

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43460-8 - The Early Age of Greece: Volume II

Sir William Ridgeway, Edited by A. S. F. Gow and D. S. Robertson

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I.

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

Οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρείττον καὶ ἄρειον,
 ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασι οἶκον ἔχοντων
 ἄνηρ ἡδὲ γυνή· πόλλ' ἄλγεα δ' ὕμνευσι,
 χάρματα δ' εὐμενέτησι· μάλιστα δέ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί.

Od. vi. 182—5.

THE preceding volume of this work was devoted to a rigorous examination of the material remains of prehistoric Greece and a comparison of their evidence both with the literary traditions and with the culture portrayed in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Up to that time it had been universally held that the great culture revealed at Mycenae and numerous other cities had been brought into Greece by the Achaeans or other invaders, and that it was this Bronze Age culture which is presented to us in the Homeric poems. From this survey we were led to reject the older views and to point out that whilst the so-called 'Mycenaean' or Aegean culture was that of the full Bronze Age, this culture so far from being adventitious had grown up step by step in the basin of the Aegean, whilst that mirrored in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* belonged to the Early Iron Age, when that metal, though in common use, had not yet wholly superseded bronze in the manufacture of weapons and other cutting implements.

We were then led to seek for the region whence this new culture had entered Greece, and our researches brought us to the belief that the old theories by which iron was held to have been introduced into Europe from either Africa or Asia must be abandoned—as well as that other doctrine, till then no less universally maintained, that the knowledge of bronze, if not of copper, had passed up into Europe from the lands south or east of the Mediterranean. It was next pointed out that the Early Iron Age of central Europe which first came into notice

at the now famous cemeteries of Hallstatt is in all respects closely analogous to the culture of the Homeric poems. Furthermore, as the Homeric Achaeans are pictured as tall men with fair hair, a type never produced in the Mediterranean lands, and which, when it descends into that region, inevitably wanes, and as all Greek tradition declares that the Achaeans had come down from the north into Greece shortly before the Trojan War, we were forced to the conclusion that not only the use of iron, but the round shield with a central boss, the practice of cremating the dead, the use of the brooch, and the style of ornament known as Geometric or Dipylon, had been brought by bodies of fair-haired men of large stature who had come from the north and mastered the old melanochrous race which had dwelt in the Aegean basin from the Neolithic period, and whose artistic genius had created the grand civilization of the Copper and Bronze Ages of Greece. An investigation of the Homeric poems showed that in them the existence of this elder race is everywhere assumed, that its traditions form the background of the poems, and that its language and its metre enshrine the deeds and chequered fortunes of the heroes from the north. In the present volume we propose to test these conclusions by a scrutiny of some of the sociological facts of ancient Greece.

The majority of the ghosts seen by Odysseus in the realms of Hades and Persephone were those of women. All these, with the exception of the hero's mother and the two daughters of Minos, belonged to the elder age and to the elder race of Greece. The prominence thus given to women in the *Nekyia*, combined with the fact that a famous poem called the *Eoiai*, and ascribed to Hesiod, was wholly devoted to heroines, naturally suggests that in the early days of Greece descent may have been traced through females rather than through males, as has been and still is the rule among many races. This *prima facie* probability would be much strengthened if it could be shown that the rule of female succession prevailed in any of the royal lines to which these heroines belonged. But such an example is not far to seek. Among the great

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dames of the *Nekyia*, Tyro takes a prominent place. She was daughter of Salmoneus, the Thessalian chieftain, and she bore, as the fruit of the embraces of Poseidon, Neleus and Pelias, whilst by her union with the mortal Cretheus, she became the mother of Aeson, the father of Jason. If descent had been reckoned through males in the royal house of Iolcus, Jason would naturally have described himself as the son of Aeson, the son of Cretheus; but, far from so doing, it was through a woman that he traced his lineage when in fulfilment of the oracle "spoken at the central stone of tree-clad mother Earth," and wearing the close-fitting garb of the Magnetes with a leopard-skin, single-sandalled, and brandishing two javelins, he stood in the Agora at the hour of full market¹. His argument was on this wise: "The same mother bare Cretheus and rash Salmoneus, and in the third generation we again were begotten, and look upon the strength of the golden sun." Thus Jason's claim rests on the fact that Cretheus and Salmoneus had the same mother, no reference whatever being made to their father. If the royal Minyan house reckoned descent through males, and Tyro, having no brothers, was the heiress of Salmoneus, Jason could have claimed kinship with Pelias on the ground that his father Aeson and Pelias had a common maternal grandfather Salmoneus.

