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# Homeric Reciprocities

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exotic cylinder seals into plain beads or adornments in Mycenaean style represents a different kind of claim about foreign exchange. Perhaps the Theban elite were intimidated by the Near Eastern states and the powerful heritage represented through the lapis lazuli cylinder seals. Whatever their motivation, their strategy to limit the spread of foreign iconography was flouted by those actors who acquired faience cylinder seals. The deployment of their own foreign objects by non-palatial actors could represent the competitive acts of elite figures claiming their own relationships with external sources of power. The individuals who held the visual symbols of foreign connections displayed their own opportunities and obligations beyond the local realm,

perhaps in open defiance of the centralized authority at Thebes. International reciprocity operating at a non-palatial level can thus be seen as a destabilizing impulse to a centralized power that aims to control long-distance exchange and its resources.

### About the Author

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## Homeric Reciprocities

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### Abstract

*A modified version of Marshall Sahlins's model of reciprocity, which maps the modes of reciprocity across kinship distance, helps elucidate reciprocity in Homer. With important qualifications, Homeric reciprocity can also elucidate the social realities of Archaic Greece. There are three primary modes of Homeric reciprocity: general, or altruistic giving, balanced exchange, and negative taking. The model for general reciprocity is family relationships, and it characterizes a ruler's relationship with the community, where it masks the reality that the upward flow of chiefly tribute exceeds the downward flow of the ruler's largesse. Balanced reciprocity is practiced between peers within the same community: exchange items are notionally of equivalent value and the transaction is completed within a limited timeframe. Exchanges outside the community tend to be negative: 'stranger' is often synonymous with 'enemy'.*

*Walter Donlan further distinguishes between balanced reciprocities that are compensatory, and tend to be (but are not always) negative, and positive compactual reciprocities such as guest-friendship (xenia). Significantly, compensatory reciprocity includes reciprocities that begin as negative, in which the victim is able to exact compensation (poinē) or revenge (tisis). In Homer, balanced reciprocity consists of seven primary ritual practices: marriage (gamos) and supplication (hiketeia) can be related to xenia, as can sacrifice (iera rezein), somewhat more distantly; ransom (apoina) is related to poinē and tisis. In addition to systematizing further and refining Sahlins's model, this paper shows that the plots of both Homeric epics are comprehensively structured by reciprocity: whereas the Iliad consists of a causal chain of balanced*

*exchanges, generalized, though not redistributive, reciprocities predominate in the Odyssey. The causal link between exchanges is attenuated as a consequence.*

Keywords: *guest-friendship, Homer, marriage, reciprocity, revenge, sacrifice*

### Sahlins's Model 50 Years Later

Among Homeric scholars, the model of reciprocity developed by Marshall Sahlins has proven influential.<sup>1</sup> Sahlins (1972: 191, 196-204; cf. Schieffelin 1980: 511-12) argued that the basic types of reciprocity—generalized, balanced, and negative—change with the social distance separating the exchange parties. Within the immediate kinship group and community, generalized reciprocity predominates: such reciprocities are called generalized because they belong to a larger *system* rather than a single exchange (Sahlins 1972: 196; van Wees 1998: 21-24). In its ideal form, generalized reciprocity is selfless: one gives because one can, one takes because one needs, and although obligations are still felt one does so without thought of return (Sahlins 1972: 193-94; Zanker 1998; Postlethwaite 1998; Gill 1998). The parent-child relationship embodies generalized reciprocity, and there is a tendency to treat other hierarchical relationships as analogous or even identical. It covers a range of behaviors that fall under the heading of 'sharing' (Sahlins 1972: 194, 196; Binford 2001: 24). Its broader, social function is to provide material support that creates and sustains relationships, fostering unity within the group while subordinating it to a leader (Sahlins 1972: 186, 190, following Gouldner 1960: 176-77). The social aspect of the exchange is thus more important than the material (Sahlins 1972: 194; Donlan 1982: 140).

In Homer, prominent examples of generalized reciprocity involve kinship and its social analogues, and the complementary relationship between chiefly dues and generosity—the latter including public feasts and sacrifices, and gifts and prizes.<sup>2</sup> In general, the upward flow of goods and services to the leader will exceed the downward flow of largesse: for example, in war-

fare a basically equal division of spoils reinforces group solidarity, while supernumerary prizes of honor to the leader affirm rank and provide the resources that allow him to be generous, thereby indebting the group and securing its loyalty and service. From *Iliad* 12.307-21 we see that other forms of chiefly due in Homer include land allotments and banqueting privileges. The same passage suggests that such imbalances are paid for, as it were, through effective leadership in endeavors such as protecting the community and enriching it with plunder.

