

Identity in Homer: The Uses of *Ethnos* to Denote Small Groups

The term ἔθνος, pl. ἔθνεα, defined as “a body or band of men,” appears 26 times in the *Iliad*. Typically, the word is found in the formulaic phrase, ἐτάρων εἰς ἔθνος ἐχάζετο, which Richmond Lattimore translates as, “he shrank into the host (or swarm) of his companions.” Other times, the word is used to describe of body of men acting as one. It is used of both the Greeks and Trojans armies and is used to describe either the winning or losing ἔθνος. Almost always, it occurs in the midst of, or more often, right after a battle in which a warrior is wounded when the warrior retreats to the company of his companions where he is shielded from the enemy’s arrows. The term, ἔθνος, can also be used to describe a flock of birds, (Il. 10.291), or a swarm of bees, (Il. 2.87). What can be inferred about Homeric society, either that of the Myceneans, or the later age of pre-Archaic Greece, in terms of a consciousness about retreating to one’s own companions, or kin? Did the term ἔθνος imply an observable difference between the host or λαοί, and ἔθνεα? This paper will analyze the appearances of ἔθνος in Homer and will then move on to analyze the use of the term in Herodotus, who uses *ethnos* to refer to a tribe or nation, and then later as it is used to describe non-Greek or non-Athenian groups. The goal of this discussion will be to follow the word’s meaning as it changes from its use in Homer and Herodotus to its appearance in Athenian citizenship decrees where it is used to refer to recipients of block grants of citizenship awarded to non-Athenians.

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