PISTOS HETAIROS IN
THE ILIAD AND THE ODYSSEY

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I

Pistos and pistoō in the Iliad and the Odyssey are associated with the provision of concrete evidence of reliability. This can be either a symbolic handshake, as between Diomedes and Glaucus (pistōsanto, Iliad 6.233), which serves as external proof of their agreement, or a more significant deed, such as Automedon's response to Patroclus' needs in battle which qualifies him to be considered the latter's pistotatos (16.147). In such cases the epithet pistas should be understood to convey reliability, trustworthiness or faithfulness, meanings which the epithet most commonly holds in later authors but rarely in the Iliad when it is used personally. The case of Alcimedon, who is Automedon's pistos hetairos (17.500), is the sole example for such a meaning of this phrase. The proof of his reliability is his helping Automedon on the battlefield (17.466 ff). The heroes do not share any relationship other than being hetairoi to each other; that is, they belong to the same contingent and fight the same enemy. By giving aid to Automedon in a troublesome situation Alcimedon merely opens the way for a closer relationship which is neither obligatory nor assured.

The remaining occurrences of the phrase pistos hetairos in the Iliad refer to four heroes: Patroclus (17.557; 18.235, 460), Stichius (15.331), Lycophron (15.437), and Podes (17.589). Three characteristic features in the description of these heroes differentiate them from the case of Alcimedon-Automedon. First, each of them is referred to as pistos hetairos only after being killed in the battle, the proof of their reliability thus being their death. It is noteworthy that although several other epithets are applied to Patroclus prior to his death, pistos is used — three times — after it. Secondly, the pistos hetairos shares a specific close relationship and positive sentiment with the person to whom he is said to be pistos, a relationship which is highly personal and goes beyond the comradeship (hetaireia) of the battlefield. And indeed the special relationship between Patroclus and Achilles is evident throughout the epic. In the other instances the close relationship between the two parties is discernible as well. In the case of Hector and Podes for example,

...μάλιστα δέ μν (Podes)τίνεν Ἐκτορ
dήμου, ἔπει οἱ ἑταῖρος ἐην φίλος εἰλαπιναστῆς.
(17.576-577)

... and Hector honoured him above all the people, for he was his dear comrade in banquets.
Furthermore, the personal bond between the heroes is emphasized by an explicit possessive adjective, proper name in the genitive case, or personal pronoun. In the case of Hector and Podes, when Apollo addresses Hector he says: σὸν δέκταν πιστὸν ἑταῖρον . . . (17.589)—“It is your pistos hetairos that he killed.” In the story of Lycophron’s relationship to Ajax and Teucer (15. 436f) the use of the personal pronoun again stresses the personal involvement: Τεύκρε πέπνον, δὴ νότιν ἀπόκτατο πιστὸς ἑταῖρος (15.437)—“My dear Teucer, indeed it was our pistos hetairos who was killed.” The personal nature of the bond is evident, too, when Athene in the person of Phoenix urges Menelaus to recover Patroclus’ body, and speaks of Patroclus as Ἀχιλλής ἀγανόθ πιστὸν ἑταῖρον . . . (17.557). Her use of this expression indicates that she expects Menelaus to be moved by Achilles’ relationship with Patroclus rather than by any other consideration. While in Stichius’ case (15.331) we are not given any detailed information about his relationship with Menestheus, the latter is mentioned whenever Stichius appears (13.195f, 689–691, 15.329–331).

It is remarkable that the preferential attitude is attributed to the object of pistis and not to the pistos hetairos himself (Achilles in 17.655, 24.416; Ajax in 15.438f; and Hector in 17.576f). The explanation may lie in the different status of the heroes. Patroclus’ social status, for instance, is inferior to Achilles’ according to Menoetius’ instructions to his son:

τέκνον ἐμόν, γενεῆ μὲν ὑπέρτερος ἡστιν Ἀχιλλῆας . . .