Generally speaking, then, a primary objective of amassing wealth is to convert it into social rank and relationships (Sahlins 1972: 210-15). The deferral of the return exchange and primacy of the relationship over the material assimilates the generalized reciprocity of ruler and his people to the family model of such exchanges. In economic terms, however, the system reverses the family model: the rhetoric of generosity and due, and the deferral of return mask the expectation of a return that will materially exceed the ruler's generosity, yielding an unbalanced or exploitative reciprocity, as it were. The leader who is not sufficiently generous will, however, meet with resentment from his followers; and both epics suggest that such resentments were commonplace (e.g., *Iliad* 1.122, 231; *Odyssey* 10.38-42—Donlan 1982: 163, 167-70; 1998: 64; Seaford 2004: 39-47). Reciprocity would thus seem to map onto social hierarchy in a manner parallel to social distance, so that wealth distinctions constrain assistance in inverse proportion to kinship distance (Sahlins 1972: 213; Donlan 1982: 140-41). Whereas ostensibly altruistic acts of generosity may nevertheless obligate and subordinate, there is more potential for the next category of reciprocity—balanced—to be overtly agonistic (Mauss 1990 [1925]: 6-7, 74-75).

Outside the immediate community, but still among peers in the community or tribe with whom an affinity is felt, balanced reciprocity is the norm: ideally, the items exchanged are of equivalent value, and the exchange is either simultaneous or takes place within an agreed-upon timeframe. In contrast with generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity is less personal and more nearly resembles economic exchange, so that ‘the material side of the transaction is at least as critical as the social’ (Sahlins 1972: 195; cf. Donlan 1982: 140). The exchange parties have distinct though possibly aligned interests. If the debt is immediately and fully cancelled, its role in creating and maintaining social relationships is attenuated in comparison with generalized reciprocity, yet it remains embedded in such relationships, which could be compromised by an unequal exchange.

There are, however, advantages to be had by unequal exchanges: for example, an exchange without remainder could actually weaken the relationship, as obligations are no longer felt by either party (Sahlins 1972: 222-23; Donlan 1982: 146; van Wees 1998: 25-26). Unequal exchanges can also be used to calibrate the relative social status of the exchange partners—for example, in forming a marriage alliance (Sahlins 1972: 222-30; Donlan 1982: 145-47). As such, they establish and advertise hierarchy; and although such exchanges will be represented as magnanimous, they are inherently competitive and can even involve ‘gift attacks’ that aim not only to mark the recipient as subordinate, but even to deprive him of honor (*timē*) (Donlan 1993: 164; cf. Mauss 1990 [1925]: 29; Wilson 2002: 5; Lyons 2012: 13; on *timē* see Nagy 1999; van Wees 1992; Beidelman 1989). For the same reason, there are potential advantages in delaying repayment, during which time the beneficiary remains under obligation to the benefactor; nor does the benefit accrue solely to the benefactor, as the social bonds uniting both parties are maintained and potentially strengthened (Gouldner 1960: 174-75; Morris 1986a: 2). There are thus

two primary ways of using balanced reciprocity to sustain relationships: outbidding the initial giver’s generosity with the return gift, and allowing time to elapse between gifts, as for example in Homeric guest-friendship. Despite the increased social distance between exchange partners, balanced reciprocity can thus serve the same instrumental functions as generalized.

Donlan (1982: 143-46) distinguishes between two classes of balanced reciprocity: compensatory and compactual. Compensatory reciprocity tends to be negative, involving, for example, debts, fines, and compensation for loss of life, possessions, or honor; but it can also include wages and rewards. Such reciprocities follow the logic of gift-exchange in that an initial action creates a subordinating ‘debt’ that the recipient seeks to ‘repay’ in an equalizing exchange. For example, someone may receive an insult, thereby losing *timē*, and then repay the insult by inflicting an equivalent loss. Under the rubric of compactual reciprocity, Donlan (1982: 145, 148) places ‘peace-making and friendship agreements, marital alliances, hospitality, gift-giving, and gift-exchange’. Such reciprocities may thus concretely signify the choice to pursue self-interest through alliance rather than negative reciprocity. Whereas compensatory reciprocity emphasizes the material aspect of the exchange, compactual reciprocity emphasizes the social (Donlan 1982: 151).

Reciprocities with strangers are assumed to be negative, eristic and unsocial: non-kin is often a ‘synonym for “enemy” or “stranger”’ (Sahlins 1972: 197), while a stranger can be a synonym for ‘thief’ (Walcot 2009 [1977]: 141). At its limit, negative reciprocity involves ‘the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity’ (Sahlins 1972: 195). The social and economic interests of the exchange parties are thus directly opposed. Tactics involve ‘various degrees of cunning, guile, stealth, and violence’ (Sahlins 1972: 195). Prominent examples in Homer include: commercial trade, theft, piracy, cattle raids, the capture of persons for slavery, killing, war, and insults or other attacks on personal honor.