The labours of Bachofen, J. F. McLennan, L. H. Morgan, W. Robertson Smith, Westermarck and others, have abundantly proved the general prevalence of various forms of primitive marriage in the early stages of human society, and terms such as polyandry, exogamy, endogamy, and *punalua* have become as familiar as polygamy.

Mr J. F. McLennan² devoted a separate essay to the subject of early kinship in Greece, in which he embodied the results of his examination of Homer, Aeschylus, Attic law, and the early legends. He strove to prove that the Greeks, like every other people (as he held), had at one time traced kinship and descent solely through females. As he regarded the Greeks for his purpose as practically a single people, he held of equal value

¹ Pindar, *Pyth.* iv. 74 sqq. For ἀγορὰ πλῆθουσα=9 o'clock see Ridgeway, *Trans. Cambridge Phil. Soc.*, vol. 1 (1872—80), pp. 301—2.

² *Studies in Ancient History*, pp. 195 sqq.

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for his immediate object any evidence that could be obtained from any part of that wide area which in historical times was included in the term Hellas, and he even made use of evidence drawn from Lycia.

Now if it can be shown from McLennan's own data not only that sole female kinship cannot be proved for the Homeric age, but that he himself admits that descent is reckoned through both males and females in the Homeric poems, and that the only cases in which he can point to anything like female kinship are not Achean, but Lycian and Trojan; and if we can also demonstrate that descent through males is the invariable rule in the great Achean families, and that with them the son is regularly named not from his mother, but from his father, we shall then have proved, by evidence which can hardly be suspected of being *ex parte*, that with the Achaeans of Homer descent through males was the rule. On the other hand, if we can find very strong evidence that at Athens the rule of descent through the mother was still well known in the fifth century B.C., that it survived in Crete, that it was the custom of Lycia in historical as well as in heroic times, and that the pre-Achean legends of Attica, Arcadia, Thessaly, and other parts of Greece afford many indications of a like social condition, we may conclude that the reason why the Homeric poems exhibit a form of society much higher than that which prevailed in Attica down to a comparatively late epoch is that the Achaeans held the rule of descent through males when they became the masters of the older inhabitants of Greece, who were in the lower social condition wherein descent through females is customary.

"In no respect," says McLennan, "has life in the Homeric times so modern an aspect as in regard to the position of 'wedded wives'...In Homer we find acknowledgment of the blood ties through both the father and the mother...Homer prefers the father in tracing genealogies, without denying the mother her place." But it is remarkable that when McLennan comes to cite from Homer instances of the latter custom he is able only to give cases which can hardly be called Greek. Thus his first reference¹ is to the "pleading of Lycaon in the

¹ *Il.* XXI. 74 *sqq.*

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Iliad, as containing proof of kinship through the mother, and proof that the tie through the father did not, in the same degree, infer the rights and obligations of kinship. This Lycaon was a son of Priam, by Laothoe, daughter of Altes, king of the Leleges. She was one of Priam's numerous 'wedded wives,' and had by him two sons, Lycaon and Polydorus, the latter already slain by Achilles, who had come forth to avenge the death of Patroclus, his friend and kinsman. Lycaon, being assailed by Achilles, begs for his life, his main plea being that he is not related to Hector on the mother's side:—

'Yet I'll say

This to thee, and cast it thou in heart;

Do not slay *me*, since not from the same womb

Am I as Hector is, who killed thy friend,

At once both kind and brave.'

The appeal is to the well-known law of blood-feud, for though the assault takes place in battle, it is made in the thirst for vengeance. What, then, is the meaning and effect of the appeal? Is it this:—'Hector and Hector's kindred are alone amenable to your vengeance, for it was Hector who slew your friend. I am neither kith nor kin of Hector. True, we have, as you know, the same father. But I put it to you, what does that matter? He is not my brother uterine (*δμογάστριος*), my relative through the mother'? At least, it implies that being a brother by the same father did not mark him out one of those specially liable to be slain as a relative of the wrongdoer. The pleading was ineffectual, but it remained unanswered save by the sword." Later McLennan says: "Should it be thought that the inference made from this case is too large, it must at any rate be allowed that the passage proves— (1) that the blood connection between the mother and son was fully acknowledged; (2) that the connection through the father and mother made a closer kinship than through the father only, which would not have been the case had agnation been established. And as it is obvious that Lycaon could not have urged his plea had he and Hector been uterine brothers, even had they been sons of different fathers, it becomes probable (3) that the blood tie through the mother alone was

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practically, at this time, a stronger one than that through the father alone." But this series of assumptions has no real basis since all that the sentence means is that poor Lycaon in his despair, ready to urge any plea, no matter how weak, tells Achilles that he is only the half and not the full brother of Hector, a distinction between half and full blood thoroughly familiar to our modern life with its strict descent through males. McLennan might just as well have argued that because Joseph regarded Benjamin, his brother by the same mother, as closer to him than the other sons of Jacob, the Hebrews at that time reckoned descent through females, which they certainly did not.

