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HOMER'S ESTIMATE OF THE SIZE OF THE GREEK ARMY

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The Catalogue of the Ships in *B* assigns to the Greek army at Troy the definite number of 1,186 ships, some bearing fifty men, others one hundred and twenty. Assuming the mean of these two numbers as the average crew, the total army would be about 100,000 men. Thucydides i. 10, in discussing the size of the army, assumed that Homer might have been exaggerating, but did not doubt that he consistently placed the numbers at those of the Catalogue. Professor Seymour, in his *Life in the Homeric Age*, p. 586, has this sentence: "If the Catalogue of the Ships be left out of account we have only slight indications that the Greek army numbered more than ten or even five thousand men." As this same idea is many times repeated in that book, I shall not multiply references, nor quote other scholars who have previously expressed a similar opinion (*vid. Doerpfeld, Troja und Ilion*, pp. 604 ff.). My purpose in this paper is to investigate the poem at first hand to see what evidence as to numbers is given directly or indirectly.

The *Iliad* pictures the united efforts of most of the Greek peoples against the Trojans and their allies. This tradition never varied; Homer and the Epic Cycle picture Greece as putting forth her best efforts and sending her utmost forces. The different kings did not send generals or substitutes, but went in person, leading large armies of their own. How thoroughly the land was drained is shown by Pylos, e. g., in the fact that not only the king Nestor went, but he took with him his two sons, Thrasymedes and Antilochus. Nestor's family was not the only Greek family represented by more than one, since in *E* 542 the two sons of Diocles perished. Even the gods exerted themselves in marshaling the army; Hera tells (Δ 25) how her steeds grew weary and she herself toiled in gathering the host. In *A* 278 ff. Agamemnon is pictured as leader of the greatest army

ever ruled by a single sovereign, "Since never yet has Zeus given equal honor to any scepter-bearing king." This honor, as the next verses show, consists in the numbers of the army. In I 97 Nestor says, "With thee I shall cease, with thee I shall end, since thou art lord over vast hosts." In Γ 182 ff. Priam, looking down from the walls of Troy, exclaims, "O blessed son of Atreus, surely many youths of the Achaeans are under thy sway. Before this have I gone to vine-clad Phrygia, where I saw mighty hosts of the Phrygians, men encamped on the banks of the Sangarius, but they were not so many as are the hosts of the Achaeans." In B 798 the scout of the Trojans reports "I have often entered the battles of men, but I have never seen an army so mighty and numerous, for as numerous as the leaves or the sands they are crossing the plain." *Life in the Homeric Age*, p. 588, has this sentence, "Apparently each family was required to furnish one member of the expedition, but not more than one. If this is true, then the many brothers of the Achaeans came strictly as volunteers." In order to swell the numbers there was evidently some sort of draft, as N 669 speaks of the heavy fine inflicted for failure to join the expedition; this fine was so heavy that Euchenor rather than pay it, though warned of his impending death, chose to join the expedition to Troy. One of the steeds driven by Menelaus in the chariot race in Ψ 298, had been given to Agamemnon by Echepolus of Sicyon to secure exemption from military service. The *Cypria*, dipped from the same stream of tradition, assigns the origin of the war to overpopulation. Tradition both outside and within the *Iliad* is uniform in making this the greatest of Greek expeditions, one that exhausted the numbers and resources of Greece, so that, in order to swell this great host, she was left practically without kings or leaders, in virtual anarchy. Whether such an army was ever raised is beside the mark as well as the question of its actual size. The army as well as its size may both be poetic fiction. How large must the army have been to fill the poetic conditions? This is not to be determined by archaeology, but from poetry. In the Catalogue Odysseus is credited with twelve ships, the same number is given in the ninth book of the *Odyssey*, vs. 159. Was that poetically reasonable? Professor Seymour assumes that Ithaca had 12,500 inhabitants in the epic age. Zacynthus and Cephallenia must have had as many more, so that

these three contingents with the other parts of his realm must have had more than 40,000 inhabitants. His twelve ships had presumably 1,000 men at the beginning of the war. If these regions took part in any general way, we could hardly assume a force less than the twelve ships of Homer.

