

# DEATH IN THE GREEK WORLD

From Homer to the Classical Age

Maria Serena Mirto

Translated by A. M. Osborne



# DEATH IN THE GREEK WORLD



## Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture

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*From Homer to the Classical Age*

Maria Serena Mirto

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## PREFACE

This book offers a general synthesis of people's relationships with death in the Greek world. Drawing primarily on literary and epigraphic sources in translation, but also on legislative regulations and figurative evidence, it is intended for undergraduate and graduate students in the Classical disciplines. Scholars, too, I hope, will find it an articulate and stimulating survey of the ways in which archaic and classical Greek culture dealt with the trauma of death.

Anyone who examines the Greek world—who explores its history, religion, sociology, or anthropology or studies its politics or material culture—continually encounters Greek responses to the problem of death. Each aspect described here could have formed an independent work: beliefs about the afterlife, on the boundary between literary imagination and religious faith; funerary rituals and material evidence of the cult of the dead: monuments, tombstones, and burial offerings; and various ideologies, from the archaic period until the flourishing of the *polis*, that construct an ideal model of death, making it an acceptable, perhaps even desirable, event.

Explaining each of these themes and offering grounds for reflection on their interconnections required that I make a rigorous and concise selection from the extensive available resources. My selection, though perhaps idiosyncratic and



## PREFACE

personal, includes recently discovered texts and objects that have shed new light on our themes and, as a result, have necessitated re-evaluations of our earlier judgments. My approach is not intended to be an excessive simplification; those planning to look at particular issues in greater depth will find in the bibliography some indications how to proceed with their study. The text contains none of the usual footnotes with cross-references and more technical observations. I have tried to include in the main text everything useful to students and scholars needing a general guide to the topic. And because my research focuses on Homer and tragedy, I have taken the liberty of including my opinions with those of others.

This book has been thoroughly revised since the Italian edition in 2007. Moreover, I have added a section on hero cults and an appendix outlining fundamental developments in modern studies of death in the Greek world.

To the people who promoted and helped improve this English-language edition I express sincere and warmest thanks: Seth Schein, who generously appraised the original edition; the editors of the Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture: Ellen Greene, General Editor, and her colleagues John Drayton, Alessandra Jacobi Tamulevich, and Alice Stanton; Annie Osborne, who translated the Italian text with intelligence and sensitivity, and Letizia Gualandi, who helped me with the images.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, Matteo. His death, which came as I began to rework the text for the English edition, brought me to rethink these themes from a less-detached point of view.

# DEATH IN THE GREEK WORLD





## INTRODUCTION

Our relationship with death is defined by certain features: the imagination of a life after death or a denial of immortality (but with the hope that we will survive in the collective memory); funerary rites, by means of which we take our leave of the dead; and the cultivation of memories by which we distance ourselves from the deceased. An intense relationship, it affects our culture, our expectations, our ideology, and our community lifestyles. It endures even when we attempt to exorcise it by pushing it to the edge of our social system.

Modern Western civilization has a reduced familiarity with death. We fear its intrusion into our daily activities, and we are less tolerant of the anguish associated with awaiting its arrival. We focus on achieving and preserving well-being and success, believing we can control health, wealth, and physical attractiveness. The loss of an individual must neither disrupt the social system nor open cracks that might require a collective healing process. Certainly there are exceptions, as when the deceased has achieved fame or represents values admired (but seldom emulated) by the living. A politician or a Pope can be the center of spectacular funerary rites attended by diverse and deeply moved crowds—as can victims of crime, war, or terror (whose deaths represent threats to the entire social system). Yet such a grand farewell, like the life or death



of the deceased, is a departure from common practice. In fact, today the relationship between a dying person and those close to him/her is—like displays of mourning and the funeral itself—the antithesis of Greek, Roman, and early Christian traditions.

The change that led us to treat death as a taboo and to deny the prestige of funerary rites was radical. Since the archaic and classical Greek eras, Western culture has oscillated between periods in which the family of the deceased managed grief and mourning ceremonies and periods in which established codes limited the community's emotional involvement. If the community is involved—acknowledging the death of an individual by means of rites that simultaneously reaffirm the order and continuity of social institutions—it must have stable shared beliefs and representations that respond predictably to the trauma of separation imposed by death. Today, however, our individualistic culture has banished the ritual codes that enabled us to show suffering openly and to share and process it without compromising the security of everyday life. Grief is deemed a personal emotion, to be suppressed in public.

In ancient Greece, mourning and funerary rites were both an honor due to the deceased and a necessity for the living. Looking back, we can imagine a response to the death of a member of a traditional society. But we can also see the beginnings of a trend away from the calm acceptance that characterized the response of small eighth-century B.C. communities toward the anxieties attending a more individualized vision of death. Eschatological expectations spread while several communities enacted legislation in an attempt to reduce levels of grief and signs of mourning. And today the technological world—with its sometimes-abusive medical interventions—has usurped the role of family. It now manages our departure from this life and defines a “good death” as

one whose impact on the flow of everyday life is minimal. In the past the pendulum has swung between family-run event and public rite, but the discourse of death was always dignified. Until now death was never repressed or made a taboo.

In contemporary industrialized civilization, neither the family nor the wider community willingly organizes the passage from life to death. They leave the study of the effects of death on the living to anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists. As a result, death—the event least compatible with happiness—is hidden and censured. Any attempt to treat death as a simple biological passage entailing minimal anxiety and suffering is frustrated. In the absence of familial and social solidarity, death and its associated rites have become taboos.

Even in an age of astounding scientific progress, nature imposes loss upon us, foiling human efforts to delay the end of life. As a result of our perennially ambivalent relationship with death—at times involved, at times detached—the dying are socially isolated, and our expressions of grief are forgotten. In the past, rules of mourning were established, in some periods more privately and in others more publicly, but today these spheres neither compete nor collaborate. I propose to outline the development of funerary ideology and attitudes toward death in archaic and classical Greece, seeking to highlight the alternation between family and institution in the processes of mourning, and the characteristics of each in defining its importance in public and private life.

In response to the crisis imposed by a death, funerary rites must focus on the body of the deceased, his/her soul, and those left behind (Hertz, 1960; Metcalf and Huntington, 1991). Funerary practices must facilitate passage into a new state of body and soul, not only for the deceased but also for all those attached to him/her. They do this by enacting the metamorphosis of the deceased into a fixed identity apart from the

living identity and entrusted to the memory of relatives and community. This takes place through a process in which family and friends imagine their loved one's afterlife, with its eschatological implications (chapters 1 and 2). In addition it involves a practical process in which treatment of the body and a language of pain frame the rituals, accompanying the deceased to burial (chapter 3).

Lastly, when grief affects a wider public, rituals also communicate the importance of the loss to strangers. The strategies employed by those affected are many and varied, all fed by a desire to prolong the memory of the deceased. In the early archaic period, well before inscriptions on tombs allowed common people to avoid permanent oblivion, oral epic poetry developed to perpetuate the glory of past heroes and functioned as a model for the behavior of aristocratic elites (§ 5.1). Later, monuments were erected and epigraphs carved to preserve the memory of the deceased beyond the circle of devoted friends. The magnitude and quality of monuments corresponded to the social influence of the deceased. Placing a monument in an area reserved for a particular family suggested that harmony and concord were the basis for the public success of the family members (chapter 4).

Each sex played a role in mourning ceremonies and commemorative testimonies. Men took care of the official side of funerary ceremonies and communicated with the living, cultivating a place for the individual in shared history. In classical Athens the *epitaphios logos* (commemoration of the fallen) at state funerals before the *demosion sema* (public burial) was the moment of greatest tension between public eulogy—addressed for the most part to male citizens on behalf of those who died for their country—and private lament. Men took charge of these collective expressions of pain, adopting a detached tone useful for educating the younger generation

and upholding the principle of death for the sake of common values (§ 5.2). Women were left to take care of practical arrangements and more private necessities. In particular, verbal and physical expressions of pain, including laments, during the earliest stages of transition were a female prerogative. Through lamentation and tomb-side ritual, women assumed a central role in dialogue with the deceased. This is widely witnessed in painted ceramics.

Whether we observe the Greek relationship with death from the perspective of their understanding of an afterlife or from their approach to rites and their psychological or social framework, we encounter a cult on the boundary between domestic and institutionalized religion. Greek religiosity is peculiar in maintaining a polar distinction between the world of the gods and the world of the dead. And owing to their desire to separate worship of the gods from devotion paid to the deceased or to chthonic (underworld) deities, this distinction became increasingly marked as time went on. Even so, the two spheres occasionally intersect, and the Olympian gods sometimes intervene in matters of death. Responding to the true extent of existence, religion included relationships with the deceased and with heroes. The latter were transformed into a class of demigod, somewhere between god and human, a feature exclusive to Greek culture. Although this presupposes a primitive tradition of ancestor-worship reworked to apply to more than just direct descendants, it also allows for degraded chthonic powers to be seen as superhuman but distinct from the Olympian gods.

From the eighth century B.C. onward, when the Bronze Age tradition of grand burials was past, tombs of the Mycenaean era were rediscovered and associated with epic heroes. Traces of votive offerings and sacrifices distinguish many burials of this period. The benign influence of the heroes (and some



lesser-known figures) to whom these tombs were attributed was thought to bring benefits to the region whose people took care of the burial.

During the early archaic period, the prestige of epic poetry was so great as to reshape religious ideas, transforming ancient locations of chthonic worship into shrines to the heroes of myth, extraordinary men from another age who had been immortalized through celebration of their achievements. Thus the concept of “hero,” which in Homeric poetry referred only to legendary warriors, came to imply a higher form of existence after death, giving rise to the practice of hero-worship in the hope of receiving favors (§ 4.3). Inevitably, if a family, group, or community decided to bestow such honors on one of its many dead, a new hero emerged. In the archaic and classical periods such an initiative—on behalf of the founders of a new colony, for example—had to be sanctioned by the oracles and therefore was rare. In the Hellenistic period, though, the creation of new heroes became common.

Thus it seems appropriate to begin describing the Greek relationship with death by looking into the transition between the Homeric and classical periods, when the new beliefs were still marginal and in constant tension with the dominant ideas of the time, before a new status for the deceased and the immortality of the soul became well established in popular belief and funerary rhetoric.

The transformations of the Hellenistic era mark a clear, deep caesura in the Greece of the *poleis* (city-states). The loss of independence by individual cities shattered the very foundation of the old, essentially civic, religion. And in a cosmopolitan, individualistic society open to the idea of sacred royalty, the divinization of the sovereign bridged the previously unbridgeable gap between human and divine. Mystic phenomena also changed following the widespread association of Greek mystery cults with those of non-Greek gods. No longer

## INTRODUCTION

simply attempting to bridge the gap between gods and humans that the public religion presupposed, they became the only private, direct way for an individual to communicate with the superhuman (Brelich, 1985).

I will attempt to describe the evolution of the Greek relationship with death by following its traditions and discontinuities and by tracing the difficult coexistence both of faith with ideology and of private hopes with public values. I will not, however, cross the threshold into the Hellenistic world, in which fear of the unknown and otherworldly prospects are set against the backdrop of a shift in historical and cultural circumstances, a shift that prepares the way for Christianity and other features of Western culture to establish themselves.

## CHAPTER 1



# LIFE AFTER DEATH IN POPULAR BELIEF

### 1.1 THE PSYCHE

**H**omeric depictions of the world beyond the grave and of funeral rites by which the community bids farewell to a warrior are the first literary witness to an understanding of death in Greece. Two aspects of these depictions—the destiny of the *psyche* (soul) and special treatment of the corpse—may be compared with archaeological findings relating to real funerary practices and the religious beliefs behind them.

Perception of the soul is tied closely to the moment of death. The etymological connection of *psyche* to the verb *psycho* (to blow, breathe) points to the fact that the last breath is the most realistic image of the separation of soul from body: the *psyche* flies out of the mouth (*Iliad* IX 408–409) or a wound (*Il.* XIV 518–19) like a breath and then is seen as a weaker copy of the individual. Because it retains the individual's physical features, it is also called an *eidolon* (image) and usually is described as his/her “alter ego.” Deprived of physicality and even of feeling and mental faculties, it is not a thinking, feeling entity but a sort of image of memory. It is a vision or illusion that the living succeed in imagining and with which they wish to interact quietly, by means of the cult of the deceased, across the wide gulf between the worlds of the

living and the dead. In figurative art from the sixth century onward, *psychai* are represented as tiny winged figures flitting about the tomb or crowding anonymously around the *eidolon* of the new arrival in Hades, who retains his/her lifelike appearance and size for a few moments. On leaving the living body, the *psyche* experiences the pain of regret, particularly when death comes prematurely (*Il.* XVI 856–57, XXII 362–63). Once it has taken its place in the community of the dead, it may express melancholy at its own state only during encounters with a living person who, by offering the blood of sacrificial victims, has managed extraordinarily to cross the threshold of Hades and call up the *psyche*, temporarily removing it from its eternal wanderings, where it is deprived of consciousness and memory, and giving it a minimal vitality. Indeed, the setting for the encounter between Odysseus and the dead in the *Nekyia* seems to be a necromantic rite rather than a true *katabasis* (“descent to the underworld”) (*Nekyia*, “evocation of the Dead,” is the conventional title of *Odyssey*’s book XI; the “second *Nekyia*” usually refers to the scene in the underworld at the opening of book XXIV.)