"Further on, Priam speculates as to the fate of Lycaon and Polydorus. 'If they yet live captive with the Greeks,' he says, 'then surely we shall ransom them with brass and gold; for the money is in the house, as the aged Altes gave abundance with his daughter.' There is here a further note of relationship between mother and child. The mother's wealth was specially applicable for ransoming *her* sons. We may infer that in the household of the polygamous Priam, the children of a wife, whatever other rights of inheritance they had, were heirs to her wealth." McLennan seems to assume that in polygamous communities descent is reckoned through the mother, and apparently he did not realize that in polygamous communities, as in Turkey, where descent is through the males, the children of each wife inherit their mother's property. Further on we shall find cases of polygamous kings and chieftains amongst the northern peoples, where descent through males was the rule.

As McLennan puts the case of Lycaon in the forefront of his argument, I have thought it better to quote his words in full. Yet he himself saw that "it may be said that Lycaon's plea refers solely to a state of feeling prevailing on the Asiatic side and peculiar to a people who practised polygyny. But if it was of no force from Homer's point of view, he either would not have stated it, or he would have made Achilles meet it with an answer. The reply of Achilles is irrelevant, being substantially what I have stated, with the addition that he had made up his mind to spare no child of Priam." McLennan continues:—"It must be assumed that the plea appeared of force

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to Homer's auditors, and that could only be through their knowing what a difference the want of a perfect kinship should have made. On the Greek side, as well as on the Asiatic, there was, owing to the system of 'captive wives,' abundance of room for the distinction between the paternal and maternal tie, and for its practical recognition in cases of blood-feud." But if the view which we have advanced in the preceding volume be true,—that in the Greece of the Homeric age there was a new master-race ruling an old population,—there was another and better reason why Homer's audience might be fully alive to vital differences in rules of kinship, supposing that such existed between the Achæans and the royal house of Troy, which seems not to have been the case. But the reason already given—that Homer's audience would fully realize the difference between half blood and full blood—sufficiently explains why he put that plea in the mouth of Lycaon.

The next case quoted by McLennan is that of Tlepolemus, son of Heracles and Astyoche, the founder of the Rhodian cities of Lindus, Cameirus, and Ialysus, in which he had planted according to their tribes those who had followed him into exile (vol. I. p. 199). There can be no reasonable doubt that Tlepolemus was an historical personage, for in Pindar's¹ day, and long after, the Rhodians not only offered to him sacrifices of sheep, but held annually in his honour games known as the Tlepolemeia. "This puissant seed of Heracles," according to Pindar, traced his descent from Zeus and on the mother's side from Astydamia, and the Theban poet tells how the œcist of Rhodes "once on a time smote with his staff of tough wild-olive Licymnius, Alcmena's bastard brother, in Tiryns as he came forth from Midea's chamber, and slew him in the kindling of his wrath²." But according to Homer he had inadvertently slain his grand-uncle Licymnius the brother of Alcmena, mother of Heracles, and had to flee, "for the other sons and grandsons too of mighty Heracles had threatened him³." "By old law [writes McLennan] the right of vengeance belonged to the kindred of the slain. They were therefore

¹ *Ol.* vii. 80 (with *Schol. ad loc.*).² *Ol.* vii. 27 *sqq.*³ *Il.* ii. 657 *sqq.*

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(being of the kin of Heracles) of the kindred of Alcmena and of her brother Licymnius. That is, *some* Hellenes—for this is a strictly Hellenic story—recognized the blood-tie through the mother as creating the right and obligation of the blood-feud.” But, as we have already clearly seen that Heracles and the Perseid family belong to the pre-Achean stock, and that the people who went to Rhodes with Tlepolemus were neither Achaeans nor Dorians (as generally held), but Pelasgians, the argument drawn by McLennan from this passage would prove female kinship not for the Achaeans, but for the Pelasgians.

