Tragic Troy and Athens: heroic space in Attic drama
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Citation for published version (APA):
van Uum, P. T. (2013). Tragic Troy and Athens: heroic space in Attic drama

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1. Heroic space in tragedy: the state of the art

‘... the whole question of anachronism in tragedy is a highly debated and still unsettled subject.’ (Stieber 2011, 91)

This chapter provides a survey of ancient and modern views on the physical presentation of the heroic world in tragedy. At times, the survey will also treat opinions on its social and political aspects, for comparison.

1.1 Ancient views

Ancient authors have already commented on the presentation of the heroic world in tragedy. For the investigation of this book the observations of Aristotle and the scholiasts are relevant. Their statements particularly relate to instances where they consider that the tragedians did not offer a ‘correct’ representation of the heroic world. The analysis of these remarks will be based on the question of the date of the heroic world. This section therefore begins with some remarks on this issue.

The distant past

The archaic and classical Greeks regarded the heroic age – that is, the time when the heroes inhabited the world – as a period in the past. This becomes clear, for example, from the Works and Days of Hesiod. When he lists the different races of men, he presents the race of heroes, the ‘fourth’ race, as preceding that of the humans of his own age, the ‘fifth’ race (157, 174). Thucydides, likewise, presents in his so-called Archaeology the events of the heroic age as prehistory for the contemporary events of the Peloponnesian War, which forms the subject of his historiographical work (1.1-21).

Some Greeks, historians and genealogists in particular, attempted to date the heroic age – or specific events from this age – but their results varied. The Trojan War, for example, was assigned to 1334 (Duris), ‘around 1250’ (Herodotus), 1184 (Apollodorus), and 1082 (Dicaearchus). Burkert has shown that these dates are mere speculation, based mostly on Greek and near-Eastern king-lists. These

1 Duris (FGrH 76F41): 1000 years before Alexander’s expedition to Asia (i.e. 334); Herodotus (2.145): about 800 years before his own time (i.e. around 450); Apollodorus (FGrH 244F61): 408 years before the first Olympiad (i.e. 776); Dicaearchus (fr. 58 Wehrli): 306 years before the first Olympiad.
lists are not a uniform, consistent body of genealogies, but a muddle of separate lineages containing a high degree of invention. According to Burkert, ‘serious’ genealogies led back to the tenth century, whereas the earlier period was mainly a blank, whose chronologies and genealogies could be easily manipulated.¹

There were also Greek authors who left the date of the heroic age indefinite. However, all of them regarded it as a period in the distant past. This becomes clear from several examples:

1. In the Iliad, Homer separates the time of the heroes from that of his audience when he claims that the heroes are more powerful than mortals ‘as they are now’ – that is, in the present of the audience (5.304 οἵον βροτοῖ). He also indicates the heroic age with the phrase ‘that remote day’ (2.482 ἐστὶν ξένῳ).

2. In his victory odes, Pindar often introduces stories about the heroic age with the indefinite temporal adverb ‘once’ (I. 1.13 ποτε) or adjectives with a similar temporal meaning, such as ‘ancient’ (N. 1.34 ἀρχαῖον, N. 3.32 παλαιότερον).

3. Although Herodotus gives a specific date for the Trojan War, he generally refers to the heroic age with indefinite temporal markers, such as τὸ παλαῖον. For example, the fifth-century Athenians in his narrative claim that they protected the children of Heracles ‘long ago’ (9.27 παλαιά).

4. In the heroic age presented in tragedy, heroes refer to the time of the audience as the future. For example, in Euripides’ Trojan Women, Hecuba states that her misery will inspire poets ‘of later generations’ (1245 ὑστέρων βροτῶν). These poets live in the time of the audience, and have not yet been born in the age of the Trojan queen.⁴

For the purposes of their poems and treatises, these authors did not need to date the heroic age. It was sufficient to state that a particular event had taken place in the time of heroes, not in that of ordinary humans. Pindar, for example, praises athletes who were victorious in the Panhellenic games in his odes. One of his laudatory devices is to compare their victories with deeds of heroes from the past. These heroes were admired by the Greeks because they were supposed to be able to perform greater deeds than humans (e.g. II. 5.304). By placing the athletes

² Burkert 1995, 139-48. Parker (1987, 89-90) states that Attic genealogists from the fifth century, such as Pherencydes and Hellanicus, introduced new kings to the Attic king list to make the heroic chronology of Attica fit that of Greece as a whole.

