

The Ethical Structure of Homeric Society

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ABSTRACT

According to Plato, the society as reflected in Homer's epics is one without state power. In a society without state power, the act of revenge which the offended party prosecutes on the offender is the only disciplinary force, which should be endorsed by the ethical concepts of the society. Though the ethics of Homeric society has been analyzed before, there has been no theory on the ethical structure of Homeric society analyzed from the viewpoint of a society without state power. This study attempts to address this issue. Six concepts, »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood«, »food« and »revenge« have been extracted from Homeric epics in comparison with the ethical structure of the Albanian Kanun. The ethical structure of Homeric society appears to belong to the category of the ethics of a society without state power, as represented by the ethical structure of the Kanun. Plato explicitly criticizes the ethical value system of Homeric society, which he thinks is alienated from the idea of Good.

Introduction

The Iliad and the Odyssey are the greatest epics of the ancient Greek world, which have been recited and read for over two thousands years. According to Xenophanes, Homer's epics were used as a textbook for the education of the young in the ancient Greek world^{1,2}. Plato wrote in »The Republic (598D–607A)« that some Greeks claimed that poets such as Homer, who was called the educator of Hellas, knew everything human pertaining to virtue and vice, and everything divine,

so that they should order their entire lives according to the guidance of the poets³. Homer's epics therefore came to represent the ethical value system of the ancient Greek world.

Plato suggested in »Laws (680A–682E)« that the society as reflected in Homer's epics was one without state power, though an incipient state power had appeared in Ilium⁴. Friedrich Engels indicated in »The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (chapter IV)« that there was no public power separate from the people which could have been used

against the people in Homeric society⁵. Finley said that while the nobles in Homeric society recognized monarchy, they proposed to maintain the fundamental priority of their status, to keep the king on the level of a first among equals¹. From the facts that Thucydides refers to the old *basileia* as *patrike* and that Aristotle says in »Politics (1285b5–20)« that the *basileia* of the heroic age was a leadership over freeman and the *basileus* (king) was military leader, judge and high priest⁶, Engels also suggested that the *basileus* in Homeric society had no governmental power in the later sense⁵. Therefore, we must analyze the ethical structure of Homeric society from the viewpoint of a society without state power, if we truly want to understand its ethical value system. Though the ethics of Homeric society have been analyzed before^{1,7–9}, there has been no theory on the ethical structure of Homeric society analyzed from the viewpoint of a society without state power.

Thomas Hobbes indicated in »Leviathan (chapter XIII)« that a society without state power, where there is no common power which keeps people all in awe, is in a condition called war, that is, every man is against every man¹⁰. In contrast to him, I suggested that a society without state power had ethics and social order of its own making and clarified the ethical structure of a society without state power, which was based and developed on the comparative study between the Albanian tribal customary code, the Kanun, and the ancient culture of the Japanese¹¹). It was found that the ethical structure of a society without state power such as the Gheg tribes of northern Albania consisted of »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood«, »food« and »revenge«¹¹. The ethical structure of a society without state power converts the violence of revenge into a sacred force which purifies the society, bringing a sense of justice to it¹¹. With

the aid of the ethical structure of the Kanun, I will elucidate the ethical structure of Homeric society, which may lead us to understand a repertoire of behavioral patterns with moral consequences and provide us with further insights into the origin of ethical concepts in human society.

A Search for the Ethical Structure of Homeric Society

Homeric society is assumed to be a society without state power, where men live with a value system which regards revenge as an act of justice¹². This value system is defined by the social condition where there is no judicial system with authorized power to punish an offender except for the revenge prosecuted by the offended party. In such societies, there is little room for other value systems, especially one which prohibits revenge, to exist. Unless the act of revenge carried out by the offended party is endorsed by the ethical concepts, it results in vicious, endless violence, which puts the society in danger, making it almost impossible for the society to continue to exist¹². The fact that Homeric society did survive may indicate the presence of a sense of justice and morality, which should be linked with the ethical concepts of that society. Conversely, it is also true that societies with developed systems of moral norms do not necessarily last long as they may be attacked by powerful forces from outside.

The clue to the ethical concepts of a society without state power is to find the offenses which cause men to take revenge, resulting in killing the offender, since men commit such terrible acts because they deem the offenses to be the most unethical in their society¹². In an attempt to clarify the ethical structure of the Kanun, I made a search in the clauses of the Kanun for the offenses against which the

Kanun sanctions a retaliatory violence. It enabled me to find the concepts of »oath«, »honor« and »guest«, which are associated with the concept of »revenge«¹². According to the Kanun, when a man is insulted, he has every right to restore his honor either by the spilling of blood or with a magnanimous pardon¹³. When a man or a guest is killed, the spilt blood must be avenged. All concepts, »oath«, »honor« and »guest« converge on »blood« through vengeful violence, which is regarded to be a sacred force of justice wielded by the gods¹². Finding the offenses which make men take revenge in Homeric epics should lead us to the concepts associated with the ethical structure of Homeric society.

