

## Collective Decision Making in Homer's *Odyssey*

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*Collective decision making at the level of a politeia requires a collective body. The ancient Athenian concept of the ecclesia of demos was one such body as was the apella in the ancient city-state of Sparta. Qualified members of demos met at a specific place and venue to make decisions. At the level of a small polis (city-state), such gatherings were easily organized. In such cases, the power (-κρατέω -κράτος) belonged to people. If this power was exercised by the majority (πλείονας) and not by few (μη ἐς ὀλίγους) then this system of political organization was called (κέκληται) democracy (δημοκρατία = δῆμος + κράτος) as Thucydides so eloquently wrote in his Peloponnesian War [2.37.1] for all future generations to cherish which was his wish. Democracy can be considered as the end of a long process (voyage) of developing the art of collective decision making. It is the "Ithaca" of humanity's expedition to discover an ideal political system. This article attempts to shed some (historical) light on this journey by looking at collective decision-making cases in Homer's *Odyssey*. I was able to pinpoint ten such meetings of interest during which a sort of a collective decision was taken. Three of these meetings were held by immortals and seven by mortals. Some are described in detail while others in a few verses. All these are discussed in some detail in the different sections of the paper.*

**Keywords:** *demos, democracy, Homer, Odyssey, collective decision making*

### Introduction

The word democracy is composed of two ancient Greek words: δῆμος and κρατέω/κράτος. Both words are found in Homer's writings. In *Odyssey* the word "δῆμος", meaning gatherings of people<sup>1</sup>, is first found in [7.11] in conjunction with a description of a "perfect" *demos* in the land of Phaeacians governed by king Alcinous. His people (demos) listened to him, Homer told us, like a God "θεοῦ δ' ὡς δῆμος ἄκουεν"<sup>2</sup>. The word κράτος which in "democracy" means "power" is first found in *Odyssey* [1.70], meaning individual physical strength. Later, [1.359],

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<sup>1</sup>The same word had also a geographical meaning such as an area or a country. Homer used the same word to describe an area or a jurisdiction exactly as the same word is used today in modern Greek, i.e., the City of Athens in Greek is called The Demos of Athens.

<sup>2</sup>I provide my own adaptations of Homer and other ancient Greek writings to English language. They are not translations. They should be simply considered as my understanding of reading the ancient document. Interested readers can easily find the relevant passages in their own language and according to their own preference of a translation. Nothing can, however, compare with the beauty of the original text. If someone wants an excuse to endeavor into learning ancient Greek reading Homer's original texts is a good one. Those who are interested in the problems of translating Homer in English they should read Dieu's "Introduction" of his translation of Homer's *Odyssey* which was first published in 1946.

Telemachus<sup>3</sup> told her mother that he had the power in their house "τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ". He repeated the same claim with the same wording at the end of *Odyssey* [21.353]. Zeus had the greatest power of all "...οὐ̄ τε κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον" [5.4]. Thus, democracy literally speaking means "people have power" or "power comes from the people". Either way, this is the true meaning of democracy throughout its history. Very few words were so fortunate as the word "democracy". Its true meaning has remained the same as its literal meaning throughout its long history. The fact that many have misused the word democracy does not change the meaning. Even those who misused the word they did not question its true connotation.

Many other ancient writers have used the two words after Homer. Hesiod, a contemporary of Homer, in his *Works and Days* used the word *δημος* as well. As a matter of fact, Hesiod's *Works and Days* dealt with the issue of justice at the level of polis as this was dispensed by kings<sup>4</sup>. Herodotus was the first to combine the two words to produce the compound word "democracy". Herodotus used the word as a verb and as a noun. In his *Ιστορίας* [4.137.2] made the distinction between being ruled by democracy or by tyranny; in his own words, "βουλήσεσθαι γὰρ ἐκάστην τῶν πολιῶν δημοκρατέεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ τυραννέεσθαι". In my translation, "because cities rather wanted to be democracies rather than tyrannies". As a noun is found in "δημοκρατίας κατίστα ἐς τὰς πόλιας" [6.43.3] and later in the same book "τούτων δὲ συνοικησάντων γίνεται Κλεισθένης τε ὁ τὰς φυλὰς καὶ τὴν δημοκρατὴν Ἀθηναίοισι καταστήσας" [6.131.1]. And in my English "... all these local communities (φυλὰς) Cleisthenes united and established the Athenian democracy".

Thus, learning about democracy one should start adventuring with the word "demos". I begin this exploration of democracy from Homer's *Odyssey*. This paper is part of a larger research project. So far, a short book has been produced entitled "Democracy in Ten Lessons" (Papanikos 2020b). This piece here is my first background paper of the first chapter of the book which was entitled "The Demos". The concept of "demos" is used in the literature of political science and international relations extensively; see among many others and the studies by Abizadeh (2012), List and Koenig-Archibugi (2010), Mayne and Geissel (2016), Thorpe (2010), Van Parijs (2014), Volkova (2013) and Weinstock (2009).

In *Odyssey* ten descriptions of collective decision making were mentioned; three of which refer to meetings of immortals and seven of mortals. In *Iliad*, there were many meetings and decision makings but these were part of a military expedition and participants did not form a political unity. As a matter of fact, in these meetings participants were coming from different city-states (polis) of ancient Greece, which pretty much resembles the NATO alliance today. These gatherings had nothing to do with the meaning of the word "demos". Nevertheless, there was

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<sup>3</sup>Telemachus is usually ignored in *Odyssey* even though his role was fundamental in preparing the return of Odysseus and organize the plot against the Suitors as well as its ethical legitimization. On this issue, see Gottesman (2014).

<sup>4</sup>Hesiod used a beautiful word to describe the bribing of kings-judges. He called them *δωροφάγους* (gift-eaters). Or as he puts it in his masterpiece of *Works and Days* "μέγα κυδαίων βασιλῆας δωροφάγους, οἱ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δίκασσαι" [38–39]. In English "...greatly flattering the gift-eaters kings who this way judge".

a meeting of Trojans during the Trojan War which is briefly mentioned in the *Odyssey*, as I will show below in this article.

The basic thesis of my paper is that these collective decision-making gatherings can be considered as precursors of democracy. Furthermore, my own reading of *Odyssey* shows that Homer was very favorable to collective decision making. Even in cases that kings or Zeus made a decision they had to take into consideration mortals' and immortals' opinions and reactions. If they did not, then political instability could result as this is clearly mentioned in *Odyssey* when a disguised Odysseus asked Telemachus what was the reason of the political anomaly which existed in the island of Ithaca as is shown below. However, Homer was not against kings. On the contrary, the *Odyssey* favors kings as long as people like them because they rule with justice and take people's opinions into consideration. But Homer's epics paved the way to democracy by educating all future generations. *Odyssey* and *Iliad* along with Hesiod's *Works and Days* and *Theogony* became the textbooks which were used to teach all Greeks from the eighth century onwards.

Plato, in his *Politeia* [606e], clearly recognized the value of Homer's epics. The great philosopher said "...τὴν Ἑλλάδα πεπαιδεύκεν οὗτος ὁ ποιητής καὶ πρὸς διοίκησιν τε καὶ παιδείαν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἄξιος ἀναλαβόντι μανθάνειν τε καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν ποιητὴν πάντα τὸν αὐτοῦ βίον κατασκευασάμενον ζῆν". This poet taught Greece (τὴν Ἑλλάδα πεπαιδεύκεν), how to be governed (διοίκησιν), how to study human issues (παιδείαν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων) and how to live their private and public life (αὐτοῦ βίον κατασκευασάμενον ζῆν). The emphasis here is put on the word "διοίκησιν" because it relates to collective decision making at the level of a given politeia. A perfect politeia was Plato's subject in the book where Homer is mentioned. Homer in *Odyssey* outlined such an ideal politeia as is mentioned below.

Based on Plato's comment, my received view of the benefits of studying Homer are as follows. Firstly, studying Homer makes me a virtuous man. This has its own intrinsic value even though in *Odyssey* vices are not always punished. Secondly, I can implement my own decisions because as a human being I have a free will. This is what Zeus told me in the opening verses of *Odyssey*. Gods do not decide everything for me. I can forge my own destiny as long as I do not commit the crime of hubris (ὕβρις). If I do, then Gods will punish me because I upset them<sup>5</sup>. In ancient Greek this was expressed with the word *νέμεσις* which has exactly the same meaning as the word *nemesis* in many languages today<sup>6</sup>. For example,

<sup>5</sup>The problem with the system of ancient Gods was that they were too many and, in some cases, mortals were caught at crossfires between immortals as was the case between Poseidon and Athene. In modern Greece this problem has been solved despite the fact that an individual may have his/her own divine protection from God himself (the father), the Holy Mother (a Goddess Herself), the Son (a God himself), thousands of saints and half saints (osioi) who once they protect a mortal the others do not intervene. All these have the power to make "miracles".