³ Lysias, in his Funeral Oration, uses a similar phrase (2.13 ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ χρόνῳ).

⁴ For the heroic age as distant past in general, see: Finley 1975, 14-6; Neumann 1995, 9-10. See further: De Jong 1987a, 44-5; 235-6 (for Homer); Nünlist 2007, 233-4 (for Pindar); Baragwanath and De Bakker 2012, 19 (for Herodotus). Pindar sometimes uses pote to indicate the recent past in which his addressee has gained an athletic victory (e.g. P. 3.74). As Young has demonstrated (1983, 31-48), this pote relates to reperformances of the Pindaric ode in the future – that is, after the death of the athlete – which keep his memory alive. On the moment of the reperformance, the victory has taken place in the ‘distant’ past.
on a par with the heroes, Pindar increases the praiseworthiness of their victories. For these comparisons, he did not need to give a precise date of the heroic deeds, but only state that they had taken place in the admirable heroic past.

Since heroic events were regarded as having occurred in the distant past, poets, such as the tragedians, had to recreate this past when composing stories about the heroes. Already in antiquity, there were authors who commented on this process of recreating the past. Their comments primarily relate to instances where they consider that the tragedians did not succeed in giving a ‘correct’ presentation of the distant past. The remaining part of this section presents an overview of ancient opinions on this subject.

Aristotle

In the Poetics, a normative treatise on the principles of poetry, Aristotle gives a list of examples of improbability (ἄλογον) that should be avoided in a dramatic play. Among these he mentions ‘the messengers of the Pythian Games in the Electra’ (1460a31-2 ἐν Ἠλέκτρᾳ οἱ τὰ Πύθια ἀπαγγέλλοντες). Aristotle here probably refers to the Electra of Sophocles, in which Orestes’ pedagogue arrives at Mycenae to announce the prince’s death in the chariot race of the Pythian Games (680-763).5

Aristotle does not specify the exact improbability (ἄλογον) concerning the account of the messenger. Modern scholars, for their part, have identified the alogon in two ways. According to Vahlen, the improbability lies in the fact that the inhabitants of Mycenae have to wait for the arrival of the pedagogue to receive the message of Orestes’ death. In his view, it would have been more likely if the rumour of it had already been spread to Mycenae.6 I do not see why this would need to be the case. The pedagogue is presented as having come to Mycenae quickly after Orestes’ death. Therefore, he could very likely have been the first to convey the message. He says that Orestes was cremated ‘immediately’ after the fatal accident (757 εὐθύς), and that he has run ahead of the men who are bringing Orestes’ ashes to Mycenae (757-60, 1114).

Gudeman and Easterling identify the improbability of the passage in a more plausible way. They regard as the alogon the fact that the Pythian Games do not fit the time of the heroic world. Since the athletic contests were introduced in Delphi only in 586 – and the chariot race in 582 – Aristotle may have considered them as too recent to be presented as probable elements in the distant past.7

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5 Although Aristotle uses the plural form οἱ ἀπαγγέλλοντες, it is only one character in the play – that is, the pedagogue – who conveys the message. On this incongruity see: Gudeman 1934, 416.
6 Vahlen [1914] 1965, 176-7. ‘... die Kunde davon [i.e. Orestes’ death] [müβte] sich schon früher ... nach Mykenä verbreitet haben ...’
7 Gudeman 1934, 415; Easterling 1985, 7-8. The scholia on the Electra also note the temporal incongruity of the Pythian Games: τοῖς χρόνοις ἀνήκειν νέωτερος γὰρ Ὀρέστου ἔστιν ὁ Πυθικὸς ἁγών (ad 49). ‘He [Sophocles] has ascended in time, for the Pythian Games are younger than
Easterling corroborates her view by mentioning that Aristotle has published a list of victors in the Pythian Games, which he had based on written records in the archives of Delphi. Presumably, these records did not go further back than the sixth century, when the athletic contests were organised for the first time. If so, Aristotle may have realised (after studying the records) that the Games were of a relatively recent origin and did therefore not belong to the heroic age.

