THE SOCIAL GROUPS OF DARK AGE GREECE

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THE TRADITIONAL THEORY that the Dark Age Greeks were divided into large kinship groups rests on the interpretation of three passages in the *Iliad*. In two places *phulon* appears to be used precisely to indicate a distinct social unit (*Il.* 2. 362–63, 2. 668). In the first of these passages, the word *phretre* occurs, joined with *phulon*, in a context which suggests that both were social divisions of a particular kind. The word *aphretor* is found in *Iliad* 9. 63–64, where the context also suggests a social group called *phretre*. Proceeding on the assumption that the Dark Age Greeks were heirs to a "prehistoric tribal organization," historians have unhesitatingly identified *phulon* and *phretre* as "tribe" and "phratry." In fact, however, these obscure references are the only attestations we have of such Dark Age social groups. The fundamental question raised by their appearance is: What did *phulon* and *phretre* mean to a Dark Age poet and his audience? Consideration of this question leads us to examine the nature and historical evolution of the social groups of the Greek Dark Age.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the prevailing view, Greek society was always an inclusive ordering of kinship segments, one neatly nesting in the other: families organized into clans, clans into phratries, and phratries into tribes, with the combined tribes forming the people of a given territorial community. Many variations of this scheme have been suggested over the years; and certain aspects of it have been hotly debated, most notably the nature and function of *phule, phratria, patra, genos*, and similar "kinship" groups in the developed city-state. There has been nearly universal agreement, however, that such subdivisions were descendants of a prehistoric tribal organization, which survived without interruption into the archaic polis.[1]

Recent studies by D. Roussel and F. Bourriot have demonstrated that this traditional view is unwarranted on both historical and philological grounds.[2] To begin with, we know almost nothing about the social

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1. See, e.g., J. Day and M. Chambers, *Aristotle's History of Athenian Democracy* (Amsterdam, 1967), p. 161.

2. Roussel, *Tribu et cité: Études sur les groupes sociaux dans les cités grecques aux époques archaïque et classique* (Paris, 1976); Bourriot, *Recherches sur la nature du genos: Étude d'histoire sociale Athénienne—périodes archaïque et classique* (Paris, 1976).

organization of the Mycenaeans, and nothing at all about the social structure of the "Dorian" newcomers. There is thus no evidence to support the assumption that the social groupings of the Dark Age Greeks were inheritances from the Bronze Age. On the contrary, there are sound reasons to think that the social organization of the Greek-speaking peoples would have undergone radical change after 1200 B.C.[3] It seems unlikely that the existing social and political divisions of the Mycenaean Greeks could have remained unchanged after the collapse of the centralized redistributional system that supported them and during the generations of upheaval that followed.[4] We should expect even less group integrity among the shadowy "Dorian" immigrants (who have left so little trace that their very existence has been questioned). The Dorians may, as most earlier historians supposed, originally have been organized into a formal system of nested clans and tribes. But here again, it seems unlikely that a system of large, corporate kinship groups could have remained intact during the long period of migrations across the Greek mainland, the islands, and the Asian coasts.[5]

The almost barren archaeological record from 1200 to 1000 attests to a drastic decline in technology, economy, and communication. By 1000 B.C., according to Snodgrass, the population of the Greek world had fallen to its lowest point in a thousand years; most of the previously inhabited sites were abandoned, many permanently.[6] Given the extent of desolation and dislocation, little could have survived of earlier social institutions; and historians agree that whatever remained from the past (discontinuity is never total), the social history of Greece began anew after this violent chapter.[7] Yet, despite the indications to the contrary, the assumption that the Dark Age Greeks were divided into formal descent groups, which they had inherited from their "Achaean" or "Dorian" ancestors, continues to dominate historical thinking. The support for this assumption has been found in Homer, where the words *genos, phretre,* and *phulon* have been interpreted to mean "clan," "phratry," and "tribe." These identifications, however, fail under close scrutiny.

The few collective nouns that specify human groupings in Homer and Hesiod are flexible terms, having a wide range of applicability. For

3. Roussel, *Tribu,* pp. 180, 184, 187, 214–15, 253–54.

4. Ibid., p. 6, n. 17; 30–31; A. Snodgrass, *The Dark Age of Greece: An Archaeological Survey of the Eleventh to the Eighth Centuries B.C.* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 386–88; M. I. Finley, *Early Greece: The Bronze and Archaic Ages* (New York, 1970), pp. 63–68.

5. Roussel, *Tribu,* pp. 179–80, 221. Roussel discusses at length the contradictory theories about the origins of the four "Ionian" and three "Dorian" *phulai* (pp. 173–91). His view is that the "Dorian" and "Ionian" *phulai* were not ancient, autonomous ethnic groups, but were creations of the nascent city-states (pp. 193–263).

6. *Dark Age,* pp. 364–67; cf. J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece* (New York, 1977), p. 369, n. 2.

7. See, e.g., A. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), pp. 15–18; W. G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy, 800–400 B.C.* (New York and Toronto, 1966), p. 45; M. I. Finley, "Homer and Mycenae: Property and Tenure," *Historia* 6 (1957): 159.

example, Homeric *ethnos*, which sometimes refers to military contingents or to groups of contingents, also includes bees, birds, flies, footsoldiers, corpses, and pigs. Most frequently Homer speaks of the *ethnos* of *hetairoi* (fifteen times, *Iliad* only). Like *ethnos*, the word *genos* designates a class of beings which share a common identification (e.g., mules, cattle, heroes, gods, mankind, giants, flint). *Genos* also conveys a general sense of "birth," "origin," "stock," "descent," or, less frequently, denotes a "descendant," "family," "lineage." Both Bourriot and Roussel prove beyond any question that *genos* in Homer and Hesiod does not signify "clan" or any other extensive kinship group.[8] *Phulon* (or *phula*) in Homer and Hesiod groups together gods, men, women, bees, flies, dreams, giants, and singers. Twice *phulon* means a "lineage" (*Od.* 14. 68, 181), and twice it refers to component groups within military contingents (*Il.* 2. 840, 17. 220).[9]

It is clear, even from this very brief review, that to Homer and Hesiod *genos* and *phulon* (like *ethnos*) were inclusive terms denoting an aggregate of like beings. This seems to be their meaning also when they refer to large or small groupings of people who have a common identity. They appear in our sources as imprecise categories, which convey the idea of "family" in its widest sense—a usage too broad for them to be considered as "technical" names for formal social groups.