Offenses Which Result in Bloodshed in Homeric Society

There are many offenses in Homeric epics, which result in bloodshed. At first we find that plundering cattle and horses is a cause of feuds. Achilles says that he would come to fight men who plunder his horses and cattle (Iliad 1: 152–160*). Nestor boasts that when he was young and strong, he stole cattle and killed a man who fought for his cattle (Iliad 11: 670–676). The suitors stay at Odysseus's house and consume his property with feasting for three years, which may be thought to be plundering. Odysseus and his son take revenge on the suitors for the offense. Sometimes women are abducted in Homeric society, which results in bloodshed. When Alexander of Troy lures and abducts Helen, the Achaeans attack and destroy Troy in order to get her back.

When an oath is not fulfilled, the offended party takes revenge on the per-

jurer, which results in bloodshed. Agamemnon says that he makes the Trojans pay atonement with their own heads, wives and children for the perjury, as they broke the oath of truce between the Achaeans and the Trojans (Iliad 4: 155–163).

When men's honor is damaged, the offended party takes revenge on the offender, which results in bloodshed. The goddesses Hera and Athene hate Troy and plot to destroy it because Alexander of Troy insulted them by praising Aphrodite when they came to his sheep fold (Iliad 24: 27–30). Achilles in the nether world says to Odysseus that if he were alive and had the strength, he would come to his father's house and force the men who defiled his father's honor to concede to his superior strength (Odyssey 11: 492–503).

When a guest is hurt or insulted, the host takes revenge on the offender, which results in bloodshed. Odysseus in disguise says that he would rather die than see the suitors mistreat his guest in his house (Odyssey 16: 99–111). If the guest returns the hospitality with an ungrateful deed to the host, he takes revenge on the guest. Menelaus, who is eager to destroy Troy, expects that punishments of Zeus, the god of hospitality, fall on the Trojans, as Alexander of Troy violated his hospitality by carrying away his wife (Iliad 13: 623–629).

When men's blood is shed, the victim's kin take revenge on the slayer. Orestes kills Aegisthus and his own mother, who treacherously killed his father, Agamemnon (Odyssey 1: 33–43). Priam's wife Hecabe says that she wishes she could fix her teeth in Achilles' heart and feed on it

* All citations of the Iliad and the Odyssey in this paper are from 1) Homer: Iliad Books 1–12, Harvard University Press, 1999, 2) Homer: Iliad Books 13–24, Harvard University Press, 1999, 3) Homer: The Odyssey Books 1–12, Harvard University Press, 1995, 4) Homer: The Odyssey Books 13–24, Harvard University Press, 1995. Received for publication September 23, 2002

to avenge her slain son (Iliad 24: 209–213). Eupheithes, whose son was killed by Odysseus, says at the assembly of Ithaca that the relatives of the suitors should avenge their slain sons and brothers. According to him, they shall be ashamed forever if they do not take revenge on Odysseus and his son (Odyssey 24: 430–437).

Thus, we find from Homeric epics that plundering cattle, seducing and carrying away women, breaking an oath, damaging men's honor, hurting or insulting a guest, and shedding men's blood all result in bloodshed. Although plundering cattle, seducing and carrying away women can happen in any society regardless of the cultural activity of the men, these offenses are deemed to damage the honor of the wronged in Homeric epics, and are therefore included amongst the offenses which are associated with men's honor. On the other hand, as offenses such as breaking an oath, damaging men's honor, hurting or insulting a guest and shedding men's blood are related to the cultural activity of men in Homeric society, they are regarded to represent the ethical value system of that society¹². The comparative study between the Kanun and Homeric epics leads us to five concepts, »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood« and »revenge« of Homeric society.

Progress, Mediation and Reconciliation of Blood-Feuds

If men kill a member of kin groups of other lineages, it results in blood-feud in a society without state power. When plundering cattle, seducing and carrying away women, or damaging men's honor and so forth results in bloodshed, the victim's kin chase after the killer in order to avenge him. Acamas says that men pray that a kinsman, who should avenge their death be left, since it would be disastrous for the dead to be left unavenged (Iliad

14: 482–485). The killer flees from the land where the homicide occurs in order to avoid the pursuit and revenge of the victim's kin. Theoclymenus, who killed a man at Argos and fled, asks Telemachus to take him to Ithaca by ship because the victim's kinsmen are hot on his heels (Odyssey 15: 272–278). Odysseus says to Telemachus that whoever kills a man must leave his kindred and native land and go into exile (Odyssey 23: 117–122).

When a killer safely flees to another land, his kin ask the victim's kin to accept recompense for the bloodshed. When the victim's kin accept such recompense and reconciliation is achieved, the killer is allowed to return to his native land. Aias says to Achilles that men should accept recompense even from the slayer of their brother or son. According to Aias, if the kinsmen's heart and proud spirit are restrained by the recompense, the killer is able to remain on his own land (Iliad 9: 632–636). If the payment of the recompense is not carried out as agreed, strife occurs between the parties involved, which is dealt with by the mediation of the elders. The elders listen to what both parties have to say and render judgment upon it. How the mediation proceeds is vividly depicted on Achilles' shield (Iliad 18: 497–508).