In Homer, most moveable goods are acquired through gift exchange or warfare and related activities (Donlan 1982: 142, 151; Seaford 1994: 18-19). Conversely, slaves are ‘virtually the only objects bought by Greeks’ (Finley 1954a: 173), while commodity exchange never occurs within the same community (Seaford 1994: 17-18; 2004: 25-27). Finally, as the above example on insults illustrates, there is always the possibility that a negative reciprocity will be transformed into Donlan’s compensatory reciprocity.

This leads to an important distinction that van Wees (1998) draws between Sahlins’s negative reciprocities, noting that they include exchanges where ‘it is the attitude of the participants which is negative, insofar as they are openly “selfish” and “mean” with positively valued objects of exchange’, and those where

it is the objects of exchange, the insults and injuries traded, which are negatively valued. The exchange of harm between enemies may quite properly be called ‘negative reciprocity’, but has no place at the end of a spectrum ranging from altruistic to egoistic attitudes toward exchange. (van Wees 1998: 24)

Stated differently, in Sahlins’s model, negative reciprocity ranges from commercial profit to simple theft and other imposed losses, *as well as to revenge over such losses*; and van Wees objects to the linkage between pure taking and revenge on the grounds that the psychology of the agents is incompatible.

At first this might seem to confirm the wisdom of mapping reciprocity onto social distance, and it should be noted that taking and revenge are analogous as impositions of loss. Nevertheless, the sentiment of the exchange partners is central to Sahlins’s model, which can be reconfigured in affective terms, such that *generalized reciprocity* is pure giving motivated by positive sentiment and a resulting disposition to altruism, while *balanced reciprocity* is equal exchange motivated by positive sentiment and self-interest and a resulting disposition to

fairness, and *negative reciprocity* is pure taking, motivated either by pure egoism, in exchanges resulting in loss, or by anger over suffering loss. In the latter case, this may lead to the attempted exercise of revenge or material compensation. The egoistic taking of the first type of negative reciprocity thus stands in contrast with the selfless giving of generalized reciprocity; the second type is identical with the first as a form of pure taking, and as such likewise stands in contrast with the pure giving of generalized reciprocity. But its affective motivation, the anger felt by the agent towards the exchange partner, is antithetical to the positive feelings that characterize generalized reciprocity; and if successfully executed it combines with the first negative reciprocity to produce a type of Donlan’s compensatory reciprocity. These congruencies and oppositions are possible because generalized reciprocity includes both a sentiment, symbolized by parental love, and a resulting action, selfless giving, which can be separately opposed: selfless giving by egoistic taking, a parent’s love by a victim’s hatred. Sentiment thus helps determine, and can significantly nuance, understanding of the exchange behavior. Nevertheless, van Wees is right to treat these exchanges as distinct: altruistic giving and taking with impunity are opposed as positive and negative reciprocities; revenge, on the other hand, is a negative balanced reciprocity, opposed to positive balanced reciprocities such as gift exchange. Finally, it should be noted that both types of negative reciprocity, selfish taking and revenge for selfish taking, can be used to create, sustain, and structure relations at the personal and (inter)communal level.

These categories of reciprocity should be viewed as a heuristic device: they lack native vocabulary and in actual practice there is considerable slippage and overlap between them (Donlan 1982; Appadurai 1986; Ferguson 1988: 495). It is better to conceptualize them as a continuum ranging from altruistic generosity to unavenged murder (Sahlins 1972: 191-93):

Household	Lineage	Village	Tribe	Outside the tribe
Generalized reciprocity		Balanced reciprocity		Negative reciprocity

**Figure 1.** Reciprocities and social distance (adapted from Sahlins 1972: 199, fig. 5.1).

to use a mathematical analogy, pure giving and taking constitute its infinite positive and negative limits, implied by, but strictly standing outside, the sequence of possible reciprocities (Figure 1).

In terms of this continuum, market trade can be located on the notional boundary between positive and negative balanced reciprocity, with profit constituting the negative aspect of the exchange (Sahlins 1972: 195; Donlan 1982: 141). It is doubtless true that Homeric characters' disdain for traders reflects an aristocratic disapproval of 'activities that are not embedded in a social relationship, and confer no prestige, but are regarded as negative and unsociable' (Donlan 1982: 141 n. 7; see also Sahlins 1972: 232-33; Morris 1986a: 5-6; Beidelman 1989: 228; Appadurai 1986: 33; Seaford 2004: 32-33, 37-38). A more direct explanation is that a function of embedding such exchanges in social relationships is to disguise their economic function (Bourdieu 1977: 171-77; Appadurai 1986: 11-12; Kurke 1991: 96). On the other hand, 'Mentes' describes the necessary trade in which he is engaged, exchanging iron for bronze, as a perfectly honorable activity (*Odyssey* 1.180-84). He is thus engaged in the balanced reciprocity characteristic of intercommunal trade friendships and partnerships (Sahlins 1972: 200-202).