<sup>6</sup>The process is as follows: ἄτη (craziness, blindness, confusion, acting on impulse) → ὕβρις (hubris) → νέμεσις (nemesis) → τισις (punishment). For some unexplained reason, Odysseus got mad and acted on impulse when he was leaving a blinded Polyphemus behind him. He committed hubris with what he said which had upset the Gods (nemesis); in his case Poseidon who punished him by making his trip (nostos) longer and full of worries. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to further analyze this process but since everything starts from ἄτη, then one must start with the

Odysseus committed hybris and Poseidon punished him. Thirdly, Homer empowers me to deal with human issues and human behaviour. *Odyssey* has many such paradigms of how to deal with people, e.g., Odysseus's approach of Nausicaa and her polite respond to him, Alcinous' philoxenia of Odysseus, Nestor's treatment of Telemachus, Helen's praise of Odysseus, Suitors' and servants' behavior in Odysseus' palace, etc. Fourthly, reading Homer makes someone a better citizen in governing the politeia. Many examples of good governing (διοίκησιν) exist in *Odyssey*. A few are presented in this paper. Good governing implies some sort of consensus and trust on the process of taking decisions. Keeping citizens informed is part of good governing and in *Odyssey* most of the meetings served this purpose. Homer taught all future generations that good governors (kings, rulers, elected politicians) are those who respect justice and keep their people and society happy. As mentioned above, in Hesiod's *Works and Days* justice was the central issue and according to my opinion it was treated much better than in *Odyssey*. However, given that both were produced around the eighth century BCE, they had the same effect as far as the education of future generations was concerned. Reading and re-reading the two works -*Odyssey* and *Works and Days*- I distill the same conclusion: justice makes people happy and their politeia flourishing. The message is clear: justice brings material prosperity and happiness in a politeia. Homer and Hesiod did not go as far as to say that democracy is a system of political organization which gives power to the people to decide for themselves and this makes them happier. It was left to Thucydides who used the occasion of Pericles' Funeral Oration in the first year of the Peloponnesian war (431–404 BCE) to praise the happiness democracy brings to people.

This paper emphasizes what we can learn from *Odyssey* as far as collective decision making is concerned. I follow a very flexible and practical interpretation of the process of collective decision making. There are many facets of collective decision making that we can think of. It by no means necessarily implies a voting mechanism and/or some kind of formal approval. There is no such thing in *Odyssey*. It can simply be a process of what today would be called brainstorming. At the end of it only one (e.g., Zeus or a King) decides and quite possible someone else implements the decision (e.g., Athene). Another term which is used quite often is collective bargaining. Some of the issues discussed below could be considered as collecting bargaining processes because we have two opposite parties compromising in order to reach an agreement or a decision. For the shake of this argument, I claim that there was a collective bargaining between Poseidon and Athene as to what would happen to Odysseus with Zeus being the moderator. At the end, Athene got what she wanted albeit after Poseidon, in the interim, was given the time to take his revenge with Odysseus.

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question "who makes people mad in the first place?" and then proceed with the rest. If Gods make people mad (as many believed in ancient Greek times including Homer himself) in order to commit hybris so that they can have an excuse to get upset and punish them, then it is Gods that should be blamed and not the weak mortals who cannot resist. Actually, ancient Greeks had a Goddess for ἄτη with the same name. She was the one who made people mad.

The paper is organized in fourteen sections including this introduction. In the next section, I say a few words about the legacy of *Odyssey*. In the following section, I present in summary all the meetings which in one way or another included collective decision making. In the following sections (sections four to thirteen) I discuss the meetings mentioned in the *Odyssey*. In the last section, I conclude.

### The Long Legacy of *Odyssey* in a Few Words

*Odyssey* is an epic poem with 12,110 verses written in what is called Homeric hexameter. There is a practical explanation for this. These poems were supposed to be memorized because printed versions were not available and even if they were the greatest number of people did not know how to read. The first who recited these epics were called *ᾄδοι*; sort of a singer. They had no written script in front of them and in many cases they improvised. By the sixth century BCE, the *ᾄδοι* were replaced by the *rhapsodists*. The tyrant of Athens Peisistratus or his son Hipparchus recorded the epics in order to make sure that all *rhapsodists* delivered the same verses during the various festivities such as the Panathenaea. Homer was most probably a *rhapsodist* who had been travelling around to reciting his poems.

In the early years, memory played an important role. As a matter of fact, still plays today. Ancient Greeks had a goddess devoted to memory, called Mnemosyne, who was the mother of nine girls called muses; the latter were protecting all arts and sciences. Without the muses and mnemosyne (memory), there is no gnosis (knowledge). Actually, the role of muses was considered fundamental for both Homer and Hesiod. They started their poems by calling upon the muses either to speak on behalf of them or inspire them to tell what they had to tell, i.e., an epic and a didactic poem respectively<sup>7</sup>. The reader does not know who is talking, Homer or the Muses. In the opening verses of *Odyssey*, Homer called upon a muse (which of the nine did not tell us) to voice/say (ἔννεπε) about a man (his name is not mentioned till later) who is in the middle of something. It is really amazing that in the first twenty-verses the entire story is told from the beginning till the end. No suspense. No mystery. The historical time of *Odyssey* is forty-one days but the dramatic time spans over a period of ten years. If you do not like long stories, the twenty-one verses are sufficient. If you like the true history of events, still the twenty-one verses are sufficient because as Thucydides warned as a few centuries later "...Ὀμηρος τοῦτο δεδήλωκεν, εἴ τῳ ἱκανὸς τεκμηριῶσαι" [*The Peloponnesian War* 1.9.4]. This was said by Homer if he was able to authenticate it at all. And a few lines later "...τῇ Ὀμήρου αὖ ποιήσει εἴ τι χρεὶ κἀνταῦθα πιστεύειν, ἦν εἰκὸς ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον μὲν ποιητὴν ὄντα κοσμήσαι" [*The Peloponnesian War* 1.10.3]. These were what Homer told us with his poems but we do not need to believe him because as a poet it was simply natural that he overstated it by "cosmetics". My interpretation of Thucydides on Homer is that what he thought about Homer was that he was a good poet but he should not be trusted as a historical source.

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<sup>7</sup>This practice was copied in the first century BCE by Publius Vergilius Maro or Virgil (70–19 BCE) in his excellent epic book *Aeneid*. Vergil's introduction is a mirror image of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Homer told us, in the first twenty-one verses, a man, who conquered the sacred castle of Troy, was running around alone now because all his comrades had lost their lives. However, nobody is to blame (Odysseus or the Gods) but his comrades themselves because they had eaten Helios' sacred oxen even though they were warned against it. They committed *hybris*<sup>8</sup>. Now this man is not only alone but a prisoner of Goddess Calypso who wanted him as her mate. After seven years of full service provided by a woman in love (Calypso) to a man full of nostalgia (Odysseus), this man wanted to return back to his home. The place is explicitly mentioned: *Ἰθάκην* (Ithaca), which, unlike other places mentioned by Homer, it was real place; and not fantasy. But Gods had decided to change his destiny despite the strong opposition by Zeus' brother Poseidon who was angry at the man because he blinded one of his Cyclops, named Polyphemus. At the end of these first twenty-one verses, it is revealed that the man's name is *Ὀδυσῆι* (Odysseus). We also learn that he would finally reach his homeland and would see again his beloved wife and son. No suspense. End of myth. End of story.

*Iliad* and *Odyssey* are historical novels<sup>9</sup> written during the geometric age (1000–700 BCE) describing events which took place a couple of centuries before during the Mycenaean epoch; during the last year of a ten-year siege of Troy (*Iliad*) and ten years thereafter (*Odyssey*). It is a period of a great decline of the Mycenaean civilization which was to be followed by a long period of political instability and exacerbating mobility towards east and west; all over the Mediterranean Sea. They departed from the Greek mainland. People were forced to move out and find new places to live by creating colonies throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Herodotus and Thucydides gave us a good description of what had followed the return of the heroes of Troy. Hesiod in his *Works and Days* had devoted a separate race for them as being something special.