(11.786)

My child, in birth Achilles is nobler than you . . . So, too, Podes has a lower status than Hector, as a son of the Trojan royal family. And Lycophron, who came to dwell in Salamis with Telamon, the father of Ajax and Teucer, after leaving Cythera where he had killed a man (15.432), presumably had a lower social position as an exile than the host family. An additional indication of lower status is the reference to him as Ajax’s therapon (15.431). It is also plausible that in the fourth case Menestheus, who is the leader of the Athenians (2.552; 13.195f, 698f), is superior to Stichius, who is not always said to be a commander (13.195f cf. 13.690f). This subordinate status is not merely a matter of military rank nor an ephemeral inferiority resulting from a particular situation, but reflects the social structure of Homeric society. There is no reference to both parties involved in the relationship as pistoi; the term is applied exclusively to the party of lower status.

II

There is no one word in Greek that consistently denotes the English words ‘loyalty’, ‘loyal’, or ‘to be loyal’. Several words, like pistos, euphrôn, kednos, eunous, and their related nouns and verbs, are sometimes translated as ‘loyal’ but in other cases assume meanings other than this specific notion. In order to find out, therefore, when these words and others can be understood as indicating loyalty, a criterion is needed to ascertain from the context precisely how the
author intended them to be construed. For that purpose the following definition has been evolved: "Loyalty is a specific relationship in which 1) A has an obligation to B to fulfil some pre-defined duty, or duty which emerges from particular circumstances and is understood by the parties involved. 2) When fulfilling this duty A subordinates his own interest to that of B. 3) A has a positive attitude or sentiment toward B."

I would like to suggest that the above four cases of pistos hetairos in the Iliad be understood as conveying the notion not merely of 'reliable' but rather of 'loyal' comrade. The heroes thus termed have fulfilled the requirement of subordination of their interests by dying in battle and they are involved in close relationships with B manifesting a positive sentiment. Since statements concerning the obligations of one hero to another do not occur in Homer and the obligations can be assumed only from the situations described, the very participation of Patroclus, Stichius, Lycophron and Podes in the fighting at Troy should suffice for the requirement of pre-defined duty. The loyalty implied by pistos is to be understood as strictly personal. Thus for example, when Athene calls upon Menelaus to save the body of Patroclus she refers to him as the pistos hetairos — loyal comrade — "of the noble Achilles" (17.557 cf p.15 above). If pistos in the meaning of 'loyal' implies loyalty to a cause and not to an individual, Athene's emphasis on the personal bond between Achilles and Patroclus would be uncalled for, especially to Menelaus on whose behalf the war is being fought. Furthermore, Patroclus was killed because he objected to Achilles' reluctance to fight and decided to fight himself. In other words, Patroclus is the hero who more than anyone else fits our notion of loyalty to his fellow warriors or to a cause, and yet he is called the pistos hetairos exclusively of Achilles, not of Menelaus or the Greeks.

While loyalty does not call for an inferior social status in the loyal person, such a status is a characteristic feature of the epithet pistos when it conveys the comprehensive notion of loyalty. It does not exist in the case of Alcimedon-Automedon. Alcimedon is one of five leaders of the Myrmidon contingent appointed by Achilles (16.171ff) and cannot therefore be inferior to Achilles' charioteer. This subordinate status can at least partially explain why the epithet is never used of Achilles either in reference to his assumed obligation to the Achaean heroes or to the vengeance he takes for Patroclus. In both instances loyalty is in question. Achilles does not consider himself inferior to Agamemnon (16.53) or any other Achaean. An additional reason may be the fact that pistos in the meaning of 'loyal' is always used of a dead hero.

III

In the Odyssey the phrase pistos hetairos occurs only in one disputable passage (15.539), which refers to the lodging of Theoclymenus, "Telemanus' xenos", after the return of Telemachus and his crew to Ithaca. Since Telemachus intends to see Eumaeus rather than go straight home, Theoclymenus inquires where he
should go to seek shelter. Telemachus refers him first to Eurymachus but then changes his mind and commends him to Peiraeus, whom the poet calls the *pistos hetairos* of Telemachus.¹⁴

The reference to Peiraeus as *pistos* is justified, for the proof of his reliability is his past obedience to Telemachus (*σὺ δὲ μοι τὰ περ ἄλλα μᾶλλον πειθή ἔμοιν ἐτάρον* (15.540–541)). There is, however, no indication of any real subjection of interests beyond mere obedience, nor does the affection between the two qualify Peiraeus to be viewed as loyal. There are, however, hints indicating the possibility of such a relationship.