Scholia
Scholia are annotations of scholars written in the margin or between the lines of manuscripts of classical texts. Some scholia deal with the presentation of the heroic world in tragedy. These generally focus on the presence of elements that are temporally ‘inconsistent’ in the heroic world. Such elements are said to derive from the time of the poet himself:

(1) Eteocles promises the gods to erect trophies in their honour.
παρατηρητέον δὲι οὐδέπω ἦν ἡ τῶν τροπαίων ὄνομασία κατὰ τὸν Ἐτεοκλέα, ὡστε άνεβίβασε τὰ κατὰ τὸν χρόνον ὁ Αἰσχύλος (scholion ad A. Th. 277a (Smith)).
One must note that the expression ‘trophies’ did not yet exist in the time of Eteocles, so that Aeschylus has caused the things of the period to go up.

(2) Hecuba calls Odysseus a demagogue, for he has manipulated the mob with rhetorical tricks. Demagogues were regarded as a negative by-product of fifth-century Athenian democracy.
ταῦτα εἰς τὴν κατ’ αὐτὸν πολιτείαν λέγει καὶ ἐστὶ τοιοῦτος ὁ Εὐριπίδης, περιάπτων τὰ καθ’ ἐμοί τοῖς ἡρωῖς καὶ τοὺς χρόνους συγχέων (scholion ad E. Hec. 254).
He [Euripides] says these things according to the habits of his own age. Such is Euripides, combining his own time with that of the heroes and mixing up the ages.

The scholiasts use the word ‘anachronism’ (ἀναχρονισμός) for elements that do not belong to the heroic age. Sometimes, scholiasts only write the word ‘anachronism’ in the margin (e.g. scholion ad A. PV 846b (Herington)); at other times, they also add a short explanation:

(3) The Oceanids, listing the regions on earth where people lament Prometheus’ fate, mention the continent of Asia.
ἀναχρονισμός· οὔπω γὰρ ἦν ἐποικισθεῖσα ἡ Ἀσία τοῖς Ἐλλήσι (scholion ad A. PV 411 (Herington)).

Orestes.’ οὔπω ἦν ἐπὶ Ὀρέστου ὁ Πυθικὸς ἀγών (ad 682). ‘The Pythian Games did not yet exist in Orestes’ time.’
8 D.L. 5.26.22-3, Plu. Sol. 11 (testimonia). CID 430 is an honorary inscription set up in Delphi for Aristotle’s compilation of the list.
Anachronism. Asia was not yet settled by the Greeks.

Scholiasts seem to identify anachronisms by comparing the heroic world in tragedy to that in Homer. Anachronisms, then, are elements that are present in tragedy, but absent in Homer. Some scholiasts explicitly state that the Homeric world is the ‘model’ heroic world that the tragedians had to follow:

(4) Medea lists the practice of providing dowry among the disadvantages of being woman.

(a) ἀναχρονισμός· οἱ γὰρ ἥρωες τὸ ἐναντίον παρείχον (scholion ad E. Med. 233).

Anachronism. For the heroes gave the opposite.

(b) τοῦτο δὲ ὁ Εὐριπίδης ἀπὸ τῆς καθ’ αὑτὸ συνηθείας λέγει. οἱ δὲ ἥρωες οὐχ οὕτως ἐποίουν τοὺς γάμους, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων αὐτοὶ ἐδίδοσαν, καθάπερ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἄλλοις παρίστησι. καὶ Ὅμηρος· ‘πρῶθ’ ἑκατὸν βοῦς δῶκεν, ἔπειτα δὲ χίλι’ ὑπέστη’ (scholion ad E. Med. 232).

Euripides says this on the basis of his own experience. The heroes did not make marriages in this manner, but they gave [gifts] in the opposite way, as he himself shows in other instances. Homer says: ‘First he [Iphidamas] gave a hundred cattle, and thereafter he promised a thousand.’

Both scholiasts say that the giving of dowry does not fit the heroic world, since the heroes gave gifts ‘in the opposite direction’. The scholiasts mean the custom of ‘bride price’, in which male suitors try to win the hand of a woman by giving precious gifts to her father. The second scholiast, moreover, cites a verse from the Iliad (11.244) as ‘evidence’ for the correct practice, indicating that he considers the heroic world in Homer to be the model for tragedy. He adds that Euripides presented this custom correctly in other instances in his tragedies (e.g. Hipp. 269).

