oxen / in bride-price, **dancing...**

10 (18.607-608): city #1—the so-called city of peace

18.607 On it he also set the mighty stream of **Ocean**
18.608 to run round the outermost rim of this strongly fashioned shield.

Notes: one of the **Pleiadēs** (486) was Maia, mother (w/ Zeus) of Hermēs; **Hyadēs** (486), the nymphs who with Hermēs' help protected baby Dionysus (son of Zeus and the mortal Semele) from Hērē's anger; **Orion** and the **Bear** [=Kallisto] (486-8) both killed by Artemis, the latter at the behest of the jealous Hērē; **Linus** (571) "first human endowed with the art of song, but killed out of jealousy by Apollo and mourned by the Muses" (< Green's note); **Daidolos** and **Ariadnē** (592), both tragically involved in the Krētān labyrinth myth, the former ultimately losing his son Icarus whom he sees fall from the heavens into Ocean, while the latter was abandoned by Thēseus and/or Dionysus.