If a killer does not flee to another land, the victim's kin may take revenge on him, which results in the reciprocal violence between the parties involved. If both parties agree on reconciliation, the kin group whose turn it is to be avenged pays the recompense and the ritual of reconciliation is carried out. Though how the ritual of reconciliation is carried out is not explicitly depicted in Homeric epics, the oath of truce between the Achaeans and the Trojans, which declares that if Menelaus wins the duel with Alexander, the Trojans will return Helen and pay recompense to the Achaeans, may reveal how the ritual of reconciliation is carried out.

In this ritual, Agamemnon who represents the kin group of the wronged, takes the oath to carry out the agreement and prays to the gods with the sacrifice of sheep that if either side breaks the oath, punishments of the gods should fall on the perjurers (Iliad 3: 276–301).

Concepts Associated With the Ethical Structure of Homeric Society

If men die of a disease or senility, it is not a death caused by social sanction, but a natural death. If men are killed by the acts of revenge, whose causes are related to breaking an oath, damaging men's honor, hurting or insulting a guest and shedding men's blood, the resulting strictly sanctioned death is considered to reflect the ethical value system of the society. Earlier, I suggested that the ethical structure of a society without state power represented by that of the Kanun consisted of »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood«, »food« and »revenge«. It is assumed that the ethical value system of Homeric society is similar to that of the Kanun. We found five concepts, »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood« and »revenge« in Homeric epics. In an effort to clarify the ethical value system of Homeric society, the five concepts are elaborated here. As the concept of »food« cannot be divided from the concept of »guest«, we try to find the concept of »food« in Homeric epics in conjunction with the five concepts.

The concept of »oath«

When we analyze the concept of oath in Homeric epics, we find three patterns of oath. The first is the oath of making a promise. Men make a vow to do this or that, which they swear by the name of gods to carry out. Achaean seer, Calchas asks Achilles to swear that he defends Calchas with sword and hand from Agamemnon who will be angry at him if he tells the prophecy of Phoebus Apollo (Iliad 1: 74–83).

Achilles gives Calchas the oath to defend him. Calchas informs the Achaeans of the prophecy of Phoebus Apollo, because he completely believes that Achilles' oath guarantees his safety. Dolon, a Trojan asks Hector to swear that he will give Achilles' horses and chariot to Dolon as a reward for spying on the Achaean ships (Iliad 10: 319–324). Hector swears by the name of Zeus that he will give them to Dolon if he succeeds. When Odysseus and his comrades come across the island of Helios, he asks his comrades to take an oath not to eat cattle or sheep on the island (Odyssey 12: 298–302).

The second is the oath to tell the truth. Men make a vow indicating that A is A, which they swear by the name of gods that it is true. When Agamemnon returns Briseis to Achilles, he swears an oath that he has never laid his hand on her (Iliad 19: 258–266). When Circe asks Odysseus to go into the bed with her, Odysseus demands her to swear an oath that she has no plot to harm him (Odyssey 10: 342–347). Circe answers to Odysseus that he should not fear because she swore the oath not to harm him (Odyssey 10: 380–381).

The third is the oath, which ensures total compliance with the original vow. Men swear by the name of gods that their vows will be fulfilled. A poor stranger whom Odysseus disguises himself as, declares an oath by the name of Zeus that Odysseus will return to Ithaca and take vengeance on the suitors who dishonor his son and wife (Odyssey 14: 158–164). Telemachus orders his mother, Penelope to vow to all the gods that she will offer perfect hecatomb in the hope that revenge on the suitors will be fulfilled (Odyssey 17: 48–51).

When men take an oath, they need a witness to confirm the vow which guarantees its fulfillment. The oath-taker must make an oath by naming the guarantors

such as gods, earth, sun and rivers. Agamemnon swears an oath with the witness of Zeus, the Earth, the Sun and the Eri-nyes that he has never laid his hand on Briseis (Iliad 19: 258–266). Calypso swears an oath with the witness of Heaven and the river Styx that she does not plot against Odysseus (Odyssey 5: 184–187).

It is believed in Homeric society that when an oath is not fulfilled, the witness of the oath such as Zeus takes revenge on the perjurer. Idomeneus believes that death and woes will fall on the Trojans, since they were the first to behave violently in defiance of the oath of truce (Iliad 4: 268–271). Antenor says at the assembly of the Trojans that if they do not return Helen and the treasure to Menelaus, there is no hope of accomplishing anything to their benefit (Iliad 7: 350–353). Agamemnon declares that if his oath that he has never laid his hand on Briseis should prove false, he will accept whatever the gods meet out to him (Iliad 19: 258–266). In the serious situation such as the oath of truce between the Achaeans and the Trojans sworn by Agamemnon, the oath-taker must offer a blood sacrifice to the gods in order to seal it (Iliad 3: 268–301). It is believed that when the solemn oath is not fulfilled, the curse of the sacrificial blood and the punishment of the gods fall on the perjurer.

Men in Homeric society seem to believe that an oath is always fulfilled since it commands the conduct of oath-takers. Circe affirms that Odysseus should fear nothing as she swore not to plot against him (Odyssey 10: 380–381). The god of Sleep lulls Zeus to sleep as ordered by Hera, since he totally believes Hera's oath to give him a young goddess (Iliad 14: 272–276).