So, what is so important about the *Odyssey* or Homeric Epics in general? Despite my preference of Hesiod's *Work and Days*, as an economist I must admit that the demand for the Homeric epics has been much greater than the demand for Hesiod's very practical and down to earth *Works and Days*. Again, Thucydides has warned us that people do not like practical things. They do not like the truth. They like stories which entertain them. *Iliad* and *Odyssey* serve this purpose exceptionally well. The *Works and Days* does not. This legacy has shaped the western and to that extent the entire world. Many writers have recognized this legacy or worked on it

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<sup>8</sup>As an economist I do not agree with this interpretation because if people have a choice starving to death and eat the sacred oxen even if the punish is death, I would definitely prefer the latter if they are no afterlife consequences. On another note, what was the crime committed by Odysseus' comrades, which justified all the trouble they had to go through with Odysseus and at the end punished them with death? Homer never told us. The legacy is that Odysseus was an honest man obeying Gods but apparently his comrades were not. I am not persuaded but this is not important. Homer's epics are full of contradictions and anachronisms but they make a very good story (novel).

<sup>9</sup>Rieu (1946, p. 10), in his English translation of *Odyssey* (originally in 1946) wrote that *Iliad* was a tragedy and *Odyssey* a novel. They were the first of this kind in western literature. And as far as the novel *Odyssey* was concerned, he wrote that "And though it is the first, I am not sure that it is not still the best. Let the new reader decide for himself".

such as Adams (2018), Eis (2014), Gasbarra (2016), İşman (2017), Michaels (2014), Milli-Konewko (2020), Needham (2018), Roos (2020), Ruck (2019), Saracco (2018), Smith (2015) Vella (2017), and Whissell (2019) among many others<sup>10</sup>. There is no philosopher and playwright who has not been affected by Homer's two beautiful stories. For example, Agosto (2019) examined Homer's influence on Sophocles and in general the concept of demos in Greek tragedy is examined by Carter (2010). Many issues are still debated. Did Homer write the two epic poems? Were one or many poets who contributed? Were these poems circulating all over the known world and someone called Homer sat down and put them in a piece of papyrus? Did the story of *Odyssey* take place in the Mediterranean Sea or somewhere else<sup>11</sup>? These issues are still the subjects of scientific research but it goes beyond the scope of this article to discuss these important and very interested issues. They simply add to the mystery surrounding the whole story of *Odyssey*.

### Collective Meetings in *Odyssey*

In *Odyssey*, I was able to identify ten meetings, which resemble a general assembly, where collective decisions were made. Summary information of these meetings is given in Table 1. The seven columns of the table give the number of the meeting. With the exception of the Trojan meeting, all other are in the chronological order of the historical time that they took place and are actually mentioned in *Odyssey*. The second column gives the historical day of the meeting, taken into consideration that the poem started forty-one days before the story ends but it described ten years of adventures; not only of Odysseus but of others, e.g., Menelaus, the king of Sparta. I also tried to provide a description of the subject of the meetings. The next three columns identify wherever possible the place, the venue, and the time. The last column provides the reference to *Odyssey* where these meetings are discussed.

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<sup>10</sup>I opted to include only a selection of recent papers published in one of the different academic journals of the *Athens Journal of Education and Research* (<https://www.athensjournals.gr/>).

<sup>11</sup>See Duichin (2017) and Vinci (2017) who argued that the events of *Odyssey* took place in the Nordic Sea. Some others have extended Odysseus trip to the Americas. All these add to the beauty of *Odyssey*. After all, since antiquity, many people believed in the truthiness of Homeric epics like Heinrich Schliemann whose archaeological evidence unearthed Troy. The city did exist. However, many other places are unknown. One persuasive argument against the hypothesis of Troy and the *Odyssey* is that during these twenty years not a single earthquake is mentioned by Homer when we know that area is full of earthquakes.

**Table 1. Assemblies in *Odyssey***

Meeting	Day	The Subject of the Meeting	Place	Venue	Time	Verses
1	1	Athene requests a decision by Gods' to help Odysseus to return to his homeland.	Olympus	Zeus' Palace	Early (?) in the Morning	1.26–1.95
2	2	Telemachus asked for people's support to throw the Suitors out of his palace.	Ithaca	Agora	Early in the Morning	2.6–2.259
3	6	Penelope's Suitors meet to decide how to deal with Telemachus. They decided to kill him on his return from Pylos and Sparta.	Ithaca	Odysseus's Palace	Evening-About Dinner Time.	4.659–4.673
4	7	Gods' meet for the second time to discuss a failure to implement a part of the plan decided in the first meeting and the new development of Telemachus' threat of his life by the Suitors.	Olympus	Zeus' Palace	Early in the Morning	5.1–5.42
5	33	Alcinous the king of Phaeacians called his people to inform them about the philoxenia he provided to Odysseus and approve his actions.	Sxeria	Agora	Early in the morning	8.1–8.49
6	--	Trojans meet to decide what to do with the Trojan Horse.	Troy	Agora	Unknown	8.505–8.510
7	38	Second Meeting of Penelope's Suitors to decide the failure of their plan to kill Telemachus on his return from Pylos and Sparta. The meeting ended without a decision which was left to Gods.	Ithaca	Outside the palace of Odysseus	Most probably midday	16.342–16.406
8	40	Third Meeting of Penelope's Suitors. They decided not to carry on with their plan to kill Telemachus because Gods' would not approve it.	Ithaca	Not mentioned		20.240–20.247
9	41	The Meeting of the Relatives (mainly fathers) of the Killed Suitors.	Ithaca	Agora	Early in the Morning	24.420–24.465
10	41	Gods' Third Meeting.	Olympus	Zeus' Palace		24.470–24.487

In all these meetings there were no voting mechanism; at least was not mentioned by Homer but only a sense of a general approval or disapproval. There is one exception in the ninth meeting where Homer mentioned that the majority (*πλείονες*) decided; it will be discussed below. Three of the ten meetings refer to Gods' meetings. This shows that even Gods meet to decide.

### Gods' First Meeting at the Starting Day of *Odyssey* (1.56–1.108)

After a significant introduction, *Odyssey* opens up with a general assembly where a collective decision had to be taken. This was the first of the three Gods' meetings mentioned in *Odyssey*. All three meetings took place in the mount of Olympus and the venue was Zeus' palace. Most probably, it was early in the



morning<sup>12</sup>. We do not know who called the meeting and who were present; with the exception of Zeus and Athene, nobody else's presence is identified. However, we are informed that Poseidon not only was not there but he was not informed about the meeting, as was stated later, which made him furious<sup>13</sup>. Was it kept secret? Most probably yes. Homer told us that Poseidon when he saw Odysseus in the sea sailing for his freedom got upset and shouted that Gods' had changed their minds when he had been away in Ethiopia. I assume that, in a previous assembly, Gods' had decided in favor of Poseidon's proposal. Nevertheless, Poseidon accepted Odysseus' destiny to be free but before he had a few days left to make his life miserable. And so, he did.

We do not also know what the agenda of the meeting was. Was it a usual morning meeting such as a common everyday breakfast (morning) briefing or someone initiated it, most probably Athene, who had a keen interest in the issue to be discussed? Zeus made a general opening speech announcing that mortals make the mistake to think that everything -good or bad- is determined by Gods<sup>14</sup>. According to Zeus, this was not the case. He used the example of Aegisthus who despite that he was warned by Hermes, he had, nevertheless, decided with Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon.

It seemed like a golden opportunity for Athene to take the floor and bring up the issue of Odysseus. The opportunity had two facets. Firstly, Zeus talked about a case that related to the great Trojan War and Odysseus was a big part of it. Secondly, Zeus talked about justice and the free will of mortals. Athene was quick to point out, in front of all Gods, that there were some mortals who despite their virtues and respect for Gods were prohibited to act according to their own free will. Gods prevented them from doing so. A case in point was Odysseus who had always respected and honored Gods with sacrifices but his will of returning to his faithful and beloved wife, humble son and divine homeland had not been materialized because some Gods (i.e., Poseidon and Calypso) banned him from doing so. Therefore, it was not true, Athene seemed to say, that Gods permit humans to make and implement their own decisions. In this case, Gods intervened not to correct an injustice but to perpetuate it. Zeus seemed to be taken by surprise and responded by saying "my child how you can say such a thing" or how can leave something like that escape the wall of your teeth (τέκνον ἐμόν, ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων

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<sup>12</sup>Unlike the second God's meeting, Homer did not tell us the time of this first gathering of immortals.

<sup>13</sup>In his own words, "ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ μετεβούλευσαν θεοὶ ἄλλως / ἀμφ' Ὀδυσῆϊ ἐμεῖο μετ' Αἰθιοπείσιν ἐόντος, / καὶ δὴ Φαιήκων γαίης σχεδόν, ἔνθα οἱ αἴσα / ἐκφυγέειν μέγα πείραρ οἰζύος, ἢ μιν ἰκάνει/ ἀλλ' ἔτι μὲν μὴν φημι ἄδην ἐλάαν κακότητος" [5.286–5.290]

<sup>14</sup>Serving for fourteen years in an organization which according to the Greek constitution and the European Union's sister organizations had the mission to promote dialogue between the various social partners (civil society), I was spending hours and hours every day to listen to various arguments in order to shape decisions. Whenever our political body was addressed by some important persons, such as head of states, prime ministers etc. they thought that they were Zeus. I had always a smile in my face because their speeches reminded me of this opening speech of Zeus. What had in common is their nothingness. Some general and vague statements about justice and democracy.