Scholiasts, however, do not always identify tragic deviations from the Homeric world as anachronisms:

(5) Ajax says that he wants to be buried with his armour after his death – except for his shield, which he gives to his son Euryphaces.

τὸ μὲν σάκος διὰ τὸ ἐξαιρετὸν τῷ παιδὶ φυλάσσειν καλεῖει, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τεύχη συνδάσαι φησίν. ἐπίσταται γὰρ καὶ αὐτὰ περιμάχετα ἐσόμενα. οἶδεν Ὅμηρος ὅπλα συγκαιόμενα· ἄλλαν οὖν κατέκηε σὺν ἔντεις δαιδαλέοισι’ (scholion ad S. Ai. 574).

He instructs his child to keep the shield as a special honour, but says that his other armour will be buried with him. For he understands that these will be fought for. Homer is acquainted with weapons that are burnt [together with the heroes]: ‘but he burnt him with his ornate armour’.

The scholiast compares Ajax’ burial with arms to Homer’s practice of a warrior’s cremation with armour. The scholiast cites a verse from the Iliad (6.418) about the cremation of Andromache’s father Eetion by Achilles. The scholiast does not pre-
sent Sophocles’ deviation from Homer as an anachronism, unlike the scholiast who commented on the presence of dowry in the Medea. A possible reason for this might be that Sophocles has also in a sense followed the Homeric model. Although he has his hero buried instead of cremated, Sophocles follows the Homeric practice of paying the hero the last honours together with his armour.

1.2 Modern views

My survey of opinions on the presentation of the tragic world starts for modern times in 1880, the year of Stricker’s book De tragicorum anachronismis. Stricker’s views set the tone for the majority of scholars in the twentieth century.

A Homeric world

In line with the ancient scholiasts, Stricker regards the heroic world in tragedy as a ‘Homeric world’. In his view, the tragedians modelled the heroic world in their plays after that presented in the epics of Homer:

Unde vero illius aetatis imaginem sibi informare poterant tragici? Ex Homero sine dubio, cujus carmina etiam posteriorum fabularum nucleus fuerint (1880, 1).

From what source could the tragedians form an image of that [heroic] age? From Homer, without doubt, since his songs were also the kernel of later stories.

Most twentieth-century scholars hold a similar view. Bain, for example, states:

The tragedians were for the most part attempting imaginative recreations of the Homeric world (1977, 209).

Similarly, Easterling wrote:

... the world created by the epic poets exercised a powerful hold on the imagination [of the tragedians] ... (1985, 10).

Although Easterling speaks of ‘epic’ poets – that is, Homer as well as the cyclic poets – she primarily compares the heroic world in tragedy with that of Homer. Elsewhere, she says that the tragedians made use of ‘broadly Homeric settings’ in their plays.9

The identification of the tragic and Homeric world probably developed from the observation that the epics of Homer were of paramount influence on classical

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9 Easterling 1989, 9 [my emphasis].
Greek society, literature included. The poems of Homer have been called ‘the Bible of the Greeks’ and Homer the ‘educator of the Greeks’. On account of this dominant position, scholars may have assumed that Homer was also the main source for the image of the heroic world in tragedy.

The notion of the tragic world as a Homeric world has prompted scholars to trace specific elements in the heroic world of tragedy back to that of Homer. For example, Fränkel associates the silver bath-tub of Agamemnon in Aeschylus with the silver baths of Menelaus in the Odyssey (Ag. 1539-40 ἄργυροτοίχου δροίτας, Od. 4.128 ἄργυρεας ἀσαμίνθους). Kamerbeek links the braziers in the Greek army camp at Troy in Sophocles’ Ajax with those in Odysseus’ palace in Homer (Ai. 286 λαμπτῆρες, Od. 18.307). He even identifies a pear tree in the grove of Colonus, mentioned by Sophocles, as inspired by a pear tree on Ithaca in the Odyssey (OC 1596 ἀχέρδου, Od. 14.10).