The concept of »honor«

When we try to find the concept of honor in Homeric epics, it is first neces-

sary to find the offenses which men think are dishonorable. Dishonor in Homeric society may be found in the following cases. When Agamemnon, a human, does not accept the ransom from the priest of Apollo for releasing his daughter, the priest feels dishonored (Iliad 1: 93–96). Achilles, the strongest warrior of all the Achaeans feels dishonored when Agamemnon does not treat him as a valiant warrior (Iliad 6: 646–648). Achilles' fury against Agamemnon makes him refuse to fight the Trojans. When the suitors devour Odysseus's cattle and sheep for three years, they feel themselves to be dishonoring Odysseus and Telemachus (Odyssey 22: 367–370). If men cannot protect their lands when others challenge them, it is dishonorable. If a tribal chieftain is not invited to a feast of an equal, it is dishonorable (Odyssey 11: 184–186). If a host does not give a guest gifts on his departure, the guest is dishonored (Odyssey 4: 587–593). If men who are the descendants of the gods do not pay respect to their ancestor-gods, the gods are dishonored (Odyssey 13: 128–130). If a young person slights an elder, the elder is dishonored (Odyssey 13: 141–145). Thus, men feel dishonored in Homeric society when they are not duly treated in accordance to their social status. In other words, men feel honor when they are treated with due respect in accordance to their social status.

When men who retain honor in society accomplish an admirable deed, increase their wealth or strengthen their social status, their honor is augmented, resulting in the sense of glory. If their own efforts bring them the increased honor, the sense of glory may be enormous, though if other's help brings them increased honor, the sense of glory may be less. When men who retain honor in society commit a foul deed, their wealth is diminished or their social status weakened, their honor declines, resulting in the sense of dishonor

or shame. If their own misdeeds bring a decline of honor, the sense of dishonor or shame may be acute. If other's misdeeds bring a decline of honor, the sense of dishonor or shame may be less acute because they may restore their honor by taking revenge on the offender.

When men who retain honor in society do not receive treatment fitting to their social status or lose their honor due to the misdeeds of others, they feel anger toward the offender. They take revenge on the offender to attain equilibrium for damaging their honor. The priest of Apollo asks the god to let the Achaeans pay for his tear, as Agamemnon insulted him and Apollo by spurning his request to return his daughter (Iliad 1: 37–42). Achilles' mother, Thetis implores Zeus to give strength to the Trojans until the Achaeans who dishonored Achilles, show respect to Achilles and honor him (Iliad 1: 503–510). Achilles avenges his dishonor by refusing to fight the Trojans, who nearly rout the Achaeans.

When men who lost their honor due to the misdeeds of others take revenge on the offender, their anger is abated and the sense of dishonor or shame lessens. The act of revenge enables them to restore the sense of honor in society. Achilles' mother, Thetis says that if the Achaeans are routed by the Trojans to whom Zeus gives strength, Achilles will have his honor restored among the Achaeans, who show respect to him by making amends (Iliad 1: 503–510). Odysseus and Telemachus restore their leadership in Ithaca when they take revenge on the impudent suitors.

If an offender pays recompense for the damage of lost honor to the offended party, the anger of the offended party is abated and reconciliation may be achieved. The goddess Athene says to Achilles that Agamemnon will pay him three times as many glorious gifts for recompense of the insult (Iliad 1: 213–214). Agamemnon

swears that if the Trojans return Helen and the treasure which Alexander stole and pay recompense, reconciliation may be achieved between the Achaeans and the Trojans (Iliad 3: 276–290).

The concept of »guest«

A guest has important symbolic meanings in Homeric society. According to the Iliad, the cause of the war between the Achaeans and the Trojans is that a guest committed a misdeed against his host. Menelaus claims that the Achaeans attack the Trojans because his guest, Alexander of Troy plundered his wife and treasure in violation of the hospitality he was given (Iliad 13: 623–639). Achilles says that he mobilized troops in order to help Menelaus and Agamemnon to get recompense from the Trojans for the dishonor of the violated hospitality (Iliad 1: 152–160). There are many cases in Homeric epics, which clarify the concept of »guest« and hospitality.

When men, who run away from their home because of a blood-feud or travel to another land with a certain mission or wander into another land after losing their land and possessions, visit a house asking for shelter, they become guests. When men, who are in distress for various reasons, visit a house of other lineages to ask a help, they are considered guests. Odysseus, who has wandered for a long time after destroying Troy, asks as a suppliant the river on the island of the Phaeacians to give him help (Odyssey 5: 445–450). The Phaeacians receive Odysseus as a guest and offer him hospitality. A swineherd Eumaeus, receives Odysseus in disguise warmly, as he thinks that all strangers and beggars are sent from Zeus (Odyssey 14: 55–59). Telemachus asks his friend Peiraeus to give Theoclymenus, who fled Argos after killing a man, a kindly welcome in his house (Odyssey 15: 539–543).