[1.64]<sup>15</sup>. He was in defense and accused Poseidon for such a mistreatment of Odysseus but the time had come to rectify this injustice. Now that Poseidon was away, the rest of them could decide to allow Odysseus to return to his homeland because Zeus did not think Poseidon would ever dare to go against Gods' unanimous decision. Thus, it was a collective decision to permit (help) Odysseus to return to his homeland. A satisfied Athene suggested a quick plan of action. Nobody seemed to reject the plan. It was a unanimous collective decision with the exception of Poseidon who was absent and not informed. On the plan, I will say more later.

I would like to highlight a few things. Firstly, Zeus intervention was full of contradictions which were exploited by Athene to extract a favorable decision. Secondly, this decision was taken in the absence of Poseidon which by itself was not very ethical. If Gods could do it, then mortals could do it as well and so they have done. Anthropomorphism characterized ancient Greek Gods and therefore some of their decision did not serve justice well as do decisions taken by mortals. Thirdly, Zeus wished that his brother would accept a unanimous decision but as we learned later, he did not; Zeus could have asked him beforehand but he did not because it is common practice in collective decision-making processes to exploit the absence of people who strongly oppose. Fourthly, Athene knowing this and taking advantage of Poseidon's absence, she was very eager to have her plan approved before Poseidon returned. By the time Poseidon found out, it was too late. Athene's eagerness was shown later when she "apologized" to Odysseus of not acting earlier because she did not want to fight with Poseidon: "ἀλλά τοι οὐκ ἐθέλησα Ποσειδάωνι μάχεσθαι" [13.341]. Fifthly, Athene as the goddess of wisdom (canniness) reiterated her status in the way that she managed the extraction of a favorable decision. This opportunistic practice has been repeated many times thereafter in meetings where collective decisions are taken by people who think they are "Gods". Actually, in her speech hid the hybris of Odysseus but reminded Zeus that Calypso was the daughter of his archenemy Atlas, a Titan.

The moral of the story is that favorable decisions may be obtained if those who strongly oppose are absent (sick, on vacation etc.) and there exist some contradictions in the positions of those who are mildly oppose or are indifferent. Good supportive arguments like the ones given by Athene can pull the strings. But as we shall see, this was necessary but not sufficient. A second Gods' general assembly was called in a few days later to correct some gaps in the execution of Athene's plan. In the meantime, Athene was busy in implementing the first phase of her plan which included a meeting of mortals this time. This is examined in the next section.

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<sup>15</sup>The phrase is discussed by Rieu (1946) to demonstrate how difficult is to translate Homer's idioms. In modern Greek this is expressed like "deep your tongue into your brain before you speak" but I find Homer's expression, which has not survived in modern Greek, much more eloquent. Sometimes, people who want to say something which will upset someone, who is superior they say it keeping their teeth closed something like mumbling.

### The General Assembly of the Demos of Ithaca on the Second Day of *Odyssey* [2.6–2.259]

The idea of a general assembly of the demos of Ithaca came from Athene. The message was clear to all those who listened or later read Homer's *Odyssey*: Gods' not only approve such meetings but helped the mortals to organize them. Who would dare to go against Gods' will and oppose a people's meeting? This first meeting of mortals in the *Odyssey* had been suggested by Athene after discussing it in the first assembly of the Olympian Gods "... εις ἀγορὴν καλέσαντα" [1.90]. We assume that the other Gods did not object with the exception of Poseidon who was absent.

Athene committed herself that she would bring this message to Telemachus. The same day "flew" from Olympus and reached Ithaca just at the time when the Suitors and Telemachus were ready to start a symposium. Athene was disguised as an old acquaintance of Odysseus, Mentos, from the island of Taphion; a nearby island well-known for his tradesmen, probably the island of Meganisi. Telemachus is advised by Athene-Mentos, among many other things, to stand up to his responsibilities and call a general assembly of the Demos of Ithaca. Athene put it explicitly to Telemachus "αὔριον εις ἀγορὴν καλέσας ἥρωας Ἀχαιοὺς μῦθον πέφραδε πᾶσι, θεοὶ δ' ἐπὶ μάρτυροι ἔστων" [1.272–1.273]. Tomorrow, told Telemachus, call all people in the agora and tell them that this had the support of Gods. This is an indication of Homer's support of the idea of collective decision making at the level of a demos. Thus, those who objected such a meeting they would commit an *hybris* which will insult Gods (*nemesis*) who put such general assemblies under their auspices. Punishment (*τίσις*) would result.

Telemachus was anxious after Athene's encouragement. The same evening, during the symposium, he announced to Penelope's Suitors, who were all present enjoying their banquet, that tomorrow morning he would invite all people of Ithaca to a general assembly to ask them to leave his palace "...ἦῶθεν δ' ἀγορήνδε καθεζόμεσθα κιόντες πάντες, ἴν' ὕμιν μῦθον ἀπηλεγέως ἀποείπω, ἐξέναι μεγάρων" [1.372–1.374]. However, the debate started right away inside the palace. Two of the Suitors responded to Telemachus. But further deliberations were left for the next day.

Early in the morning the next day, a caller (*κῆρυξ*) invited his compatriots to a general assembly (*κηρύσσειν ἀγορήνδε*). Many came very quickly (*τοὶ δ' ἠγείροντο μάλ' ὄκα*). Last went Telemachus and sat on his father throne in the agora (*ἔζετο δ' ἐν πατρὸς θώκῳ*). Thus, the agora was a permanent meeting place where a throne was available for the king to preside during general assemblies. The fact that the throne was now occupied by Odysseus' son Telemachus without any reaction being mentioned, it can be interpreted that he was recognized by the demos of Ithaca as having a right to the throne; at least for the time being. Some commentators of Homer claim that *Odyssey* provided a criticism of kings and aristocrats. I do not see this. Kings like Alcinous, Nestor, Menelaus, Odysseus himself were praised. Here Homer put Telemachus, a king to be, at the center of the scene without any reaction from the people or even from the Suitors themselves. What I read from this is that

Homer wanted the people to play a more active role in decision making and not overthrow their kings.

The first to speak in the assembly was an old man, named Aegyptius, who had four sons; one was with Odysseus but was gobbled by Polyphemus; the other was one of the many Suitors and the other two worked in the family estate. Aegyptius said this was the first time a general assembly was called after twenty years because king Odysseus was absent<sup>16</sup>. Thus, it was natural to ask who called the meeting of the demos (δήμιον) and what he wanted to declare (πιφάσκειται) by talking to the general assembly (ἀγορεύει) [2.32]. The choice of the words here are very important because they were developed into the "jargon" of democracy during the classical years<sup>17</sup>. First, it was recognized that this crowd was a "legitimate" political body to take decisions. It was not a meeting of an army but an assembly of what today would be called a "civil society". The verb "πιφάσκω" has its own important meaning as well. It means that I make an official public declaration. The last word is more important because it means that I speak in the "agora" in front of the demos. Actually, later in the Athenian general assembly, called ecclesia of demos, the starting phrase was made by the caller (κῆρυξ) who shouted who wanted to make a speech or "τίς ἀγορεύειν βούλεται". Thus, all three words were used in the context of an assembly of demos and this is what I want to stress here. There is no doubt that these meetings took place regularly and all participants had the right to "ἀγορεύειν".

After Aegyptius posed the question, Telemachus stood up, left the throne and went in the middle of the agora to announce that he was the one who called the meeting. Again, nobody questioned his right to do so. As he was moving to the middle, the herald (κῆρυξ) Peisenor put in his hand a sceptre "σκῆπτρον δέ οἱ ἔμβαλε χερσὶ" [2.37] which meant some kind of authority. My purpose here is not to present the debates between Telemachus and the Suitors but to emphasize that this was a quarrel that one could easily find in any modern assembly at all levels of decision makings. Telemachus was an emotional speaker and tried hard to appease his audience. At the end, he threw his sceptre away and started to cry. However, the Suitors did not yield and attacked him and his family. In any case, Telemachus asked for the support of his demos but everyone remained silent; they did not give their approval. Apparently, his proposals were rejected. This shows that the demos had power. As we learn later (see below the section on the meetings by Suitors), the Suitors were not so unpopular as one might thought by sketchily reading Homer. However, Telemachus achieved to expose the Suitors and give an indication of the political instability which existed in the politeia of Ithaca. Furthermore, and more

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<sup>16</sup>Later Odysseus himself, disguised as a beggar, asked Telemachus why there was a political instability in Ithaca. Odysseus was wondering whether this was because the people (λαοὶ) of Ithaca demos (δήμιον) became his enemy "ἢ σέ γε λαοὶ ἐχθαίρουσ' ἀνὰ δῆμον" [16.95–16.96] or there was an intrafamily quarrel with his brothers on who would rule Ithaca. The emphasis here is on the role of people and the demos of Ithaca because Odysseus knew that Telemachus had no brothers.