When Telemachus came to Pylos, in search for tidings of his father, he found a feast at which there were present 4,500 men of Pylos. Pylos was only one of several districts furnishing men for Nestor's command. Nestor is assigned 90 ships in the Catalogue. This number does not seem excessive, if Pylos alone could furnish 4,500 men for a banquet, and Pylos must have given a good account of itself in the muster, since it sent not only the king but two of his sons with him. Crete is said to have furnished 80 ships or presumably about 7,000 men. The recent excavations in Crete, as well as the ninety or one hundred cities of Homer and the great population there assumed, furnish ample proof that Crete was thickly peopled in the second millennium B. C.

τ 172, Κρήτη τις γαί' ἔστι μέσῳ ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ
καλή καὶ πλείρα, περὶ ῥρυτος· ἐν δ' ἄνθρωποι
πολλοί, ἀπειρέσιοι, καὶ ἐννήκοντα πόλεις.

It is probable that Crete had as great numbers before Homer as she has had since. In 68 B. C. a much weakened Crete is said to have put in the field against Metellus an army of 24,000 men, or nearly four times as many as the contingent named in the Catalogue. Beloch, who quotes the authority for the army which fought Metellus, places the early population of Crete at 200,000.¹ Hence the force under Idomeneus was about 3 per cent. of the entire population. The numbers from the other parts of Greece, as given in the Catalogue, are quite as reasonable as those from Ithaca, Pylos, or Crete.

Poetry could not assume that Greece had sent her largest army, in which both king and subjects joined alike, in collecting which Hera had grown weary, for which there had been a draft, which had deprived Greece of leaders and brought on virtual anarchy, and then assume that all these had produced as small a force as 5,000 or 10,000 men. If actually one had gone from each family, as Professor Seymour assumed, then the army had been vastly greater than the numbers

¹ *Bevölkerung*, p. 160.

of the Catalogue. Professor Murray, in discussing another phase of poetry says: "Homer is not fiction but traditional history. In Homer, Hesiod, Stesichorus, and the Epic Cycle the underlying consensus of statement is quite unmistakable." "The *Iliad* is not an independent work of fiction, but dependent on a living saga or tradition."¹ This seems to me perfectly true. Thus the Catalogue, from whatever source it came, is part of that living tradition. The consensus of opinion, in Homer and elsewhere, is that Greece and the Islands strained themselves in raising a great army. Could poetry have conceived this and then assume an army less than 100,000? Thucydides i.10 considered the army as numbered by Homer as "not large, when one reflects that it was a common expedition from all Greece."

It is evident that the Catalogue describes the Greeks at the beginning of the war and not at the end of ten years, so that it is presumably the muster-roll of the army as it embarked for Troy. It is said e. g., "Of the Boeotians 120 went on board each ship." The 120 of each ship of the Boeotians and the fifty of each ship of Philoctetes has the definite regularity of an initial equipment. Protesilaus who was dead, Philoctetes who had been abandoned, and Achilles, though not sharing in the battle, are named. Hence probably the number 100,000 is the size of the original army, not the army which has pressed the siege for over nine years. By the time the action of the *Iliad* began deaths from natural causes, from pestilence, and war must have greatly reduced the numbers. We have only hints of these previous battles, e. g., in Γ 125 ff. Helen, when summoned to the wall, was weaving in cloth scenes of the many battles the Greeks and Trojans had undergone for her sake. Athena, quoting Hera, says in B 176, "You would leave as a boast to Priam and the Trojans Argive Helen for whose sake many have perished in Troy." The words of Achilles, in A 61, "If war and pestilence continue to destroy the Achaeans," can refer only to battles outside of the field of the *Iliad*. Priam laments "I have lost three mighty sons, Mestor, Troilus, and Hector," Ω 257. He puts these three sons on the same footing, yet Hector is the only one who survived until the events belonging to the actions of the poem. Mestor and Troilus have fallen in previous battles. War,

¹ *Rise of the Greek Epic*, pp. 160, 163.

pestilence, and the lapse of ten years must have reduced the army at least one fourth. A second cause, diminishing the numbers of the army, was the Greek practice of marauding. In I 328 Achilles boasts that he had plundered twelve cities on expeditions by sea and eleven by land. Others of the Greeks at the time of the action of the *Iliad* may well have been on such forays. Others, as was supposed by Thucydides, may have been engaged in the more peaceful pursuits of agriculture at considerable distance from the Troad. If one were inclined to take Homer as history and not as poetry, it would be easy to explain the absence from the events of the *Iliad* of certain warriors of the Catalogue by assuming that they were on marauding expeditions or busy with agriculture during the few days on which the battles of the *Iliad* fell.