When a guest visits a house asking for shelter, the host should receive him cordially and offer food. Menelaus receives Telemachus as a guest and treats him to wonderful feasts. The Phaeacians receive Odysseus, wash his hands and treat him with feasts. When a host receives a guest, he is under an obligation to offer protection and security to the guest. The king of the Phaeacians, Alcinous declares that Odysseus shall not suffer any evil or harm throughout their lands, as they protect him (Odyssey 7: 189–198). If a guest is insulted or injured, it is the host who is dishonored, compelling him to take revenge on the offender. Telemachus's mother, Penelope says to him that if he allows the suitors to mistreat the stranger who is sitting in his house, shame and disgrace will fall on him (Odyssey 18: 221–225). Telemachus says to Odysseus in disguise that he wards off the insults and blows of the suitors for him, since Odysseus in disguise is in his house (Odyssey 20: 262–265).

Guests are deemed to be sent by Zeus, the god of suppliants and hospitality in Homeric society. Nausicaa thinks that since strangers and beggars are sent by Zeus, she has to treat them kindly (Odyssey 6: 206–208). An elder of the Phaeacians says that they must offer Odysseus supper as Zeus walks in the footsteps of reverend suppliants (Odyssey 7: 162–166). It is believed that if a host does not treat his guest properly or the guest does not conduct himself well, Zeus would avenge the violation of hospitality. Menelaus expects that the anger of Zeus will fall on the Trojans because Alexander of Troy violated the sacred law of hospitality (Iliad 13: 623–629). Odysseus says that a stranger expects hospitality when he visits a house in other lands as a suppliant, since the suppliant sent by Zeus should be revered (Odyssey 9: 265–271).

When a guest visits a house and is treated well by the host, he may become a guest-friend of the host. They exchange gifts with each other and forge a long-lasting friendship. When Diomedes of the Achaeans finds on the field of combat that Glaucus is his guest-friend because his grandfather treated Glaucus's grandfather for twenty days and exchanged gifts with him, he proposes to stop fighting (Iliad 6: 215–226). When Lycaon is taken prisoner by Achilles and sold, his guest-friend saves him with a ransom (Iliad 21: 40–44).

The concept of »blood«

Blood has great symbolic meanings in human society and Homeric society is no exception. First, it means the blood relationship of men. When Glaucus meets Diomedes on the field of combat, he says to him that his blood originated in the land of the Argives from where his grandfather, Bellerophon, fled to Lycia (Iliad 6: 145–211). When Telemachus declines to receive gifts of three horses from Menelaus because there is no wide plain for the horses in Ithaca, Menelaus praises that Telemachus is of good blood (Odyssey 4: 594–611). When Odysseus reveals his true identity in the hut of the swineherd in Ithaca, he tells Telemachus that if he is truly of Odysseus's blood, he must let no one know that Odysseus is at home (Odyssey 16: 300–303). The goddess Athene gives Telemachus advice that he should be careful lest his mother steal some treasure against his will because women wish to enhance the house of the man whom she marries (Odyssey 15: 19–23). This advice indicates that women are strongly attached to the family to which they belong. Telemachus declares to his mother that he holds the authority of the house (Odyssey 21: 350–353), indicating that Homeric society is patrilineal. Homeric society, where the blood relationship is of great importance, is a segmentary society

which consists of families, clans and tribes. Before the battle begins between the Achaeans and the Trojans, Nestor gives Agamemnon military advice that he should separate men by tribes, and by clans so that clan may aid clan and tribe may aid tribe because each fights for itself (Iliad 2: 360–366). Nestor says at the assembly of the Achaeans that he who loves the horror of war in society is clanless, lawless and hearthless (Iliad 9: 63–64). His words indicate that if men do not belong to kin groups, they do not follow society's rule.

It is believed in Homeric society that if blood is shed, it gives rise to the pollution of blood, which they must purge to prevent evil things from happening. When Odysseus kills the suitors to avenge having been dishonored, he orders his old maidservant to bring sulphur to cleanse the pollution and to bring fire to purge the hall (Odyssey 22: 481–482). It is also believed that blood has an indescribably terrible power, which can animate the dead or bring about terrible consequences to perjurers. When Odysseus visits the nether world and meets Teiresias, Teiresias asks him to remove his sword so that he can drink the blood of the sacrificed sheep (Odyssey 11: 95–96). According to Teiresias, the dead gain power to speak truth when they drink blood (Odyssey 11: 147–149). When the Trojans break the oath of truce between the Achaeans and the Trojans, Agamemnon says that the blood of the sacrifices is not shed in vain (Iliad 4: 155–163), indicating that the curse of the blood may fall on the Trojans.

When men's blood is shed, the victim's kin must take revenge on the offending party. The act of revenge is the obligation of the victim's kin. Acamas says that if the dead have no kinsmen to avenge their death, it is disaster for the dead (Iliad 14: 482–485). Achilles catches twelve Trojan youths alive out of the river as a blood price for the dead Patroclus, his dearest

comrade (Iliad 21: 26–28). He sacrifices the youths at the funeral of Patroclus.

The concept of »food«

When men receive a guest in the house, it is the custom in every human society that the host treats the guest with food and drink. In Homeric society, where a guest has such important symbolic meanings, the concept of »guest« cannot be divided from the concept of »food«. We find many cases of eating food in Homeric epics, which reveal the concept of »food«.