The first hint is the personal involvement between the two. Peiraeus is the only one of the four *hetairoi* of Telemachus cited who is not called a *patrôos hetairos*.¹⁵ That is to say, Peiraeus is the only one of the four whom Telemachus did not inherit from his father but gained for himself on his journey.¹⁶ Telemachus’ reference to his self-acquired *hetairos* is a mark of his growing independence attested in Book 15,¹⁷ since he could have sent his protégé to one of his *patrôoi hetairoi*, who lived in the city and with whom he took counsel shortly after coming home (17.67–70). Besides, Telemachus seems to consider Peiraeus a personal friend just as he considers Eurymachus, his other choice, a personal enemy. Urging Telemachus to hurry back to Ithaca (15.10–42), Athene points to Eurymachus as a personal and immediate threat to him. She tells the youth that his mother was ordered to marry the overgenerous Eurymachus and that he should beware lest she marry and carry away some of his possessions against his will (esp. 15.19). The remark about Eurymachus’ gifts (15.17f) makes clear to Telemachus that Eurymachus is one of the suitors and included among the *mnêstérôn . . . aristēes* (15.28), who according to Athene plan to kill him. This information is echoed in Telemachus’ reply to Theoclymenus, when he refers to Eurymachus as *pollon aristos anér* (15.521) and adds that of all the suitors he is the most eager to marry his mother. Eurymachus, thus, turns out to be the most dangerous of the suitors to Telemachus who takes a personal view of him as he does of Peiraeus.

Telemachus’ feelings for Peiraeus seem to be reciprocated. First we hear that of all the companions who went to Pylos, Peiraeus was the most willing to obey Telemachus (*malista*, 15.540). This unconditional obedience is shown also in his willingness to host Theoclymenus in accordance with Telemachus’ wishes, even for a lengthy period (15.545f). There is also evidence that Theoclymenus considered Peiraeus an alternative host even after Telemachus’ return home (20.372).¹⁸ Moreover, after Telemachus’ arrival, Peiraeus brings Theoclymenus to him, as agreed (17.71f), and asks Telemachus to remove the presents Menelaus gave him from Peiraeus’ home. Telemachus answers that the situation is dangerous as his mother’s suitors may still kill him and divide up his *patrôia panta* (17.80). If that should happen, says Telemachus, he prefers that Peiraeus should have those presents.¹⁹ Telemachus’ warm attitude toward Peiraeus might be a sign of their possible future affection.
To sum up, the phrase *pistos hetairas* applied to Peiraeus does not mean more than ‘reliable comrade,’ as in the case of Alcimedon. Yet, the relationship between Telemachus and Peiraeus, which is described after the occurrence of this phrase, has all the characteristics of loyalty, with the exception of a clear-cut subordination of interests on Peiraeus’ part, which, however, seems likely to occur if required, given the warm feeling that Peiraeus has for Telemachus.

The only other occurrence of the adjective *pistos* in the *Odyssey* is in 11.456. It appears there in neuter plural, which is usually equated with the abstract *pistis*, customarily rendered “trustworthiness”, “fidelity.” It has been suggested that the lines where the term appears have been interpolated. Lines 454–456 are lacking in most ancient editions and there is a tendency among modern scholars to reject them because they are not consistent with the praise of Penelope’s virtues in the immediately preceding lines 441–451. It should be pointed out that the use of *pistos* in 11.456 differs from the others encountered. We could assume that in saying that “there is no longer *pista* in women” Agamemnon means that women are *apistoi*, that is, that they act in a way that dishonours the pledge of reliability they gave upon their wedding. If, then, from line 451/2 on Agamemnon is reviewing his own experience, upon which he bases his ultimate conclusion in line 456, it can be understood that Clytaemnестra’s acts of not letting Agamemnon set eyes on Orestes and of slaying Agamemnon were contrary to the pledge she had given in marrying him. However, even such an interpretation still leaves a problem unsolved. In the *Odyssey*, *apistos* (14.150, 391; 23.72; 13.339-apisteon) no longer refers to a concrete and clear-cut token of reliability as in most of its occurrences in the *Iliad* (3.106; 24.63, 2207). Rather than “untrustworthy,” it now has the meaning of “beyond one’s experience” and thus “unbelievable.” It is noteworthy that Clytaemnестra is not called *apistos* nor is Penelope referred to as *piste*. None of these adjectives is used of women in Homer. *Pistos* especially is used only of *hetairoi* and mostly in the *Iliad* where war plays a larger part than in the *Odyssey*. It is also possible that Agamemnon’s use of it in 11.456 reflects warrior’s jargon, since his relationship with Odysseus is chiefly military. The “manly” Clytaemnестra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (606) is the first woman to be called *pistē* and the label is applied by herself.