II. THE MEANING OF φῦλον AND φρήτρη

With these preliminary observations in mind, let us turn to the passages which contain our only references to the Dark Age social groups *phulon* and *phretre*.

> (1) *Iliad* 2. 668: Tlepolemus came to Rhodes with settlers who
>   τριχθὰ δὲ ᾤκηθεν καταφυλαδόν . . .
> (2) *Iliad* 2. 362–63: Nestor advises Agamemnon,
>   κρῖν᾽ ἄνδρας κατὰ φῦλα, κατὰ φρήτρας, Ἀγάμεμνον,
>   ὡς φρήτρη φρήτρηφιν ἀρήγῃ, φῦλα δὲ φύλοις.
> (3) *Iliad* 9. 63–64: Nestor declares,
>   ἀφρήτωρ, ἀθέμιστος, ἀνέστιός ἐστιν ἐκεῖνος
>   ὃς πολέμου ἔραται ἐπιδημίου ὀκρυόεντος.

Everone agrees that *phulon* and *phretre* in the passages above refer to functional social groups. Many have also considered their mention as sufficient proof of the primitive kinship state: Homeric φῦλον and φρήτρη were large subdivisions, of ancient origin, based on descent; they were early forms of φυλή and φρατρία, the classical age "tribe" and "phratry."

This standard view of Dark Age social structure can no longer be considered correct. As Bourriot and Roussel have shown, the gentilic

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8. *Recherches*, pp. 240–69; *Tribu*, pp. 17–37; see also H. P. Gates, *The Kinship Terminology of Homeric Greek* (Baltimore, 1971), pp. 31–32.
9. On these passages, see Roussel, *Tribu*, pp. 31, n. 35; 161–62, 223, n. 10.

model was a product of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rationalizing. Heavily influenced by the anthropological theories of the day, historians postulated that the primitive Greeks (like the Iroquois) must have had "tribes," "phratries," and "clans." These categories have no reality outside these assumptions.[10] We have seen nothing in the usage of *genos* and *phulon* to suggest that they were terms for formal corporate groups.[11] Most conclusive is the fact that our sources tell nothing about them; in the whole of Homer and Hesiod there is not the slightest indication that people were organized in such groups.

What, then, were Homeric *phulon* and *phretre?* In the Catalog of Ships we are told that Tlepolemus came to Rhodes with πολὺν λαόν, and that "they were settled in three parts by *phula*" (*Il.* 2. 668). Some lines earlier it is said that the Rhodians "dwelled around Rhodes, arranged in three parts (διὰ τρίχα), Lindus, Ialysus, and chalk-white Cameirus" (2. 655–56). An earlier view, that *phula* here are to be identified as "tribes" (specifically, the three "Dorian" *phulai*), has been refuted on a variety of grounds by recent scholarship.[12] The fact remains, however, that the adverb καταφυλαδόν, in its context, naturally supposes the existence of a social group called φῦλον.

As we have seen, *phulon* in Homer denotes an aggregate of like beings—a generic "family." We should therefore expect the Rhodian *phula* to be social groups whose members shared a common identity. Homer gives us some important information about that shared identity. On attaining manhood, Tlepolemus, a son of Heracles, killed his father's mother's brother, Lycimnius. Threatened by his half brothers and their sons, Tlepolemus quickly built ships, and "gathering much people (*polus laos*) he went fleeing over the sea." Eventually, after many hardships, they ended up in Rhodes (*Il.* 2. 657–67). The *laos* was Tlepolemus' following—a large voluntary association, which he recruited, led over-seas, and then settled "by *phula*" (he was still their leader years later when they came to Troy in nine ships); the *phula*, according to the context, were constituent elements of the *laos*. We may suppose that the *phula* of Tlepolemus' following included some isolated families and individuals. It seems more likely, however, that Tlepolemus would have recruited the bulk of his colonists, not by random selection, but by small, localized groups, where each group was made up of families linked by a common interest and following its own leader.

10. On the mutually influential attitudes of early anthropologists and contemporary classicists, see Bourriot, *Recherches,* pp. 1385–94, and Roussel, *Tribu,* pp. 5, 99–103. Bourriot conveniently summarizes the views of other scholars who have questioned these assumptions (pp. 256–61). "Tribe" and "tribal" are the despair of modern anthropologists, while "phratry" has effectively disappeared from their lexicon: see M. H. Fried, "On the Concepts of 'Tribe' and 'Tribal Society,'" *Trans. of the New York Academy of Science* 28 (1966): 527–40.

11. Roussel argues that *phulon* and *phule* were different concepts in Greek. *Phule* was always a precise, limited term, designating a formal group within the polis; *phulon* was always a general, indeterminate word (*Tribu,* pp. 161–63, 169–71, 173, 305).

12. A. Andrewes, "Phratries in Homer," *Hermes* 89 (1961): 132–33; Roussel, *Tribu,* pp. 222–23, 261, 294. Neither scholar, however, assigns a meaning to *phulon* here. The third edition of *CAH* 2. 2 (1975) continues to hold to the older view (pp. 689, 844).