A Bronze Age world

The view of the tragic world as Homeric world has entailed the notion that the tragic world is a representation of the Greek Bronze Age. Presumably, this view has developed from the scholarly opinion that the heroic world in Homer is a representation of the Bronze Age: scholars may have transferred this view to the heroic world in tragedy. Barlow, for example, states that Euripides presents ‘Mycenaean times’ in his tragedies. Stieber, for her part, remarks on the presence of ‘Cyclopean walls’ in Euripides’ heroic world (e.g. Tr. 1087-8 τείχη ... Κυκλώπι[α]) and claims that they are one of Euripides’ archaeologically ‘most correct’ images: ‘Cyclopean’ is the designation of the distinctive masonry style of the Bronze Age. What is more, she calls the house of Heracles in Euripides a ‘Bronze Age house’ (HF 922-1015) but regards it as archaeologically less correct, since it contains many fifth-century elements.

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10 For the influence of Homer on Greek society see: Verdenius 1970. For Homer’s influence on Greek literature see: Clarke 1981; Graziosi and Haubold 2005. For an overview of intertextuality between Homer and tragedy see: Garner 1990.
13 For the Homeric world as representation of the Bronze Age see e.g.: Lorimer 1950; Bennet 1997; Latacz 2001. As I noted in my introduction, the Bronze Age is only one of the possible sources of Homer’s heroic world.
14 Barlow 1986, 168; Stieber 2011, 30; 91. For the Cyclopes as builders of the walls of Bronze Age cities see: B. 11.76-7, Hellanic. ForH 4F88.
Anachronism

This brings us to the question of anachronism. Not only ancient, but also modern scholars have detected non-Homeric (or post-Bronze Age) elements in tragedy and called these elements 'anachronisms'. Stricker presents an extensive overview of anachronisms in tragedy – particularly in the sphere of architecture, sculpture, painting and geography.

Modern scholars generally criticize the use of modern elements by the tragedians. Stricker, for example, states that the tragedians should have cared more for a 'correct' presentation of the heroic world. They possessed, after all, the epics of Homer, in which the heroic world was presented in the 'right' way:

Saepius ... antiquitatis studio parum dediti tragicci insci et imprudentes se anachronismo obstringunt. Homeri carminibus poetae et philosophi magnopere quidem delectabantur, sed ut ex iis antiquitatis doctrinam haurirent tragicis eorumque aequalibus ne in mentem quidem veniebat (Stricker 1880, 3).

All too often the tragedians dedicated themselves too little to the study of antiquity, and ignorantly and imprudently became guilty of anachronism. The poets and philosophers were indeed greatly delighted by the songs of Homer, but the tragedians and their equals did not even think of drawing from these songs lessons in antiquity.

After Stricker – that is, in the twentieth century – scholars have continued to disapprove of anachronism. For example, Pearson (1917) says that Sophocles is 'guilty' of an anachronism when he makes the heroes rub themselves with oil before exercise (fr. 494 ξηραλοιφῶν). Stevens (1971) considers the meeting of women in a palace in Euripides' Andromache (930) 'incongruous' and 'improbable', as – in his view – this belongs more to the contemporary life of Athens than to the heroic world. Lee (1976) describes the presence of 'modern' places like Sicily and Thurii on the geographical map of Euripides' Trojan Women (220-9) as 'dramatically inappropriate', since it involves a 'glaring anachronism'.

Stricker states that some anachronisms present the 'voice of the poet'. This means that the personal preferences of the poet ring through in these elements. However, when the tragedian follows Homer, he stays in the background and presents the heroic world 'correctly'. For example, Euripides' tragedies contain many anachronisms in the sphere of architecture and painting (e.g. Ion 184-218, Hipp. 127). According to Stricker, these anachronisms have arisen from Euripides' admiration of Greek art and from his activities as a painter. According to his ancient biography, he was a painter before becoming a playwright. Stricker states that

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15 Pearson 1917, 102; Stevens 1971, 203; Lee 1976, 102.
16 TrGF 5TA 1A, 14: φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ ζωγράφον γενέσθαι καὶ δείκνυσθαι αὐτοῦ πινάκια ἐν Μεγάροις. 'They say that he [Euripides] became a painter and showed his paintings in Megara.' Lefkowitz
Euripides, by not suppressing his admiration for the contemporary visual arts, has violated the atmosphere of the heroic age. To compare, scholars also connect political anachronisms – that is, utterances of characters relating to contemporary politics – to the voice of the poet. For example, some scholars regard the praise of Athens and disapproval of Sparta, uttered by the chorus in Euripides’ *Trojan Women* (207-13), as reflecting the preferences of Euripides. Their reasoning is that since Athens and Sparta were at war in the fifth century (not in the heroic age), the words of the chorus are anachronistic and have to be ascribed to the poet.

