

SOME GREEK TERMS IMPORTANT TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOMER

XENIA (ξενία) is guest-friendship, the reciprocal relationship that binds guest and host in a mutually secure relationship. Usually reinforced by the exchange of gifts, *xenia* was the the most important method of establishing and propagating social relationships with foreigners. The shared relationship of *xenia* could be passed down through the generations (e.g. Diomedes and Glaucus in *Iliad* 6. The violation of *xenia* by Paris in abducting Helen from his host Menelaus was the central charge against the Trojans.

ARETÉ (ἀρετή) is often translated "virtue," but this English word is more abstract and suggests to us perhaps a Christian ethic which is of course alien to the classical Greeks. "Excellence" is better, or "worth." *Arete* conveys in one word the combination of qualities for which a Homeric hero is admired: physical strength, courage, daring, and above all success in battle.

TIMÉ (τιμή) is the honor or recognition which the hero expects to receive in proportion to his "worth" (*arete*). The word *time* may be used in a fairly abstract sense, like English "honor;" it may also be used (sometimes in the plural, *timai*) for the gifts or prizes which are the tokens of honor—for example, the share of booty from a captured city given to each warrior who helped to take that city. The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book I of the *Iliad* starts when Agamemnon threatens to take Briseis, a captive woman who was given to Achilles when he sacked her town. For Achilles this is an intolerable loss of *time*.

GERAS (γέρας) is the tangible manifestation of a hero's *time*, such as plunder won in battle or gifts received from other heroes. Briseis is a *geras* to Achilles, and Agamemnon's removal of her is the manifestation of his dishonoring of Achilles.

KLEOS (κλέος) is the fame or renown which a hero wins when he accomplishes some great deed, like the killing of a powerful enemy or the sacking of a city. Like *time*, it has both an abstract sense—something like English "glory"—and a more concrete sense, for it is based in the first place on what is reported and can only survive if people, and especially poets, continue to speak or sing of it. To the Homeric heroes, who believe in a dismal and shadowy afterlife for all men, *kleos* is the closest thing to immortality that a human being can attain. It is thus the ultimate goal of the warrior.

MOIRA (μοῖρα) is an individual's "lot" or "portion;" in the distribution of booty it means a share, and in speaking of a person's life as a whole it means his or her destiny. On yet a higher level it is sometimes translated "Fate" and refers to the impersonal and inscrutable forces—beyond the control even of the gods—which impose the ultimate conditions under which men live, in particular the time and manner of one's death.

AIDOS (αἰδώς) is usually translated "shame," but it covers a whole range of emotions, from simple respect to a deep-seated fear of disgrace. In every case, however, it is an emotion which is created by the anticipation of "what people will think" and is based on a sense of one's obligations to family or society. Hector repeatedly says he feels *aidos* toward the Trojan men and women, whose chief defender he is; and Achilles' friends accuse him of a lack of *aidos* when he refused to fight in their behalf.

NEMESIS (νέμεσις) is the "righteous indignation" evoked by a lack of *aidos* in another person. The Trojans—and especially Hector, the hero of *aidos*—feel *nemesis* toward Paris when he hangs back from fighting in the war he is chiefly responsible for starting.

ATÉ (ἄτη) is the "blindness," "madness," or "folly" a god can send to punish or harass a mortal. In some cases, *ate* is actually both a punishment and a crime, insofar as it leads the mortal into further wrongdoing. But it may be inflicted for no apparent reason.