Despite the layering of oral-epic material and its performers’ progressive selection of ideas and phrases, the fusion of two distinct understandings is evident in the final versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the earlier understanding, the dead inhabit the afterlife as specters without mental faculties, unable to communicate with the living. Necromantic magic is required in order to override this permanent condition and give them a transitory ability to speak, recollect, and recognize. In the more recent understanding—which (consistent with a more developed cult of the dead) assumes that the dead can appreciate funerary rites and offerings—the dead possess the same feelings, emotions, intellectual standing, and even hierarchical status that they had while alive. Because epic

narrative masks contradictory details, the original audiences probably did not notice them. Odysseus' encounter with Achilles' *psyche*, for example, testifies to both models: Achilles enjoys the same great prestige among the dead and is honored as a sovereign, even if the desolate prospect of Hades dampens any gratification he may feel (*Od.* XI 482–91). Yet when Achilles greets Odysseus, recognizing him without having drunk the blood of any necromantic sacrifice, and expresses surprise at his presence among the spirits, he describes his own companions as specters without feelings (*Od.* XI 473–76) even though they give him the homage previously denied him by the living, and his supremacy among the *psychai* confirms the glory he won at the cost of a short and heroic life.

Odysseus sets out for Hades in order to consult the Theban soothsayer Tiresias about his return journey to Ithaca but in the end receives a prophecy about the end of his life. Tiresias is an exception. According to the sorceress Circe, he was the only soul Persephone allowed to retain his mental faculties; the others were deprived of their faculties and became mere wandering shadows (*Od.* X 492–95). The poems sketch the *psychai* of the deceased with extraordinary naturalness in their encounters, real or imaginary, with the living. Some are distant, disembodied, unaware of who they were. Others have physical consistency sufficient to undergo torture and suffering: vultures eat Tityus' liver; fruit and water remain just out of Tantalus' reach, tormenting his hunger and thirst; Sisyphus repeatedly pushes a boulder up a hill with great effort, only to see it roll down each time. These three who suffer for their transgressions against the gods and the cosmic order (*Od.* XI 576–600) are a Homeric departure from the usual scenario of the afterlife. Similarly, the Furies' punishment of perjurers after death (*Il.* III 276–80, XIX 258–60) contrasts with the usual concept of an afterlife in which only the pallid ghosts of mortal beings remain. But Homer did not conceive of them as an

otherworldly tribunal, executing judgment and meting out punishment. The Furies are, instead, the incarnation of demonic powers that avenge crimes against the natural order or the breaking of an oath (*Il.* IX 454, 569–72; Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 416–17).

The poems' orthodoxy is reflected in an idea that is in constant tension with the concept of hierarchical distinction and individual destinies. That idea, namely a common law for everyone, is implicit in two unforgettable episodes describing the pathetic frustration of the living when they attempt to embrace the *psychai* of their loved ones but, however hard they try, see them slip away from physical contact ("like smoke," *Il.* XXIII 100; "like a shadow or a dream," *Od.* XI 207). In the first episode, Achilles is visited in a dream by Patroclus' *psyche*, but even though the shadow offers a handshake before leaving (*Il.* XXIII 75), Achilles' attempt to hug him reveals the shadow's bodiless inconsistency. At that, Achilles understands how the soul exists in Hades: it looks identical to the deceased person but lacks vital energy (*Il.* XXIII 103–7). In this rare encounter that bridges otherwise separate worlds, both the living person and the soul of the deceased seem unaware of the "rule" preventing nonverbal communication of feelings. In the second episode the *psyche* of Anticlea explains that rule to her son Odysseus, who is dismayed following repeated failed attempts to embrace her;

The sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones  
together,  
and once the spirit [*thymos*] has left the white bones, all  
the rest  
of the body is made subject to the fire's strong fury,  
but the soul flitters out like a dream and flies away.

(*Od.* XI 219–22, transl. R. Lattimore)

The body's decay, accelerated by cremation, signals the end of existence. However, what survives in the shadowy kingdom of the dead seems still to possess a physical consistency, if we imagine it as able to undertake tasks or receive punishment. From the perspective of the living, then, the dead are vain shadows or specters in the afterlife, showing no sign of life but, even though separated from their body, retaining its physical shape.

The fate of a corpse is a source of intense concern. In a dream, Patroclus urges Achilles to carry out the funerary rites quickly. Similarly, Elpenor, Odysseus' companion and the first to greet him on the threshold of Hades, asks that Odysseus not leave his body unlamented and unburied. Anyone who deprives the dead of funeral honors is exposed to divine wrath—which the *psychai* can solicit (*Il.* XXII 358; *Od.* XI 73). Anxious to join forever the community of the dead, they desire to lose consciousness and memory—in stark contrast to the intense awareness, the authentic premonition, that often accompanied the final moments of their life (death of Patroclus: *Il.* XVI 851–57; death of Hector: XXII 355–63). If they were to regain consciousness, they would experience only regret at what they had lost forever with their life. An encounter with a *psyche* teaches both the living witness and Homer's audience that all treatments must focus on the body itself. Stunned and disoriented, in a new existence that seems to exclude happiness, the *psyche* can derive calm resignation from the way the living have laid to rest its corruptible body, the most authentic part of the individual, the part that identifies it most wholly, even when it has become inert matter (*Il.* XXIV 54). The opening of the *Iliad* (I 3–5) refers to the body with a pronoun that appears to give it exactly this status, making a distinction between the *psychai* of the heroes whom Achilles' anger has flung into Hades and *autous* ("themselves": their bodies or, better, their persons), which are left

“as prey to the dogs and all the birds.” Emily Vermeule (1979, p. 118) sums up the contradictory and illogical implications of this idea: “The Greeks understood that the body and the soul parted in death, of course, and they focused on the sorrow of the parting in many epic and lyric verses. They never quite accepted it, however, and, as strongly as any other people, felt that the link endured, which was one of the western world’s great contributions to the argumentative literature about mortal and immortal.”

## 1.2 HADES

*Aides* (*Hades* in Attic Greek), which meant “invisible” according to the ancient etymological interpretation, was the name of the god of the dead. Homer almost always used the name to refer to the god himself, but later it became a metonymic term for his dominion. The soul’s journey to Hades involves a very quick “flight” through the air, followed by entry into the underground dwelling of the most mysterious of Cronus and Rhea’s three sons (among whom sovereignty over the cosmos is divided: Zeus rules the skies, Poseidon the seas, and Hades the nether world, “but earth and high Olympus are common to all three” [*Il.* XV 189–93]). *Iliad* XV 191 describes Hades’ realm as a “cloudy shadow” but, in narrating the clash between the Olympian gods, also describes it as a repugnant place that can be revealed only as a result of the cosmic conflict (*Il.* XX 61–65).

For a living person the route to Hades is rather different. Odysseus’ journey to the most extraordinary and distressing destination a man may reach alive is one leg of his sea voyage. Circe directs him to steer his ship westward until the end of the earth is enclosed by the river Oceanus. Carried across the ocean by the north wind, Boreas—following currents from east to west—eventually it will reach the land of the dead,



ruled over by Hades and Persephone. Circe also describes the landscapes Odysseus will find there (*Od.* X 504–15), drawing a detailed picture (not entirely matched by the subsequent narrative) of the land of the Kimmerians, a place “hidden in fog and cloud” at the edge of the earth (*Od.* XI 14–19). The sorceress speaks of the entrance to the underworld as part gentle, part bitter and impenetrable. The gentle aspects are the beach, where he will ground his ship, and Persephone’s sacred woods of tall poplars and willows that lose their fruit prematurely. Next he should enter far enough to see both the river that separates the living world from Hades (cf. *Il.* VIII 367–69, the Styx; XXIII 71–74, no name given) and a rock where rivers of the underworld, the Pyriphlegethon and the Cocytus (a branch of the Styx), flow into the Acheron. The names of these swirling watercourses are clearly derived from the fire, lamentation, execration, and melancholy associated with mourning.

The underworld has clearly defined borders and is sacred. The water of the Styx is a supreme guarantor of divine oaths (*Il.* XIV 271, XV 36–38). But the landscape is not entirely horrifying. Indeed, its dreamlike atmosphere, like the backdrop of a child’s nightmare, combines with familiar elements of a normal walled city with entrance gates. These “wide” gates (*Il.* XXIII 74; *Od.* XI 571) are often a metonym for the underworld: they invite all to enter but permit none to exit. (The epithet *pylartes* defines the god as one who “keeps the gates locked”: *Il.* VIII 367, XIII 415; *Od.* XI 277.) Furthermore, they are a measure of all that is detestable: “For as I detest the doorways of Death, I detest that man, who / hides one thing in the depths of his heart, and speaks forth another” (*Il.* IX 312–13, transl. R. Lattimore) are Achilles’ words condemning hypocrisy. Odysseus, himself the object of this complaint in the *Iliad*, later echoes Achilles’ sentiment in a truly ironic quotation, when he defends his sincerity to Eumeus (*Od.* XIV 156–57).

A river and a gate, then, mark the frontier between the two worlds, a frontier that can be crossed but is strictly controlled. The comparison with frontiers between earthly dominions suggests an eschatological vision in which death is inescapable, an inherent component of the community life cycle, in which the passing of generations gives meaning to the limits of individual existence.

Homeric epic testifies to this "familiarity" with death. Accompanied by an impassioned love for life, it posits an impassable boundary between the mortal and the immortal as the foundation of the cosmic order. The life span allotted to each individual is predetermined and unchangeable. Hence Patroclus' *psyche* is anxious to complete its transition by crossing the border, which seems to be guarded by the dead themselves, who keep his *psyche* at a distance until burial rites permit it to join them:

Bury me  
as quickly as may be, let me pass through the gates of Hades.  
The souls, the images of dead men, hold me at a distance,  
and will not let me cross the river and mingle among them,  
but I wander as I am by Hades' house of the wide gates.

(Il. XXIII 71–74, transl. R. Lattimore)

The pathetic contrast between Patroclus' desire to shake hands with Achilles one last time and his desire that his cremation be expedited suggests a vision of the afterlife as the only possible destination in the natural separation of the two worlds. The impossibility of leaving Hades is later embodied in descriptions of Cerberus, the dog of Hades. Although Homer doesn't name him (but does mention Heracles' descent to the underworld to capture him: *Il.* VIII 367–68; *Od.* XI 623–24), Hesiod does so and, after alluding to his bronze voice and fifty heads,

describes him as capable of malign cordiality to those arriving but ready to devour any who attempt to leave (*Theogony* 310–12, 767–74).

### 1.3 ELYSIUM

In Homeric poetry, Sourvinou-Inwood (1995) observes not only deep-rooted ideas about destiny beyond death but also indications that a new eschatology has begun to supplant the archaic tradition by which the *psyche* and its residual vitality were understood. New ideas begin to challenge the belief that all who die will share a common destiny in Hades—even though the new perspective pertains to only a chosen few. In book IV of the *Odyssey*, for example, the sea god Proteus prophesied that Menelaus' fate would be radically different from that of his companions Ajax, Agamemnon, and Odysseus:

But for you, Menelaos, O fostered of Zeus, it is not the  
 gods' will  
 that you shall die and go to your end in horse-pasturing  
 Argos,  
 but the immortals will convoy you to the Elysian  
 Field, and the limits of the earth, where fair-haired  
 Rhadamanthys  
 is, and where there is made the easiest life for mortals,  
 for there is no snow, nor much winter there, nor is there ever  
 rain, but always the stream of the Ocean sends up breezes  
 of the West Wind blowing briskly for the refreshment of  
 mortals.  
 This, because Helen is yours and you are son-in-law  
 therefore  
 to Zeus.

(*Od.* IV 561–69, transl. R. Lattimore)

Menelaus' promised survival in an apparent Eden—a privilege reserved for him by the gods because he married Helen, daughter of Zeus—contrasts sharply with situations in which not even a blood relative of the supreme god escapes the destiny of death (Sarpedon in *Il.* XVI 431–61; Heracles in *Il.* XVIII 117–19). In the *Odyssey*, Athena, disguised as Mentor, reminds Telemachus of the gods' impotence in the face of human death (III 236–38). Menelaus, however, will be saved from death and, according to other sources, other heroes too will enjoy an alternative destiny. Hesiod, for example, says that for at least some of the fourth race—heroes who fought at Thebes and Troy and are defined as “demigods”—Zeus has reserved survival on the Isles of the Blessed at the edge of the world, marked by ideal weather, like that of Elysium (*Works and Days* 157–68). According to the growing new eschatology, at least some heroes will elude death.

There has been much debate as to the origin of the word and concept of *Elysium*. Burkert's attractive hypothesis (1961) considers it, rather than an earlier Minoan loan word, a Greek term derived from the adjective *enelysios* (struck by lightning), which might derive from a misunderstanding of an oral epic formula describing the sacralization reserved for anybody killed by a thunderbolt. That the Cretan judge and legislator Rhadamanthys achieves Elysium and his brother Minos administers justice among the shadows of Hades in the *Nekyia* (*Od.* XI 568–71) seems to provide further support for the origin of the concept of Elysium in Minoan Crete. But this motif may be just a “later transformation” of a Minoan belief that rulers retained their high status in the afterlife (Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, pp. 87–88). The presence of Minoan sovereigns in a land of the Dead (Elysium or Hades) is only one of many features of a particularly Greek understanding of the afterlife that emerged in the eighth century, when the hero cult was developed and the Homeric poems were composed

in their final form. In the *Odyssey*, Calypso offers to make Odysseus immortal if he will stay with her rather than return to his wife (*Od.* V 208–10, XXIII 333–36), and the *Nekyia* contains two unusual compromises by which mortality is associated with survival: first, the Dioscuri live and die underground on alternate days (*Od.* XI 300–304), and second, only a double of Heracles dies: his *eidolon* remains in Hades (where it becomes Odysseus' last interlocutor), but *autos* (he himself, his physical person) is rewarded with apotheosis and an eternal life on Olympus, where he marries Hebe, the goddess of youth (*Od.* XI 601–26). The latter fusion of two mythical traditions (XI 602–4) may have resulted from an adaptation in the sixth-century (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995), by which time both the divinization of Heracles and the epic fact of his death—paradigmatic of the destiny shared by all mortals (cf. *Il.* XVIII 117–19)—were well established. Alternatively, by contrasting theoretically irreconcilable destinies—Hesiod also speaks of Heracles' apotheosis (*Theogony* 950–55; fr. 25, 24–33; fr. 229, 7–13 Merkelbach and West)—the *Odyssey* shows its protagonist, his actions, and other paradigmatic mythical figures in terms that resist any reassuring or univocal reading (Schein, 2002).