I suggest that *phulon* was the name by which such small leader-groups were known in the Dark Age. This interpretation of the Rhodian *phula,* led by Tlepolemus, allows us to assign a precisely corresponding meaning to the hitherto obscure *phula* of the Pelasgi, collectively led by Hippothous (*Il.* 2. 840) and the "μυρία φῦλα of allies who dwell around," commanded by the leaders mentioned in *Iliad* 17. 216–18.[13] If this suggestion—that *phula* specified small local groups, parts of a larger group of followers—is valid, then we must presume that the aggregate grouping also had a name. The obvious candidate is *phretre.* Since the theory that *phretre* meant the "blood-brotherhood," the band of warriors, is an old and commonly accepted belief, most current opinion would agree with this identification.[14] In the scheme I am proposing, however, *phretre* is not a formal group, the "phratry," a subdivision of the "tribe" (*phulon*), but an association of small bands (*phula*) loyal to a single leader, like Tlepolemus. The two other Iliadic passages confirm this hypothesis.

The crucial text, of course, is *Iliad* 2. 362–63, where *phulon* and *phretre* are linked together for the only time in our early sources. When Nestor counsels Agamemnon to "separate the men by *phula,* by *phretrai,* so that *phretre* may bear aid to *phretre* and *phula* to *phula,*" he means that Agamemnon should marshal each of the contingents according to their usual divisions—the small bands of followers (*phula*) and the wider bands of followers formed by them (*phretrai*), commanded by important leaders.[15] Nestor's next words support this interpretation (*Il.* 2. 364–65):

> If you do this, and the Achaeans obey you, you will know who among the leaders (*hegemones*) is *kakos,* and who among the *laoi,* and who is *esthlos.* For they will fight by themselves (*kata spheas*).

In these lines Nestor continues to speak of leaders and their warrior groups, who fight together as units, in mutual support. So, too, in the Achaean and Trojan catalogs which follow, Homer gives us the names

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13. See above, p. 295. Cf. Roussel, *Tribu,* p. 230, n. 10.

14. E.g., O. Murray, *Early Greece* (Glasgow, 1980), p. 55. The theory goes back to G. Glotz, *La solidarité de la famille dans le droit criminel en Grèce* (Paris, 1904), pp. 85–91: the early *phretre* was made up of *hetairoi,* the men of military age, and of noncombatant members, *etai* (who were not blood-kin). Other versions of this thesis were advanced by G. de Sanctis, *Atthis: Storia della repubblica Ateniese*[2] (Turin, 1912), pp. 41–49; *Storia dei Greci,* vol. 1 (Florence, 1939), pp. 87–95; and by H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courètes* (Lille, 1939), pp. 97–111, 133–34. C. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 57–59, conflates the opinions of Glotz and de Sanctis (for whom the "brotherhood" was essentially a self-help association of neighbors). For a different theory, see Andrewes, "Phratries in Homer," p. 140, and "Philochoros on Phratries," *JHS* 81 (1961): 14–15: the "phratry" was a late (end of the ninth century) creation by aristocrats. Forrest, *Emergence,* pp. 50–53, 62–63, follows Andrewes.

15. We note that *phretre* is singular in line 363. This fits the sense that several *phula* made up a *phretre.* Jeanmaire, *Couroi,* p. 133, and Roussel, *Tribu,* p. 162, argue that *phula* here refers not to "tribes" but to "national contingents." This interpretation, however, accords neither with the context (which implies that *phula* were subgroups of some sort) nor with the meanings of *phulon* in *Il.* 2. 840, 17. 220; *Od.* 14. 68, 14. 181.

of the contingents, the localities where they lived, and their principal leaders.[16]

Finally, in *Iliad* 9. 63–64 Nestor says that the man who loves war among the people (*polemos epidemios*) is ἀφρήτωρ, ἀθέμιστος, ἀνέστιος—meaning that the socially disruptive man is excluded from the community (*demos*), articulated by Nestor as *phretre, themistes,* and *hestia.* Belonging to the people thus appears to be expressed here, as it is everywhere in Homer, in terms of its two conspicuous elements: the primary household and the band of warrior-companions.[17]

III. THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF DARK AGE GREECE

I have argued that *phulon* and *phretre* were not the ancient kinship groups hypothesized by nineteenth-century scholars, but were names given to groups of followers. It remains now to subject these conclusions, arrived at by consideration of the textual evidence alone, to the test of other evidence about the social organization of the Dark Age Greeks. The evidence will show that *phulon* and *phretre* (so far identified simply as follower-groups) were important structural units, made up of a number of constituencies and serving several functions. They originated in the early Dark Age as loosely organized political/military associations, formed in response to the unsettled conditions in Greece after the dissolution of the Mycenaean states. As conditions changed, their nature and functions also changed.[18]

Our investigation of Dark Age social organization begins with a brief description of its primary components. The epics and Hesiod recognize three—and only three—clearly delineated social units: *demos, laos,* and *oikos.*

Demos in Homer and Hesiod signifies both an area of land and all free inhabitants of the area; it occurs only in the singular and its limiting genitives are always geographical places or named human groups.[19] *Demos* is always portrayed as a single body with a common will.[20] Although there are indications that *demos* originally was a local division, in Homer and Hesiod it always seems to mean the whole population or the whole territory of a given named people. In short, *demos* is the all-inclusive social unit—a particular people and their land.[21]

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16. Compare *Il.* 2. 437–40, 487–93, 815, 3. 1. See M. W. Edwards, "The Structure of Homeric Catalogues," *TAPA* 110 (1980): 81–105. On the use of *laos* as a "following," see above, on Tlepolemus; also p. 299, below.

17. Exclusion from customary law (*themis*) expresses at the "legal" level the outlawing of the socially destructive man from these two fundamental associations. Roussel, *Tribu,* pp. 117–18, stresses, correctly, that *phretre* here is not a military unit, but a social group, bound together by a personal relationship of some sort. The remainder of this article is devoted to exploring the nature of that relationship.

18. My explanation follows, in many respects, de Sanctis' theory about the origins and development of the Dark Age *phretre* (*Storia dei Greci,* 1: 87–95; for an analysis, see Roussel, *Tribu,* pp. 113–14).

19. E.g., *Il.* 3. 201; *Od.* 6. 34; cf. *Il.* 16. 437; *Od.* 1. 237, 15. 227; *Theog.* 971.

20. E.g., *Il.* 5. 78, 11. 704, 20. 160; *Od.* 7. 11, 150, 8. 157, 14. 239, 16. 114, 245, 21. 17; *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 271.