There are also scholars who have adopted a less negative stance towards anachronism. Grube (1941) has argued for a division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ anachronisms. Good anachronisms (1) contribute to the plot and are consistent with other elements in the drama; bad anachronisms (2) are ‘irrelevant’ and are in disharmony with other elements of the play. He gives examples of both kinds:

1. In Euripides’ *Heracles*, Megara says that she will seek brides for her sons in Athens, so that Thebes will be linked to this city by their marriages (478). Megara presumably chooses Athens because of its importance in Greece. Yet, Athens had no important role in Greece in the heroic world of Homer. Megara’s plan of constructing links between Thebes and Athens only makes sense if Athens’ contemporary status rings through. It was in the fifth century that Athens had a dominant position in Greece. The anachronism, in this case, contributes to the logic of Megara’s statement and is therefore of the ‘good’ kind.

2. In Euripides’ *Suppliants*, Athens is ruled by a king, Theseus. Yet, in the debate with the Theban herald, Theseus praises the merits of Athenian democracy, such as equality of speech and freedom for all (426-62). Democracy is an anachronism: it is absent in the heroic world of Homer since it was only established (in Athens) at the end of the sixth century. According to Grube, the democratic constitution of Athens is incompatible with the presence of the king: a city cannot be democratic and have a king at the same time. This contradiction violates the consistency of the drama. The anachronism, as a consequence, is of the ‘bad’ kind.

Grube admits that the boundaries between the categories are not clear-cut, and that it is largely a matter of taste whether a particular anachronism is placed in the first or second category.

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(1981, 91) has shown, however, that most details in Euripides’ biography are based on his own poetry.

17 Stricker 1880, 4; 28; 31.
18 E.g. Lee 1976, 102.
Sourvinou-Inwood explains the presence of contemporary elements on the basis of the social function of tragedy – the exploration of contemporary dilemmas. She argues that the tragedians use contemporary elements as ‘zooming devices’ that bring the heroic world ‘nearer’ to that of the audience. When the heroic world resembles that of the present, the audience are invited to connect the moral and social dilemmas presented in the play to their own world.20

For example, in Sophocles’ Antigone, Creon is a στρατηγός who has issued a decree (8 κήρυγμα) that forbids the burial of the traitor Polynices. The office of στρατηγός and the issuing of κήρυγμα belonged to the democratic polis of Athens. The use of these fifth-century concepts functions as a zooming device: they make the audience perceive Creon’s authority in terms of Athenian institutions and polis authority. As a result, the problem of whether or not to bury Polynices, and by consequence the larger question of the authority of the polis over the oikos, becomes relevant to the audience. The spectators are invited to reflect on this issue and relate it to the situation in their own world.21

Although Sourvinou-Inwood’s view may be right – contemporary elements may serve the social function of tragedy – it does not explain their function in the plot. It is this function to which the analysis in this book is dedicated.

The language of anachronism

Easterling has drawn attention to another aspect of anachronism – the language used. She claims that although the tragedians use contemporary elements in their plays, they try to accommodate them to the ‘atmosphere’ of the heroic world. In other words, the tragedians attempt to make anachronisms less conspicuous in order to prevent any ‘jarring incongruity’ between the Homeric and contemporary elements. To do so, Easterling claims, the tragedians use vague, poetic words (instead of explicit, prosaic language), which integrate the anachronisms into the Homeric world. As Easterling puts it:

… [W]e should be thinking of an artistic challenge to the dramatist to find language that will fitly accommodate things undreamed of in the world of epic heroes (1985, 3).22

For this process of toning down the conspicuousness of anachronism Easterling introduces the concept of heroic vagueness. She gives several examples of it:

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22 Elsewhere, Easterling speaks of tragedy’s ‘well-known concern to keep out overt anachronism’ (1997, 23).
(1) In Euripides’ *Electra*, Orestes asks the farmer why he is scrutinising him so closely, ‘as if he is looking at the stamp on silver’ (558–9 ὥσπερ ἀργύρου σκοπῶν ... χαρακτῆρα). This comparison relates to the phenomenon of counterfeiting. Coinage is an anachronism, since it is not a feature of the Homeric world. Yet, this anachronistic element is not conspicuous among the other elements of the heroic world: Euripides uses the vague term ‘silver’ (ἄργυρος), which lessens its conspicuousness. He deliberately suppresses modern words like δραχμή, ὀβολός and στατήρ, which would have disrupted the heroic atmosphere. ‘If [coinage] is an anachronistic import into the heroic world, [Euripides’] use of language makes it seem comfortably at home.’

(2) In the parodos of Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, the captive women of Troy speculate on places in Greece where they will end up as slaves. One of the places they mention is Thurii, a colony in Italy founded under leadership of the Athenians in 444/3. Although Thurii is an anachronism on the heroic map, Easterling argues that the reference to it remains ‘vague’. Euripides does not use the ‘overt’ place-name Θούριοι but an allusive periphrasis: ‘the land bordering on the Ionian sea, watered by the lovely river Crathis’ (224-8). By using heroic vagueness, Easterling claims, tragedians can include modern concepts in their plays and at the same time preserve the ‘integrity’ of the heroic world.

Croally has countered Easterling’s view. He states that the convention that Easterling describes is often contradicted by the evidence from the plays, and that anachronism can be very overt and explicit. As example he mentions the practice of democracy, which in his view is always devoid of vagueness. Croally states: ‘... [T]he word “democracy” could not be used without referring to the contemporary era; there was no possibility of it being easily adaptable to the heroic setting.’

For example, in the debate between Theseus and the Theban herald in Euripides’ *Suppliants*, the Athenian king speaks of written laws as well as of the system of annual magistracies. These are not referred to in vague language but in very explicit terms: γεγραμμένων ... τῶν νόμων (433), ‘the writing down of laws’ and διαδοιχαίσιν ἐν μέρει ἐνιαυσίαισι (406-7), ‘yearly successions by turns’.

*A contemporary world*

Some scholars state that it is the contemporary elements, not the Homeric elements, that dominate the heroic world of tragedy. Knox, for example, claims that

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24 Easterling 1994, 74 n6. E. Tr. 224-8: τάν τ’ ἀγχιστεύουσαν γάν ἣν ἵνων ναότα πόλυτρον, ἃν ἵσεις καλλιτεύον ... Κράθες.
there are so many contemporary elements in tragedy that he totally abandons the idea of a Homeric world:

The contemporary reference in all Attic tragedy is so obvious and insistent that the term ‘anachronism’, often applied to details of the tragic presentation of the mythical material, is completely misleading; in Attic tragedy of the fifth century anachronism is not the exception but the rule (1957, 61).

According to Knox, tragedy is totally conceived ‘in terms of contemporary situations and attitudes’. Modern elements, which others regard as deviation from the Homeric model, are considered by Knox to be part of a deliberate contemporary presentation of heroic stories. In his view, the tragedians make the heroic world resemble the contemporary world so that they can reflect on issues of current interest. This stands in contrast with the theory of Easterling, who argues that the tragedians, although using anachronisms to reflect on contemporary matters, present them in ‘heroic vagueness’ to adapt them to the Homeric atmosphere of the play.

Knox even goes so far as to say that ‘the Athenian tragedians wrote not historical, but contemporary drama’. In other words, the stories dramatised in tragedy were not conceived of as past, but as present, according to Knox. This seems to be a step too far. I have already demonstrated that heroic events, such as those in tragedy, were at least imagined to have occurred in the distant past (1.1).

Grethlein has a more sophisticated view than Knox. He combines the notion of a distant past with the supposed ‘omnipresence’ of contemporary elements. He states that the Greeks presented past and present in the same register – in other words, that they modelled the past after the present. In his view, the Greeks only saw quantitative, not qualitative, differences between past and present. This means that the heroic world was sometimes presented as larger than life – heroes,

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26 Knox deduces from Sophocles’ Oedipus the King contemporary elements such as the payment of tribute (δασμόν) and the presence of metoikoi in Thebes (452). In his view, this play reflects on the position of Athens in the Greek world. In the fifth century, Athens had set up the Delian League, a maritime alliance with other cities in Greece, but appropriated the status of leader (tyrannos) over the other allies. Knox claims that Athens’ status of tyrannos finds its parallel in the leadership (tyrrannis) of Oedipus over Thebes (1957, 64-6).