To sum up before proceeding: in Homer, generalized reciprocity creates, articulates, and sustains the community under a leader; it integrates socially and differentiates hierarchically. The analogy to family relationships is acknowledged when characterizing Odysseus, *qua* ruler, with 'he was gentle as a father' (*Odyssey* 2.47, 234, 5.12; see also Sahlins 1972: 205-209; Donlan 1982: 141, 169; 1998: 56). Whereas

generalized reciprocity is analogous to the parent-child relationship, which it may reproduce socially, balanced reciprocity is compared to sibling relationships, thus underlining both the familial analogy and notional equality of the agents (see below). All types of reciprocity interpellate both exchange partners in terms of character and status: when Menelaus attempts to give Telemachus a chariot and team of horses as a guest-gift (*xenion*), he is, among other things, imposing an identity on both Telemachus and himself (Beidelman 1989: 227-29; van Wees 1998: 29-30; Seaford 2004: 26).

### Types of Homeric Reciprocity

The constitution of Homeric society is crucial to understanding Homeric reciprocity, and *vice versa*. The epics may be a mash-up of material extending from the proto-Indo-European period to the sixth century BC, and from Tartessos to Nineveh, but the social world of the epics is that of Homer's audience (Snodgrass 1974: 121-22; Donlan 1982; 1993: 155-59, 172; 1998: 52-54; Raaflaub 1991: 207-15; Seaford 1994: 6; Wilson 2002: 11-12; Antonaccio, this issue). Indeed, their contemporary relevance was key to their popularity, as of traditional poetry generally (Seaford 1994: 5). This requires, however, two important qualifications: first, Homeric society is radically streamlined by the process of Panhellenization to produce an account onto which audiences throughout the Greek world could project their own social realities, values, and anxieties (Nagy 1999). Second, but equally important, it does not simply mirror a generalized image of contemporary Greece but



is itself actively shaping the world it describes (Wilson 2002: 6, 11-12, 37-8; Cook 2004: 48-51). It is thus a refraction of an abstraction; and any attempt to play a game of connect the dots, which one is entitled to do with material artifacts such as shield-types, will produce at best an incomplete account.

The poems generally distinguish between elites and non-elites, with little attempt to articulate further hierarchy. Status within elite society is notionally egalitarian. In place of established institutional structures, competition serves to articulate elite society in a zero-sum ranking system. Homer describes three principal forums of elite competition: political, based on the number of men a leader can mobilize; intellectual, including ability as a speaker and counselor; and athletic, including warfare and games.

Reciprocity plays a central role in elite competition for status, while being allowed to reciprocate with other elites establishes elite identity as such. Elite heads of household sought to attract other households into a network of mutual support; peers so aligned within the community are called 'friends' (*philoî*) and 'companions' (*hetairoî*) (e.g., *Iliad* 17.150; see Konstan 1998 on reciprocity and friendship). Although such networks practice generalized reciprocity, pacts of friendship could be sealed with compactual reciprocity consisting of gift exchange (Donlan 1982: 145). Such gifts had intrinsic value (Finley 1954a: 180; Snodgrass 1974: 124), but this is rarely made explicit: a mixing bowl may be solid silver, gilded, and the work of Hephaistos (*Odyssey* 4.613-20—on the biographies of objects, see Kopytoff 1986; Grethlein 2008; Whitley 2013), but as an object of gift exchange it is virtually never valued in head of cattle. It is also important to stress the immaterial aspect of Homeric reciprocity; even material goods attain their value from an economy that is largely symbolic (Mauss 1990 [1925]: 5).

Homer describes seven other types of balanced reciprocity that play an instrumental role in the elite pursuit of honor (*timē*): marriage (*gamos*), guest-friendship (*xenia*), supplication (*hiketia*),

sacrifice (e.g., *iera rezein*), revenge (*tisis*), compensation (*poinë*), and ransom (*apoina*). The first four of these reciprocities are compactual, the last three compensatory. Given Greek assumptions that strangers are not simply not *philoî* but hostile, managing relations with them is highly fraught and regulated by ritual and religious sanctions. All four compactual reciprocities thus serve to convert hostile outsiders into friendly insiders. There is a noteworthy tendency for the relationships they establish to overlap and to approximate generalized reciprocity, with the further result that the exchange parties are assimilated to the status of kin. This is literally the case with marriage alliances, but marriage should not be seen as the model for the others: rather it is the direction in which all naturally tend.

