

Homeric parallels of greek and trojan culture

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The Parallels of Greek and Trojan Culture Homer's The Iliad paints an epic and gruesome picture of the Achaeans and Trojans civilizations warring over a ten-year p. If one were to compare these once great cultures, the striking similarities would suggest friendship rather than enemies. Not only did both nations perform similar rituals and sacrifices, but also these rites were directed to the same group of gods. Specifically the Trojans and Achaeans had a tremendous respect for the dead and the Underworld.

Also, the philosophies of both cultures centered on, arete, which for a warrior was excellence determined by a man's prowess as a soldier during wartime or as an athlete in peace (Chiekova 9/11). Another parallel of the cultures was hubris, and the refusal to admit one's wrongdoing because of pride. A final irony is the fact that Apollo is considered to be the "most" Greek of all gods, and yet he fought for the Trojans. Essentially both nations prayed to the same gods, performed identical rites, followed the same core set of principles and yet from all these similarities, neither nation could find a way to form a truce.

The first parallel of Achaean and Trojan culture stems from praying to shared gods. It was common knowledge of the ancients that if one were to honor the gods with sacrifices, the god would eventually reciprocate. And so both nations attempted to win favor. "At once we'll sacrifice twelve heifers in your shrine, yearlings never broken, if only you'll pity Troy, the Trojan wives and all our helpless children," exclaims Theano, a Trojan Priestess (The Iliad, Book 7, page 180), while the Greeks also relied on divine intervention.

Nestor recalls past sacrifices hoping the gods will once again return to the Achaeans, "There we slaughtered fine victims to mighty Zeus, a bull to
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Alpheus River, a bull to lord Poseidon, and an unyoked cow to blazing eyed Athena,” (The Iliad, Book 11, page 266). Not only are the Trojans and Greeks sacrificing the same animal but also in this instance they are praying to the same goddesses. Another example of the same religious practices regards to paying tribute to the dead.

Both believed that a soul remained restless and was unable to cross the River Styx and enter the underworld until burial rites were conferred. An example of the importance of proper burial occurs at the end of Book 7, after the duel between Hector and Great Ajax, “...If you are willing come, we’ll halt the brutal war until we can burn the bodies of our dead,” (The Iliad, Book 7, page 196). The mutual respect for the process of death is just another instance of the parallels between societies.

The next example of how the Achaeans and Trojans were eerily similar is in regards to cultural beliefs. In order to become a great man or hero, one must possess arete. Arete is earned by performing exceptional feats and in turn gaining glory for one’s name and country. To understand how important arete was to the ancient Greeks, the story how Achilles was brought into battle can be recalled. Achilles, mother Thetis, hid him amongst the women of Lycomedes. Achilles remained hidden until Odysseus arrived at the island with various gifts.

Achilles was the only one interested by the fine swords and shields Odysseus brought, and thus revealed himself. Odysseus then continued to remind Achilles of his destiny, that if he enters the Trojan War he would die, but earn himself immeasurable glory on the battlefield (Chiekova 9/28). Earning arete was more important than living for not only Achilles and the Achaeans but

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also the Trojans. Hector earned his arete by proving his intense loyalty and returning to battle even though he knew he was going to die, too.

Andromache pleads “ Yes, soon they will kill you off, all the Achaean forces massed for assault, and the bereft of you, better for me to sink into the Earth,” (The Iliad, Book 6, page 183). Another common theme found in both cultures is of hubris. Countless examples of characters making choices based on pride can be found throughout the epic. One specific example of pride influencing choices of the Achaeans is when Menelaus calls his men cowards for not volunteering to battle with Hector. What disgrace it will be-shame, cringing shame, if not one Danaan, now steps up to battle Hector. You can all turn to earth and water-rot away! ” (The Iliad, Book 7, page 190). This is a classic example of challenging ones pride or shaming one into action. For the Trojans, even when it seems that the city is about to fall, he refuses to return Helen to Menelaus. He proclaims “ I say no, straight out- I won't give up the woman,” (The Iliad, Book 7, page 197). Paris would rather see the entire of city of Troy fall then return his prized Helen and damage his pride.

The final great irony of the Trojan War is the concept that Apollo was the most Greek of all gods, and yet he fought for the Trojans (Chiekova 9/25). Apollo epitomizes everything the Achaeans strived for. He is often depicted as a young man perfected in beauty and grace and referred to as the sun god. Besides being a great archer, Apollo had many noble characteristics including being the god of healing, music, archery, and crafts. He is often identified by his iconic laurel wreath lyre, and bow. The Achaeans viewed all of Apollo's traits as virtuous and emulated themselves after him (Chiekova 9/21).

The great paradox is that the Greeks offend Apollo by refusing to return the daughters of one his priests. This causes Apollo to side with the Trojans and deliver a vicious plague upon the Greeks. Homer writes, " The arrows clanged at his back as the god quaked with rage, the god himself on the march and down he came like night. Over against the ships, he dropped to a knee let fly a shaft and a terrifying clash rang out from his great silver bow... He cut them down in droves- and the corpses-fires burned on, night and day, no end in sight," (The Iliad, Book 1, page 88).

Comparing Achaean and Trojan society it becomes quite apparent that the cultures were more similar than different. Each society practiced the same religion, strived to achieve greatness and respect in battle, and had a unique respect for Apollo. The parallels between civilizations almost seems as if the Achaeans and Trojans should have been allied with one another, but it seems that there eerie similarities almost led to conflict.