And thirdly, not all the remaining were fighting men. Agamemnon and others had their heralds. A serving class is clearly implied by such phrases as these: E 48, "Servants of Idomeneus strip Phaestus and care for the spoils;" E 26, "Attendants of Diomede led the horses to the ships;" Z 52, "Menelaus was on the point of giving him to his servant to lead to the ships;" H 122, "Servants relieved Menelaus of his armor." In I 71 the poet describes a regular traffic carried on by the Greeks between their camp and Thrace. The treasure, spoils, slaves, horses, and similar objects must have required the attention of large numbers of caretakers; even if they came originally as warriors, they had virtually passed from the ranks of fighting men and become servants. T 42 ff. shows the presence of great numbers of non-combatants—"And they who formerly had remained at the place of the ships, the pilots, the helmsmen, and the stewards, the providers of food." These and many other references to the care in the maintenance of the army show that a large part of the host was not actually engaged in fighting. Assuming that 100,000 men originally joined the expedition, we cannot place the fighting force at the time of the action of the *Iliad*, even from the Catalogue, at over 40,000 men.

The positive indications of numbers in the *Iliad* are: The Catalogue with its definite 1,186 ships and approximately 100,000 men; ④ 562, "The Trojans burned a thousand fires and at each fifty sat," i. e., 50,000 Trojans. Yet the Greek total was considered larger, since

(B 122) Agamemnon says, "It is a disgrace to have fought so long and vain a war, a war against fewer men," and in Θ 56 the Trojans are called *παυρότεροι*. Ξ 33, "Nor was the beach, though wide, able to hold all the ships, therefore they drew them up in rows and filled the shore between the promontories with ships in tiers." The two promontories are Sigeum and Rhoeteum, which are about five miles apart; however, the space suitable for drawing up the ships is not more than two miles in extent. As the Homeric ship is supposed to have been only thirteen feet wide, even if we allow five extra feet for intervening space, six hundred ships could have been drawn up single file in this distance; so, if they were drawn in tiers, there must have been, presumably, the numbers of the Catalogue. Π 168, Achilles is said to have fifty ships and fifty on each ship, five companies, each of five hundred under an individual commander. This is the number of ships assigned Achilles in the Catalogue. In Ψ 29 the companions of Achilles are said to have been innumerable, *μυρίοι*, "for whom he prepared a feast, slaying many oxen, many sheep, many goats, and many white tusked swine;" a slaughter suited to an army hardly less than the twenty-five hundred mentioned.

Indirect references to numbers, in order of the Homeric books, are: A 277, Nestor says to Achilles, "Nor be thou willing to strive with the king, since never yet has scepter-bearing king obtained equal honor, even if thou art mighty, and a goddess mother bore thee, yet he is mightier, since he rules over more"—a clear indication that Agamemnon is head of a great host; B 87, the number of the Greeks is compared to swarms of bees always coming afresh from the rocks and flying in clusters; 440, Nestor says to the assembled chiefs, "Let us go in a body thus along the wide army of the Achaeans;" 459, the poet, after comparing the army with many flocks of birds, geese or cranes, or long-necked swans, adds, "Thus they stood in the plain of Scamander, innumerable, *μυρίοι*, as many as the leaves and the blooms in their season;" again in 470, "As numerous as the many swarms of flies around the fold in the springtime, so many Achaeans stood in the plain;" 798, the Trojan scout reports, "I have often entered the battles of men, but I never saw such or so vast a host, for as numerous as leaves or the sands of the seashore they cross the plain;" Γ 190, Priam declares he has seen great armies, but none so great as that of