*Gamos* and *xenia* are isomorphic, in that both serve to incorporate someone unrelated by blood into the household in a dependent relationship, and both create obligations of mutual support between male heads of household (Seaford 1994: 16-17; cf. van Gennep 1960: 141; Donlan 1982: 150).<sup>3</sup> Whereas *gamos* is an actual kinship alliance, *xenia* creates 'an association that resembles kinship' (Donlan 1982: 150; cf. Gould 1973: 93) and as such can be inherited (*Iliad* 6.215, 231; *Odyssey* 1.187, 417, 17.522). Donlan identifies the association of *xenia* with kinship as the reason 'father Zeus' is the patron of strangers; which explanation can be extended to include his patronage of suppliants and beggars. Whereas *xenia* relationships are sealed with gift exchange, *gamos* may include gifts from the bride's parents and her suitors (Finley 1954a; Lacey 1966; Snodgrass 1974; Donlan 1982: 145-47; 1989: 4; Morris 1986b: 105-10; Seaford 1994: 16; Burkert 1996: 132-33; Patterson 1998: 56-62; Foley 2001: 63-64).

Marriage is typically virilocal, both to manage succession and to ensure that the husband remains a readily available resource in his father's household. Exceptionally powerful households, however, may retain both sons and daughters in marriage, so that the household's manpower is

further augmented. Moreover, *gamos* is typically used, while *xenia* is only used to form interstate alliances (Finley 1954a: 172). As a result, both institutions can create loyalties that pit elite self-interest against that of community. In Homer, however, proper marriage does not have this effect, whereas *xenia* both can and notoriously does in the case of Diomedes and Glaucus (*Iliad* 6.119-236): when Diomedes acknowledges that he and Glaucus are ancestral guest-friends, he declines to fight Glaucus and even wishes him luck killing whichever Greeks he can run down. He does not, however, stop competing with Glaucus, boasting that his grandfather Oeneus hosted Glaucus's grandfather Bellerophon more lavishly than the king of Lycia had, and that Bellerophon had voluntarily subordinated himself to Oeneus by offering the more costly exchange gift, as Glaucus himself will presently do (Donlan 1989: 11-12). This episode has been adequately studied by others, but I do need to make one observation in light of my earlier claims about the symbolic economy of gift exchange and aristocratic contempt of market trade. Homer's remark that the gods stole Glaucus's wits, since he exchanged armor worth a hundred cattle for armor worth nine, would seem to weigh against both claims, but this is the only case where Homer notes the actual cost of the exchange items. I suggest that doing so calls attention to something else going on in the scene: gift-exchange between friends here literally stands in the place of a duel between enemies that Glaucus was certain to lose. Assigning the armor drastically unequal value signals that Diomedes 'won' an exchange that does not normally serve this overt purpose among *philo*i (Calder 1984; Donlan 1989; Tandy 1997: 99 n. 78). This explanation obtains however one interprets the motives of the exchange partners.

*Hiketeia* is isomorphic with *xenia* and *gamos* in cases where the suppliant obtains a dependent relationship that involves incorporation into the household (*oikos*); like *gamos*, the relationship can be between members of the same or different communities. Gould calls attention

to the 'systematic parallelism' between the roles of guest-friend and suppliant 'and their function within the structure of social relationships', noting that *hiketeia* may include gift-giving by either or both parties, and making the suppliant an actual *xenos* (Gould 1973: 79, 90-94; Pedrick 1982; Goldhill 1991: 72-75; Seaford 1994: 8, 50, 70-71; Burkert 1996: 86-88; Naiden 2006). Odysseus's supplication of Arete, for example, results in Alcinous's providing *xenia* and even offering *gamos*. Consciousness of the affinity between *hiketeia* and *xenia* is suggested by the statement that 'Zeus is the avenger of suppliants and strangers, Zeus-Xenios, who accompanies revered strangers' (*Odyssey* 9.270-71), while the claim that 'a guest and suppliant is the same as a sibling' (*Odyssey* 8.546) assimilates both to the status of factitious brotherhood (Gould 1973: 93; Seaford 1994: 71). Social kinship, of course, defines *gamos* relations, though any time a non-slave is incorporated into the household it would be natural to use the language of kinship to characterize the relationship. Predictably, then, just as friends outside the community are 'the same as a brother', a friend within the community (*hetairros*) may be 'not at all inferior to a brother' (*Odyssey* 8.585-86) or simultaneously 'comrade and brother' (*Odyssey* 21.216), or imagined as fellow members of a 'tribe' (*Iliad* 3.32) when providing shelter from the enemy.