21. Cf. *Il.* 3. 56, 18. 295–96, 500, 20. 166; *Od.* 2. 239, 3. 82, 4. 314, 15. 468, 16. 75, 19. 527; *Op.* 261. The Homeric definition of exile is banishment from the *demos* (*Il.* 6. 158, 9. 634, etc.). The word is

Laos, like *demos*, often means the "people"; nevertheless, the two terms are not exact equivalents. Unlike *demos*, *laos* never means the "land"; it occurs in the plural; it sometimes refers to a collection of men from several communities, and, occasionally, to men who follow a particular leader.[22] These considerations have led some scholars to conclude that the Homeric *laoi* were the men under arms, and to speculate that in its "primitive sense" the *laoi* were the followers of a chief.[23] Implicit in this plausible theory is the suggestion that *laos* was tending to lose its fractional sense and was evolving into a synonym for *demos*, the collective community.[24]

Oikos is the basic kinship, residential, and economic unit, comprising both the "house" (dwellings, land, animals) and the "household."[25] The household consists of the family (often an extended family of three generations) plus servants and adopted members. Customarily, when sons marry they remain in the paternal *oikos*, thus preserving its integrity and manpower and insuring its continuity. Frequently, however, the "rule" of patrilocality is relaxed, and grooms may join the wife's *oikos*, if it is an important one.[26] In the case of eminent houses, more distant relatives and nonkin associates (*philoi, hetairoi*) attach themselves to the *oikos*-head as his followers.

While a number of Homeric *oikoi* (e.g., Priam's, Nestor's) are examples of the traditional Indo-European joint or extended family, it has been noted that "the nuclear family already appears to be the normal residential and economic unit in the Homeric poems."[27] There is evidence that the supplanting of extended families by nuclear families, apparent in the epics and Hesiod, was a stage in a long historical process of devolution from larger to smaller living units. Linguists derive *oikos* from an Indo-European root **wik-*, which originally seems to have denoted a settlement of interrelated extended families—a "clan village."[28]

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sometimes linked closely with *polis* in variations of the formula *demos te polis te*, which seems to suggest that already in the epics *demos* and *polis* had begun to converge in meaning: *Il.* 3. 50, 24. 706; *Od.* 6. 3, 8. 555, 11. 14, 14. 43; *Op.* 526. See J. V. Luce, "The *polis* in Homer and Hesiod," *PRIA* 78 (1978): 9.

22. Several communities: *Il.* 1. 54, 2. 120, 280, 438, 4. 184, 377, 11. 85, 764, 770, 13. 495; *Od.* 3. 140. Followers: *Il.* 2. 664, 4. 407; *Od.* 6. 164, 9. 263, 14. 248; perhaps also *Il.* 2. 577, 580, 675, 3. 186, 20. 283.

23. Jeanmaire, *Couroi*, pp. 55–59, 97–99 (*laoi* = *hetairoi*). See E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. E. Palmer (London and Coral Gables, 1973), pp. 371–72; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore and London, 1979), p. 83.

24. Compare *Od.* 16. 95–96 with 16. 114. See also *Il.* 18. 490–508, 22. 408, 24. 611, 776–77, 789; *Od.* 2. 41–81, 3. 304, 16. 375; Hes. *Theog.* 84, 88; *Op.* 227. Like *demos*, *laos* also expresses a common will: *Od.* 16. 375; *Theog.* 88; *Op.* 768.

25. For descriptions of the Homeric *oikos*, see M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*[2] (New York, 1978); W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca, 1968); M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977).

26. E.g., *Il.* 6. 192, 249, 9. 144; *Od.* 3. 387, 7. 311. Roussel, *Tribu*, p. 29, n. 21 and p. 30, nn. 25 and 26, cautions that we must not think of these customs as strict rules. Thus, while sons usually divide the property equally on the father's death, they might also opt to hold it jointly. So, too, a married son remaining in his paternal *oikos* is also, by virtue of being a husband and father, the head of his own *oikos*.

27. S. C. Humphreys, "Kinship in Greek Society, c. 800–300 B.C.," *ASNP* 4 (1974): 357–58.

28. O. Szemerényi, *Studies in the Kinship Terminology of the Indo-European Languages*, Acta Iranica 16 (Teheran-Liège, 1977), pp. 24, n. 85; 33–34, 96, 100, 151, 195, 205. Cf. Benveniste, *Indo-*

It is possible, therefore, that the primitive "*oikos*" had been a fairly extensive kin/residential unit, which in time split off into the smaller, autonomous *oikoi* of the epics. One consequence of such a trend would be the increasing optionality of kinship as a means of social integration, in favor of nonkin bonds. The important point to keep in mind is that the Homeric *oikos* constituted only a small nucleus of relatives. Limited in the number of its blood members, any household eager to increase its power and influence had to recruit outsiders. The success of an ambitious *oikos,* in other words, depended on political alliance.

Two key inferences about the nature of Dark Age social organization follow from what has been said above. First, since *oikos* was the fundamental social unit, all wider groups formed within the comprehensive *demos* were associations of independent *oikoi*. Second, since these intermediate associations were patterned on the modal *oikos,* we should expect them to share its character as both a kinship and an alliance group.