the Achaeans; 231, Helen points out Idomeneus "who stands like a god among the Cretans and about whom the leaders of the Cretans are gathered," evidently implying many leaders and a large Cretan contingent; in Δ 201, on the wounding of Menelaus, search was made for Machaon, the physician, and he was found surrounded by the powerful ranks of his warriors, *κρατεραὶ στίχες ἀσπιστῶν*, who had followed from Trice. Trice was only one of many cities which joined in furnishing the thirty ships under the command of Machaon and his brother, so that the *κρατεραὶ στίχες ἀσπιστῶν* can hardly refer to a lesser number than that assumed in the Catalogue. In the Ἐπιπώλησις or Inspection of Δ 253, Idomeneus took his stand near the front rank of the Cretans, while Meriones urged on the rear phalanxes, *πυμάτας ὄτρυνε φάλαγγας*, which looks like the numbers represented by the eighty ships of the Catalogue; 274, the two Ajaxes were arming themselves and a cloud of foot-soldiers, *νέφος πεζῶν*, followed, then again reference is made to the dense phalanxes, *πυκινὰὶ φάλαγγες*. They together had 52 ships or presumably 4,000 men; the phrases *νέφος πεζῶν* and *πυκινὰὶ φάλαγγες* seem appropriate descriptions of that number. Δ 297, Nestor arranges his men with the knights in front with horses and chariots, in the rear the foot-soldiers, *πολέας τε καὶ ἐσθλοὺς*, then the great mass of the timid or inferior soldiers placed between the front and rear, so they must fight and cannot escape. This arrangement seems to tally with the size of the army given him in the Catalogue. Despite all the movement in the marshaling of Δ, when Agamemnon approaches the Athenians and Odysseus he finds them standing idle, since they knew naught of the commotion. This failure to see and hear is to be explained in an army of 40,000 men, but could not be excused in an army of 5,000 or 10,000 men. Every detail in the marshaling in Δ, as well as the final simile, "as the waves of the sea dash in constant succession, thus in rapid succession, *ἐπασσύτεραι*, the phalanxes of the Danaans moved through the plain," suggests the numbers of the Catalogue. In E the spot light is on Diomedes, so the hosts are ignored, yet we are constantly reminded that he is fighting in the presence of a great army, e. g., 325, Aphrodite has rescued Aeneas from Diomedes and Diomedes pursues her, but not on foot, for the distance was too great; he goes upon his chariot and finds her, having driven past the great throng,

πολὸν καθ' ὄμιλον ὀπάζων. When it is evident that the Trojans were encamping on the plain the Greeks decided to post pickets, I 81 ff., so seven leaders, each with one hundred men, were posted to picket the camp. Certainly 707 pickets would be an absurd number for an army of 5,000 men, but entirely in keeping with the numbers of B.

In A 487 ff. the poet tells of the wonderful exploits of Odysseus, Ajax, and Menelaus, closing thus; "Then Ajax, leaping at the Trojans, slew Doryclus, and then Pandocus, and then Lysander, and Pyrasus, and Pylartes, as when a full river in torrents rushes down the sides of the mountain forced by the storms of Zeus, bringing down many hardened oaks, and many pine trees, and casts much wreckage into the sea, thus then the mighty Ajax rushed through the plain slaying horses and men, nor as yet did Hector know of it, for he was fighting on the left." In a small army such exploits as performed by Ajax would be known and seen by all. In such an army as that of the Catalogue this failure to know the various crises of the battle would have been inevitable. N 260 ff., Meriones, a Cretan leader, hastening to his ship and tent for armor, is stopped at the tent and ship of Idomeneus, who asks him to what place he is going; he replies, "to my ship and tent, but the distance is great," οὐ σχεδόν ἐστί. So Meriones prefers to put on an armor not his own rather than go all the way to his own ship. Now they were both Cretans and their ships were in the same division. If Crete furnished the eighty ships of the Catalogue, two Cretan ships might well have been two hundred yards apart. If the Greek force were only 5,000, then Crete may have furnished no more than four or five ships. The whole scene and the phrase οὐ σχεδόν ἐστί exactly correspond to the numbers of the Catalogue. N 674, Hector had not yet learned that the Trojans were meeting defeat on the left. This oft-repeated ignorance of leaders on either flank and the center can have no other explanation than the size of the army; the view could not have been hidden by the trees, as the wood necessary to build the pyre for Patroclus must be secured on the slopes of Mt. Ida, and the movements of the chariots in battle, as well as the impromptu chariot race, show that forests did not shut off the view. Ξ 1 ff., Nestor though at his ship and tent heard only the indistinct shouts of battle; he goes out to see the reason for the shouts and meets the wounded Diomedes, Odysseus, and Agamemnon who are also try-