*Hiketeia* may occur whenever someone wants something, whether on his own or another's behalf, but is unable to secure it and recognizes that someone else could. Thus, whereas alliances are formed by *xenia* and *gamos* in the expectation of mutual support, the support sought through *hiketeia* proceeds, at least initially, in one direction only. The suppliant, however, will call attention to any past services in an effort to cast the reciprocity as balanced, while in cases involving defeated or captured persons, he promises ransom, or *apoina*. Generally speaking, if the supplication is accepted then some sort of return is expected. In further contrast to *xenia* and *gamos*, the suppliant initiates the supplication with a per-



formance of status inequality through voluntary self-abasement, followed by the actual request. If the supplication is successful, the supplicant restores the suppliant to dignity and grants the request. An offer of *xenia* is an extension of the same process, transforming the suppliant into a peer engaging in balanced exchange.

Sacrifice is analogous to *gamos*, *xenia*, and *hiketeia* as a balanced reciprocity, based on the principle of *do ut des*, that formalizes a dependency relationship among the exchange parties (Mauss 1990 [1925]: 17; cf. Burkert 1996: 134-38; Parker 1998; Bremer 1998; Seaford 2004: 39-47; Antonaccio, this issue; Morris, this issue). In terms of the asymmetry between god and human it most closely resembles *hiketeia*. On the other hand, from the standpoint of the sacrificer and his community, the asymmetry is reversed: in offering sacrifice, the sacrificer unites and articulates a community that is now in his debt, both for securing good relations with the gods and for providing a sacrificial feast (Seaford 2004: 40-41). As we have seen, feasting is in fact the most common form of notionally generalized reciprocity in Homer, although, as we have also seen, this masks an underlying economy of exchange in the ruler's favor: with sacrifice, an analogy is established that relates ruler to god and thereby inverts the asymmetry of exchange into one that verges on generalized reciprocity by the ruler.

An analogy can also be drawn between the status of suppliant/worshipper and that of beggar (*ptōkhos*) as recipients of generalized reciprocity in a situation of total dependency: the suppliant's voluntary self-abasement strengthens the affinity. As in the case of suppliants, moreover, some sort of return is expected from beggars, so that the reciprocity is *de facto* balanced while still allowing it to be portrayed as generalized, and the benefactor as magnanimous (Donlan 1982: 156). *Xenos*, *hiketēs*, and *ptōkhos* thus constitute a descending scale of honor, but each is under the protection of Zeus and as such deserves similar treatment: thus 'all strangers and beggars are under Zeus's protection' (*Odyssey* 6.207-208, 14.57-58). Unlike

*xenoi*, however, *ptōkhoi* are never compared to kin.

Negative reciprocity affects the relative status (*timē*) of both parties. If it does not meet with a response, the agent gains status which the victim loses to him. In battle, for example, the ideal is to kill the enemy 'with impunity', and thereby acquire enhanced *timē*, concretely embodied in armor stripped from the victim. The *timē* won is not equivalent to the material value of the armor, but calibrated by the relative status of the victim within a parallel hierarchy among the enemy. As such, it can be more closely correlated with material value in the division of spoils afterwards, but other factors such as political and intellectual capital affect their distribution: the award of Chryseis to Agamemnon reflects his status as commander-in-chief and not his achievements in battles in which he did not in fact participate. Warfare thus allows elites within the community to compete with each other indirectly through negative reciprocity. Athletics allow analogous competition within the community, but this is not how they are portrayed in the *Iliad*, where only representative leaders of the Greek contingents compete in the games for Patroclus: they are thus analogous to Panhellenic festivals, which serve to channel elite competition outside the local community.

The victim of negative reciprocity, or someone related, will calculate the risk of seeking redress, that is of turning negative reciprocity into the first element of Donlan's compensatory reciprocity. The victim may then seek to do so by exacting revenge (*tisis*) or compensation (*poinë*). *Tisis* and *poinë* are to various degrees interchangeable, depending on context, and in fact etymologically cognate: both terms represent the return of the damages, such that the perpetrator or his household is required to lose something of equivalent value to what he took from his victim; in cases where the *poinë* consists of reprisal killing, it is functionally equivalent to *tisis* (e.g., *Iliad* 14.483-84; cf. Burkert 1996: 133-34; Wilson 2002: 147-78). More commonly, *poinë* consists of material

goods; in such cases, its social function is to ensure peaceful relations between the concerned parties (Donlan 1982: 144). If the loss consists of the victim's life, either compensatory strategy may be pursued; in such situations, the role of exacting harm for harm falls to a father, brother, or friend (*betairoi* or *philos*) who thereby assumes the role of kin (Wilson 2002: 30). In cases of manslaughter where *poinë* is not accepted, the killer may go into exile instead of being killed, as this represents the equivalent loss of life to the household. *Poinē* and *tisis* restore both families to their relative status prior to the initial loss; they compensate the victim for his loss, or if the loss consists of his own death they compensate his relatives. In cases of reprisal killing by friends, the victim's family may receive nothing, though the avenging party does acquire *timē*, and the victim himself is felt to be avenged (*Iliad* 13.414; *Odyssey* 23.312; cf. Slatkin 2011: 178). Like *gamos*, *poinë* sets objects belonging to different spheres into exchange relation. The *Iliad* dramatizes the inadequacy of material goods to compensate for a human life and the social imperative to accept the exchange; the *Odyssey's* darker vision is that only life will compensate for lost honor.