Recognition of the close similarity between kinship and alliance ties is crucial for understanding the patterns of social integration among the early Greeks. J. Pitt-Rivers reminds us that in small-scale societies kinship is properly conceived of as "a category of amity"; and, equally true, that "non-kin amity loves to masquerade as kinship"[29]—a principle that is amply illustrated in our texts. Benveniste has shown, for example, that the word *philos,* "friend," has not merely a sentimental meaning in Homer, but describes all who are united by certain reciprocal obligations. Blood relatives, in-laws, dependents, retainers, and friends are all called *philoi*.[30] A similar kind of relationship is reflected in the words *etes* and *hetairos* in Homer. *Etes,* usually glossed as "kinsman," "relation," and *hetairos,* "companion," are both derived from the proto-Indo-European stem **swe-,* "one's own," "belonging."[31] In addition to their common linguistic origin, both appear to have closely related meanings in Homer.[32] Such slurred distinctions between "friends," "companions," and kin are frequent in the epic. To cite only the most famous example: the emotional attachments between Achilles and Patroclus (*Il.* 17. 411, 655 πολὺ φίλτατος ἑταῖρος) in life and Achilles' obligations to Patroclus dead (funeral rites, burial, blood vengeance) were precisely those due and expected between close blood relatives.[33] Indeed, even allies from

European Language, pp. 165, 167, 176, 251; P. Friedrich, "Proto-Indo-European Kinship," *Ethnology* 5 (1966): 16, 29.

29. "The Kith and the Kin," in *The Character of Kinship,* ed. J. Goody (Cambridge and London, 1973), p. 90.

30. *Indo-European Language,* pp. 273–88; cf. Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans,* pp. 103–8.

31. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language,* pp. 268–71; Szemerényi, *Studies,* pp. 43, 45, 96, 150–51.

32. For Glotz, *La solidarité,* pp. 85–93, *etes* and *hetairos* were exact equivalents; Andrewes, "Phratries in Homer," pp. 134–37, argued that they were totally separate concepts. Gates, *Kinship Terminology,* pp. 28–31, has a sound discussion of the various opinions.

33. See C. A. Trypanis, "Brothers Fighting Together in the *Iliad,*" *RhM* 106 (1963): 295–96. Patroclus was Peleus' father's brother's son and an adopted member of Peleus' household. Odysseus promises his faithful *dmoes,* Eumaeus and Philoetius, wives and possessions and "houses (*oikia*) built near mine; and afterwards you will be, in my eyes, *hetairoi* and *kasignetoi* of Telemachus" (*Od.* 21. 213–16; cf. *Od.* 8. 585–86).

outside the community, *xeinoi,* were regarded in a kinlike way, with
equivalent gift-exchanges and other reciprocal obligations, extending
over generations.[34]

In short, the early Greek community was a web of "amiable rela-
tions," in which kinship, in all its degrees, and nonkin amity, in all its
degrees, partook of a similar language and a similar behavior. The
cognitive and symbolic expression of this homology reflects the universal
human instinct to interpret all friendly association as a form of kinship.
The social groupings that emerged from these confluent webs of amity
thus naturally mimicked the nomenclature and etiquette of kinship. This
signifies that the bonds which united them were close, kinlike, "familial";
it does not mean that their members were therefore related, or that they
imagined a common ancestor, or that they were recruited by descent.

We can now consider the material and social factors which shaped
these groups. Dark Age Greece was a backwater of small, unfortified
villages, made up of very small (one- or two-room) detached houses.[35]
Since few of the habitation sites uncovered by archaeologists can
be dated before about 900 B.C., we know that the earlier Dark Age
settlements were even fewer, ruder, smaller, and more widely scattered.
Yet, even in the impoverished and depopulated centuries following the
destruction of the Mycenaean culture, the Greeks lived (as they have
always) in villages. This pattern of independent households (*oikoi*)
clustered in small settlements was the physical matrix in which were
formed the wider associations whose origins we are seeking.

Sociability in the Dark Age revolved, as it does in all village societies,
around the twin axes of kinship and neighborhood. Most families in a
Greek village were related; most also had kin in villages nearby. Thus,
within the villages and village-clusters that made up the early *demos,* the
majority of households were probably linked by ties of blood and
marriage.[36] According to our texts, however, the bonds of kinship were
attenuated beyond the *oikos.* The vocabulary of specific kinship terms in
Homer and Hesiod, for example, is largely confined within the extended
family.[37] Mentions of kinship connections and duties beyond the family
are infrequent and appear usually as personal and optional exchanges
among cognatic kin. There is no indication, certainly, of the formal,

34. W. Donlan, "Reciprocities in Homer," *CW* 75 (1982): 149–51. *Xeinoi* are likened to *hetairoi* and
kasignetoi. On the "close relationship between *xenos* and *philos,*" see Benveniste, *Indo-European
Language,* pp. 278–79.

35. Snodgrass, *Dark Age,* pp. 401–16; Coldstream, *Geometric Greece,* pp. 50–52, 199, 303–14.
Archaeologists stress the low level and slow growth of urbanization. Snodgrass, "Archaeology and the
Rise of the Greek State," *Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge and London, 1977), p. 26, notes that in the
eleventh and tenth centuries Athens "consisted of a number of separate, discontinuous, unfortified
villages." He defines the Dark Age as "the period when there were no towns" (p. 34). See C. Roebuck,
"Some Aspects of Urbanization in Corinth," *Hesperia* 41 (1972): 98–103, 125.

36. According to Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece,* p. 18, in the ninth century the population of Lefkandi
in Euboea was twenty-five persons. Obviously the half dozen or so families were related.

37. Gates, *Kinship Terminology,* pp. 5–32. Beyond the terms for close consanguineals and affines, we
are confronted by obscure kinship terms like γνωτός, πηός, and ἔτης, which appear to indicate a broad
and vague range of relationship. Even fairly precise terms like ἀνέψιος, "cousin," and κασίγνητος,
"brother," "cousin," have a certain looseness of application.

collective obligations imposed by membership in large corporate kin groups. The evidence points to the conclusion that the functional kin group beyond the nuclear *oikos* was the "bilateral kindred"—a network of relatives, recognized by ego, which extended to second cousins on both the father's and mother's sides. The ego-centered kindred is structurally shapeless—a "category" rather than a "group," as R. Fox says, since "it comes in and out of existence as its focal egos are born and die."[38] Because it is not a descent group, it has no corporate functions, that is, it cannot act "as a body"; and, because kindreds overlap endlessly, the possibility of divided loyalties is always present. The Dark Age kindred was highly congruent with the system of independent households, providing an available pool of mutual aid when needed, while allowing each *oikos* wide latitude to make its own ad hoc alliances.[39]