Either way a variety of examples indicate a belief that some exceptional individuals escape death. It is also clear that the extraordinary fate of these individuals is not the gods' reward for personal merit or ethical qualities. The result of arrogance and of crimes against which the *Odyssey's* narrator warns us is death, not otherworldly punishment. Consider, for example, the companions of Odysseus who eat oxen sacred to the Sun, or Aegisthus, who kills Agamemnon. The great criminals in Hades are different. They committed no ordinary transgressions against mortals; rather, they dared offend the dignity of the gods. Their attempts to exceed the limits of human nature put the whole cosmic order at risk. Tantalus, who abused the privilege of being a guest at the

gods' table, violated the division between human and divine in the sphere of food. In attempting to rape Leto, whom Zeus loved, Tityus did the same in the sphere of sex. Sisyphus, wishing to escape death, attempted to eliminate the barrier between the two worlds.

From its very beginning, Elysium has been reserved for the elect few. But it is not set up in opposition to Hades, a world of eternal punishment. Retributive justice does not affect the dead until later. Only at the end of the fifth century (in Euripides' later tragedies, for example) does the concept of internal purity become more closely associated with physical purity. Only then, in intellectual speculation if not in common morality, does ethical responsibility gain visibility.

#### 1.4 THE GODS IN HADES AND GUIDES ON THE VOYAGE TO THE UNDERWORLD

When the *Iliad* mentions the realms of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, it states that the earth and mount Olympus, which border the three cosmic regions (sky, sea, and underworld), are under the joint sovereignty of the three brothers (*Il.* XV 193). The lord of the dead, however, is almost never seen outside his underground kingdom, and in the few stories that focus on him, his personality remains mysterious, unlike that of his brothers or of other Olympian gods.

The most complex episode in which Hades appears forms part of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. It involves the rape of Persephone-Kore. Without consulting Demeter (her mother), Zeus (her father) gives Persephone to Hades to be his wife. In his golden chariot, Hades-Aidoneus emerges from a crevice in the ground and drives away with the virgin (who had been picking flowers in a meadow) to make her queen of the underworld. The girl calls to her father for help, but in vain. And in vain Demeter searches land and sea for her daughter.

Overcome by anger and pain, Demeter, who is goddess of the harvest, prevents the crops from growing. Only after Zeus has established that Persephone will stay in the underworld for only one-third of the year, and for the remaining two-thirds will be reunited with her mother and other deities in the sunlight, is humanity saved from the threat of extinction. The double life that Persephone now must lead, between the worlds of the dead and the living, appears as the mythical incarnation of the agricultural cycle, the periodic death and rebirth of the harvests. The celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries mirrors this cycle. (The part of the *Hymn to Demeter* that tells of Demeter's stay at Eleusis describes the origin of the rite; cf. § 2.2.)

Hades is not considered a god who judges the dead for their actions while alive. Such an idea does make an occasional appearance in poetic imagery, particularly when he is depicted as the chthonic counterpart of Zeus, the supreme god of justice (Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 228–31; *Eumenides* 273–75). The term “underworld Zeus” alludes to such a role (*Il.* IX 457; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 465) and is given particular emphasis in Aeschylus: “the underworld Zeus, Zeus the great host of the dead” (*Suppliants* 156ff.). However, Hades' usual attitude when welcoming the *psychai* is absolute neutrality. No offerings are made to him. He “gives not way, and is pitiless, / and therefore he among all the gods is most hateful to mortals” (*Il.* IX 158–59). Yet he is *polydegmon* (Host of Many) repeatedly in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. In the classical period he takes on the alternative title Pluto, a name connected with *ploutos* (wealth), reflective of his more benevolent roles as guardian of the riches hidden in the bosom of the earth and as sovereign of growth and prosperity.

When Persephone, Demeter's adolescent daughter, becomes Hades' consort and queen of the dead, she takes on the epithet *epaine* (dread; *Il.* IX 457; *Od.* X 491, 534, 564). In worship she

is closely linked to her mother. They are simply referred to as "the two goddesses." Homeric epic ignores her as *Kore* (maiden); that Hades raped her is mentioned only by Hesiod (*Theogony* 913–14), and Homer does not suggest that she would leave her underworld throne. Her marriage to Hades, a common metaphor for a girl's premature death, marks a point of no return. She does return to the earth annually, as told in the *Hymn to Demeter*, but because Hades gave her a pomegranate seed to eat, she is bound to him and the underworld forever. Thus the myth highlights the osmosis between the worlds of the living and the dead.

The first guide for souls on their journey to the house of Hades is Hermes, god of limits and transgression, messenger of the gods, and protector of heroes. He accompanies Heracles on his journey to the underworld to capture Cerberus (*Od.* XI 625–26) and, on Zeus' orders, descends into the underworld to persuade Hades to let Persephone return to the light and to her angry, inconsolable mother (*Hymn to Demeter* 335ff.). At the same time, however, the Homeric poems show that in this "system" of afterlife beliefs, the risky, mysterious journey across the border separating the living from the dead requires no accompaniment: the *psychai* are independent in their swift flight to the river and the gate of Hades. The one exception occurs in the second *Nekyia* (*Od.* XXIV 1–204)—an episode long thought to be spurious on account of various linguistic, stylistic, and compositional features—when Hermes summons the souls of the slain suitors and, while their bodies remain unburied in Odysseus' palace, leads them to the gates of the underworld. He carries a golden wand—the symbol "with which he bewitches the eyes of men, / those that he wants, and others he awakens from sleep" (cf. *Il.* XXIV 343–44; *Od.* V 47–48, XXIV 3–5)—and the *psychai* follow him, fluttering and screeching like bats. The landscape of the afterlife described here is somewhat different from that in the



first *Nekyia*. Apart from the ocean current and the field of asphodel where the souls dwell (mentioned also in *Od.* XI 539 and 573), there are a white rock, the gates of the Sun, and the people of dreams (XXIV 11–13). This is the first time that Hermes was assigned the role of *psychopompos* (guide of souls) in journeys to the underworld, but the assignment occurred frequently in the classical era (Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* 2; *Eumenides* 91; Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1144–46; Sophocles, *Ajax* 831–32; Euripides, *Alcestis* 743–44). On Attic white-ground *lekythoi* (small funeral vases with oblong bodies, designed to contain fragrant oils) of the fifth century, Hermes is often depicted accompanying the deceased to Charon's boat, which waits at the riverbank. The second *Nekyia* seems to illustrate an intermediate stage between Homer's portrait of migration without a "soul-leader" and that of the fifth century, when Hermes is joined by the underworld ferryman. In the later passages, burial and correctly conducted funeral rites no longer appear to be prerequisite for entry into Hades. In the absence of coherence in the archaic epic, establishing a precise chronology of developments in eschatological belief is a challenge.

The final book of the *Odyssey* is rightly considered a thematically necessary conclusion, but the unsatisfactory juxtaposition of the scene in Hades and events on the earth evokes age-old suspicions regarding lines 1–204. Sourvinou-Inwood (1995; cf. Rohde, 1925, pp. 8–9), for example, maintains that a late seventh-century or early sixth-century poet took the conversation between spirits from another context and combined it both with the passage narrating the suitors' descent to Hades accompanied by Hermes and with parts of the original ending. The underworld scene showing the destinies of the Greek heroes Agamemnon, Achilles, and Odysseus would have occurred, incongruously, at the same time as the scenes in Ithaca. However we judge this hypothesis, the epilogue

remains problematic, given its deviation from the usual Homeric accounts of the voyage to Hades.

The influence of Homeric poetry on later symbolism is also clear in relation to two other divine figures, Hypnos (sleep) and Thanatos (death), who appear on pottery representing the “good death” of a warrior. Images of the brothers transporting a corpse symbolize the bestowal of exceptional divine favor on the deceased. These images are inspired by the passage in the *Iliad* in which Zeus, at Hera’s suggestion, sends the brothers to Troy to collect the corpse of his son Sarpedon (who has been killed by Patroclus) and carry it to his homeland, Lycia, where it will be given a funeral and the honor of a burial by his relatives (*Il.* XVI 453–57, 666–83). The famous Euphronius krater—a late sixth century B.C. red-figure bowl from Cerveteri now at the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, Rome, which portrays the brothers as winged, bearded warriors preparing to lift Sarpedon’s bloody corpse—is the prototype for subsequent scenes depicting this pair. This Homeric scene originally inspired images of the “heroic” death of a citizen in war who is brought home and buried at a public funeral. But gradually, and particularly during the fifth century, these scenes became disassociated from death in combat. On the Attic white-ground *lekythoi* the body that Hypnos and Thanatos lay in front of a tombstone is sometimes an adolescent, or even a woman. And sometimes the deceased is accompanied by the other journey-facilitators, Hermes and Charon (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995; Oakley, 2004). The mythical event thus dissolves into a decorative metaphor for the deceased’s journey to his/her final resting place.

The old boatman who ferries the souls of the dead across the river—usually the Acheron, or a deep lake of its waters—does not appear in literature or figurative art until the fifth century B.C. Pausanias (a traveler and geographer of the

second century A.D.) describes a painting by Polygnotus depicting Odysseus' descent to Hades that decorated one wall of the *lesche* (meeting room) built by the Cnidians at Delphi in the second quarter of the fifth century. Charon is at the oars. Pausanias (X 28, 2) says Polygnotus was inspired by the lost epic poem *Minyad* to depict Charon as an old man. The two lines of the poem that Pausanias cites, in which Theseus and Pirithous search for the old ferryman in order to descend alive to Hades, are also the first mention of Charon in literature. Charon's presence articulates the *psyche's* transition to Hades: crossing the river or lake constitutes the final and definitive stage in the soul's journey: its arrival at a new status after the initial separation and a period of marginality. Ferryman of the dead also exist in other cultures, but even though the historian Diodorus Siculus (I 92, 23) hypothesized that the name Charon was an Egyptian loan, no evidence supports that hypothesis. The *obolos* (silver coin) used to pay for the crossing receives occasional mention toward the end of the fifth century. Aristophanes alludes to it playfully (*Frogs* 139–40, 269–70) in 405 B.C., but the oldest reference comes from an Attic white-ground *lekythos* (ca. 420 B.C.) housed at the National Museum in Athens: a young man with a sad expression sits on the base of a stele with a coin clasped in his fingers, a fee for Charon, who approaches with his ferry on the right of the image, while on the left a woman carries a basket containing the funeral offerings (Oakley, 2004). In the fourth century, the *obolos* sometimes appears in the mouth of the deceased, a custom that would become more common during the Hellenistic period.

A passage in Euripides tells us that, like Cerberus, Charon must prevent souls from escaping the underworld. As much as he is a guide, he is also an intransigent custodian of the border between the two worlds (*Alcestis* 357–62). Admetus imagines he can save Alcestis by descending to Hades, like

Orpheus, to enchant the gods and move them to pity, but Charon appears as one of the guardians who could prevent him from departing the underworld with his wife. Just before her death, when describing hallucinations in which chthonic powers wait for her and urge her on impatiently, Alcestis outlines a journey to the underworld in which burial and funerary rites are no longer, as in the Homeric poems, a prerequisite for passage. "I see the two-oared boat in the lake. Charon, the ferryman of the dead, his hand on the boat pole, calls me now. 'Why are you tarrying? Make haste, you hinder my going!' He speaks impatiently, urging me on with these words" (*Alcestis* 252–57, transl. D. Kovacs). See also the chorus farewell commending Alcestis to the admiration of Hades and Charon (*Alcestis* 435–44) and expressing the desire that a boat capable of negotiating the waters of the underworld extract her from the shadowy dwelling and from the currents of the Cocytus (*Alcestis* 455–59).

The means of travel that Alcestis imagines in her delirium reflects the eschatological understanding of the classical period as seen in tragedy and popular superstition. Charon was perceived as ambivalent: benevolent in assisting souls, but merciless in guarding the border of underworld. On the Attic white-ground *lekythoi* he appears in two distinct iconographies, sometimes as a middle-aged or elderly man, reassuring and kind-hearted, and sometimes as disagreeable, sinister, and roughly dressed.

That the theme of burial is central to the dramatic action of many fifth-century Attic tragedies is consistent with the prevailing idea that the *geras thanonton* (dead man's honor), which the living have a duty to provide, comes from the funeral ritual and interment. But, although beliefs about the afterlife were enriched with guides for the *psychai*, the archaic epic rule that successful passage comes from completed rites and burial (as Patroclus affirms in *Il.* XXIII 71–74) seems entirely forgotten.