The first case of »food« is found in hospitality, in which a host serves a guest with food. If a stranger visits a house to ask shelter for the night, the host receives him, washes his hands and offers meals. When the host thinks that the guest is an important or dear person to him, he treats him with feasts. When Telemachus visits Sparta, Menelaus treats him with feasts. The Phaeacians treat Odysseus with a glorious feast and minstrel songs (Odyssey 13: 24–28). Whoever the guest is, it is the rule for the host to serve the guest the amount of food equal to that served to other participants of the feast. Telemachus orders his servant to serve Odysseus in disguise a portion of food equal to the suitors (Odyssey 20: 281–283). Even one of the suitors, an enemy of Telemachus, approves of his serving Odysseus in disguise an equal amount of food (Odyssey 20: 293–295). When men eat a meal with a guest, they sometimes offer a portion of the meal to their revered gods in order to make commensality with the gods. Eumaeus offers a portion of meat to the nymphs and Hermes, when he receives Odysseus in disguise (Odyssey 14: 432–438).

When the ritual of oath-taking or reconciliation is carried out, men offer sacrifices such as cattle or sheep to the gods in order to make it firm. Agamemnon sacrifices sheep when he takes the oath of truce between the Achaeans and the Tro-

jans (Iliad 3: 276–301). When men ask gods to forgive their misdeeds, they offer huge amounts in sacrifice, which they eat with the gods after the ritual. The commensality of men with gods strengthens the relationship between them. Agamemnon orders Odysseus to return the daughter to the priest of Apollo and to dedicate a huge sacrifice to the god. The Achaeans eat the sacrifices after the ritual offering of them to Apollo, who is pleased with the feast and songs of the Achaeans (Iliad 1: 458–474).

The living offer food to the dead in order either to make the life of the dead in the nether world easier or to please them. When Odysseus visits the nether world, he offers food to the dead and sacrifices sheep, whose blood gives the dead the strength to tell the truth (Odyssey 11: 24–31). Achilles asks the Achaeans to eat nothing until they avenge the dead Patroclus (Iliad 19: 205–208), indicating that the Achaeans should eat food after they offer their enemy's blood to him.

When men eat food with a stranger or a guest at the same table, they are under an obligation to help that person. When Achilles captures Lycaon, Lycaon asks Achilles to save his life because he ate the grain of Demeter at the same table with Achilles when he was captured by Achilles for the first time (Iliad 21: 74–81). When Iphitus visits Heracles, he kills Iphitus who ate food at the same table with him. This act is deemed to be a terrible transgression of the law of Homeric society (Odyssey 21: 26–30).

The food which men offer to a guest is deemed to be a sort of debt or recompense in Homeric society. Odysseus claims that Agamemnon should make a feast for Achilles at his hut, if he really wants to make reconciliation with Achilles (Iliad 19: 175–180). Agamemnon accuses Menelaus and Odysseus of avoiding to fight the Trojans, though they usually eat gorgeous food at the feast which Agamem-

non gives (Iliad 4: 343–348). In order to inspire the allied troops, Hector declares, on the field of combat, that the Trojans gave gifts and food to them so that they should conscientiously fight the Achaeans to save the wives and children of the Trojans (Iliad 17: 220–226).

The concept of »revenge«

There are many cases of acts of revenge in Homeric epics, such as the revenge of gods against gods, the revenge of gods against men, the revenge of men against men and the revenge of men against gods. Of these, the revenge of men against gods is seen only once in the Iliad, where Achilles expresses his anger against Apollo who saved the Trojans, saying that if he had power, he would avenge himself on Apollo (Iliad 22: 18–20).

In Homeric epics, the world of gods is like a kin group presided over by Zeus. Though Zeus has paramount power and holds the highest status in the community of gods, other gods have almost equal status except that the elder gods are revered by the young gods and the male gods have a superior status to the female gods. Though gods retain more respectful status than men, the world between the two is not explicitly divided, and most men are descendents of gods. In Homeric epics, gods visit man's world freely and help or hinder them. Thus, men and gods who intermingle freely, spin the epic world of the Iliad and the Odyssey together. In this context, the revenge of gods upon gods may be regarded to represent the internal conflicts of a kin group in man's world, and the revenge of gods against men represents the revenge of the superior men against the inferior ones in man's world. Thus, we think that all revenge depicted in Homeric epics reflects what is going on in man's world. The causes of bloodshed and progress,

mediation and reconciliation of blood feuds were described earlier.

Existence of Men in Homeric Society

When we analyze the ethical structure of Homeric society, we must elucidate how men in that society live their daily lives, what their social existence is, as the pattern of men's social existence affects the value system of the society. Engels indicated that Greeks and Pelasgians in prehistoric times had been organized in the same kin groups as native Americans, that is, gens, phratry, tribe and confederacy of tribes⁵. Here, we assume that the basic structure of Homeric society consists of kin groups such as family, clan and tribe. According to Nestor, men who are without homes are lawless. Only when men belong to kin groups of their lineage, they are deemed to be legal bodies with full rights. If men leave their kin groups and live as lonely individuals, they are deemed to be hearthless and lawless, which indicates that anyone can kill or plunder them without recompense. In this regard, it is possible to think that the existence of men in Homeric society is nothing other than the existence of kin groups of their lineage. When kin groups, without which men can not exist as a social entity, exist in the Achaeans or the Trojans, men's existence is guaranteed.