The axis of neighborhood, especially in the small communities of the early Dark Age, coincided with the axis of kinship; in the villages and village-clusters neighbors were often also relatives. But the dynamics of neighborhood and kinship, although similar, were not the same. Neighborliness develops its own ties and obligations (local cults, festivals, plantings and harvests, local defense, etc.), which are different from, although hardly less binding than, obligations of blood and marriage. It is easy, therefore, to visualize circumstances in which the two principles of loyalty might clash: when, for example, a man was caught between his obligations to a neighbor to whom he was distantly related, or no kin at all, and a close kinsman living at a distance. "If misfortune strikes your house," warns Hesiod, "neighbors will come in their bedclothes; kinsmen will dress up."[40]

Kinship and neighborliness were important focuses of social unity in the early Dark Age. But the social networks formed by autonomous households and kindreds, scattered among isolated hamlets, were fluid and amorphous. Such a loose arrangement of overlapping "communities," with their diverse and frequently conflicting interests, could not constitute a unified political system by itself. All the evidence at our disposal points to a third axis of social interaction as the primary integrating force. The political dynamic (for so we may justly term it) is

38. *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (Baltimore, 1967), p. 167; see also R. M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York, 1975), p. 15. The "ego-centered bilateral kindred" was jurally recognized as the *anchisteia* in classical Athens. See Humphreys, "Kinship," pp. 354–57; R. J. Littman, "Kinship in Athens," *AncSoc* 10 (1979): 5–7. The bilateral kindred appears to have been a characteristic feature of proto-Indo-European cultures. See G. S. Ghurye, *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (Oxford, 1955), p. 42; Friedrich, "Proto-Indo-European Kinship," p. 29 and n. 11.

39. Littman, "Kinship," pp. 26–27, demonstrates this relationship between the later Athenian *anchisteia* and *oikos*. Lineal descent groups may coexist with a system of cognatic kindred. There are instances of *genos* in Homer which *may* refer to the lineage (*Il.* 6. 209–11, 20. 306; *Od.* 8. 583, 16. 117). *Phulon* probably also has this meaning in *Od.* 14. 68, 181.

40. *Op.* 344–45, trans. by A. N. Athanassakis, *Hesiod: "Theogony," "Works and Days," "Shield"* (Baltimore and London, 1983). Hesiod is constantly aware of the potential for divided loyalties and conflicts between neighbors and kin, and among neighbors: e.g., *Op.* 21–24, 343–51, 370–71, 394–403, 407–8, 453–54, 700–701, 707–8.

explicit in our sources. According to the testimony of Homer, personal
alliance, which generated reciprocal bonds of loyalty between equals and
between inferiors and superiors, was the dominant structuring mechanism
of Dark Age society. Thanks to its centrality to the society described by
Homer, and its resemblance to similar developments recorded for other
societies, we are able to give a schematic account of how this political
alliance system came about and how it worked.

We may reasonably place its origins in the early Dark Age (late
twelfth and eleventh centuries): fragmented, highly mobile and violent in
its initial stage, passing gradually to a more or less stable pattern of
settled village life by about 1000 B.C. In the turbulent period of migra-
tions and regrouping, the most functional skills were military prowess
and leadership; men who excelled in these skills were the war-leaders, to
whom others gravitated for direction, defense, and profit. Blessed by
ability and circumstance, certain *oikoi* came inevitably to dominate their
neighbors and kinsmen, forming the kind of low-level political and
economic elite common among small-scale warrior societies. Given the
conditions of life at this time—a sparse population of pastoral and
farming families, huddled in unfortified hamlets, with no centralized
authority or corporate kin groups—the establishment of numerous
small, independent bands, centered around local "big men" (*basileis*),
seems assured.[41]

The name *phulon,* a generic term for a "family" of like beings,
appropriately describes these minuscule "natural" social units, composed
of a few families and occupying a small area. At this level, of course, the
political dimension would more often than not be contained within
neighborhood and related families, so that *phula* might be described as
local lineages. We have seen, in fact, that the word *phulon* is used in the
Odyssey to denote the lineages of Helen and of Arceisius; under certain
circumstances a *phulon* might simply constitute a single large extended
family, making up a small settlement.[42] The important fact to bear in
mind is that the *phulon* was not a formal corporation, based on kinship.
The superordinate tie that bound its households together was their
shared identity as the free followers of a leading man. Because of the
volatile nature of the personal bond, membership and spatial boundaries
were flexible, changing with the altered fortunes of this or that leading
local house. Within the pre-state community, *phulon* could have no
formal civic or legal functions; its internal concerns would have been
minor local matters, dealt with by its family-heads or arbitrated by the

41. On the anthropological type of the "big man" and his potential for becoming a "chief," see
M. D. Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia,"
CSSH 5 (1963): 285–303. For the applicability of the concept to the Homeric *basileus,* see Donlan,
"Reciprocities," pp. 140–41; "The Politics of Generosity in Homer," *Helios* 9 (1982): 6–7; B. Qviller,
"The Dynamics of the Homeric Society," *SO* 56 (1981): 117–20 (*basileus* is a "big-man developing into
a chieftain").