The effect on the destinies of *psychai* in the underworld if rites are not completed receives no attention either in the long debate in the *Ajax* about the suicidal hero's right to burial or in the *Antigone*—a Sophoclean tragedy concerned with the sacrosanctity of the rule by which a family must bury its dead. Sophocles refers only to the popular wisdom of a moral fable, making Teucer warn Menelaus: "Man, do not wrong the dead; for, if you do, rest assured that you will come to harm" (*Ajax* 1154–55, transl. R. Jebb). When Antigone describes "the unwritten and unfailing statutes given us by the gods" (*Antigone* 454ff., transl. R. Jebb), she emphasizes above all the contamination caused by leaving a body unburied, exposed to the shame of becoming food for dogs and birds. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the ghost of Polydorus, Priam's son—whom Polymnestor, king of Thrace, had killed and thrown into the sea—appears in the prologue asking to be buried. The *eidolon* affirms that the chthonian powers have granted him the opportunity to visit his mother, Hecuba, in a dream, in order to urge her to take care of his final rites (lines 49ff.). Evidently he has attracted their attention even though his body is still floating among the waves. Only later does the current yield it up, on a beach in the Thracian Chersonese.

Virgil, Homer's heir and emulator, combines these beliefs. He revives the epic prohibition on one's crossing the Acheron if his/her body has not been buried. Using this criterion, an old and horrifying Charon selects, from among souls gathered on the riverbank, those he will ferry across. Aeneas' helmsman, Palinurus—who is without burial—asks in vain that he be allowed to draw close to the embarkation point (*Aeneid* VI 370–76). The shadows of the unburied, who have no hope of "changing the divine fates," even with their prayers, will be ferried across only after they have waited and wandered for one hundred years (*Aeneid* VI 298–330).

## CHAPTER 2



# A REVOLUTION OF HOPE

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the heroic epic, escape from death is made possible in the collective memory of the glory conferred on the fighter by the song about his deeds, so that “as much as it is humanly possible, he escapes the destruction of death” (Vernant 1991, p. 60; cf. § 5.1). An alternative means of escape is personal survival, in which individual memory challenges the annihilation of death. Etymologically the Greek term *aletheia* (truth) means “absence of oblivion”; thus “to remember” is in some sense “to know the truth.” If, upon arriving in Hades, each *psyche* remembered its origin, experiences, and actions, these memories would enable the individual to transcend an afterlife without consciousness or memory. Certain mystical sects and thinkers outside the popular Greek tradition took up this idea. In particular, Orphic eschatology assigns a key role to memory and even inverts conventional understanding: Hades is no longer a desolate region of oblivion; instead Earth is seen as the place of trials and punishment.

In the Greek religious panorama, mystery cults acquired particular importance because they attempted to “domesticate” death, rendering it understandable and giving it meaning through individual participation in esoteric ceremonies

that afforded the initiate teachings, or simply emotional experiences, that became the bases of new existential certainties. These rites were referred to as *teletai* and *orgia*, but the word usually used to describe the various cults that coexisted with the public religion is *mysteria*. What these mystery cults had in common was their advocacy of the principle that the individual seeking more personal and direct access to the divine would find in the mystery rituals a temporary escape from the cultural system of the *polis* (city-state). These rituals were characterized by prohibitions, particularly against the publicizing of sacred actions, words, or objects revealed to initiates. As a consequence of this secrecy, creating a clear picture of the cults is not possible. But it is evident that the Eleusinian mysteries—officially recognized and promoted in Athens, although confined to a space on the edge, symbolically outside the city—must be regarded as distinct (at least in the classical period) from phenomena such as the cult of Dionysus, god of folly and bacchic frenzy, which involve a supernatural experience problematic for civic religion. The doctrines of an Orphic lifestyle and of the Pythagorean sects are different again.

## 2.2 THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

The Eleusinian mysteries gained unequaled fame and spread far and wide, in part because of Athens' prestige. Eleusis, a village about twenty kilometers from the city, had been annexed to the Attic territories in the archaic period, and from that time Athens exercised political control over the rituals, even attaching its own myths to the liturgy. However the priestly families of Eleusis retained religious control. The cult's foundational myth of Demeter and Kore helped institutionalize the agricultural cycle and cereal cultivation. The rites were performed to improve the fertility of the fields. And

by associating immediate material wealth (good harvests) with the promise of happiness for the initiated after death, the rituals also embody an important eschatological principle:

Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites,  
but the uninitiate who has no share in them never  
has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.

(*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480–82, transl. H. Foley)

Demeter taught the rites to the Eleusinians in return for the hospitality she had received from their lord, Celeus, when, angered by Hades' abduction of her daughter, Persephone, she had fled Olympus. Initially she attempted to express her thanks by making Celeus' newborn son, Demophon, immortal. The incognito goddess, entrusted with the baby's care, was burning his mortal spirit away in the family hearth each night, but before she could complete the process, his terrified mother interrupted her. Thereupon this individual gift was replaced by a collective gift. Demophon did not achieve immortality, but he was symbolically the first initiate. Having been held in the immortal arms of the divine nurse, he would obtain a hero's honors. And thereafter every person in Eleusis (and any other person wishing to do so), could learn the rites, thereby changing his/her afterlife without affecting his/her mortality (*Hymn to Demeter* 273–74, 473–82). This mythical event at the foundation of the Eleusinian mysteries has a paradigmatic value: the distinctive feature of archaic wisdom—that humans may never conquer death and achieve divinity—is joined with a new hope offered to the initiated, a privilege that reduces the fear of death.

In a fragment referring to the Eleusinian mysteries, Pindar links the initiates' otherworldly happiness, both in anticipation of death and in death itself, to an understanding gained



during the rites. (The highest form of consecration was *epopteia* ["contemplation"], a degree of visionary insight that could be reached no sooner than a year after the first initiation.) The content of these rites remains vague, but we understand that they embodied a convergence of final destination with divine origin, present in man because of his natural affinity with the gods (as Pindar points out in *Nemean* VI 1–7) but realized only in death:

Blessed is he who has seen this and thus goes beneath  
the earth;  
he knows the end of life, he knows the beginning given  
by Zeus.

(fr. 137 Maehler)

In his lost tragedy *Triptolemus*, Sophocles expresses the initiates' *makarismos* (eulogy of happiness) in even clearer terms:

Since thrice fortunate are those among mortals who have  
seen these rites before going to Hades; for they alone  
have life there, while others have every kind of misery.

(fr. 837 Radt, transl. Lloyd-Jones)

Initiation into the mysteries, attained by a ritual course of purification, fasting, and sacrifice, did not change one's social condition or lifestyle. Its sole advantage was a privileged destiny, the chance to become one of the elect, among whom were such illustrious heroes as Heracles and the Dioscuri. Having been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries before descending to Hades to capture Cerberus, Heracles won Persephone's favor before entering her realm (Euripides, *Heracles* 610–13).

The rites were open to all, including women and slaves, but non-Athenians first had to be adopted by a citizen. By positing equality in religious universality, this policy eliminated not only internal social differences but also mistrust of outsiders. The main chorus in Aristophanes' late fifth-century comedy *Frogs* consists of initiates in the Eleusinian mysteries who have the task of guiding Dionysus on his voyage to the underworld, from which he was to bring the late poet Euripides to Athens. In a comic reversal of roles, the initiates educate the god because only they possess the knowledge required to achieve privileged status in the after-life. In the clean, safe space between life and death—on the road leading to Hades' palace gates (lines 161–63)—they worship the Eleusinian gods Iacchus (sometimes identified with Dionysus) and Demeter and enjoy both perpetual light and a pleasant natural setting among myrtle groves and carpets of roses. However, the required rituals do not, by themselves, enable the initiate to achieve a destiny different from that of the other deceased; one must also exercise moral rectitude. The following lines from the *Frogs*, incised on a small Hellenistic altar in Rhodes, express the importance both of justice in social relations and of the purity gained through initiation (Cole, 2003, pp. 197–99):

For on us alone  
do the sun and the divine  
daylight shine, all of us who  
have been initiated  
and who maintained a reverent  
manner toward strangers  
and private citizens.

(Aristophanes, *Frogs* 454–59, transl. S. G. Cole)

The promised privilege in life beyond death, present from the beginning in Eleusinian rites, gains emphasis over time, as the cult is freed from Athenian politics. Cicero testifies to this, saying of the initiations, "Thus have we truly come to know the principles of life, and we have received the doctrine not only for a happy life, but also for a death supported by a better hope" (*Laws* II 14, 36). The epitaph of an Eleusinian priest dating from around A.D. 230 also sums up the eschatological message imparted to initiates during sacred nights: "He said that the mystery from the blessed ones is beautiful: death is not an evil for mortals but a benediction" (*Inscriptiones Graecae* II 3661).

### 2.3 DIONYSIAN INITIATIONS

The role of eschatological expectations in the rites of Dionysian initiatory congregations has been debated at length. The very nature of the god complicates efforts to define bacchic esoterism: Dionysus is the "other"; he questions the established order. Even when the cult had been recognized officially by the public religion, he challenged all categories, definitions, and regulations. Euripides' *Bacchae* describes the ecstasy associated with ritual regression through *omophagia* (consumption of raw meat) after *diasparagmos* (dismemberment), in which initiates pursued, attacked, and tore apart live animals. In the process, participants escaped into a golden age in which living creatures intermingled in fraternal promiscuity: "The orgy culminates in liberation from the ties of the empirical individual, from the conditions of everyday existence, and this new state is called *mania* 'madness'" (Colli 1977, p. 19). However, when the chorus of *Bacchae* intones the *makarismos* (declaration of blessedness), proclaiming the happiness of the initiate in a formula reminiscent of the Eleusinian model, that happiness seems to be based solely on religious experience,

and, unlike the Eleusinian rites, the Dionysian rites make no promise regarding the afterlife:

O blessed the man who,  
happy in knowing the gods' rites,  
makes his life pure  
and joins his soul to the worshipful band,  
performing bacchic rites upon the mountains,  
with cleansings the gods approve:  
he performs the sacred mysteries  
of Mother Cybele of the mountains,  
and shaking the bacchic wand up and down,  
his head crowned with ivy,  
he serves Dionysus.

(Euripides, *Bacchae* 72–82, transl. D. Kovacs)

Because this excerpt contains a feature characteristic of the Dionysian mystery cults, the syncretism that makes it difficult to distinguish them fully from other forms of initiation, we cannot exclude the possibility that bacchic initiations contemplated eschatological ideas just because they promised liberation from anxiety and worldly suffering through the ritual consumption of wine and the ecstatic “trance.”

Euripides' mention of the Great Phrygian Mother reveals the tendency of the Dionysian cult to merge with others (cf. Euripides, *Helen* 1353–65; Holzhausen, 2008). With time, religious congregations outside Attica adopted Dionysian language and rites. They alternated between aristocratic and popular orientations. Sometimes they were linked to the *polis* (Vernant, 1990); at other times they expressed the political isolation of smaller groups or of individuals. The Greeks later associated Dionysism with the so-called Thracian mysteries of Sabazius, and Orphism adopted the Dionysian myth in a

modified form (Scarpi, 2002). In light of these combinations, we must recognize the limits of our ability to describe the Dionysian phenomenon. We cannot, for example, affirm or deny the existence of a Dionysian eschatology in the fifth century, although the existence of the *mania* does indicate a new means of understanding, an alternative to everyday experience. And in Euripides' representation we witness the convergence of orgy and mystery: because the fury of the Maenads (possessed followers) "is a holy cleansing, the immersion in animal vitality is a contemplative detachment from life itself" (Colli, 1977, p. 374). But ultimately, because initiates were bound to secrecy regarding the rites and all privileges gained through them (Euripides, *Bacchae* 471–74), we can offer only simple hypotheses, based on enigmatic allusions in the *Bacchae*, regarding the form and content of the Dionysian mysteries (Seaford, 1981).

Even though verbal expressions of happiness beyond death are absent from the classical period, Dionysian eschatology is nevertheless depicted on vases and reliefs. In these, Dionysus is portrayed as a god of the underworld and, as a result, is often mistaken for Pluto (Metzger, 1944–45). In the late Hellenistic and Imperial ages, Bacchic scenes on funerary monuments increasingly show that those who aspire to a permanent Dionysian identity receive it in the afterlife. The Dionysian follower appears in the god's eternal retinue, or even as a second Dionysus, having reached apotheosis and become identified with one of the god's mythical roles (Henrichs, 1985). The scene on an Apulian volute krater attributed to the Darius Painter (ca. 380 B.C., fig. 1) seems to show that Dionysus has a special mission in the underworld. Hades' palace is depicted as a small temple-like structure flanked by ionic columns; Cerberus is chained to one of the columns; and Hades sits upon his throne with Persephone beside him. Hades is shaking the young Dionysus' right hand, a gesture

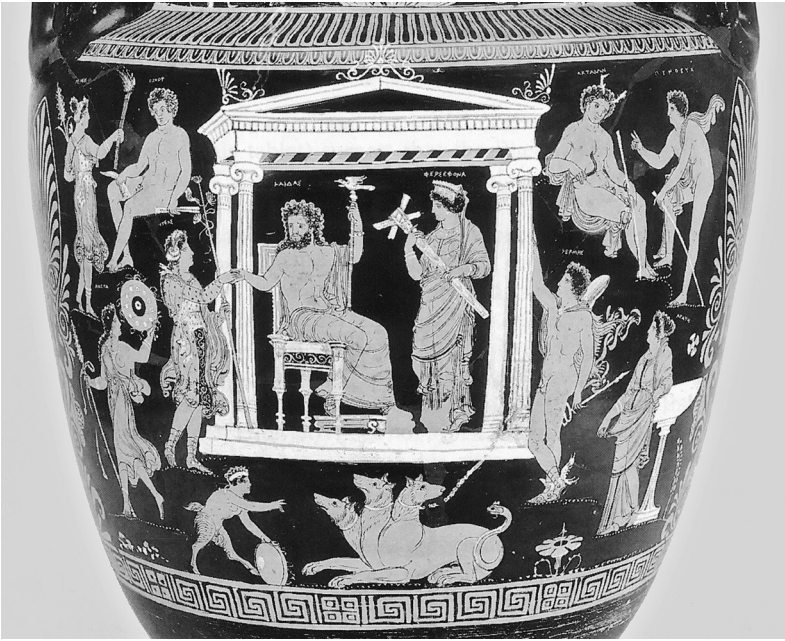


Figure 1. Apulian volute krater by the Darius Painter, c. 380 B.C. This funerary krater depicting Dionysus clasping the hand of Hades in the underworld is the first artistic illustration of soteriological doctrines alluded to in ancient Orphic sources. Courtesy Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio.

of welcome and alliance. Dionysus is accompanied by two Maenads with drums and torches, a satyr, and a *paniskos* (small Pan), who is playing with Cerberus. To the right of the building, symmetrically opposite Dionysus, Hermes stands as witness to the pact between the two gods. Behind him, with Actaeon, are Agave and Pentheus, Dionysus' Theban aunt and cousin, whom he punished for refusing to recognize his divinity. They might symbolize those excluded from the happiness reserved for the initiated and devoted, represented by the Dionysian retinue on the other side (Johnston and McNiven 1996; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal, 2008, pp. 291–93).

