

The Role of Women in the Iliad by Homer and the Movie Troy by Wolfgang Petersen

Biröl Çapa

Electric Electronic Faculty

040060450

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İřtar Gözaydın

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## Abstract

Iliad and the movie Troy whose one of the sources is Iliad, tells the “epic” of Trojan War. The Iliad is interested in fifty one days of war while Troy is trying to tell all the sections war. Although the movie Troy is nourished by Iliad, it is different from Iliad some main points. One of the main differences and also similarities is about the role of women in that war. Movie and epic agrees that there is no period in Greek history which women are more attractive. On the other hand, the movie because of its nature exaggerates the emotional sides which are about Helen and Paris’s love and Menelaus’ honour. Movie generally emphasizes that best of all Greek soldiers come to the Troy coasts because of that woman and a man’s honour which is harmed by that woman. The Iliad describe that side of war which is similar to that movie, however whenever the Iliad is carefully read, it can be recognized that Homer is aware of the real sides of war. The role of women in the real sides of war is clearly understood by the society, marriage, royal woman and kings and also army which are told in Iliad.

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Iliad and the movie Troy tells the “epic” of Trojan War. The Iliad is interested in fifty one days of war. However, Homer makes flashbacks and makes his epic exiting. Therefore, all historical background can be found from Iliad. On the other hand, Troy is trying to tell all the war chronologically. In addition, the movie uses other epics that tell how Troy falls. The endings of movie and epic are different from each other. Therefore, although the movie Troy is nourished by Iliad, it is different from Iliad some main points. One of the main differences and also similarities is about the role of women in that war. Movie and epic agrees that there is no period in Greek history which women are more attractive. On the other hand, the movie because of its nature exaggerates the emotional sides which are about Helen and Paris’s love and Menelaus’ honour. Movie generally emphasizes that best of all Greek soldiers come to the Troy coasts because of that woman and a man’s honour which is harmed by that woman. Iliad describe that side of war which is similar to that movie, however whenever the Iliad is carefully read, it can be recognized that Homer is aware of the real sides of war. The role of women in the real sides of war is clearly understood by the society, marriage, royal woman and kings and also army which are told in Iliad.

Two stories tell that the primary reason of Trojan War is Helen who is the queen of Sparta and also Menelaus’ wife. In the movie, the big love between Paris who is the young prince of Troy and most beautiful girl Helen make them taking a wrong decision. Helen abandons Menelaus and goes Troy with Paris. Menelaus learns that event and wants help from his older brother Agamemnon. Agamemnon decides to help his brother and says “we will take your honour back” (Troy). At that point film says all reason for that war because of that woman. Reason of taking Menelaus’ honour back is enough for calling fifty thousand soldiers.

Iliad has similar developing story and events. However, Homer gives some clues about the Bronze Age Greece. These clues show why Helen and this marriage are important. In addition, Homer shows clearly why Agamemnon attacks Troy.

First of all, Achilles complains about Agamemnon. He tells what he did for Agamemnon in the book nine lines between 325 and 335:

*In sea raids I plundered a dozen towns,  
eleven in expeditions overland  
through Trojan country, and the treasure taken  
out of them all, great heaps of handsome things,  
I carried back each time to Agamemnon.  
He sat tight on the beachhead, and shared out  
a little treasure; most of it he kept.*(Homer)

Therefore it can be seen that why Agamemnon comes to Troy. Although Menelaus' honour is harmed by Trojans, Agamemnon is interested in other countries' wealth which is not about Helen. In addition, Akhaians will extend their political and economic domination over the eastern Mediterranean world (Pomeroy, 1975, p.18).

Second, in the movie Helen is important because of only Menelaus' honour and fame. Paris take Menelaus' wife from him so, he is insulted by Paris. Therefore, he has to take revenge from Paris. Homer tells this story in a two different sides. First side is similar with film. The role of most beautiful woman causes a conflict between two men. On the other hand, Homer shows very different second side which the director did not see. Homer gives that clue by using Achilles again. Sarah B. Pomeroy states that by referring to Homer, Achilles spoke with bride and said that he had his choice among the daughters of many Greek chieftains (1975, p19). This saying tells very important characteristic of the Bronze Age of Greek: marriage patterns.