42. For the use of *genos* and *phulon* to denote a "lineage," see n. 39 above. The fifteen to twenty-five
souls in tenth–ninth century Lefkandi (above, n. 36) might well have described themselves as an *oikos,*
a *genos,* or a *phulon.* In any case, they would have reckoned descent ambilaterally.

leader. It was most conscious of its group identity when its fighting men assembled for raid or defense, behind their chief who, probably little superior in economic condition or style of life to his "companions" (also his neighbors and kinsmen), fought alongside them.[43]

Even in the thinly populated communities of the early Dark Age, the *phula*-bands were not politically isolated. The leader was also spokesman and negotiator for his people in the larger world of the *demos*. In time, as restless movement subsided, the outstanding men— great warriors with many flocks and numerous followers—found themselves in a position to recruit wider circles of "friends" and "companions" throughout the *demos*. The majority of such alliances would naturally have been contracted with neighboring big men (many of whom would also have been kinsmen) induced (or intimidated) by the prestige, wealth, and power of the stronger man to support him and to join their bands to his. The expanded following of an able and ambitious *basileus*, therefore, was made up of a number of smaller alliances, radiating outward from his *oikos* and *phulon*.[44]

Let us reflect for a moment on the nature of a powerful chief's following. It was linked at the top by close ties between the *basileus* and subordinate *basileis*, and below by extended kinship networks among the contiguous groups; and it occupied, naturally, a more or less distinct residential zone. The presence of such bonds implies that a *hetairoi*-group would have been conscious of a sense of communal identity, just as it was conscious of its comradely identity. In spite of this natural cohesiveness, however, an association of followers was far from being a formal corporation. To a greater extent than the *phula* of which it was composed, its integrity was determined by the fluid realities of politics. The contours of the *hetairoi*-group were not determined by kinship or geography, but by how successful a *basileus* was in his continual competition with fellow *basileis* for adherents. The association had no more organizational structure than was imposed by the shifting personal loyalties between the chief and his relatively equal and independent subordinates. Its principal collective activities were military: for example, when the bands (or, more likely, a portion of them), attracted by promise of booty, followed their leader on some adventure—joined, perhaps, by other leader-groups and individuals. On such occasions they were known only as "friends" and "companions," a cross-cutting association of warriors, bound in a personal way to their warrior-leader—the ubiquitous ἔθνος ἑταίρων of the *Iliad*.

The political organization of the Dark Age *demos* was thus an unstable collection of expanding and contracting kin/client associations. At the top, in a position of tenuous dominance over the rest of the

43. Cf. Snodgrass, *Dark Age*, p. 386: "Among the hundreds of burials known from Greece in this period, some few at least must be those of aristocrats and rulers; yet, south of Macedonia, there is barely a grave between the early eleventh and the late tenth century which can be called rich."

44. Compare Forrest's somewhat similar model of "vertical divisions," or "pyramids," *Emergence*, pp. 48–49, 52–55, 62–63.

chiefs, stood the paramount *basileus*. No monarch, the *primus (inter pares)* who held the office of community leader owed his political superiority to a general recognition of his personal competence to lead. In practice, this meant he was an able warrior and astute politician, with a wealthy *oikos* and the largest personal following. His "office" was nonetheless a real one. He provided a certain amount of "centralized" direction for the whole people, especially important when some danger threatened the *demos/polis*. Lesser *basileis* and the people granted his superior status and accorded him the deference and privileges that went with the office, including the "right" of legitimate succession within the chiefly family. But, as our sources make clear, the position of the paramount chief was precarious; he and his house faced the constant possibility of being pushed aside by other *basileis,* whose charismatic qualities and ability to distribute gifts and win followers often rivaled his own.

The comparative study of chiefdoms confirms what we see in Homer; because of internal centrifugal forces, the chiefdom is a notoriously unstable form of polity. Composed of a number of pyramids ("little chiefdoms, replicas of the paramount chiefdom"), chiefdoms historically experience cycles of breakdown and reformation, as the fragile central authority reaches the limit of its ability to function effectively, collapses into smaller political segments, and is then reconstituted.[45] Numerous legends about early Greek chiefly houses document Service's observation that "the 'rise and fall' of chiefdoms has been such a frequent phenomenon that it seems to be part of their nature."[46]

By the middle or end of the eighth century the fragile hierarchy of ranked chiefs had given way to a system of collegial rule by a land-owning nobility. The complex factors responsible for the "decline of the *basileis*" and the reconfiguration of power relations among the elite cannot concern us directly here. It is sufficient to note that the breakdown of the chiefdom and the transformation of the personal groups on which it was based were simultaneous occurrences; and that the accelerating social changes that took place between 900 and 700 B.C. were implicated in both processes.

IV. THE DARK AGE φρήτρη

In the preceding sections I have tried to construct a coherent historical outline of Dark Age social organization, consistent with the limited evidence and free of preconceptions about the nature of its social groups. It is against this background that we may attempt, finally, to offer a solution to the greatest puzzles in early Greek social history—the origin of the φρήτρη and its evolution into the archaic "phratry."

    45. E. R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization: The Process of Cultural Evolution* (New York, 1975), pp. 95–96.
    46. *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York, 1965), p. 152. The fall and rise of Odysseus' chieftainship is the main plot-line of the *Odyssey*.

The most mystifying piece of evidence about the *phretre* has been its shadowy existence in our literary sources. Not only does it occur but twice in all of Homer and Hesiod, there is also no sign of its operation in the social background of the texts. Even more mysterious, however, are the *phrateres*. The word φράτερες is as old as the language itself, and was later the name for members of the archaic and classical *phratria*. Moreover, as Roussel has pointed out, the word φρήτρη was formed from φράτηρ.[47] It is thus certain that *phrateres* (the word occurs almost exclusively in the plural) was in common use throughout the entire Dark Age. Yet they are totally absent from the texts. Plainly, our explanation of the *phretre*'s origin must begin with these curious, but indisputable, facts.