IV

The expressions *esthlos hetairos* and *pistos hetairos* are metrically identical and occur in the same place in a verse, but are not interchangeable. Are the two expressions identical in meaning and selected only for metrical convenience? Several indications point to the contrary. The first indication is an indirect one. Patroclus, the principal *hetairos* in the *Iliad*, when so referred to receives all the possible epithets that accompany the word *hetairos* — *philos*, *philutatos*, *amymôn*, *pistos* — but not *esthlos*. It appears, therefore, that Patroclus does not qualify to be termed *esthlos*. Second, there is no indication of a personal relationship
beyond comradeship between the person called *esthlos hetairas* and the one whose *hetairas* he is. This trait of *esthlos hetairas* is in line with Kakridis’ view that *esthlos* is a traditional epithet and *pistos* a personal one. Thus for example Ares calls Aeneas the *esthlos hetairas* (5.469) of the “sons” of Priam, that is “the Trojans”, with no further personal specification. The case of Pandarus sets an even more general tone. The Lycians who are ready to protect Pandarus are indiscriminately referred to in the plural as *esthloi hetairoi* of the hero (4.113–115). This may be the reason why Patroclus, being a close friend of Achilles, is never called *esthlos hetairas*. The lack of close personal involvement between parties A and B is far more evident in the later use of *esthlos hetairas* in the *Odyssey*. There the phrase appears in the singular only in a figurative use to describe favourable winds (11.7; 12.149). In the plural it refers to the unnamed crewmen of either Telemachus or Odysseus (2.391; 5.110, 133; 7.251; 23.331).

One further point about *pistos hetairas* and *esthlos hetairas* is of interest: while *pistos* in the meaning of loyal is used of heroes who have already died in battle, *esthlos* is used of warriors who are alive but in perilous situations, of those in the process of being killed and of dead ones. Thus *esthlos* is applied to Leucrus and Leocritus while they are fighting and being wounded (mortal?) (4.491–3; 17.344–7) and to the Lycians and Aeneas, who are in extremis but alive. It is true that by the time Atymnius and Maris are referred to as *esthloi hetairoi* they are already dead, but his reference to them is part of the larger description of their being slain (16.316–329). It is not, however, only the absence of any indication that the hero labelled *esthlos hetairas* is dead that disqualifies the phrase from denoting ‘loyal comrade’; the fact that the comrades endangered themselves or were wounded could have fulfilled the subordination of interest requirement in the definition of loyalty. It is the lack of any indication that parties A and B have more than a formal relationship or share positive sentiments that excludes the possibility of considering *esthlos hetairas* to mean ‘loyal comrade.’

Both adjectives are emphatic. Thus for example Ares encourages the Trojans to save Aeneas’ life, referring to Aeneas as *esthlos hetairas* (5.469) in order to stir their emotions and enhance their respect for Aeneas. The epithet *pistos* on the other hand is applied to Patroclus only after his death, to emphasize the contrast between his close relationship with Achilles and the improper treatment of his body (17.557), to describe him lying on the bier while Achilles and his comrades mourn (18.235) and to enhance Thetis’ plea to Hephaestus to provide a new shield for her son (18.460). Even when it does not refer to Patroclus, it is emphatic; as in Ajax’s call to Teucer to avenge Lycophron, their *pistos hetairos*. But the only characteristics common to the two phrases are that both denote people who fulfilled their duty in fighting and both attest the highest degree of some sort of excellence. The phrase *pistos hetairas* alone examined in the above four cases fulfils all the requirements of the working definition of loyalty and all four merit being called ‘loyal comrades’ even though the term *pistos* by itself conveys only the proof of their reliability — their death.
NOTES