<sup>17</sup>It is interesting to note that new archaeological evidence showed that in ancient Athens there was personification of the Athenian people (the concept of demos) which was represented by a common mortal; see Glowacki (2003).

important he informed the demos that he was going to take the situation in his own hands and act immediately. This was the beginning of something that worried Suitors because presumably the people of Ithaca did not know the details of all these and their silence might also be interpreted as not knowing who to believe, the Suitors who were many and from aristocratic families or Telemachus who was just a child albeit the son of king Odysseus. The meeting ended in a stalemate.

### **The First Meeting of Penelope's Suitors [4.659–4.673]**

Four days after the general assembly of the demos of Ithaca, Suitors had been gotten by surprise when they found out that, despite their calculations, Telemachus did depart from Ithaca to find out his father whereabouts. On the sixth day, Telemachus was discussing with the king Menelaus of Sparta. About the same time, Homer told us that during the dinner the Suitors called an emergency meeting, stopping their games "παῦσαν ἀέθλων". They sat all together "μνηστῆρας δ' ἄμυδις κάθισαν" [4.659]. Their leader seemed to be Antinous the son of Eupitheis who started the meeting telling them that they had underestimated Telemachus. They were wrong when they said that he would not do the risky trip "φάμεν δέ οἱ οὐ τελέεσθαι" [4.664]. It is the first recognition that Telemachus was not a hesitant and irresolute child anymore. He posed a serious threat to their objectives.

But what was their objective? Homer had given us the impression that the Suitors of Penelope were in a permanent meeting throughout the events he described. Almost every day they had been a meeting at Odysseus' palace as they had been participating in symposiums which included dinners, music entertainment, and mating with the palace's female servants. It is then natural to assume that they had plenty of time to discuss various political issues. Two issues are important for our purposes here. First, the number of Suitors and second their ideology or political objectives they had, if any.

Homer told us later that the total number of Suitors was 108, coming from four different places "μνηστήρων δ' οὐτ' ἄρ' δεκάς ἀτρεκέες οὔτε δύο οἶαι, ἀλλὰ πολὺ πλέονες: τάχα δ' εἴσεαι ἐνθάδ' ἀριθμόν. ἐκ μὲν Δουλιχίου δύο καὶ πεντήκοντα κοῦροι κεκριμένοι, ἕξ δὲ δρηστήρες ἔπονται: ἐκ δὲ Σάμης πίσυρές τε καὶ εἴκοσι φῶτες ἔασιν, κί ἦρθαν ἀκόμα εικοσιτέσσερες ἀπ' τοῦ νησίου τῆς Σάμης, ἐκ δὲ Ζακύνθου ἔασιν εἴκοσι κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν, ἐκ δ' αὐτῆς Ἰθάκης δυοκαίδεκα πάντες ἄριστοι" [16.245–16.251]. The four different places were Dulichium, Same, Zacynthus and Ithaca which were mentioned earlier by Telemachus "ὅσσοι γὰρ νήσοισιν ἐπικρατέουσιν ἄριστοι, Δουλιχίῳ τε Σάμῃ τε καὶ ὑλήεντι Ζακύνθῳ, ἠδ' ὅσσοι κρῆνην Ἰθάκην κάτα κοιρανέουσιν" [1.245–1.247]. What is important here is that Telemachus (Homer) used the word "ἄριστοι" which indicates some sort of aristocracy. Not all aristocrats but those who were dominant "ἐπικρατέουσιν". It is also of interest to note that all these aristocrats were coming from Ithaca and three from the nearby islands. For this paper here, it would have been extremely useful if Homer had provided information why the aristocrats of these islands were claiming the throne of Ithaca.

Homer in the twenty-second rhapsody provided all the details of the political differences between king Odysseus and the Suitors as a group of people who had been opposing him. Odysseus accused them [22.35–22.41] for wasting his wealth, sleeping with his female servants, wanting to marry his wife without any respect for Gods without any fear of their nemesis. Now was the time to be punished and pay with their lives "νῦν ὑμῖν καὶ πᾶσιν ὀλέθρου πείρατ' ἐφῆπται" [22.41]. On this occasion, one of the Suitors, Eurymachus, stood up and very diplomatically accused Antinous, another Suitor, who had been killed first by Odysseus. Eurymachus made crystal clear that Antinous objective was not so much a lust for his wife but to kill Telemachus and become the king of Ithaca. Or in his own words "οὐ τι γάμου τόσσον κεκρημένος οὐδὲ χατίζων, ἀλλ' ἄλλα φρονέων, τά οἱ οὐκ ἐτέλεσσε Κρονίων, ὄφρ' Ἰθάκης κατὰ δημον ἐυκτιμένης βασιλεύοι αὐτός, ἀτὰρ σὸν παῖδα κατακτείνειε λοχίσας" [22.50–20.53]. I have underlined the two most important words: "δημον" and "βασιλεύοι" which here means *politeia* and rule as king respectively.

It seemed that the Suitors had people's support as mentioned above. I will have the opportunity to discuss it more during the second meeting of Suitors mentioned by Homer. Thus, it was natural for Antinous to have the ambition not to abolish kings but instead he wanted himself to become king once he married Penelope. Even during this scene of the process of assassinations of Suitors, Eurymachus, when he failed to bribe Odysseus with money to save their lives and of course gaining time to respond with force, he tried to encourage all the Suitors to defend themselves and told them that once they went outside the palace, they would be able to get people's support "ἔλθωμεν δ' ἀνὰ ἄστυ, βοῆ δ' ὠκιστα γένοιτο: τῷ κε τάχ' οὗτος ἀνὴρ νῦν ὕστατα τοξάσσαιτο" [22.77–22.78]. Homer used the word "ἄστυ" which means the city and not the demos. This is interesting which might show that the Suitors were expecting to get the support of a segment of the demos of Ithaca where their popularity was greater. Second, Eurymachus pointed out if this happened, this would be the last time that Odysseus fought. This might show that Odysseus was not so popular and sympathetic ruler as Homer wanted us to believe. This is further reinforced by Odysseus' decision to keep secret the massacre of all the Suitors for the night because he was fearing strong reaction from the people of Ithaca. This way he would have time to prepare his defense. And as a matter of fact, his support the next day from the people of Ithaca was almost non-existent. One may safely assume that Odysseus was not so popular.

Thus, the decision of the Suitors' first meeting to kill Telemachus had political underpinnings and it was not a simple personal difference of characters even though Homer struggled to persuade us that Suitors behaved very maliciously. If this was true, they would not enjoy the popular support that apparently enjoyed by the people of Ithaca.

The decision of this first meeting was unanimous and all supported the idea "οἱ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἐπήνεον ἠδ' ἐκέλευον" [4.673]. They then decided on the plan to kill Telemachus. The idea was to prepare a ship with armed men and wait outside Ithaca for Telemachus' ship to return. A well thought plot but Athene had other plans which were more effective. However, she wanted to have Gods' approval. Thus, the

next meeting mentioned in the *Odyssey* took place in the mountain of Olympus at Zeus' palace.

### Gods' Second Meeting on the Seventh Day of *Odyssey* [5.3–5.49]

This meeting was a follow up of the first one. Early in the morning, Gods took their position in their thrones "θῶκόνδε καθίζανον" [5.3]. Most probably Athene called the meeting because now there was no introduction by Zeus unless Homer chose to start with Athene's intervention and not mentioning previous speeches. She seemed to be under tremendous time pressure. There were three reasons for this. First, the second part of the plan was not implemented. Second, Poseidon was about to return from Ethiopia. Third, Telemachus life was in danger because the Suitors conspired to kill him. Athene started by accusing again Gods' unfairness. Mortals and their kings would have no incentive to promote justice "μηδὲ φρεσὶν αἴσιμα" [5.9]. If Gods did not reward good behaviour but instead punished them like they did with Odysseus, mortals would not trust and respect Gods anymore. Here Athene used the word "αἴσιμα" which might as well mean that acceptance of Gods by mortals was in question.