Let us look first at the *phrateres*. *Phrateres* was not used in Greek to signify the consanguineous "brothers" (*adelphoi, kasignetoi*). According to Benveniste, Greek *phrater* was a classificatory kinship term which preserved the original "broad" meaning of Indo-European **bhrater* (cf. *fratres Arvales, fratres Atiedii*).[48] Szemerényi, who agrees with Benveniste, also cites Ossetic *aervad*, any male relative, and Old Irish *brath(a)ir*, not only "brother," but also any "male member of the *fine*, the joint family." He contends that this wider usage "probably represents the original sphere of the term." Indo-European **bhrater*, he concludes, "denotes not only a 'brother german', but also any *'male member of the joint family or clan'*."[49]

It seems very likely, on the basis of the linguistic evidence, that *phrateres* always meant in Greek the classificatory "brothers." It is thus natural to suppose that in the distant past they were the male members of the primitive *"oikos"* (collection of extended families, clan). Even in the fragmented post-Mycenaean world, where there were no clanlike corporations, and the extended family itself was segmenting into smaller units, men continued to call themselves *phrateres*, a concept embedded in the folk consciousness, resonant with traditional loyalties and senti-ments.[50] The ancient word, which had never vanished from the language, was as alive in the tenth century as it was in the fifth. The reasons for its nonappearance in our texts have already manifested themselves. In the Dark Age the webs of obligations and interdependencies represented by the "brothers" were significant only at the micro-level of society. The solidarity of the *phrateres* was the generalized solidarity of local kinsmen

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47. *Tribu,* pp. 95–96, 118. Although *aphretor* in *Il.* 9. 63 is usually rendered "without a *phretre,*" G. Nagy points out (*per litt.*) that ἀφρήτωρ must be "without a φρήτηρ (cf. πατήρ–ἀπάτωρ)."

48. *Indo-European Language,* pp. 172–73; cf. 179, 222, 259.

49. *Studies,* pp. 23–24. He also cites Russian *bratar,* "brother, elder brother, cousin, nephew" (p. 156). So also Friedrich, "Proto-Indo-European Kinship," pp. 8–9 (*aervad* = "clan brother"). According to Gates, *Kinship Terminology,* p. 15, **bhrater* refers to parallel cousins as well as to brothers, i.e., is a classificatory term.

50. On the aboriginal *"oikos,"* see above, p. 299. The segmentation of composite kinship units into smaller ones is explainable on the basis of demographic and material factors: e.g., wanderings and migrations, drastic decline in population, and the consequent abundance of land, which favored the splitting off of family groups.

and neighbors, a locus of social integration eclipsed by the major structuring device of personal alliance, which cut across family and local ties.

But conditions in Dark Age Greece were not static. In the course of the Dark Age, as social conditions became more stable, the dynamics of kinship and neighborhood came, increasingly, to play an expanded integrating role; and in the process the nature of the social groupings was gradually altered. Archaeology tells us that throughout the tenth and ninth centuries the population of the Greek world did not increase significantly from its previous low levels. Yet, while population growth remained near zero, life was changing in many important ways. By the ninth century the Greeks were completely sedentary, and were beginning to turn from stock-breeding to grain-growing for their main means of livelihood. Also during the ninth century, scattered, isolated hamlets were coalescing to form recognizable villages, and there appear the first faint signs of "urban" clustering in the form of walled towns.[51] The clear result of the "agricultural revolution" (as Snodgrass terms it) was the concentration of a small, static population of farming families (including the leading families) in permanent residential centers. A natural social consequence of these economic and demographic developments was that the political/military associations and the kin/neighbor networks blended together "on the ground." *Hetairoi* and *phrateres* had, of course, always been overlapping statuses to a greater or lesser degree; now, as a result of fixed patterns of agrarian land use and settlement in ancestral villages, they constituted undefined, but increasingly homogeneous, areal groupings.

The development of settled agrarian life, with its multiple effects, was thus demonstrably the key variable in the transformation of fluid personal groups into cohesive communities. Unified by the cooperative interests and reciprocal ties that inevitably evolved during several generations of living together, the members of the separate alliances that made up the following of a chief came naturally to regard themselves as "brothers." At some point—around the middle of the ninth century we may guess—the word φρήτρη was coined (from φράτηρ) to convey the sense of the wider brotherhood. The new word consciously declared the fraternal solidarity of men bound together as warriors in the service of their chief and as sharers in the common experiences of everyday life in their cantons. The passing references to *phretre* in the *Iliad* do not yet, however, attest the existence of formal, "jural" groups. As long as the Dark Age chiefdoms endured, politics continued to determine the way men associated together. The *phretre* existed as a kind of vague conceptual entity, but it was still functionally the "friends" and "companions," a loosely knit collection of semi-autonomous bands. In the pre-state society the shifting and unstable vertical divisions composed of eminent

51. Snodgrass, *Dark Age*, pp. 378–80, 402–16; *Inaugural Lecture*, pp. 10–25; *Archaic Greece*, pp. 22–24, 35–36; Coldstream, *Geometric Greece*, pp. 55–106.

warrior-politicians and their followings remained the only conceivable form of political organization.

We have succeeded, I think, in formulating a sociologically intelligible answer to our initial question: What did *phulon* and *phretre* mean to a Dark Age poet and his audience? Our investigation of the Dark Age social groups concludes with a brief account of the *phretre*'s evolution into the archaic "phratry." This must necessarily be only a sketch, since the processes which led to the formation of the civic unit "phratry" were the same as those which culminated in the birth of the city-state, a subject too vast to be contemplated here.

The structure of the *phretre* remained elastic as long as powerful *basileis* competed with one another for large followings. But when the houses of major chiefs lost the ability to attract, reward, and control numerous small alliance groups, the *phretrai* stabilized along their natural boundaries. The communal bonds of kinship and neighborhood, which had grown firmer with each succeeding generation, replaced the weakening personal ties between chief and "companions." Gradually the *phretre* developed an internal structure; religious cults became official; membership became hereditary. With the collapse of the pyramidal system, the small *phula*-bands ceased to function independently and were absorbed into their *phretrai*. *Hetairoi* shrank to the dimensions of the *hetaireia*, the small faction of adherents who supported an aristocratic *oikos*. The elite families continued to dominate the *phretrai*, of course, since the political hegemony of the wellborn and wealthy was not diminished by the restructuring of the power system. These were no longer the pivots around which fluid personal groups revolved, however, but simply the senior members of their hereditary "brotherhoods," born into them like their less noble "brothers." Thus, while the mighty continued to jostle one another for position, they did so not as independent architects of their personal followings, but as a privileged class operating inside an established social framework.

With the evolution of the *phretrai* into formal structural elements of the *demos* and the simultaneous evolution of the warrior-chiefs into a horizontal aristocratic class, we are at the threshold of the archaic city-state.[52]

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