1. Textual references are to the *Iliad* unless otherwise stated.

2. Cf. M. Scott, "Some Greek Terms in Honor Suggesting Non-Competitive Attitudes", *Acta Classica* 24 (1981) 1-15, who suggests that the idea behind the adjective is "of something binding and fixed," *ibid.* 12. When applied to an individual this fixity is not hypothetical but based on real proof from past experience. A person is termed *pistos* only after he has proved his constancy in threatening circumstances. In the phrase *horkia pistas*, which is more formulaic than *pistos hetairos* (cf. Scott, p. 15, n. 37), the evidence of reliability implied in *pista* is only symbolic. The epithet occurs in the context of oaths to be taken in the future when their fulfilment seems certain, emphasizing the fact that the oaths are binding. Thus for example out of twenty-one occurrences of the term *horkia* in oaths the Trojans and Achaeans exchanged, it is followed nine times by *pista* referring to oaths yet to be taken and alluding to their observance and solemnity (2.124; 3.73, 94, 245, 252, 256, 260, 280, 323). In 3.105 *pista* is not used of *horkia*, but since there is no shift in meaning from 3.94, perhaps *horkia* itself carries the meaning established in *horkia* *pista* in 3.94. After the oaths have been taken and arc or might be violated, they are not accompanied by the epithet *pista* (3.107, 299; 4.67, 72, 155, 236, 271; 7.69, 411), except to express horror at the violation of "faithful oaths" (4.157, 7.351). The phrase *horkia* *pista* refers also to the oaths Agamemnon and Hector wish to swear with Achilles (19.191; 22.262), and the oaths Zeus proposes Odysseus should take with the Cephallenians (*Od.*24.483).

3. E.g., Aesch. *Ag.* 1213; Ch. 397, 901, Soph. *Tr.* 181-3, 398, 541, 623; *OT* 1420, 1445; El. 774, 886f, 1317; Ph. 813; OC 611; Eur. *Pothec* 22, 413, 492, 511, 698, 821; Hipp. 395, 1037, 1321; I.A 66, 153, 302; Ph. 268; Or. 245, 727, 1014.


6. Patroclus is also called *enètes* et *enètes te krateros te hetairos* only after his death (17 204; 21.96; 23.252).

7. See also Kakridis, *op. cit.*, 51lf, 61.

8. See especially 1.306f; 16, 195; 17, 655; 18.81—93; 23.77f; 94—98, 222—225 etc.

9. There is no claim in the *Iliad* that an exile and his host are socially equal.

10. For the view that the term *therapóén* describes a person in a subordinate position see: M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, Pelican Books 1962, 58, 103f; G. Glotz, *La cités grecque*, Paris, Methuen 1933, 230. An opposite view is expressed by G. Stagakis, "Therapontes and hetairoi in the *Iliad*", *Histuria* 15 (1966) esp. 410f, 415, 419, who claims that the *hetairoi* and *therapontes* relationships are not related to the power structure of the Homeric state, are reciprocal in nature, and that a person's *therapontes* are identical with his *hetairoi*. This conclusion on the reciprocity of *therapóén* is based on evidence that is less factual than speculative, and still open to debate. The personal identity of the *therapontes* and *hetairoi* does not necessarily support the alleged reciprocity of the *therapóén* relationship, since the same people may function differently in different situations.

11. H. Jeaunarme, *Coure et coureets*, Lille 1939, 101f, had some very valuable insights on the subject, unfortunately unsupported. His assertion that Alcimedon (to whom he refers as Alcinous) is inferior to Automedon is unacceptable (see p. 17 above). The scholar also seems to see the subordination as occurring in certain situations only and not resulting from a permanent social status. On the phrase *pistos hetairos* in 15.331 as referring to Stichius, and not Arcesilas as the scholar maintains, see note 5 above.