Her complaint was that the second part of the agreed plan in the first meeting was still unexecuted. According to the decision taken during the first general assembly six days ago, Hermes was supposed to go to Calypso's island, Ogygia, and inform her about Gods' collective decision during the first meeting. However, Zeus responded to Athene not as a Goddess but as her daughter "τέκνον ἐμόν, ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων" [5.22]. Zeus used the word ἔπος which now is used for epic poetry but originally meant just "saying something". And now Zeus told her daughter why such a word (ἔπος) came out from the bench/wall (ἕρκος) of her teeth (ὀδόντων). He told her that nothing had changed as far as their collective decision was concerned and to prove that, Zeus gave an immediate order to Hermes to implement the second part of the plan which was to ask Calypso to let Odysseus free to return to his homeland. Zeus told Hermes to inform Calypso about their unmistakable (νημερτέα) Gods' decision (βουλήν<sup>18</sup>) [5.30]. Hermes immediately executed the plan after the meeting ended. Thus, the decision of the first meeting was reinforced and new ones were taken such as Athene would take care of Telemachus life.

Poseidon was still in Ethiopia and he did not know anything about these decisions. Zeus wanted to accommodate his concerns as well. For this reason, he suggested, and presumably it was accepted by all, that Odysseus before he eventually returned to Ithaca, he would be struggling at the sea for twenty days. After this ordeal, he would land on the island of Sxeria where the Phaeacians lived. These twenty days would have given Poseidon plenty of time to make Odysseus's

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<sup>18</sup>The word "βουλή" in Homer is usually related to Gods and means apart from decision, wish and will. It somehow relates to collective decision. It is interesting to note that the word itself, as many others from Homer, has survived in modern Greek meaning among many other things and "parliament"; a political body where collective decisions are made. It is still used to mean decisions and wills of individuals or a group of people who make decisions.

life rough in his waters but at the end and according to the unanimous decision by all other Gods Odysseus had to return safe to his homeland. Zeus also informed the other Gods about his plan concerning what would happen to Odysseus. In doing so, everyone was aware about his intentions. This way, he, indirectly, obtained their approval. The tone of his voice was such that it could be interpreted as a threat. Nobody would have dared to undermine his plan for Odysseus. Homer did not give us more information but he did tell us that when Zeus gave the order to his son Hermes to inform Calypso about Gods' decision he did not disobey "οὐδ' ἀπίθησε" but executed the order immediately "αὐτίκα" [5.43–5.44]. It is fair to assume that nobody from the participating Gods disobeyed (ἀπίθησε) and of course when Calypso heard from Hermes the ultimatum, she had no other choice but abide by Gods' collective decision.

However, we do learn later that Hermes brought the bad news to Calypso without himself wanted to do it or at least that was what he told her. He said that Zeus ordered him to come but he did not want "Ζεὺς ἐμέ γ' ἠνώγει δεῦρ' ἐλθέμεν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα" [5.99]. But he did not say anything in the meeting. Hermes' position might have been a diplomatic one. On one hand, he did what Zeus told him to do and on the other he told Calypso that he did not want to do it but he did it because of fear of Zeus. But it is not clear what he did not want. Bring the message or he did not agree with the message itself? As all diplomats, Hermes statement and position had more than one interpretation. On the other hand, Hermes was vindicated because Calypso initially got mad and she responded by swearing at all male Gods accusing them of jealousy when an immortal Goddess have erotic relations with mortal men. In her own beautiful words: "σχέτλιοί ἐστε, θεοί, ζηλήμονες ἔξοχον ἄλλων, οἳ τε θεαῖς ἀγάσθε παρ' ἀνδράσιν εὐνάζεσθαι" [5.119–5.120]. The choice of the word "σχέτλιοί" is an excellent one because in Homeric writings had a double antithetical meaning: a positive one meaning patient, enduring, strong, resolute, unyielding, firm and a negative one meaning cruel, ruthless, savage, inhuman, and beastly. Homer at his best. But at the end, she yielded to Zeus' wish and accepted the verdict to set Odysseus free [5.137–5.139], recognizing that she could not disobey; no immortal can do that "οὔτε παρεξελεῖν ἄλλον θεὸν οὔθ' ἀλιῶσαι". Hermes supported her decision by warning her that she should protect herself from Zeus' anger "Διὸς δ' ἐποπίζεο μῆνιν, μή πῶς τοι μετόπισθε κοτεσσάμενος χαλεπήνη" [5.146–5.147]. And later on, Homer informed us that Calypso obeying Zeus brought the news to Odysseus [5.150]. The amazing is that Calypso helped Odysseus to prepare his departure showing what true love is all about. A beautiful woman promised everything to Odysseus including real immortality. At the end she lost. Odysseus, on the other hand, being a smart man he was, told Calypso that she was much better than his wife but he wanted to return to his homeland. And for this, he would sacrifice his immortality promised by Calypso. A typical man when he wants to leave a lover. Most probably he was bored to death. In *Iliad*, Achilles had a choice between to live as a common mortal and pass away old and infamous or die now young but famous. He chose eternal fame and he got it. Odysseus met Achilles when he visited the world of dead. Achilles told him that now would have preferred infame if he had the choice. Life above all!



I find this second Gods' general assembly very important because a number of lessons can be drawn for the implementation of collective decisions even at the level of immortals. Firstly, even Gods delay the implementation of their divine plans. Thus, it is very common for plans which were decided earlier through a collective decision process to be re-evaluated. Some parts of the plan usually are not implemented for various reasons. Here we find that one important part of the plan assigned to an unenthusiastic Hermes was not realised. We do not really know the reason and Zeus did not ask for Hermes' explanation or apology. Secondly, as in many meetings of mortals in real life, the revised plan now included a clear and detailed roadmap with deadlines of implementation. Hermes had to do his job immediately after the meeting and Poseidon would have twenty days to make Odysseus life miserable. Again, Athene was assigned to take care of other details and intervene whenever necessary to straighten out the implementation of Zeus' plan. Again, this is very common in collective decision making to assign the chief role of implementing the plan to the one who has the greatest interest in its successful implementation. Athene had a keen interest in the project. Thus, if the project was not implemented according to the plan, nobody would have criticized Athene for undermining its execution.

A final note should be made on Zeus awkward and difficult position which is very common for those who had to take the final decision after hearing all the interesting parties. Athene wanted Odysseus to return to his homeland. Calypso wanted Odysseus for herself. Poseidon wanted Odysseus to suffer away from his homeland for as long as he could enforce it. Zeus position was very difficult indeed. It seems to me that Zeus had no interest in the story and the fate of Odysseus. He tried to find a solution that would please both his daughter and his brother. Of course, at the end, Zeus yielded to Athene and let her have her own way. A very common story. Daughters and especially wise ones at the end get what they want from their fathers. No mortal would want to be in Zeus position. Of course, Calypso was angry at Zeus because she was truly in love with Odysseus offering him everything and even more than what a mortal beautiful woman can offer to a man. If he stayed with her, he would have immortality, eternal youth, an ageless beautiful woman to serve him, and an island which Homer described as a paradise. What else would a mortal man want? This shows how inelastic -to use an economic term- nostos is. It is of interest to note that Calypso was served by her domestics but Odysseus was served by her alone. Despite all this treatment, Odysseus from the first day till the last of these seven years wanted to return to his homeland. Calypso had seven years to persuade him but she did not succeed. After all, Calypso should not have complained because Zeus allowed her to have Odysseus for seven years. Now it was time to let him go. And as a woman in true love, she helped Odysseus with all the preparations of departure. These preparations took four days and especially four nights. Homer gave as an indication what happened only in the first night.

Odysseus departed and after a long sea voyage with Poseidon giving him a hard time in the last few days finally achieved to reach Sxeria, the island of the people of Phaeacians where Alcinous was a king. This was an ideal politeia. At last, this place was finally Odysseus final obstacle before he reached his destination. But it was a

pleasurable obstacle if one considers the beauty of Alcinous' daughter Nausicaa. During his stay in Sxeria, he witnessed many events such as sports, music, dance and singing. Most important for our purpose here was a general assembly of the people of Phaeacians which was called by their king Alcinous with Odysseus being a guest. This general assembly of the demos of Phaeacians is discussed in the following section.

### **Phaeacians General Assembly [8.1–8.49]**

Early in the morning of the thirty-third day of the *Odyssey*, the king of Phaeacians, Alcinous, woke up and called for a meeting of all the leaders (ἡγήτορες) and protectors (μέδοντες) of his kingdom in the usual place of convening which was called agora (ἀγορῆν): "Φαιήκων ἡγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες, εἰς ἀγορῆν ἰέναι" [8.11–8.12]. For all intents and purposes of this article, this constituted the demos of Phaeacians. But how many people were all together? It all depends on what is meant by leaders (ἡγήτορες) and protectors (μέδοντες). Who and how many belonged to each of the two groups? What was the demarcation criterion between the two? One assumption, based on my etymology of the two words, might be that the first were some kind of aristocrats and the second were land or ship owners. The latter may also be considered as some kind of city guards because Phaeacians were known for their ability in seawares. A more precise word would have been μέδωνάλος which means the master (μέδων) of the sea (άλος).