*Apoina* (ransom) is cognate with *poinë* and *tisis* and it serves a related if distinct function (Wilson 2002: 13-39). Whereas the victim has potential recourse to either *tisis* or *poinë* any time he suffers negative reciprocity, *apoina* is essentially restricted to reciprocity between enemy combatants in the *Iliad*. In cases where someone is defeated in battle, he may offer *apoina*, usually on behalf of his father, so that the victor will spare his life and release him; if taken captive, the victim's father may offer *apoina* to secure his release. In either case, the offer begins with *hiketeia* (Wilson 2002: 28-29). With the exception of Agamemnon's offer of *apoina* to Achilles, only Trojans offer *apoina* in the *Iliad*, and only to Greeks, while both Trojans and Greeks exact and pay *poinë* (Wilson 2002: 71-108). Such offers always fail in the *Iliad*, though the poem creates a backstory in which they succeed, and Priam

does exchange *apoina* with Achilles for Hector's corpse. Like *poinë*, *apoina* is a payment equal in value to the victim's life; in contrast to *poinë*, *apoina* both preserves the honor and wealth the victor has won by gaining mastery over the victim, and the loss the victim's family has suffered, which is converted from human life to prestige goods.

In sum: *xenia*, *gamos*, and *hiketeia* are structurally and functionally related ritual institutions regulating balanced reciprocity, as are *poinë* and *apoina* within the system of balanced negative reciprocity. *Xenia* and *apoina* are properly used to manage relations between elites from different communities, while *gamos*, *hiketeia*, and *poinë* manage relations within the same or different communities. Together with *tisis* they are routinely employed for competitive means, often in combination with other forms of reciprocity. *Gamos*, *xenia*, *hiketeia*, and sacrifice all use reciprocity to create and manage alliances. *Poinē* and *tisis* use reciprocity to restore relative *timē* after suffering loss, while *apoina* uses it to consolidate *timē* so acquired while sparing the captive's life. Under either scenario, a human life may be exchanged for goods or another life, although such conversions between exchange spheres are also portrayed as highly problematic, if culturally sanctioned.

### Reciprocity as an Organizing Principle of the Epic Plot

I conclude with how reciprocity structures the plot of both epics. The *Iliad* can be understood as a causal chain of balanced reciprocity marked by a consistent failure of compensatory exchange to resolve conflict (Seaford 1994: 23-25): in the backstory, Paris acquires Helen by negative reciprocity, violating *xenia*; Agamemnon leads a war against Troy, a negative reciprocity constituting *tisis* that creates balanced reciprocity; during the war, Agamemnon acquires Chryseis by negative reciprocity; Chryses offers *apoina* to recover his daughter, which would create a balanced

reciprocity; Agamemnon, however, rejects the exchange, inflicting further negative reciprocity on Chryses, and by extension Apollo, in the form of dishonor; Apollo then inflicts negative reciprocity in the form of *tisis* that causes Agamemnon to lose Chryseis and the *timē* she embodies; Agamemnon holds Achilles responsible and inflicts negative reciprocity on him by appropriating Briseis and the *timē* she embodies; Achilles withdraws from the fighting and Zeus aids the Trojans, inflicting negative reciprocity on Agamemnon in the form of *tisis* that produces another balanced reciprocity; this causes Agamemnon to offer compensatory reciprocity to restore Achilles's honor by returning Briseis; the offer, however, includes a 'gift-attack', a negative reciprocity designed to subordinate Achilles (Donlan 1993; Wilson 2002: 71-108); Achilles rejects the offer and continues imposing negative reciprocity on Agamemnon; Hector inflicts negative reciprocity on Patroclus, and by extension Achilles, by killing him; Achilles then inflicts *tisis* on Hector by killing him in return, thereby imposing compensatory reciprocity; Priam offers Achilles compensatory reciprocity in the form of *apoina* for Hector's corpse; Achilles, however transforms the *apoina* into another balanced reciprocity, *xenia*, by compelling Priam to dine and sleep under his roof. The pattern implies a causal connection between Achilles's rejection of Agamemnon's offer and the death of Patroclus, which would otherwise be the only break in the causal sequence.