27 Knox 1957, 62.

28 Homeric scholarship witnesses a similar debate. Van Wees (1992, 6-7; 1999, 2) argues that although Homer models the heroic world after the present, he identifies it as part of the distant past. Crielaard (2002, 239-95), by contrast, states that Homer portrays the heroic world as parallel to the contemporary world of his audience.
...for example, could be portrayed as much stronger than humans in the present (e.g. Il. 5.304) – but in essence resembled that of the present.  

**Visual arts**

For comparison, I briefly turn to the field of archaeology. The theory that the heroic world resembles the contemporary world is also current here. Archaeologists state that the visual arts, such as vase painting and sculpture, portray heroic events in a contemporary mould: heroes are presented as wearing clothes and bearing weapons from the time of the painter or sculptor. Fifth-century vases, for example, show Amazons in hoplite armour and Trojans in Persian dress. Similarly, architecture depicted on vases resembles that of the time of the painter. For instance, a fifth-century vase presenting a scene from the life of Bellerophon portrays the hero standing near a temple that is classical in design: it has a colonnade, a pediment, and acroteria on its roof.

Since heroic events are portrayed in a contemporary mould, it is often difficult to determine whether a given representation is heroic or contemporary. For example, archaeologists do not agree whether the friezes of the Athena Nike temple in Athens – containing battle scenes with armed men and horses – represent the Trojan or Persian War. According to Giuliani, a given representation can only be plausibly identified as heroic if the event represented does not belong to the everyday experience of the audience but is a *unique* element of a heroic story. For example, a warrior who is presented as wounded by an arrow in his heel might plausibly be identified as Achilles, since he was the only one who died in this way. ‘Ordinary’ soldiers from the time of the audience would presumably die from wounds to their head or chest.
1.3 Conclusion

The survey presented in this chapter has shown that the question of the heroic world in tragedy is far from a settled subject. The following tendencies can be discerned in my overview of ancient and modern opinions:

1. The majority of scholars regard the heroic world in tragedy as a 'Homeric world', which means that it resembles the heroic world presented in the Iliad and Odyssey. Some scholars (Barlow, Stieber) equate the tragic world with the Bronze Age. This opinion has probably developed from the first view, because the Homeric world has been considered a Bronze Age world, too. A minority of scholars (Knox, Grethlein) take a different view and regard the tragic world as by and large a reflection of the present.

2. Scholars who favour the 'Homeric' and 'Bronze Age' theory also detect elements that differ from these worlds. They ascribe these elements to the present of the poet and call them 'anachronisms'. These elements are usually criticised by them (e.g. Stricker), although Grube has also made a first step in determining their function in the plot.

3. The language of anachronisms has been qualified as both overt and glaring (Croally), and vague and inconspicuous (Easterling). The latter qualifications are related to the concept of heroic vagueness, which means that contemporary elements are 'accommodated' to the atmosphere of the Homeric world.

The disagreement between scholars is largely due to a limited scope of their research. They have not made in-depth comparisons between the tragic world and the world with which they have equated it. Those who favour the 'Homeric' theory simply assume the equality of these worlds, based on the observation that the epics had paramount influence on Greek literature. Adherents of the 'Bronze Age' theory have basically transferred a theory from the field of Homeric scholarship to that of tragedy. And those who support the 'contemporary' theory simply give priority to fifth-century elements, the presence of which nobody denies. Moreover, due to lack of analytical tools, the discussion of the function of 'anachronism' has largely been unproductive. Scholars have not determined the role of contemporary elements in the plot but merely considered them an artistic failure.

This book aims to throw new light on these questions. The heroic world will not be discussed in its entirety – physical, social and political – but the analysis will be restricted to the first element. It will analyse the form and function of the elements that build up the tragic world. The next chapter lays the theoretical foundation for this investigation. The analysis of the form of the tragic world makes use of memory theory (2.1); the study of the function of the tragic elements starts from literary theory on space (2.2).