Definitely those who participated in the assembly in the agora were not a handful of people. Such a meeting could have taken place in the main room of the royal palace which normally would seat at least 100 people. Thus, we may assume that the number of people who attended the assembly were many more. Homer himself informed us that the agora was full of people and all seats were taken "καρπαλίμως δ' ἔμπληντο βροτῶν ἀγοραὶ τε καὶ ἔδραι ἀγρομένων" [8.16–8.17]. We also get the information early on that the agora of Phaeacians was built by the ships "Φαιήκων ἀγορήνδ', ἣ σφιν παρὰ νηυσὶ τέτυκτο" [8.5]. It is important that Homer mentioned "τέτυκτο" but for what reason it was built is not clear. He also mentioned that the agora had seats (ἔδραι). Later on, the same word is used by Sophocles to mean the meeting of an assembly. I assume that this was a regular meeting place of the demos of Phaeacians

Once this "huge" crowd was assembled so fast (καρπαλίμως), king Alcinous took the floor having by his side the "stranger" Odysseus. He addressed the crowd by stating that this foreigner, whose name was not known to him either, asked for help to return to his homeland. He recommended to assist him because this was part of their custom. Never before in the past were such requests rejected. The admission that the Alcinous did not know the stranger's name did not come as a surprise to the demos and of course to the readers of *Odyssey* because they knew that any stranger who asked for philoxenia was protected by a certain customs which included not to

ask any questions about his whereabouts till the end of the philoxenia. This way philoxenia was offered equally to all, rich and poor, strong and weak<sup>19</sup>.

Then, the king asked for their consent and approval of his plan "πομπήν δ' ὀτρύνει, καὶ λίσσεται ἔμπεδον εἶναι. ἡμεῖς δ, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ, ἐποτρυνώμεθα πομπήν" [8.30–8.31] by providing a black ship with fifty-two excellent oarsmen. It seems that there was no objection. Then he proceeded with an invitation to dinner but only to those who held a royal sceptre (σκηπτουχοὶ βασιλῆες). Who were these? Homer did not tell us. We can infer that these were a small group of the Phaeacians belonging to ἡγήτορες, a kind of aristocracy. Of course, from a logistical point of view Alcinous could not have invited to his palace the entire demos of Phaeacians.

Why Alcinous did not only simply inform the demos of Phaeacians but asked for a collective decision? Why had he to inform them in the first place? Informing a group of people about something you make them responsible of what is going to follow even if you do not have a dialogue with them and/or a vote at the end. But Alcinous went one step further and asked his *demos* for their help by using the word "we" (ἡμεῖς) instead of "I" and as always (ὡς τὸ πάρος περ), we must provide this help. Why would he have to ask for their permission since as a king could have provided the help himself? It is obvious that the option of a "no" was on the table. At the end of his uninterrupted speech, he invited those who hold a royal sceptre to join him in the palace and stated that nobody rejects it (μηδέ τις ἀρνεῖσθω). Of course, this refers to the invitation to the dinner but as this was part of the entire speech one may interpret it that the king asked all those present not to reject his entire proposal. Homer did not tell us if there was anyone rejecting it.

By the end, he asked his caller (cyrix) to invite to the symposium the divine singer Demodocus (καλέσασθε δὲ θεῖον ἀοιδὸν Δημόδοκον). His name is composed of *demos* and a noun which we found it in later writings to mean "men of fame". Homer used another name, similar to Φήμιος (fame) who sung in the symposium of Ithaca when Athene visited Odysseus' palace and encouraged Telemachus to get into action by calling first the general assembly of the demos of Ithaca and then depart to find information about his father's whereabouts.

I would like to emphasize a few things. Firstly, king Alcinous called the meeting announcing its purpose. I assume that he had the right to do so. Secondly, Phaeacians were not surprised but quickly (καρπαλίμως) run into the agora. I assume that this was a relatively common (frequent) practice to call a meeting of the demos. I also assume that those who run into the agora had the right to participate in such meetings. After all, the call was for a specific group of people: ἡγήτορες and μέδοντες. I also assume that all were men. Thirdly, these meetings must have been very popular because all seats were taken "ἔδραι ἀγρομένων". One interpretation could be that participants knew that such meetings were followed by an entertaining program such as an athletic competition and/or a symposium with singing, music and dancing. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that so many people packed

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<sup>19</sup>Eumaeus (the swineherd) and Telemachus in the sixteenth rhapsody of Odyssey is a case where this is also demonstrated. They offer the same philoxenia to a stranger beggar without knowing that he was Odysseus disguised by Athene. Without asking his name they offered him the best of hospitality including sending him wherever he wanted to go. On the issue of philoxenia in ancient Greece, see Papanikos (2020a).

(ἔμπληντο) the agora in the expectation of an entertainment to be followed. And as it turned out, Alcinous, their king, did not disappoint them. He offered a full-fledged entertaining program. Of course, curiosity to see the stranger could have been another reasonable explanation. For an isolated island, in an era of infrequent travelling, a visitor is a spectacle by himself, worth attending.

Summing up, king Alcinous felt obliged not to hide the stranger in his palace but to call all Phaeacians in the agora. No other details are given but we can infer that the purpose of the meeting was (a) informative and (b) take a collective decision. King Alcinous, for whatever reasons which are not known to us, did not want to keep the strangers philoxenia at his palace a secret. Why? No answer was given by Homer. But it seems to me that in his opening speech to the demos of Phaeacians sounded apologetic and appealed to custom to justify his offering of hospitality and help a stranger. Was it a tradition or an obligation? My interpretation is that king Alcinous wanted a collective decision revealing a new type of ruling by kings in this transitional Homeric period. Or quite possible this was the message Homer wanted to communicate. The first step of a more democratic rule is to keep people informed. The second is to ask for their consent or indirect approval. The last step is to ask for their vote. I think the general assembly of the demos of Phaeacians was close to step two in this process of democratic trajectory.

Homer in this rhapsody provided us with the idea of an ideal society (demos). We are witnessing material wealth, a high level of civilization and a peaceful coexistence. Many people participate in common activities such as athletic and cultural events. Women are free to move around and speak to foreigners even though gossiping is a problem as this is revealed by the dialogue between Odysseus and Alcinous' daughter Nausicaa which is demonstrated by her unwillingness to enter together with Odysseus in the city. It still is a problem in modern Greece and I guess in many other countries around the world. If this society did not exist, as many commentators have stated, then Homer must be credited as envisioned a future society with more people participating in the events of the demos. Participation is the essence of democracy. Homer was a forerunner of Plato in envisaging an ideal politeia.

### **Trojan's Assembly and the Trojan Horse [8.505–8.510]**

During the festivities in the land of Phaeacians the famous *αοιδός* Demodocus was singing about the achievements of Greeks in Troy and particularly Odysseus' triumphs without knowing that the stranger was Odysseus himself. At this point, Odysseus stepped in and asked Demodocus to recite the story of the Trojan horse which was Odysseus' great idea. Demodocus was flattered by Odysseus and started to tell the story of the Trojan horse. Part of the story included an apparent gathering of Trojans who were debating what to do with the horse. The Trojans brought the horse to their agora which presumably was their meeting place. They started debating what to do with that "τοὶ δ' ἄκριτα πόλλ' ἀγόρευον ἡμενοὶ ἀμφ' αὐτόν: τρίχα δέ σφισιν ἦνδανε βουλή" [8.505–8.506]. Homer in this passage, using

Demodocus, told us that Trojans had three (τρίχρα) different suggestions what to do with the horse. Two of the used in this sentence relate to discussions taking place in general assemblies as I have already mentioned above. Firstly, the Trojans were making interventions (ἀγόρευον) regarding the three proposals. Secondly, Homer used the word βουλή which means a decision. I conclude that this was the way the demos of Trojans were making decisions and the place was their agora which I assume it was a large open space in the middle of the city. But what is really surprising is Homer's characterization of these debates. He called these discussions that were "ἄκριτα" which in Homeric epic it may mean indecisive, confusing, or uninterrupted. I guess the meaning here is that Trojans were really very concerned about what to do with the horse. It was really a difficult decision to take because if this was sent by Gods and they had decided to destroy it, as some suggested, then they would commit hybris. Of course, the decision to bring it inside and not destroy it was part of their destiny to be ruined by Greeks and particular by Odysseus' trick.