At that time, there are two ways of marriage pattern: patrilocal and matrilocal. Pomeroy states that a warrior who married with a princess settles down in her kingdom in the matrilocal pattern, and continued, the marriage of Helen and Menelaus was matrilocal and

matrilineal (1975,p20). This situation make Homer's clue clear. Menelaus became a king after he had married with a Sparta princess. Therefore, whenever he lost his wife, he will lose his throne owing to the matrilineal marriage rules. All these conditions make Helen very important. Moreover, she has to be taken from Paris for Menelaus' future. This is explains why Menelaus tries to get help from other king of kings Agamemnon and also attack Troy with his sixty ships.

The first woman's actions shaped all the starting. Her behaviour causes the war and affects the war directly and also indirectly.

After war is declared by Agamemnon to the Trojans, all army prepares to fight. Before they sail in the sea, Agamemnon makes Artemis angry. Therefore, Artemis makes wind not to blow. Kalkhas explains that until Agamemnon sacrificed his girl Iphianassa to Artemis, wind wil not blow (Wöhlcke, 1998, p.56). This scene cannot be seen in the movie. However, the sailing cannot start before the sacrificing Iphianassa. A goddess Artemis wants a girl for herself. Generally most important and most valuable things are sacrificed. If she was not sacrificed, the army could not move to Troy. A girl can change the progress of the war. The other important role of women is seen at that event.

Whenever Akhaians come to Anatolia, they attack not only Trojans but also other countries in these lands. One of these attacks brings a prize to Agamemnon. This prize is Khryseis' girl. However, Khryseis offer Agamemnon to ransom for her girl. Firstly Agamemnon rejects it. Then, Khryseis prayed to Apollon. Due to his praying, Apollon punishes all Akhaians. At last, Agamemnon admits giving girl Astynome to his father, but he wants Achilles' girl Briseis. Because of that event Achilles argued with Agamemnon, but he gives Briseis. Astynome is given to her father, Apollon stop punishing Akhaians. The director did not interested in that part too. Nevertheless, a woman causes a curse of a god and again affect all army namely all the war.

Another important woman role is taken by Briseis. Actually, Iliad starts with Achilles' anger to Agamemnon. Agamemnon has taken Achilles' honour share: Briseis (Homer, Iliad, p.2, 180-190). Owing to that situation, Achilles argued with king of kings Agamemnon. He tries not to give the girl. However, Achilles has limits. He cannot oppose to Agamemnon. The situation can be understood from Iliad, the feudal regime makes Achilles to obey and admit Agamemnon's wish. On the other hand, he is not a regular warrior, so he can argue, shout or swear to Agamemnon. His mother is Thetis. Therefore, he wants her mother to pray Zeus. Zeus listens Achilles and makes his decision. Until Achilles joins the army, Achaeans cannot win the war.

The movie Troy tells that section in a different way. Like Iliad, Achilles loves Briseis. When he sees Briseis in the tent of Agamemnon he gets crazy, but he is stopped by Briseis' words. She says that "if your talent is only killing then you're cursed. I don't want anyone for dying me anymore" (Troy). The main difference is at that point. Achilles doesn't stop because Agamemnon has more power than him, he stops because of Briseis' words. A woman causes two big heroes to fight. That is the similar point. However, while the movie Troy tries to exalt love, Homer tells the real reason of Achilles' treatment.

Finally, after Patroclus dies, Achilles decides to join the war. At the same time, Agamemnon wants Achilles to join the war again. He proposed a lot of gifts and also Briseis who is not touched by anyone (Wöhlcke, 1998, p.109). All these conditions get together and Achilles joins the war again. In the movie, this section is not like that. Achilles gets Briseis from soldiers by killing them. In addition, she affects Achilles' behaviour to the war. However, when he learns Hector kills his Patroclus, he gets crazy again and he does not listen even Briseis.

In conclusion, Trojan War is affected by women. In a men's world, women play lots of roles and have effects on decisions. In Iliad, Goddesses cause lots of events which is not seen

in the movie Troy. Moreover, woman changes the trend of war. Lastly it can be said that, there is no period in history which women are more attractive and effective.

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