Kin groups

Kin groups are transcendental communes, which consist of the dead, the living and their offspring. The most important obligation of the living in the commune is to bury the dead and hold funerals for them, tearing their hair, scratching their faces and wailing. There are several cases of funeral and ancestor worship in Homeric epics. It is believed that if the living neglect the burial and funeral of the dead, they are refused entry to the nether world

or are harshly treated there. When Odysseus takes revenge on the suitors, one of the ghosts deploras that their bodies are not washed and buried, as the family and friends do not know of their death. According to the ghost, the dead are owed a burial with wailing (Odyssey 24: 186–190). Nestor proposes at the assembly of the Achaeans that the bodies of the dead are cremated so that the bones can be carried home to their children (Iliad 7: 332–335), who will lament the death of their fathers and hold funerals for them. When Achilles lies groaning on the seashore after the funeral feast, Patroclus's spirit appears and asks Achilles to bury him as soon as possible. Patroclus' spirit says that he cannot pass through the gates of Hades because the spirits of men who have toiled do not allow him to mingle with them beyond the river (Iliad 23: 70–74). If the kin of the dead may not hold funerals, a substitute of his kin is requested to do it. It is believed that if the dead remain unburied, the wrath of the gods falls upon the men. When Odysseus visits the nether world, the ghost of Elpenor who was killed on the island of Circe and not buried, appears and asks Odysseus to bury him before he departs from the island. The ghost of Elpenor says that if Odysseus departs from the island leaving his body behind unwept and unburied, the god's wrath may fall upon him (Odyssey 11: 51–74).

In Homeric society, kin groups must survive by their own might and wits. They remain honorable themselves in the society, without which kin groups cannot exist, since kin groups of other lineages are prone to attack weak kin groups. One of the suitors says to Telemachus that he must keep his possessions himself and be the lord in his own house lest men who shall wrest them by violence and against his will come (Odyssey 1: 402–404). When Odysseus meets Nausicaa on the shore of the island of the Phaeacians, he says to

her that nothing is greater or better than that a man and a woman keep their house together by sharing both heart and mind (Odyssey 6: 182–185).

Plundering

Kin groups in Homeric society must remain honorable in the society by following the code of a society without state power, which allows men to plunder kin groups of other lineages if they are in dire straits. Plundering is not considered to be a crime, but rather an act of virtue for men in Homeric society. When Odysseus is treated well as a guest on the island of the Phaeacians, Laodamas, Alcinous's son says to him that there is no greater glory for men than that which they achieve by their own hands and feet (Odyssey 8: 147–148). When Odysseus returns to Ithaca, he says to Eumaeus that due to hunger, men set sail over the endless sea in order to plunder others (Odyssey 17: 286–289). He boasts at Eumaeus's hut that he led warriors and ships nine times against foreign lands to get great spoils before the Achaeans set foot on the land of Troy (Odyssey 14: 229–233). If men, who set out to plunder do not bring back many spoils to their homes, they are dishonored. When Odysseus and his comrades are coming home, his comrades complain that Odysseus carries with him much booty from the land of Troy, while they are coming home empty handed (Odyssey 10: 40–42).

When kin groups are defeated in battle, they are forced to face the hard reality of being plundered. Hector says to his wife that he would rather die than hear her cries when the Achaeans drag her into captivity (Iliad 6: 462–465). At the same time, he expects that some day someone will say to his son that he is better than his father when he brings the blood-stained spoils to his mother (Iliad 6: 478–481).

Discussion

Homeric society, which is assumed to be a society without state power, is a society consisting of kin groups of various lineages, which must exist by their own might and wits, keeping their honor. It is inevitable that conflicts between men occur in human society. If a conflict occurs within a kin group, it is resolved by the chief of the kin group, who is authorized to wield supreme and absolute power over it. On the other hand, there is no judicial system which is authorized to use power to resolve conflicts between kin groups of different lineages. Therefore, even a minor quarrel between men of different lineages may easily conflagrate into a serious conflict in a society without state power. It is the customary code of a society without state power represented by the Kanun, which presides over the conflicts in order not to let them escalate, preventing the society from slipping into chaos¹².

The conflicts, whose causes are related to breaking an oath, damaging men's honor, hurting or insulting a guest and shedding men's blood, can escalate into bloodshed in Homeric society. If men commit one of those misdeeds, the offended party takes revenge on the offender, whose blood is shed, resulting in a blood-feud. Then, the victim's kin avenge the bloodshed and the kin groups involved in the blood-feud carry on the act of revenge alternately. If both parties agree to reconciliation, the offending party pays recompense for the damage and the ritual of reconciliation is carried out. When a minor quarrel occurs among men of different lineages, it is solved by the mediation of the elders in the society. Though if both parties accept mediation, reconciliation is achieved, if the mediation of the elders is not accepted, the quarrel may result in bloodshed. Thus, the code of a society without state power presides over con-

licts in Homeric society, allowing it continued survival.