Homer did not provide us with all the details of the decision because this was not his main theme in this passage. He wanted to praise Odysseus' ingenuity and prepare his audience of the next episode which does not concern us here. However, it does reveal the process of decision making. People were speaking in public making proposals and apparently, they had a mechanism of making decisions. In this particular case we do not know if a decision was taken by majority voting or simply their king listened to all, at the end he took by himself the decision.

### Suitors Second Meeting [16.342–16.406]

This second meeting was organized on the spot by the Suitors once they learned that Telemachus' ship returned to Ithaca safe despite their plot to kill him as they decided and planned during their first meeting. Suitors at the time were inside the palace and once they heard the bad news, went outside, passing through a great wall. They sat outside the yard door. This beautiful description provided the scenery of the meeting in the sense that was a place that somehow guaranteed some privacy.

Two proposals were made. First, Antinous proposed to carry on with their original plan to kill Telemachus despite the fact that they failed in their first attempt. He told the other Suitors that they must act quickly because two things had been happening. On one hand, Telemachus' determination was increasing. He was becoming a serious opponent to their struggle to siege power. Telemachus now was very thoughtful in his actions and more effective. In Antinous' own words, Telemachus "μὲν γὰρ ἐπιστήμων βουλή τε νόφ τε" [16.374]. The three words in this sentence are so masterfully selected by Homer. First, the word "ἐπιστήμων" has survived in modern Greek as "scientist" and in English as episteme. In Homeric times meant someone who was knowledgeable, wise, experienced, prudent, and cognitive. "Ἐπιστήμων" was someone that knew a subject very well. I guess in the case of Telemachus it could be interpreted that he knew or inherited the art of ruling and that was a serious threat for an ambitious Antinous. The word βουλή was mentioned above. It was used to describe a serious decision taken by an individual or by a group of people. This is the reason the word has survived in modern Greek

to mean "the parliament" as already mentioned. The third word "νόϕ" means nous or mind, sense, intellect, and wit. In other words, the Suitors had now to compete with a serious contender of the throne of the kingdom of Ithaca.

The other development which justified a quick action was more serious. Antinous made the announcement that the people (λαοὶ) were diminishing their devotion/love (ἦρα) to/for them. It was not like before anymore that all (πάμπαν) supported them "λαοὶ δ' οὐκέτι πάμπαν ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἦρα φέρουσιν" [16.375]. Not only they were losing people's devotion but there was a danger that Telemachus would call a meeting/gathering/assembly (ὀμηγυρίσασθαι) of Greeks (Ἀχαιοὺς) to the agora (ἀγορήν) again and expose them as he did in the first meeting but this time, we infer that Antinous considered it as a serious threat "ἀλλ' ἄγετε, πρὶν κείνον ὀμηγυρίσασθαι Ἀχαιοὺς εἰς ἀγορήν" [16.376] and added that Telemachus would not give up "οὐ γάρ τι μεθυσέμεναί μιν οἶω" [16.377] and he would stand in front of everybody and expose them that they planned to kill him [16.378–16.379]. Alternatively, Antinous continued, all Suitors must give up and return to their places because there was a danger that once the people learned about their plan to kill Telemachus will get upset and send them to an exile far away from their homes.

The other Suitors, nevertheless, had second thoughts. They remained silent. At the end, Amphinomid, another Suitor, stood up and suggested that before they proceeded, they must make sure that Gods would approve the assassination of Telemachus. All others seemed to agree with this proposal "τοῖσιν δ' ἐπιήνδανε μῦθος" [16.406] and dissolved the meeting and headed towards the palace.

### Suitors Third Meeting [20.240–20.247]

The reference to this meeting is very sort -only eight verses. It was taking place in parallel with Odysseus discussion with Philoetius who was responsible of herding Odysseus' estate cattle. He was talking to a disguised Odysseus. In the middle of this discussion, the scenery moved to a meeting which apparently was taking place simultaneously, presumably outside the palace, with the participation of the Suitors. Most probably the meeting was at its climax because they were talking all together "ὥς οἱ μὲν τοιαῦτα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀγόρευον" [20.240]. At this point, Zeus sent them his sign: an eagle with a pageant in its nails. Amphinomids suggested that they must give up on their plan to kill Telemachus "ὦ φίλοι, οὐχ ἡμῖν συνθεύσεται ἦδε γε βουλή, Τηλεμάχοιο φόνος" [20.245–20.246] because Zeus did not approve it. To this it seems that all agreed "τοῖσιν δ' ἐπιήνδανε μῦθος" [20.247] and the meeting ended.

### **The Meeting of the Relatives (Mainly Fathers) of the Slaughtered Suitors [24.420–24.465]**

After Odysseus slewed all Suitors who, by the way, were all young and from aristocratic families with popular support as mentioned above, their relatives heard the bad news early the next morning and gathered to decide what to do. They wanted revenge. The leader of this group was the father of Antinous named Eupitheis who very emotionally and with tears in his eyes proposed to retaliate by killing Odysseus before he left Ithaca. However, there were reactions. First, Medon suggested that Odysseus' quite possible had the support of Gods otherwise he could not do such a thing. He also told them he saw an immortal guiding Odysseus' actions. This revelation scared them. Then, an old man by the name of Halitherses addressed them. He accused them that it was their fault that this happened because they did not listen to him and Medon when they warned them about their sons' folly behaviour. He proposed to take no further action against Odysseus. His proposal was not accepted by the majority of the participants. It is the first time Homer used explicitly a sort of a majority rule-more than half "ἡμίσεων πλείους" [24.464] but the rest did not approve and remained in their seats "τοὶ δ' ἄθροοι αὐτόθι μίμνον" [24.464]. The rest went to kill Odysseus and his supporters. Eupitheis was the first to be killed but the fighting was interrupted by Athene's intervention which was the result of the last meeting of Gods and of *Odyssey* itself.

### **Gods' Third Meeting [24.471–24.487]**

It is not clear whether there was a meeting of all Olympians or simply an exchange between Zeus and Athene. Homer told us that Athene was meeting with Zeus and they exchanged some words but we do not know exactly what was said before. Presumably they were discussing the new developments and Athene was questioning Zeus what he had in his mind again: war or peace. "ἢ προτέρω πόλεμόν τε κακὸν καὶ φύλοπιν αἰνὴν τεύξεις, ἢ φιλότητα μετ' ἀμφοτέροισι τίθησθα;" [24.464]. The use of the word "προτέρω" is of interest here which might mean that Athene accused Zeus that he sought war again because he wanted to continue the war and the evil it entails with the sound of war (φύλοπιν). Athene gave (suggested) him the option of peace (φιλότητα). Zeus complained to Athene that so far got what she wanted. Presumably he was completely indifferent and bored with all this game. Finally, he told Athene to do as she pleased "ἔρξον ὅπως ἐθέλεις" [24.481] but Zeus suggested that now Odysseus got his revenge on the Suitors, peace should be established and Odysseus becomes a king for life. This is what Athene wanted to hear and immediately intervened to stop the fighting.

This is the end of the story. We do not really know what happened to Odysseus but the message from *Odyssey* is that Homer did not want to abolish the political system of having a king for life. After all this was the wish of Zeus pending of course that the king was good with his people. If this was the case then this politeia will flourish and become eudaemon because wealth (πλοῦτος) and peace (εἰρήνη) come

together in abundance (ἄλις ἔστω) or in Zeus' own words "πλοῦτος δὲ καὶ εἰρήνη ἄλις ἔστω" [24.486].

## Conclusion

Homer's *Odyssey* educated many generations of Greeks and non-Greeks with ideals. Mortals should respect Gods and live their lives along the lines of the three apothegms found in the Oracle of Delphi: know yourself, nothing in excess and to guarantee something is madness. Nothing of these is explicitly found in Homer's work but their meanings are all there. These three apothegms were expressed in the sixth century BCE but I think Homer's influence had been tremendous.

Homer's *Odyssey* conveyed another more important message. Mortals and immortals should take decision taken into consideration other people's or Gods' feelings, opinions, and reactions. Meetings may serve the purpose of conveying information, exchange ideas and decide what to do. In *Odyssey*, it is obvious that Homer favored collective decision making at the level of a politeia but he did not go so far as to suggest the abolishment of the political system where a king was the ruler. He favored good kings like Alcinous in the land of Phaeacians who was listening to his people by meeting them regularly in the agora. One may contrast the political plight of Ithaca without its king Odysseus with the "paradise" of Alcinous' politeia. Thus, for Homer the choice was not between kings and no kings but between good and bad kings. It took a few centuries and thanks to the *Odyssey*'s clear message that people realized that they have the power to establish a system called democracy where the majority (πλείονας) decide and rule.

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