In contrast with the system of balanced exchanges in the *Iliad*, the preponderance of generalized—though not redistributive—reciprocity in the *Odyssey* is striking. A result is a weakening of the causal links between reciprocities which, nevertheless, still comprehensively structure the plot; as in the *Iliad*, the plot involves *tisis* over negative reciprocity that includes improper courtship of a ruler's wife and theft of his property. Athena's support of Odysseus's *oikos* is generalized reciprocity: it is ostensibly for sacrifices offered to Zeus over nine years ago that Athena

appeals to her father to send Odysseus home; she then helps Telemachus search for his father out of simple loyalty to the family; the suitors abuse the rules of hospitality and courtship, and pervert the generalized reciprocity of the ruler's feast into negative reciprocity (Seaford 1994: 65); in another example of generalized reciprocity, Calypso helps Odysseus leave Ogygia; Poseidon raises a storm that destroys Odysseus' ship as *tisis* for blinding the Cyclops, a balanced reciprocity imposed by a family member; Ino-Leucothea rescues him out of simple pity (5.336), another act of generalized reciprocity; Odysseus supplicates Nausikaa, who provides him with food and clothes, declares to her maids that she would not be adverse to *gamos* with such a man, and instructs him to seek further assistance from her mother—her actions, which are essentially generalized reciprocity, anticipate the *xenia* and *gamos* that Alcinous subsequently offers; Odysseus supplicates Arete, whereupon Alcinous offers *xenia*, even though he presumably has no intention of visiting Odysseus, and follows on with an offer of uxorial *gamos*, both acts bordering on generalized reciprocity; the other kings of Scherie also offer hospitality-gifts, after which Alcinous provides escort home, again essentially generalized reciprocity masquerading as balanced. Athena appears to Odysseus on the shore of Ithaca and offers her assistance even though he has not prayed to her; she continues to help him to the end of the poem, even though he nowhere promises or offers sacrifice, thus continuing her generalized reciprocity to the *oikos*; the disguised Odysseus seeks and achieves *xenia* with Penelope, a balanced reciprocity based on his former hospitality to 'Odysseus'; when Odysseus reveals himself to the suitors, Eurymachus offers material compensation for their depredations—that is, he attempts to transform their negative reciprocity into a balanced reciprocity of the *poinē* type. Odysseus, however, insists on *tisis*, compensating his lost honor with human life; Penelope subsequently recognizes Odysseus, converting *xenia* to *gamos*; and Zeus imposes

forgetfulness (*lēthē*) on the suitors' parents so that Odysseus' reciprocity remains unanswered by further *tisis*. Of the many things that the epics have been said to be, arguably none is truer than the claim that they are meditations on reciprocity and its discontents, and in particular the necessity and ultimate inadequacy of material compensation for loss (Slatkin 2011; Cook 2012: lv, lviii-lix).

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### Endnotes

1. Sahlins (1972: 185-275), Gouldner (1960), MacCormack (1976), and Gregory (1982: 15-24) provide helpful context. Seminal works on reciprocity include: Malinowski (1922: 146-94; 1926: 9-68, cf. Appadurai 1986: 18-22), Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]; cf. Damon 1980); Simmel 1971 [1908], and Mauss (1990 [1925];

cf. Sahlins 1972: 149-83; Wagner-Hasel 2006). On applying Sahlins to Homer, see Donlan (1982; cf. Tandy 1997: 94; Thalmann 1998: 259-64). On Homer, cf. also Beidelman (1989; cf. Appadurai 1986: 3-7), Slatkin (2011) and Seaford (2004).

2. Sahlins (1972: 188) notes that redistribution is a '*system of reciprocities*' (his emphasis; cf. Donlan 1982: 141, 154, 160-63, 172; Seaford 2004: 24, 37). Sahlins (1972: 211, 215-19) finds that food is the most widely employed medium of generalized reciprocity. On Homeric feasting, see Donlan (1982: 163-65), Thalmann (1998: 261-62) and Seaford (2004: 39-47).
3. The *locus classicus* on *gamos* is Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]; cf. Wohl 1998; Ormand 1999; Lyons 2003). On *xenia*, see Herman (1987); for Homeric *xenia*, see Finley (1954b: 99-104) and Donlan (1989: 6-10).

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## Iron Age Reciprocity

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on reciprocity in the context of Bronze Age collapse and early Iron Age 'reboot'. The highest level of Mycenaean hierarchy collapsed, but neither the entire system, nor the entire ideology, vanished with the palaces: the basileus and a warrior elite survived and moved into places of authority. The circulation of prestige goods through networks of relationships continued, connecting especially the Levant and Cyprus with Crete and Euboea in the early Iron Age. Such objects and the relationships they embody created*