In Euripides' lost tragedy *Cretans*, the chorus, composed of followers of the cult of Zeus Idaeus, mention the *omophagia* and describe their religious experiences as including the rites of Zagreus, of the Mountain Mother, and of other mystery cults. It is difficult to know whether they are describing a gradual initiation into a variety of cults or the poet is deliberately combining distinct rituals in a syncretistic complex (Holzhausen, 2008). Either way the result is an unusual juxtaposition of Dionysiac symbols (a meal of raw meat, night wanderings, and the title *bakchos*) with apparently Orphic features (abstention from sexual activity and from food that was once alive—the vegetarian diet representing rejection of the violence and bloodshed implicit in animal sacrifice, which is at the heart of the *polis* religion—and the requirement to dress in white). All these features, contradictory though they seem, indicate the initiate's choice to live a "pure life" (Euripides, fr. 472 Kannicht, 9ff.). A similar syncretistic mixture of Dionysism and Orphism, in which the consumption of meat no longer seems to be prohibited, appears in a mid-third-century B.C. papyrus fragment found at Gurob (in the Egyptian Fayyûm region). It combines instructions for animal sacrifice with divine invocations typical of the Orphic tradition, and it mentions symbols of the myth of Dionysus Zagreus (Scarpi, 2002, pp. 404–405; Graf and Johnston 2007, pp. 188–89).

We are uncertain when the Orphic and Dionysian rites began to share certain features relating to initiation, purification, and after-death salvation, but Plato's motto, "Many are the thyrsus-bearers, but few are the *bakchoi*"—a reference to Orpheus' enigmatic language used to announce a special destiny for the initiated in Hades (*Phaedo* 69c)—demonstrates that already in the classical period the devotees of Dionysus (the thyrsus-bearers) included a number of small groups (the true *bakchoi*) and that only to them could Orpheus

direct his message of salvation (Graf and Johnston 2007, pp. 143, 159).

#### 2.4 THE BACCHIC GOLD TABLETS, PINDAR, AND OTHER "ORPHIC" EVIDENCE

Gold-leaf tablets found in tombs in Thessaly, Macedonia, Crete, and Southern Italy (Thurii, ancient Sybaris; Petelia, near Kroton; and Hipponion, or Vibo Valentia) are the most interesting evidence of hope that a privileged destiny in Hades might be won by initiation into mystery doctrines—apparently Dionysian but strongly influenced by Orphism. These slim leaves, just a few centimeters square, are inscribed with formulae in hexameter or rhythmic prose, roughly written and with several mistakes in meter and orthography. They convey instructions for the deceased, such as the route to take on the journey to the underworld and “passwords” to say to the gods to show that he/she has achieved purification. Others are addressed to the dead, congratulating him/her on the happiness that awaits initiates. Despite many similarities and repeated formulae, the texts of the tablets are by no means homogeneous. Günther Zuntz (1971) divides them into two categories, both influenced by Pythagorean thought. In the first group, consisting of texts from the two burials at Thurii, the soul approaches the gods of the underworld with the expectation that he/she will be freed from the cycle of reincarnation. The second group, which includes all other texts, consists of guides to the afterlife, with specific instructions for the deceased about what he/she must say to the gods.

Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli (2003) altered and refined this classification. Because tablets found later combine the characteristics of both Zuntz groups and show connections with Dionysian mysteries, he proposed a division based on soteriological doctrine. In the first group—including the tablets



from Magna Graecia (except Thurii), one from Entella (Sicily), and those from Pharsalus (Thessaly) and Crete—a mystical formula for recognition is proposed to the deceased: “I am a son of Earth and starry Sky.” Hearing this, the guards of Hades will allow him/her to approach the Spring of Mnemosyne (Memory), who is personified as a god in the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition. Then, with the memory of his/her mystical experiences and doctrine, the initiate can avoid the painful cycle of reincarnation. With it he achieves a better fate, vaguely described as heroic happiness, which seems to maintain a firm distinction between mortality and immortality. In the landscape of Hades, the first spring (on the right) is that of oblivion. The drinker, forgetting everything, is reborn in a new body, continuing the sequence of mortal incarnations. The earliest example of this group, from a female tomb at Hipponion dated near the end of the fifth century B.C., is also the most extensive and precise:

This is the work [mound?] of Memory, when you are  
about to die  
down to the well-built house of Hades. There is a spring  
at the right side  
and standing by it a white cypress.  
Descending to it, the souls of the dead refresh themselves.  
Do not even go near this spring!  
Ahead you will find from the Lake of Memory,  
cold water pouring forth; there are guards before it.  
They will ask you, with astute wisdom,  
what you are seeking in the darkness of murky Hades.  
Say, “I am a son of Earth and starry Sky,  
I am parched with thirst and am dying; but quickly  
grant me  
cold water from the Lake of Memory to drink.”

And they will announce you to the Chthonian King,  
and they will grant you to drink from the Lake of Memory.  
And you, too, having drunk, will go along the sacred  
road on which other  
glorious initiates and *bakchoi* travel.

(Graf and Johnston 2007, n. 1, transl. S. I. Johnston)

The second Pugliese Carratelli group, all from the fourth century, includes the tablets from Thurii and two, shaped like ivy leaves, that were placed on the breast of a woman in her tomb at Pélinna, in Thessaly. These mention Persephone and other gods of the underworld to whom the initiate must declare that he/she belongs to the race of immortals and has paid the price of his/her offenses against justice. The two almost identical texts found on the tablets from Pélinna demonstrate the value placed on these gold leaves as magical protection. In addition, these amulets testified to the dead woman's beliefs and, possibly, her initiation into a Bacchic group. (A terracotta statuette of a Maenad was found among her funerary equipment.) In one example from Thurii, the divinization of the deceased is compared with the good fortune of a kid (an animal sacred to Dionysus) that has fallen into milk (Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 3, 4–6): “‘You have become a god instead of a mortal. A kid you fell into milk. / Rejoice, rejoice (*chaire*).’ Journey on the right-hand road / to holy meadows and groves of Persephone.” Another tablet from Thurii promises immortality and might allude to the cycle (*kyklos*) of reincarnation, an Orphico-Pythagorean concept later taken up by Plato. His vision of the other world, however, included an element of ethical judgment—reward or expiation would follow from assessed merits or faults—and he formulated this vision into a complex philosophic project.

I have flown out of the heavy, difficult circle (*kyklos*),  
 I have approached the longed-for crown with swift feet,  
 I have sunk beneath the breast of the Lady, the  
     Chthonian Queen,  
 I have approached the longed-for crown with swift feet.  
 "Happy and blessed, you will be a god instead of  
     a mortal."  
 A kid I fell into milk.

(Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 5, 5–10)

The enigmatic conclusion here seems to draw on a metaphor of spiritual rebirth, to signal the blissful state that the *mystes* (initiate) attains when he/she, like the fortunate kid, falls upon mystic nourishment, the milk of happiness. Persephone's relationship with the deceased is then described as maternal care offered to a hungry baby. And the explicit reference to divinization signals a break from the "Pythian" theology that dominated fifth- and sixth-century B.C. religiosity, when the Delphic motto "Know thyself" ("Recognize your limits as a mortal") emphasized the boundary between men and gods. This description of the final destiny of the initiates most distinguishes the latter group of tablets from the first, which focuses on liberation from the burden of worldly existence and stresses the importance of remembering our heavenly origin rather than our earthly one, albeit without aspiring to become divine. To the extent that the promised liberation is through divinization, however, some tablets signal a revolutionary—albeit eccentric and isolated—change in the traditional Greek religious system (Burkert, 1985, p. 295).

Other scholars do not consider the two groups of tablets to be from different religious environments; rather, they judge them to be different stages and perspectives in a single sequence relating to the voyage to the underworld, each a

vade mecum addressing a client's particular needs on the journey beyond the grave. The authoritative voice in these tablets, imparting orders and giving advice to the deceased so that he or she does not commit a fatal error, could be that of the mythical hero Orpheus, who, prompted by grief at his wife Eurydice's untimely death, descended to Hades hoping that the magic of song would free her. Of the heroes who went to the underworld alive, he is the only one believed to have authored theological-theogonic poetry (at least after the end of the sixth century B.C.) and to institute Bacchic-Dionysian rites (in which the poetry evidently was used; Bernabé, 2000; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal, 2008, pp. 182–83). Furthermore, early in the classical period, a verse narrative of his journey to the underworld, circulating under his name, seems to have contained theological and eschatological revelations (Riedweg, 1996). This poetic version of the journey may be the source of formulae used in the gold burial tablets (Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal, 2008, pp. 231–33). Even in tablets lacking any explicit assimilation to divinity, however, the mystical statement “I am a son of Earth and starry Sky” seems to refer to traditional beliefs about divine nature (Hesiod, *Theogony* 105–106), which include the origin of mankind as both earthly and heavenly, like that of the gods (cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 108; Pindar, *Nemean* VI, 1ff.; Euripides, *Suppliants* 532–34; fr. 839 Kannicht, from *Chrysippus*; fr. 1004 Kannicht).

This double essence that initiates recognize as the source of their being not only relates them to the gods but also invites them to renounce physical humanity, their membership in family and *genos* (lineage), placing value instead on their pre-mortals status and the cosmic reality of their new life in the underworld among the divinities of the afterlife. Memory as a guarantee of perennial glory is no longer the purview solely of heroes whose exploits are recorded in epic song

and passed down through the generations. Now memory affords every person individual survival through recollection of his/her immortal nature and previous existences. If it is true that the feminine ending of many adjectives refers not to the *psyche* but to the sex of the person undertaking the journey to the afterlife, the offer was extended to women, for whom several tablets were made. In the series of tablets that allude to water flowing from the Lake of Memory, anyone who, suppressing his/her instinctive "thirst for life," does not drink from the first fountain is permitted to show the guardians of the underworld that he/she knows the password and thereby find relief at the Spring of Memory. In all the tablets the deceased must confront the powers of the underworld, but there is no suggestion that one must possess such heroic qualities as cunning and strength in order to overcome obstacles. (Nor do we learn what becomes of those who fail.) The only essential initiative is to ensure one's recognition by the gods. Hierarchies dictated by the dominant culture, such as one's role or status in the city and family, must be rejected in favor of a particular state of purity, achieved in the constancy of an ascetic life, thanks to one's special connection to the gods (Edmonds, 2004).

Although the eschatology here is largely consistent, there are nevertheless surprising differences in the landscape of the underworld. Usually the white cypress and the spring to avoid are on the right side, as is the spring from the Lake of Memory, which is farther along the same path (Graf and Johnston, 2007, nn. 1; 8; 25). On the Petelia tablet, however, the cypress and the first spring are on the left, perhaps to contrast with the "other," beneficial, spring, which we imagine to be on the right, although the text does not make this explicit (Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 2). On all the Cretan tablets and on one from Thessaly, the cypress marks a single spring, that of salvation, which is always on the right (Graf and

Johnston, 2007, nn. 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 16; 29) except in one case, on the left (Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 18). There has been much speculation as to the reasons for these variations (see Ferrari, 2007, pp. 115–40, and Tortorelli Ghidini, 2007), but Johnston observes persuasively that because the alteration occurs over time, together with a progressive reduction in the length of the texts, changes most likely came about because, “in a system that perpetuated itself through itinerant, independent initiators,” craftsmen misunderstood the meaning or offered their client an innovative version (Graf and Johnston, 2007, p. 108).

Even so, in the landscapes of all but two tablets, both ephemeral relief and ultimate salvation are connected with the right side, which, according to the binary symbolism of archaic thought, was the positive, auspicious side. This religious polarity was reinforced later by Pythagorean ideas that the right was the origin of odd numbers, and so of divine nature, whereas the left was the source of even numbers and so of all that was destined to perish (cf. Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life*, 156). A further affinity with the Pythagoreans is suggested by the taboo that often marks the cypress in the tablets. A Pythagorean rule forbade the construction of coffins from cypress wood, because this was the material of Zeus’ scepter—or, as Iamblichus states, “for some other mystic reason” (*On the Pythagorean Life*, 155). But, as we have seen, the meaning of the tree by the fountain changes over time and according to where the gold tablets were made.