ing to find the cause of the noise. The number of ships is conceived as being so great that an uproar could be heard only indistinctly along the whole line. Even the fierce and prolonged fighting around the slain Patroclus was known to but a part of the men. P 378, "Thrasymedes and Antilochus had not heard of the death of Patroclus, for they were fighting far away." The descriptions of the arming host, T 358, all give the impression of vast numbers, e. g., "As numerous as thick snow flakes driven by the blasts of Boreas, so numerous were the helmets of the Achaeans."

Υ 156: "And the whole plain was filled with men and horses,"

τῶν δ' ἅπαν ἐπλήσθη πεδίων, καὶ λάμπετο χαλκῶ,
ἀνδρῶν ἦδ' ἵππων.

The plain of Troy in which the poet pictures the fighting, however we may contract the scene of the combat, is five miles long and over three wide, or containing over 10,000 acres. An army or armies of 100,000 men could fight, maneuver, advance, or retreat in this area, but to apply the phrase "the whole plain was full of men and horses" when there were only a few thousand or hardly more than a man to an acre, is certainly to misuse it.

Υ 326: "The army was drawn up in many ranks of men and many of horses."

πολλὰς δὲ στίχας ἠρώων, πολλὰς δὲ καὶ ἵππων.

At the funeral of Patroclus, Ψ 133, "First there went the knights, then a cloud of foot-soldiers, innumerable," *νέφος εἶπετο πεζῶν, μυριοί.*

The chief arguments against the numbers of the Catalogue are: First, the assemblies in B 86 ff. and in T 42 ff. where the gathering of the army, the applause, or response given the speaker, and the fact that he seems to have been heard by all, would warrant the assumption of a comparatively small force. This, however, in no way follows. From a mass of literary parallels I select this one. In Exodus the writer assumes the number of the Israelites as at least a million; cp. 12:37, "And the children of Israel were about 600,000 on foot that were men, beside children." Yet we have such verses as these—16:6, "And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel;" vs. 9, "And Moses spake unto Aaron, say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel;" vs. 10, "And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel;" 24:3, "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and

all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words of the Lord will do we." I do not know how the words of Aaron were conveyed to this vast host, but it no more concerned the author of Exodus to give the details of such matters than it concerned Homer.

The rapidity with which various heroes move from one part of the field or army to another is a second argument for a small force, but this is poetic foreshortening. To refer constantly to the various contingents and to keep the attention on the entire army would simply be to ruin the poem. The hearer has but little interest in the movement of nameless masses, so the attention must be fixed upon a few persons, but there is always the background of a great host, and even in those books where a single warrior is most prominent the presence of a great army is always felt. The argument advanced by Professor Seymour, p. 571, that since Heracles took Troy with but six ships Agamemnon had no need of 1200, seems to me to take the persons of Heracles and Agamemnon too seriously. Whether Heracles or Agamemnon ever took Troy is not the question, but what the poetic tradition is. This tradition never assigned a large army to Heracles or a small one to Agamemnon. It was his own personal prowess that gave glory to Heracles, while the glory of Agamemnon consisted just in this particular fact that he was leader of great forces. The mediocre hero Iphidamas started from Thrace to assist the Trojans with twelve ships, *A* 228, or twice the number led by Heracles.

My reasons for believing that the numbers of the Catalogue are poetically correct and in harmony with the *Iliad* are:

First, The tradition was uniform and consistent that a great army, an exhaustive levy, embracing most of the Greek kings, with their followers, had taken part in the Trojan War. The population of Greece was so great that a poet could not have pictured to the Greeks themselves such a force and then conceive it as less than 100,000 men.

Second, Whenever there is a positive statement of numbers it is always in harmony with the Catalogue.

Third, The similes, descriptions, and casual references in the *Iliad* assume the presence of a great army.

The numbers of the Catalogue seem to me to agree perfectly both with Homer and epic tradition.