But is the argument sound? (1) McLennan assumes that it was on the ground of the blood-feud that the other sons and grandsons drove Tlepolemus from the land. But as a blood-feud can only exist between two different families, clans, or tribes, and as Tlepolemus himself stood in exactly the same degree of kinship to Licymnius as the other sons of Heracles, the question of blood-feud did not arise at all. The modern Albanians, who are probably the lineal descendants, more or less mixed, of the ancient Illyrians, the close congeners of the aborigines of Greece (vol. I. p. 342 *sqq.*), afford a good example of this: “the tribe cannot punish bloodshed within the family group, *e.g.* if one cousin in a communal house kill another. The head of the house is arbiter. A man said naïvely on this subject, ‘How can such a case be punished? A family cannot owe itself blood?’ To him the family was the unit, the individual had no separate existence¹.” The action of Tlepolemus’ relations must have sprung from an entirely different cause—the desire to rid the family from the pollution (*ἄγος*) of kindred blood (*ἐμφύλιον αἷμα*). (2) But McLennan has unwarrantably assumed that this passage shows female kinship. To make his reasoning cogent Tlepolemus and his kinsmen, who expelled him, ought to have been born not from a son of Alcmena, but from a daughter. Under the rule of female succession Tlepolemus and the other sons and grandsons of Heracles were not of the kindred of Alcmena at all, for Tlepolemus and the other sons of Heracles would belong to the families of their respective mothers. Thus then the

¹ M. Edith Durham, *High Albania* (1909), p. 35.

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passage does not refer to a case of blood-feud nor yet prove female descent. The banishment of Tlepolemus was probably due simply to the desire to rid the land of one stained with human blood. But with this very important subject we shall deal at length later on.

McLennan's next case is that of Helen, who, when from the wall of Troy she scans the ranks of the Achaeans and points out their chieftains to Priam and the Trojan elders, looks in vain for Castor and Pollux—

“Mine own brethren,
Whom both, as also me, one mother bare.”

She knew not that the dear land of Lacedaemon that gave them birth had by then clasped them to her breast. “Homer [says Mr McLennan] represents her thoughts as wholly fixed on their common mother.” McLennan sought also to support his argument by quoting the passage of the *Iliad*¹ in which Briseis, as she bewails the dead Patroclus, recites her own sorrows—the loss of her husband, and “of three beloved brethren too (one mother bare us).” He likewise points out the stress laid on the epithet *ὁμογάστριος*, ‘of the same womb,’ as contrasted with *ἑπατρός*, ‘of the same father,’ which is only used twice². But, as Helen and her brothers were the children of Tyndareos, the last king of the ancient Pelasgian line of Lacedaemon, the argument *quantum valet* indicates that the Pelasgians and not the Achaeans reckoned kinship through the mother. Briseis likewise is not Achaean, for she was wife of Mynes king of Lyrnessus in the Troad³.

Finally he quotes the words of Apollo⁴:

“One right dear,
Either a brother born of self-same womb,
Or even a son.”

From this McLennan infers that “Homer attaches superior importance to the tie through the mother.” Though it may turn out that the aborigines of Greece did trace descent through

¹ *xix.* 291 *sqq.*

³ *Il.* *xix.* 60, 296 *sqq.*

² *Il.* *xi.* 257, *xii.* 371.

⁴ *Il.* *xxiv.* 47.

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women, this passage does not imply anything more than what holds generally true in our modern life,—that there is usually a closer bond of affection between brothers by the same mother than between half-brothers by different mothers.

“The beggar Arnaeus,” says McLennan, “got his name through his mother.” But the Greek of the passage¹ does not mean that Arnaeus was called after his mother, but merely that she named him:—“Arnaeus was his name, for so had his good mother given it him at his birth, but all the young men called him Irus, because he ran on errands.” Yet the fact of the mother naming the child is no more proof that descent was traced through females than if one were to attempt to show that the same rule exists in modern England, relying on the fact that bastards usually bear their mother’s name. But in communities where descent is traced through males even children born in wedlock are constantly named by the mother and not by the father, a practice which can be abundantly proved from the Icelandic Sagas. Thus we read in *Burnt Njal*² that “in the summer after the wedding Hallgerda gave birth to a girl, and Glum (her husband) asked her what name it was to be called. She shall be called after my father’s mother, and her name shall be Thorgerda, for she came down from Sigurd, Fafnir’s-bane on the father’s side according to the family pedigree. So the maiden was sprinkled with water and had this name given her.” Nor can it be said that Hallgerda had the right of naming the child in this case because it was a daughter. For “the son begotten between Unna, daughter of Fiddlemord, and Valgard, her second husband, was called Mord after his mother’s father³.” Again, Thorgerda, when delivered of a boy, sends to her mother Hallgerda, to know whether she shall call him Glum or Hauskuld⁴. Finally Hrolf the Ganger himself was named after Hrolf Nefia, his mother Hild’s father⁵.

¹ *Od.* xviii. 5—7.² *The Saga of Burnt Njal*, chap. xiv.³ *ibid.* chap. xxv. Njal had a bastard son Hauskuld by a woman named Rodny, daughter of Hauskuld. The bastard was thus called after his mother’s father.⁴ *ibid.* chap. lviii.⁵ *Heimskr.* (Saga Lib.) vol. i. p. 117.