12. H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley 1971, 26, acknowledges this fact for Homeric Greek and maintains that the Homeric Greeks might have lacked the word for "loyalty" but not the thing itself. Contrary to B. Snell, who concludes that absence of an appropriate term necessarily indicates the absence of the concept as well, *Discovery of the Mind*, trans. T.G. Rosenmeyer, Harvard University Press 1953, 5.

13. The definition was constructed from *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. 'Loyalty,' by J. Ladd. Cf. also *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, s.v. 'Loyalty,' by S. Bryant; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. 'Loyalty,' by W. Fleming; J. Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, The Macmillan Company 1908. The subordination of interest is complete and specific to the situation in question, and A is not required to subordinate all his interests to B. Such partial subordination at times results in a naturally unavoidable conflict of interests. The definition does not include cases in which three parties are involved.

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15. The other patrooi hetairos are Mentor (2.225, 254, 286; 17.69; 22.208), Halitherses (2.254; 17.69) and Antiphon (17.69).

16. Peiraeus and the other crewmen were recruited by Athene (2.286f, 402–404, 408) on a commercial basis with no appeal to their sentiment for Telemachus.


18. The claim that Telemachus sent Theoclymenus to Peiraeus so as to place him afterwards under Euryymachus' aegis is unconvincing and not supported by adequate evidence. To this effect, however, see Page, op. cit. 87.

19. It is possible that consciously or not the poet here injected the 'personal' motif by giving to Telemachus gifts which Telemachus did not inherit but himself received from Menelaus.


21. For this view see Blass, op. cit. 127–128, who rejects lines 441–443 as well.


23. 4.113—Pandarus' friends, the Lydians; 491—Leucus; 5.469—Aeneas; 16.327—Atymnius and Maris; 17.345—Leocritus.

24. The inflections of pistos hetairoi and esthlos hetairoi are of equivalent metrical value but differ in their initial sound, like the forms of euryopa Zeus and metieta Zeus; see A. Parry, The Making of Homeric Verse, Oxford 1971, 274f.

25. The epithets dios, kednonatos, philopolomos, hyperthymos modify the noun hetairoi as well. With any of these, however, the noun hetairoi is always plural, applying to a group of unnamed comrades. The adjective pistos, on the other hand, is applied not to indeterminate groups, but to specific identifiable individuals. Secondly, the occurrences of the above epithets are very rare, none of them appearing more than twice (5.663, 692; 9.586; 23.512).


27. The epithet erieros, sometimes rendered by the word 'loyal', appears in the Iliad only in the phrase erieros hetairoi (3.47, 378; 4.206; 8.332; 13.421; 16.363; 23.6). There are two principal uses of the epithet. One is applied to specific individuals, as in the cases of Idomeneus (4.266), Mecistheus and Alastor (8.332; 13.421). Since the epithet is used when either proof or promise of reliability is proffered, at times, it can substitute for pistos in the meaning of 'reliable' or 'trustworthy.' The second use of the epithet in the Iliad is a formulaic and general one in the plural without reference to deeds that might deserve praise (3.47, 378; 16.363; 23.6). This last use is exploited in the Odyssey, where the epithet conveys a general notion of positive quality. This is true for the epithet whether applied personally in erieros aoidos (Phemius—Od. 1.346; Demodocus—Od. 8.47, 471), or impersonally in erieres hetairoi (Od. 9.100, 172, 193, 555; 10.387, 405, 408, 471; 12.199, 397; 14.249, 259; 17.428; 19.273). The latter, like esthlos hetairoi, is of a generalizing sort and is used for Odysseus' unnamed companions in adventure. The formulaic nature of erieres hetairoi is most evident in a case where the basic positive connotation of the adjective erieros is in contrast with the behaviour of the person so described. Those of Odysseus' companions who feasted on the cattle of Helios (12.397) are called erieres hetairoi. Further erosion in its connotation of superlative approval is found in 9.193–196, when Odysseus chooses only the best (aristos) of his erieres hetairoi. Since the epithet developed in the Odyssey in a formulaic manner, it ceased to convey the notion of a token of reliability, which is essential to pistos (hetairoi) in either of its meanings ('reliable' or 'loyal' (comrade)), and cannot be viewed as a possible semantic substitute of a different metrical value for pistos, as it is in the Iliad.
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