In recent decades a number of finds have increased the evidence that one or more sects politically less important than the Eleusinian Mysteries offered the promise of salvation. Evidence such as three bone tablets from Pontic Olbia (a Greek colony on the Black Sea coast) that can be dated to perhaps the first half of the fifth century B.C., have sharpened our understanding of the religious tradition associated since ancient

times with the mythical Thracian singer Orpheus. These tablets seem to be *symbola* (membership tokens for initiates). Various authors refer to such tokens in relation to mystery celebrations, and the word appears in the golden tablets from Pherai in Thessaly and Entella (Graf and Johnston, 2007, nn. 27, 1; 8, 19). Inscribed on one tablet are *Orphikoi* (Orphics), which is associated with *Dio* (the shortened name of Dionysus), *bios thanatos bios* (life death life), and *aletheia* (truth). These lead us to infer faith in life after death and in metempsychosis (Tortorelli Ghidini, 2000; Graf and Johnston, 2007, pp. 185–87).

The two gold tablets from Pélinna both begin with what looks like a comment on the “password” featured in the bone tablets from Olbia: “Now you have died, and now you have come into being, O thrice happy one, on this same day. / Tell Persephone that Bacchios himself released you.” (Graf and Johnston, 2007, nn. 26 a, b). One also foresees the initiate’s fate as a perennial celebration of the sacred rites in the company of the chosen ones (Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 26 a, 7). This detail is missing from the majority of the tablets, whose focus is how to overcome difficulties on the journey.

On the one hand, texts not inspired by the classical tradition constitute a sort of underground literature that itinerant priests and purifiers—whom Plato decries in his *Republic* (364b–65a; Burkert, 1999)—provided to their customers with suitable rituals and formulas. On the other hand, eschatological ideas also appear sporadically in the work of classical authors, especially those with links to the Western Greeks. In a fragment of a *threnos* (funeral song), for example, Pindar alludes to Persephone as the goddess who makes immortal souls pay the “punishment for the ancient sorrow” before she sends them back into the cycle of incarnation. This image closely echoes the initiate’s statement, “I have paid the penalty for unrighteous deeds,” found in two tablets from Thurii (Graf and Johnston, 2007, nn. 6, 4; 7, 4):

But for those from whom Persephone accepts retribution  
for her ancient grief, in the ninth year she returns their  
souls

to the upper sunlight; from them arise  
proud kings and men who are swift in strength  
and greatest in wisdom, and for the rest of time  
they are called sacred heroes by mortals.

(Pindar, fr. 133 Maehler,  
transl. W. H. Race and S. I. Johnston)

In these lines is an echo of the Orphic anthropogenesis linking human origins with the Titans' killing, dismemberment, and devouring of Dionysus Zagreus, Zeus' son from his incestuous union with his daughter Persephone. The Orphic myth of the murder of the baby god ends with his rebirth, when Zeus and Semele revive him after Athena saves his heart. The Titans are brought down by Zeus' thunderbolt, and the human race is born out of their ashes. Humans continue to be burdened with this sacrilege but may be redeemed from it through the cycle of rebirth. They also inherit the divine nature of Dionysus, whose flesh the Titans consumed. Although this myth is attested only from the Hellenistic age onward—it is found in its most complete form in a comment by the sixth-century A.D. neo-Platonic philosopher Olympiodorus on a passage in Plato's *Phaedo*—traces of it testify to a far more ancient origin (Dodds, 1951, pp. 155ff.; Burkert 1985, p. 298; Bremmer 2002, p. 22; Bernabé 2003; Graf and Johnston 2007, p. 66ff.). Most scholars agree that the above Pindaric fragment refers to Persephone's sorrow at her son's death, but Radcliffe Edmonds (2008), challenging the modern vision of Orphism as a dogmatic sect, asserts that Pindar is alluding to Hades' mythical rape of Persephone: "The ancient grief of Persephone, which must be assuaged by the honors paid to her



in ritual, arises from the traumatic experience of her passage from the land of the living to the realm of the dead, from the stage of unmarried maiden Kore to the married matron Persephone, Queen of the Dead" (cf. Holzhausen 2004). Two gold tablets from Thurii speak of injustices that have been expiated; on a tablet from Pherai is written: "Enter / the holy meadow, for the initiate / is redeemed" (Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 27). The two from Pélinna remind the initiate to tell Persephone, "Dionysus himself delivered (*elysen*) me" (Graf and Johnston, 2007, nn. a, b). This might suggest a link between Dionysus and Persephone, but in no other known mythical event are both protagonists.

In the critical debate regarding the historical and religious context of the "Orphic" tablets there is broad consensus regarding the nature of the fault requiring expiation. Some, however, doubt that this fault is the killing of Zagreus. Instead, they argue, it involves general, unspecified injustices committed by one's ancestors. They reject the idea that "Orphic" doctrine involves an original sin that would weigh on the human race, a claim made by Domenico Comparetti and other late nineteenth-century scholars who, having read the Thurii tablets in conjunction with Christian theology, promoted the idea that Orphism was founded on such a dogma (Edmonds, 1999, 2004, 2008). Contrary to the official political and religious order, the sacred literature circulating in the name of Orpheus, like the people who followed its discipline, rejected violence and blood sacrifice and was inspired by utopian ideals. In line with Greek religiosity—which was free from conflicts and missionary zeal—Orphism established "an idea of conversion and a sacred literature but not a church" (Nock, 1998, p. 32).

Fritz Graf's admirable and well-balanced history of studies of the gold tablets points out the inevitable and continuing

influence of both lay and religious ideologies on modern interpretations of the Orphic movement. It is unlikely that early Christianity derived its salvation theology from pagan mystery cults, but prior to the beginnings of Christianity, Orphism and Dionysism had developed eschatological beliefs, as archaeological finds continue to demonstrate. Nevertheless, Dionysian mysteries derived from an Orphic account of the origin of humankind attested to in marginal areas of the Greek world: "To derive Christianity directly from the pagan mystery cults still smacks of an ideological stance, and when religions are understood as systems, the Bacchic mysteries are, if anything, only a subsystem" (Graf and Johnston, 2007, p. 65). These conclusions seem to accord with known evidence because they take into consideration both the fragmentation of the secret cults and a possible shared source that might have inspired traveling professionals who spread hope for a better afterlife. On the other hand, although Radcliffe Edmonds's (2008) radical skepticism appropriately emphasizes the profound differences between the pagan religious ideas of the Greeks and those of our Judeo-Christian culture, it is too restrictive in excluding the possible construction of a plausible mosaic of Orphic doctrine from the various tesserae scattered over time and space:

Rather than looking for a coherent set of sacred texts canonical to people who considered themselves Orphics, texts expressive of doctrines pertaining to sin, salvation, and afterlife, we should look for the products of bricolage, pieced together from widely available traditional material to meet the demand of clients looking for extraordinary solutions to their problems. If the texts and rituals are products of bricolage, however, and their creators bricoleurs competing for authority, we cannot

expect to find either consistency of texts or doctrines, merely a loose family resemblance between composites of the same traditional elements.

Describing the *modus operandi* of whoever created the myth of Dionysus' murder and rebirth, Johnston makes use of a similar image. But she suggests a *bricoleur* who, perhaps in the sixth century B.C., united older, well-known ideas with his own bold innovations: an effective and attractive reconstruction to illustrate how "anthropogony and eschatology were inextricably joined together for the first time" (Graf and Johnston, 2007, p. 93).

Behavior during life is also important if we wish to be freed forever from metempsychosis, and Pindar shows, in the aforementioned *threnos* fragment 133, how Persephone grants the just a final reincarnation as sovereigns, athletes, or sages before their definitive liberation as heroes. Empedocles of Akragas (prime ca. 444–441 B.C.), who was trained in mysticism, philosophy, magic and medicine, composed a poem entitled *Purifications* in which he describes the human soul as a *daemon* (spiritual being between divine and mortal) who is banished from Olympus for a transgression and must pay the penalty in the cycle of rebirth. Those who purify themselves are reincarnated in increasingly noble forms—seers, poets, doctors, high-ranking dignitaries—and eventually take their place among the gods, free and blessed (31 B 146–47 Diels-Kranz). The idea of the soul as an immortal part of human existence probably was consolidated in southern Italy and Sicily during the first half of the fifth century. There is a clear link between Empedocles and the Pythagorean and mystery traditions (Kingsley, 1995), and Parmenides—who lived in Elea (a Phocaean colony on the coast of Campania) during the second half of the sixth and the first half of the fifth centuries B.C.—likely believed in reincarnation and was influenced by Pythagorean doctrines (Bremmer,

2002, p. 13). Furthermore, the journey described in esoteric and ecstatic terms in the opening of Parmenides' philosophical poem may be seen as a real journey to the afterlife. Leaving the world of ordinary experience, the poet passes through the gate leading to paths of Night and Day, at which point an abyss (the world of the dead) opens, and he is met by a benign goddess (Persephone) who will teach him truth (Sassi, 1988; Kingsley, 1995; Battezzato 2005, pp. 90–94 and bibliography). Plato himself (*Gorgias* 493a) attributes to "some clever Italian or Sicilian"—suggesting a follower of Pythagoras or Empedocles—a myth about the unhappy destiny reserved for the souls of the uninitiated, who, using a perforated sieve, are condemned to pour water into an equally perforated jar (Bremmer, 2002, pp. 14ff.).

In *Olympian* II, an ode celebrating the tyrant Theron of Acragas (composed between his Olympic victory in 476 B.C. and his death in 473–472 B.C.), Pindar again offers a description of the destiny in store for the just, a description inspired both by the traditional religious heritage and by the eschatology of the mystery cults. Hesiod's paradise of the elect—prefigured in Homer's Elysium—is now the Isle of the Blessed. The dead who have remained just through three incarnations and as many periods in the underworld are granted access to their deserved climactic happiness here at the edge of the ocean in a permanent springtime climate (Pindar, *Olympian* II 68–83). Zeus' father, Cronus, sovereign of the golden-age world, reigns here in the Utopian "walled city of Cronus" (line 70) assisted by his grandson, the judge Rhadamanthys. The island is home to the virtuous (who, having completed their transmigration by abstaining from iniquitous actions, are rewarded with a tear-free existence), to privileged heroes dear to the gods, such as Cadmus and Peleus (whose merit lay in marrying goddesses), and to the valiant Achilles.

While alive, these men were rewarded for their justice, but they do not therefore escape death. Nor are they destined, through the gods' favor, to live eternally in some Eden with Menelaus and a number of Trojan War heroes mentioned in the *Odyssey* and in Hesiod. Instead, they take "Zeus' road," evocative of the initiates' sacred journey in such "Orphic" texts as the Hipponion golden tablet. Their destination is modeled on features of the *locus amoenus* (idealized place of safety or comfort), mentioned for example in a fragment of a Pindaric *threnos* (fr. 129 Maehler), where the just exist, beyond death, in perennial sunlight and in a landscape of purple rose beds and trees laden with golden fruit. Here existence is enriched by aristocratic pastimes: the souls take part in athletic and equestrian activities, move pawns on a board, and play the lyre. They eternally reiterate their piety to the gods, offering repeated sacrifices, whose odors fill the air. In Pindar, then, the promises reserved for initiates of mystery cults were combined with the popular eschatology embodied in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, which had determined the Greek theological tradition. The emerging picture is a far cry both from the Homeric afterlife and from the idea that beyond death is a single destiny, equal for everybody.

Establishing the origin of the theories that appeared at the end of the archaic period is difficult. We know little about the content of poems attributed to Orpheus that circulated in the fifth and fourth centuries, but the various sources help us to pick out the main ideas they conveyed: "that the body is the prisonhouse of the soul; that vegetarianism is an essential rule of life; and that the unpleasant consequences of sin, both in this world and in the next, can be washed away by ritual means. That they taught the most famous of so-called Orphic doctrines, the transmigration of souls, is not, as it happens, directly attested by anyone in the classical age; but it may, I think, be inferred without undue rashness from

the conception of the body as a prison where the soul is punished for its past sins" (Dodds 1951, p. 149). Moreover, Egyptian religion might have helped shape Orphic beliefs (Burkert, 1999). The two have much in common, such as the presence of a sacred tree, thirst, and the necessity of answering questions or providing tokens. The voyage to the underworld is described in collected texts, of varying date and nature, known as the *Book of the Dead*: found in tombs of the New Kingdom, these rolls of papyrus were guides for the deceased. The historian Herodotus (II 81) delineates surprising similarities between Egyptian religion and Orphic beliefs. For example the "Orphic and Bacchic" mystery cults might have assimilated a ban on burying the dead in woolen clothing from "Egyptian and Pythagorean" practices. Herodotus had observed this funerary custom, appropriated from Egypt via Pythagoras (whom he considered the real author of texts ascribed to Orpheus) and practiced by groups carrying out the Bacchic mystery rites inspired by Orpheus' books. This is how we must interpret his remarks if, as seems probable, "Orphic and Bacchic" is a hendiadys (two nouns joined by a conjunction in place of a noun-adjective pair) referring to a single religious group (Graf and Johnston 2007, p. 159).

## 2.5 PYTHAGOREAN ESCHATOLOGY AND THE DERVENI PAPYRUS

Orphic beliefs are profoundly similar to those of a school centered on Pythagoras, who was born in Samos and emigrated to Kroton, Magna Graecia, around 520 B.C. The precisely regulated lifestyle that the school advocated—employing prescriptions and prohibitions (such as a ban on eating meat and beans), cathartic rituals, and secrecy—was inspired by the idea of the immortality of the soul and of its transformation into other beings. These similarities often led to confusion.

