"The past is a foreign country": this saying emphasizes the way in which the past, even of one’s “own” culture, inhabits a different world from our contemporary reality—in terms of built environment and material culture, institutions and practices, mores and values, manners and customs, beliefs and knowledge. Focusing on Homer’s Iliad as your primary text, discuss (1) significant features of the text that strike you as “foreign” to your own world (keeping in mind the many dimensions of that world mentioned above) and (2) what you see as the significance of these features for our understanding or interpretation of the work: how do they enter into and shape our response, as modern readers, of this work?

Your task is thus twofold: first, you need to read the text closely, scrutinizing it for aspects, dimensions, dynamics, conventions that strike you as distinctively characteristic of its age and culture—and in doing this you need to clarify for the reader what exactly is going on in the text and how it departs from our modern realities, norms, notions. Secondly, you need to assess the significance or import of the features you have identified for Homer’s text and for a modern reader’s engagement with that text. For instance, you might note that the demi-god status of heroes like Achilles is a striking departure from modern conceptions and you would lay out the most important occasions and ways in which the text constructs this narrative fact for us (part one), but you might argue (part two) that this narrative fact about Achilles actually affects the action, values, and outlook of the text only minimally and that, consequently, it poses only a minor obstacle in the way of a modern reader’s ability to respond to the work as narrative about human experience—or, on the contrary, you might argue that this feature of the text makes Homer’s work inhabit a radically different universe and makes the text’s account of the Trojan War discontinuous with any modern discussion of war (pace the Norton Anthology editors’ remark that “Homer is still one of war’s greatest interpreters” [101]).

As you can see, the second part of the question is where the interpretive dimensions of your argument will be most in evidence, though the kind of interpretive claim you can put forward will depend in good measure on the care and perceptiveness with which you discern culturally distinctive features of the Homeric text in the first place. Moreover, the two “parts” of your paper need not appear as separate, sequential steps in the argument; instead, you might find it more useful to combine both aspects of the paper’s discussion as you take up each bit of textual evidence that you handle.