Homeric society is a society where kin groups of different lineages coexist in an orderly manner under the guide of the code of a society without state power. However, when the existence of a kin group is in danger, they fight for their survival. If a food shortage puts a kin group in dire straits, they may resort to the plunder of cattle or horses from kin groups of other lineages. Plunder by daring, strong men, exposed to danger, is not considered to be a sin, but a virtue. While the kin of the plunderers are happy to applaud the adventure, the offended party takes revenge on the plunderers.

Kin groups, which are believed to belong to the lineage of the gods, are under an obligation to bury the dead of their lineage and hold funerals for them, in which men and women scratch their faces, tear their hair and wail. Kin groups keep their bond with their ancestors by offering food and sacrifices to them and confirm the legitimacy of their existence in the society. Thus, kin groups of Homeric society guard the temporal existence by observing the rituals of ancestor-worship and secure the spatial existence by coexistence and rivalry with kin groups of other lineages.

We extracted six concepts from Homeric epics in comparison with the ethical structure of the Kanun and found that Homeric society had the ethical structure similar to that of the Kanun. The ethical structure of the Kanun represents the value system of a society without state power, which engenders the sense of justice in the society. The act of revenge which the offended party prosecutes on the offender is the only disciplinary force to keep and restore social order in a society without state power, where a quarrel which if not resolved escalates into bloodshed is likely to engender strong emotions among the men, which drive them to take action. Unless the violence of re-

venge is endorsed by the ethical concepts of the society, it may yield chaos and nightmarish disorder in the society. The ethical structure of the Kanun, which changes the violence of revenge into the sacred force of justice, is an indispensable element for a society without state power to survive¹². The ethical structure of Homeric society, which consists of »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood«, »food« and »revenge«, seems to belong to the category of the ethics of a society without state power, which is represented by the ethical structure of the Kanun.

In »The Republic (598D–607A)«, Plato explicitly criticizes the ethical value system of Homeric society, which he thinks is alienated from the idea of good³. As one of the keen criticism against it, Plato states how men should conduct themselves when a loved one dies. According to Plato, when a good and reasonable man experiences such a stroke of misfortune as the loss of his son, he will bear it more easily than the other sort, as it is the reason and law that exhorts him to resist the bare feeling, which urges him to give way to his grief. The law declares that it is best to keep quiet as far as possible in calamity and not to chafe and repine because we cannot know what is really good and evil in such things, and it gives us no advantage to take them hard, and nothing in mortal life is worthy of great concern. Instead of stumbling like children, clapping his hands on the stricken spot and wasting time in lamentation, he should accustom his soul to devotion to the healing process. Though the best part of men's soul is willing to conform to these precepts of reason, the irrational and idle part of them dwells on the memory of their suffering and impels them to lamentation. As the nature of the mimetic poets such as Homer is not related to the better part of the soul, but is devoted to the fretful and complicated character, it is justified for rational men not to admit them

into a well-ordered state. The mimetic poets should be expelled from the ideal state because they set up in each individual soul a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality, and by currying favor with the senseless element that cannot distinguish the greater from the less. Plato warns that if men grant admission to the honeyed muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be the lords of the city instead of law. Thus, in the last chapter of »The Republic«, Plato criticizes the ethical value system of Homeric society, insisting that it must be eradicated because it antagonizes and undermines the ethical value system of a society with state power. Apparently, the divorce of ethics from the emotional aspect of humanity began after Plato.

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This study tried to find a repertoire of behavioral patterns with moral consequences in Homeric epics, which led us to the ethical structure of Homeric society consisting of six concepts, »oath«, »honor«, »guest«, »blood«, »food« and »revenge«. However, as the morality of Homeric society implied by the Iliad and the Odyssey may have wider scope than these, more research is needed to clarify the ethical value system of Homeric society.

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ETIČKA STRUKTURA HOMERSKOG DRUŠTVA

SAŽETAK

Prema Platonu, društvo kako je prikazano u Homerovoj epici predstavlja društvo bez državne vlasti. U društvu bez državne vlasti čin osвете koji uvrjeđena strana izvršava nad stranom koja je odgovorna za uvredu predstavlja jedini čimbenik društvene stege i kao takav treba biti uvršten među etička načela društva. Premda je etika homerskog društva i prije analizirana, nije postojala teorija o etičkoj strukturi homerskog društva sa stanovišta društva bez državne vlasti. Ovaj članak bavi se tim problemom. Šest pojmova homerske epike: »zakletva«, »čast«, »gost«, »krv«, »hrana« i »osveta«, uspoređeno je s etičkom strukturom albanskog *Kanuna*. Pokazuje se da etička struktura homerskog društva pripada kategoriji etike bez društvene vlasti koju predstavlja i etička struktura *Kanuna*. Platon eksplicitno kritizira etički sustav vrijednosti homerskog društva smatrajući da ovaj nije u skladu s idejom Dobra.