Although the two groups were distinct—one can speak of the Pythagoreans only as a stable association or a confraternity of men and women—their doctrines eventually merged into one vague Orphéo-Pythagorean context. It seems, for example, that because Pythagoras and his first disciples took part in the politics of their local community, they did not adopt total vegetarianism. Just later followers, devoid of political ambition, detached themselves from the main religion of the *polis* and opposed animal sacrifice (Bremmer, 2002).

The Pythagoreans' aspiration to move beyond tradition emerged from their placing otherworldly destiny at the center of speculation and basing their lifestyle on cathartic ritualism. Their rejection of blood sacrifice is said to have derived from their belief in metempsychosis (the animal being killed might house a human soul), but because this is also true of vegetables (as Empedocles claimed: fr. 117 Diels-Kranz), we should attribute this rejection instead to a primordial horror of bloodshed. What is more, Orphic thought remained anchored in a mythical cosmology and anthropogony, but the Pythagoreans—whose protector is no longer Dionysus, god of orgiastic enthusiasm, but Apollo, patron of reason and science—sought to translate their doctrine into rational terms, with the aim of “educating” the city according to a conservative, aristocratic canon inspired by their master's life. Along with nutritional taboos, the Pythagorean association imposed an austere way of life upon its members, including enforced silence for novices, and sexual continence, in accordance with a puritanism that was foreign to the dominant culture. Their method for purifying the soul was not the thaumaturgic (miraculous) power of the Orphic mystery rites but the cult of science based on numbers. Through music, initiates were introduced to number theory and to the systems of arithmetic and geometry on which the order and harmony of the cosmos is founded.

Such differences aside, both groups believed in reincarnation, which offered a solution to the late archaic period problem of evil and divine justice that was more satisfying than the inheritance of guilt or punishment after death:

As for post-mortem punishment, that explained well enough why the gods appeared to tolerate the worldly success of the wicked, and the new teaching in fact exploited it to the full, using the device of the “under-world journey” to make the horrors of Hell real and vivid to the imagination. But the post-mortem punishment did not explain why the gods tolerated so much human suffering, and in particular the unmerited suffering of the innocent. Reincarnation did. On that view, no human soul was innocent: all were paying, in various degrees, for crimes of varying atrocity committed in former lives. And all that squalid mass of suffering, whether in this world or in another, was but a part of the soul’s long education—an education that would culminate at last in its release from the cycle of birth and return to its divine origin. Only in this way, and on this cosmic time-scale, could justice in its full archaic sense—the justice of the law that “the Doer shall suffer”—be completely realized for every soul.

(Dodds 1951, p. 150–51)

Another precious document, completing the mosaic of Orphic eschatology, is the Derveni papyrus. The only papyrus text found in Greece, this partly carbonized scroll was discovered in 1962 not far from Thessaloniki, in the tomb of a mid-fourth-century B.C. Macedonian. The first official edition of this fragmented text (Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006) presents a fascinating testimony by an initiate in an



Orphic sect, probably a professional seer and dream interpreter who, for didactic purposes, illustrates and explains ritual practices. In the footsteps of Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia, and other pre-Socratic thinkers, he later comments on a sacred text and interprets it allegorically. The text, from the fifth, or even sixth, century B.C., is an ancient theogony attributed to Orpheus (Burkert, 2005). The papyrus' first columns, which are full of gaps, refer to funerary ceremonies, propitiatory rites, and eschatological ideas. (For example, the Eumenides are mentioned as souls [col. VI 9–10]). Fears relating to Hades are also discussed. In particular, the author maintains that fears about what happens in Hades arise from ignorance and lack of faith: in his sophisticated vision as an educated initiate, intellectual and ethical shortfalls coincide. It seems he is protesting against profane people who consult him in order to obtain and interpret oracles relating to their destiny after death but who do not trust the visions of Hades' terror that he can offer them and cannot understand messages from dreams and other realities (col. V). The pathway to follow in order to achieve a correct understanding of the afterlife and of the suffering awaiting those who have not acted justly, is a source of anguish. As described in the following section, faith in the Orphic cosmology is supported allegorically, and reality is delineated by means of enigmatic but explicable visions that Orpheus transmitted to his devout followers. In a culture that had not yet separated physical from theological and moral speculation, the natural world and the soul's journey to salvation are therefore compatible (Most, 1997; cf. also Betegh 2004).

The superficial relationship many followers had with this sacred text is reminiscent of the superstitious man, described by Theophrastus, who goes once a month with his wife—or nurse—and children to the *Orpheotelestai* (professionals in the Orphic rites) to be purified (*Characters* XVI, 12 [the text

reads “to be initiated”]). He hopes to efface his forefathers’ misdeeds and his own by means of incantations and ceremonies. The constant, often disparaging, references to books and scripture in relation to Orphic mysticism are exemplified in Theseus’ reference to Hippolytus’ pure life, which mentions both vegetarianism and Orphic literature (which, by its very nature as a book, is inauthentic): “Now you may plume yourself, now by a vegetable diet play the showman with your food, and with Orpheus for your lord hold your covens and honor all your vaporous screeds—for you are caught!” (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 952–54, transl. Barrett). In relation to this passage, Burkert rightly observes: “The characteristic appeal to books is indicative of a revolution: with the *Orphica* literacy takes hold in a field that had previously been dominated by the immediacy of ritual and the spoken word of myth. The new form of transmission introduces a new form of authority to which the individual, provided that he can read, has direct access without collective mediation. The emancipation of the individual and the appearance of books go together in religion as elsewhere” (1985, p. 297).

## 2.6 THE SOUL/BODY OPPOSITION FROM PINDAR TO PLATO

Dodds (1951) astutely observes that the Orphic concept of the dualistic nature of man, in which the mortal body houses the immortal soul—the essential element, best representing the person—was a sign of a “new culture pattern.” A fragment of a *threnos* by Pindar provides the first literary reference to this new perspective that brought about radical changes in the Greek perception of human afterlife and replaced fears about death with ethical choices and cathartic religious practices capable of determining and changing one’s destiny (fr. 131b Maehler, transl. E. R. Dodds): “Each man’s body follows

the call of overmastering death; yet still there is left alive an image of life (*aionos eidolon*), for this alone is from the gods: it sleeps while the limbs are active; but while the man sleeps, it often shows in dreams a decision of joy or adversity to come." The divine, immortal soul dwelling in the body is no longer simply its living essence and spiritual counterpart, as in archaic thought. Now it is the hidden "I," in opposition to the body, fully realizing its being only when it is freed from physical or temporal constraints. This is demonstrated in sleep, the living state closest to death: because the *psyche* enjoys greater freedom, it can foresee future events. We do not know for whom Pindar composed this poem, but he/she probably was sympathetic to Pythagorean or Orphic ideas (Bremmer, 2002, p. 23).

This radical new concept—the two dimensions of man—would be taken up irreversibly by Western culture. Plato first established an ontological and metaphysical basis, and a place in our global vision of reality, for human dualism (Reale, 2004, III, p. 220). In the *Gorgias* (492e–93a), Plato echoes verses from a lost Euripidean tragedy to illustrate the doctrine of the *soma* (body) as *sema* (tomb for the soul): "Who knows if to live is to be dead, and to be dead, to live?" (fr. 638 Kannicht, from *Polyidus*; see also fr. 833 Kannicht, from *Phrixus* by Euripides, and the comment by Rohde, 1925, p. 435 and n. 137). This gives rise to a new way of life, involving mortification of the body and all things physical so as to live according to the soul. Plato's understanding of the afterlife is interwoven with the Orphic and Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, and through his various examples, one principle remains firm: "That which gives meaning to this life is the soul's eschatological destiny, that is, the other life; everything here only has meaning if it is related to an after-life, where the just and virtuous man is rewarded and the unjust and evil man is punished" (Reale, 2004, III, p. 235).

Plato sometimes attributes the idea of the mortal body as a prison, in which the soul must be punished for its past misdeeds, to Orpheus and his followers (*Cratylus* 400 c), sometimes to a pronouncement during the mysteries (*Phaedo* 62 b).

In the mythical tradition, rebirth after death may be understood as simply a happy survival in the afterlife, or as a migration from one body to the next, in a cycle of births and deaths by which one expiates all sins—personal or ancestral—that have stained the soul. These reincarnations may repeat themselves *ad infinitum*, but it is possible to escape the cycle and achieve a permanent state of happiness in the other world. Given the fragmentary nature of many testimonies regarding the eschatological expectations of marginal groups, we cannot be sure what kind of “rebirth” is implied in every text. Indeed, Plato’s works offer a number of different descriptions of the soul’s destiny and its cyclic reincarnation.

A text by Plutarch (ca. 45–125 A.D.), which suggests a striking affinity between the experience of the dead and that of an initiate during the mysteries, is a significant testimony to the visions, emotions, and sounds of the (probably Eleusinian) ceremony. But above all, the initiation reflects the death and rebirth characteristic of a rite of passage. It paves the way, not to a shadowy Homeric Hades, where the soul wanders without consciousness or memory, but to spiritual happiness, freed from bodily and material constraints and enriched with knowledge. For the soul the world of pure intelligibility and transcendence of the senses is a permanent state, not the Homeric warriors’ brief, transitory moment during departure from life:

In this world [the soul] is without knowledge, except when it is already at the point of death; but when that time comes, it has an experience like that of men who

are undergoing initiation into great mysteries; and so the verbs *teleutân* (die) and *teleisthai* (be initiated), and the actions they denote, have a similarity. [A similar etymological word play on "initiatory rites" {*teletas*} and "dead" {*teleutesasin*} is present in Plato, *Republic* 365a.] In the beginning there is straying and wandering, the weariness of running this way and that, and nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and then immediately before the consummation every possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement. But after this a marvellous light meets the wanderer, and open country and meadow lands welcome him; and in that place there are voices and dancing and the solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions. And amidst these, he walks at large in new freedom, now perfect and fully initiated, celebrating the sacred rites, a garland upon his head, and converses with pure and holy men; he surveys the uninitiated, unpurified mob here on earth, the mob of living men who, herded together in murk and deep mire, trample one another down and in their fear of death cling to their ills, since they disbelieve in the blessings of the other world. For the soul's entanglement with the body and confinement in it are against nature, as you may discern from this.

(Plutarch, fr. 178 Sandbach, transl. Sandbach)

However, Plato had already identified virtue and knowledge with purification, saying that bodily death releases the soul into true life and supreme knowledge of the truth. In a passage of the *Phaedo*, philosophy—which implies a desire for death and liberation from the body—is described as a true initiation into the mysteries, a typical Platonic fusion of mysticism and rationalism (*Phaedo* 69 c-d).

The nucleus of religious ideas usually known as “Orphic” is founded both on faith in the divine and immortal power of the soul and on a view of the body as a punitive trap from which the soul attempts to free itself once it understands its true nature. Individual salvation is the salvation of the purified soul, which frees itself definitively and returns to the blessedness of its original divine condition: “The contrast between these ideas and those of the Homeric world is complete; *there*, the soul released from the body was credited only with a poor, shadowy, half-conscious existence, so that an eternity of godlike being in the full enjoyment of life and its powers was only thinkable if the body and the soul, the two-fold self of man, were translated in undissolved communion out of the world of mortality” (Rohde, 1925, p. 345). For as long as the *polis* remained, however, no sect succeeded in fully expressing the struggle of the *psyche* to regain its divinity. It is remarkable that, even after the decline both of the Pythagorean communities in Magna Graecia, in the mid-fifth century B.C., and of their effort to unite contemplative life and scientific research in a worldview that would leave its mark on reality, it was philosophical thought that translated the topics of self-discipline, purification, and immortality into his own register (Vernant, 1990).

## CHAPTER 3



# THE LONG FAREWELL

### 3.1 DEATH AND CONTAMINATION

Unlike expectations of the afterlife and beliefs about the soul's journey to reach it, which are inconsistent and change over time, the rituals of leave-taking are more stable and conservative. These procedures mark each stage of the gradual transition, beginning with the body's precarious state just after death and ending with the *psyche*'s detachment and integration into the afterlife. The living honor the deceased with care, affective tributes, and appropriate ceremonies before resuming their usual rhythm of life. And in the classical age, the period of exclusion that followed any contact with death was brought to a close by rituals of self-purification and cathartic procedures in the house of the deceased.

In Homeric poetry, funerary rites both permit the deceased to enter Hades once and for all and release the living from their liminal state. However, none of the elements are yet present that, in classical texts, constantly link death with impurity. Warriors are continually involved in battle massacres but never take part in any of the procedures that, in later periods, would be required of them before they could resume their normal activities. Even the horror of contagion associated with the dying and the dead, sufficient to deter the gods and

defile temples or altars, seems to belong to a subsequent period. For example, the Athenians' removal of all tombs during the purification of Delos, Apollo's sacred island, in 426 B.C. was sparked by superstitious fears in a time of recurrent plagues and earthquakes (Thucydides III 104).

In the *Iliad*, Apollo himself cares for the body of Sarpedon, Zeus' mortal son and leader of the Lycians. Following Zeus' orders, he washes the corpse in river water, anoints him with ambrosia, and clothes him in "immortal vesture" before handing him over to Hypnos and Thanatos (cf. § 1.4). And Apollo, with Aphrodite, looks after Hector's corpse, keeping it from decomposition during Achilles' attempts to destroy it (XXIII 185–91). Similarly, when Apollo and Artemis kill the sons of Niobe, the gods organize their burial because Zeus had turned all the inhabitants of their community to stone (XXIV 612).

In fifth-century drama, on the other hand, the Olympian gods' fear of contamination is so great that they will even abandon their favored heroes in agony to avoid being present at their moment of death. Whereas the Homeric gods have a confident familiarity with human death, Euripides' Artemis, says, "It is not lawful for me to look upon the dead or to defile my sight with the last breath of the dying" (*Hippolytus* 1437–38; see also Euripides' Apollo in *Alcestis* 20–23.) But the taboo that death later constitutes is only a way of emphasizing the insurmountable barrier between gods and mortals. The principle is already well established in Homer: nature's limit on human life is a destiny that cannot be altered and that overpowers even the divine sovereign and his emotions regarding his son Sarpedon (*Il.* XVI 431–61). It is unlikely that this alteration reflects a radical change in mentality. The later obsession with impurity derived from contact with the dead seems to be a ritually settled extension (or development) of the break from routine that affects all who are involved in a bereavement (Parker, 1983).



In the Homeric poems the initial expressions of grief by the family and friends of the deceased are graphically characterized by filth and neglect of hygiene, of which contamination is the symbolic and metaphysical form. When Achilles, on learning of Patroclus' death (*Il.* XVIII 23–27), and Priam, after Hector is slain (*Il.* XXII 414; XXIV 163–65), assimilate with the decomposing body, they enter a state of contamination, the metaphorical equivalent of suicide. Rolling in mud, covering one's head and face with ashes, or (like Achilles) refusing to wash away the gruesome signs of battle before Patroclus' funerary rites were complete (*Il.* XXIII 44–46) all symbolize participation in the death (De Martino, 2000). Dirtiness, which compromises a person's physical integrity, is a visible sign of the existential disorder affecting those who have lost someone close. In the Homeric poems these traditional expressions of grief accompany voluntary exclusion from social life and religious worship. Later a lack of requisite "metaphysical" purity would achieve the same effect, and participation in social and religious life would be forbidden during the conventional mourning period. Whoever has been in contact with death is considered fatal company, to be avoided for a certain time.

Hesiod is the first to describe death's sinister effect on the activities of the living: "Do not, when you have come back from an ill-omened burial, beget children, but when you come from a feast of the immortals" (*Works and Days* 735–36, transl. R. Lattimore). The distinction is subtle between harmful "contagion" and the idea that funerary rites are simply incompatible with procreation. That the same symbolic logic characterizes both the immediate display of grief and the idea of contamination suggests that they are not separate views of the relationship with death (Parker, 1983). Since the eighth century B.C., when the fear of death was more intense, graves were placed outside inhabited areas. (There were a few

exceptions in the classical age but not previously.) Sourvinou-Inwood (1981, 1983) regards this practice as indicating that the space of the dead had to be separated from that of the living owing not only to growing urbanization but also to a change in the collective attitude toward death. Archaeological data, however, draw a more ambiguous picture. Changes in funerary practice (such as the alternation of inhumation and cremation) do not necessarily correspond to changes in understanding of death and its effect on the survivors.

### 3.2 MOURNING CEREMONIES

The various phases that make up the funerary rituals—*prothesis* (display of the body), *ekphora* (transportation of the body in a procession to the burial place), and either placement of the cremated remains in a tomb or inhumation of the body—lend themselves to analysis, taking into account the ways in which social norms are interlinked with the psychic state of those involved in this dramatic ritual: the collective influence in psychological mechanisms of grief, the social conditioning of convention, and the catharsis of personal sorrow. The “grammar” of ritual gestures—the way in which they overlap with spontaneous, uncontrollable feelings, moderating them according to a prescribed and codified system—reveals how Greek tradition developed strategies of acceptance, how it overcame the trauma of death by building it into the cognitive horizon.

Social anthropology has taught us to read ritual expression of emotions as a sign of interaction and social cohesion. Such expression gradually reshapes the fabric of interpersonal relations, establishing rules and mechanisms for dealing with death and its arbitrary nature. This corresponds with the way in which, on the individual level, eschatological expectations symbolize protest against the senselessness of death

and its annulment of personality. Communal order was disrupted less by the death of a woman or a baby, who had a reduced or nonexistent social profile in the traditional patriarchal society, than by the death of a male citizen. But individual responses did not always coincide with collective expectations: from the archaic period onward, statues, reliefs, and funerary epigraphs for women provided touching expressions of relatives' sense of loss. And in literary texts and figurative art, women commonly appear as active participants in the rituals because they supervised the first and most private parts of the funeral ceremony: the preparation of the body, its *prothesis*, and the ritual lament.

### 3.2.1 The *Prothesis*

In the *Nekyia*, when Agamemnon's shadow tells Odysseus of his horrifying death, planned by Aegisthus with the complicity of his lover (Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra), he refers to the compassionate gestures a dying man expects to receive from his wife, which his faithless assassin took care not to perform, symbolically denying their conjugal bond:

I lifted my hands and with them beat on  
the ground as I died upon the sword, but the sluttish woman  
turned away from me and was so hard that her hands  
would not  
press shut my eyes and mouth though I was going to Hades.

(*Od.* XI 423–26, transl. R. Lattimore)

In a "good death"—not violent, unjustified, or illegal, but accepted and sealed with the appropriate rites performed by friends and family—the female relatives' first duty is to shut the deceased's eyes and mouth. Next they cleanse the

body, washing it, anointing it with oil, and clothing it in an *endyma* (a red or white robe) down to the feet. After this they lay the body on a *stroma* (heavy pall) and cover it with an *epiblema*, a shroud that hides it from view while it is transported to the tomb. Leaves and branches of plants, aromatic and otherwise—such as oregano and grapevine (cf. Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 1030–31)—are laid at the feet or under the bier. On Attic funerary vases of the eighth century B.C., female mourners often wave branches in the air, possibly to keep insects away (cf. § 3.2.2, fig. 2). Vase paintings depict the *kline* (bier), on which the dead body is laid, as having very tall legs that sometimes were raised still higher by supporting blocks to allow mourners to address the deceased in intimate conversation during the ritual lament and to caress his face without leaning too far. The corpse is prepared for the journey with its feet facing the doorway, through which (in ceramic depictions) the men proceed with their right arms raised, palm outward, in a salute that they repeat in front of the bier, during the *ekphora*, and again at the tomb. Years after Agamemnon's assassination, when Orestes returns to Argos, he visits the dead king's tomb and there expresses his sorrow for not having given him a traditional farewell: "I was not present, father, to bewail thy death, / nor did I stretch forth my hand for thy corpse to be borne out to burial" (Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* 8–9, transl. Lloyd-Jones; cf. Euripides, *Alceste* 768, *Suppliants* 772).

At times, men also express their sorrow for the deceased by calling them by name in an attempt to establish emotional contact for the last time: Achilles bids farewell to Patroclus, wailing and "calling his companion by name" (*Il.* XXIII 178). By contrast, in Theognis' elegiac verses, hatred for a deceased tyrant is expressed as follows: "I shall not go to his funeral, I shall not call him by name, the tyrant will not be buried with the homage of my tears upon his tomb" (lines 1203–1204).

The deceased's head is well supported on cushions. Some vases and black-figure funerary *pinakes* (painted tablets, with scenes of *prothesis*) from seventh- and sixth-century B.C. tombs depict a strap passing under the chin and secured behind the head to keep the jaw shut. Because these probably were strips of linen or leather, no trace of them remains in tombs from the archaic or classical ages. However, a number of golden straps have been found in Mycenaean burials.

The practice of cleaning the body has ritual implications, much like the ablutions that precede rites of passage—think of the betrothed bathing before a wedding ceremony—and sometimes a person knowingly approaching his death will consecrate himself to the gods of the underworld by performing this duty himself. With his daughters' help, Oedipus does so (Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1598–1603), as does Alcestis when she feels that her fatal day has come (Euripides, *Alcestis* 158–60). In Plato's account, Socrates speaks ironically of the preparatory cleansing of the body-prison at the moment when the soul is about to depart; he defines it as an inconvenience that he will spare the women of his family from performing when he has drunk the lethal potion: "I am now already, as a tragedian would say, called by fate, and it is about time for me to go to the bath; for I think it is better to bathe before drinking the poison, that the women may not have the trouble of bathing the corpse" (*Phaedo* 115a, transl. H. N. Fowler).

Running water, from a river or a sea, was preferred because of its greater cathartic virtues (cf. Euripides, *Hecuba* 609–13). In the classical period, a container of pure water, obtained from another house, was placed at the entrance to the house where the body is laid out (cf. Euripides, *Alcestis* 98–100, Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 1033) so that, using laurel branches, visitors can sprinkle themselves when leaving. Besides being an emotional experience for the person who prepares the

body, washing one who fell in battle had a practical function: the removal of dust and blood and the cleansing of unsightly wounds. Achilles, wishing to spare Priam the trauma of seeing Hector's body after he has disfigured it by dragging it behind his chariot, asks his slave girls to wash, anoint, and dress the corpse—with Trojan fabrics taken from the ransom—which he himself then places on a bier before returning Hector to his father (*Il.* XXIV 580–90). That Hector's funerary rites are begun by his killer is unusual. They were followed by the formal *prothesis* among the women of his family and Troy's lamenting population. Theseus shows similar care and compassion for the fallen Argives, though with a different motive (Euripides, *Suppliants* 760–70; 941–49; cf. § 3.2.2).

Patroclus' comrades in arms heat the water, wash his wounds and fill them with ointment, anoint his whole body, and dress him in a linen sheet, which they then cover with a white cloak. The Greek hero's *prothesis* in this military context is thus led by Achilles and the Myrmidons rather than by women (*Il.* XVIII 343–55).

The cleansing process ends with the decoration of the deceased with flowers, garlands, and jewelry. The clothing selected may emphasize age or social position: a wedding dress for an unmarried or recently married girl and armor for a soldier, particularly in the Geometric period (from 900 to 700 B.C.). One custom absent from Homeric poems but increasingly frequent in later periods was the placing of a crown upon the deceased as a symbol of purity and dignity. (The gold crown found in some Athenian burials from the fourth century and the Hellenistic period had its origin in a simple garland of myrtle, a plant sacred to the gods of the underworld.) The preparations for the vigil, including the clothing and ornaments, symbolize the purification of the deceased "in despite of the contamination all around him; of all those present at the wake, he alone wore the crown, emblem

of purity" (Parker, 1983, p. 35). Several late authors refer to the ritual purity of the corpse, expressed in the choice of white as the color of mourning (Plutarch, *Moralia* 270 d-f; Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life* 155), but the corpse remained a taboo object, precisely because it was sacralized. Contamination and purity are two sides of the same coin (Garland, 2001).

The *prothesis* begins the day after death and lasts for twenty-four hours; on the third day the body may be taken to the burial place. Plato recommends that the body lie on display no longer than is necessary to determine that the death is genuine (*Laws* 959a). But the funerals of some epic heroes featured vastly extended periods of mourning, and of the *prothesis*. As Priam explained to Achilles when they made their truce, Hector's body was to lie in state during nine days of mourning (*Il.* XXIV 664) in part because the besieged Trojans needed that time to collect wood in the hills for the funeral pyre. Patroclus, on the other hand, was on view for only one day, during which time the battles that would culminate in Hector's death continued. Odysseus' judicious suggestion, that, because the warriors needed to return to battle, they should eat rather than observe a fast, gives the impression that the effect of war was to reduce to one day the period of mourning for its many victims: "It may not be that the Achaeans should mourn the dead with their bellies" (*Il.* XIX 225–29). The fighting was not interrupted for Patroclus, and unlike Hector's funeral, the ceremonies for this Greek hero were notable for their lack of a familial setting. Achilles and his comrades-in-arms mourned him at the beginning and the end of the day, and they honored him both with extraordinary offerings at the funeral pyre and with funeral games (*Il.* XIX–XXIII), but female mourning for Patroclus was limited to the war slaves' tribute (*Il.* XVIII 339–42; XIX 282–302; cf. § 3.2.2).

When Achilles died, those who gathered around the bier to take part in ritual lamentation included not only the Greek

warriors who had prepared his body but also Achilles' immortal mother, Thetis, and the other Nereids. They were guided by the nine muses, who for seventeen days and nights took turns leading the threnody (*Od.* XXIV 43–64). Aside from examples of masculine lament in epic, the dominant expression of classical-age grief is thought to be an uncontrolled cry of pain belonging to feminine emotions. The consolatory topic, already present in archaic poetry, judged resignation to be the only remedy for the sorrow of loss and condemned desperate grieving as unseemly for mature, sober men. Hence Archilocus, urging a friend to get over his anguish following a disaster—a shipwreck—in his town, says that bad things happen to all men at some time and that for the moment he must give up “weeping like a woman” (fr. 13 West).

Scenes of the *prothesis* are common in vase painting of the Geometric period, and grieving gestures are present in terracotta feminine figurines placed under the handles of large funerary vases from the mid-ninth century B.C. In the first examples of figurative style, which emerged in the mid-eighth century B.C., the iconography of funerary rituals follows codified patterns that highlight the division between male and female roles. The private space, in which women gather to gesticulate around the deceased, is clearly distinct from the outside and the entrance space through which the men filed to salute the body from a distance. On Geometric-period pottery the gesture of raising both hands to the head is associated solely with women's lament. Thus, when motifs such as weapons are absent, this criterion is used for determining the sex of a stylized figure (Catoni, 2008, pp. 166–69).

The exposition of the body, surrounded by women engaged in ritual lamentation, is less common on painted ceramics of the classical period and has almost disappeared by the end of the fifth century B.C. On *lekythoi* (perfume jars) this scene is replaced by depictions of offerings being laid at the tomb,



another task reserved for women. In some later examples, the *prothesis* scene includes motifs associated with the burial place: the tombstone is visible not far from the bier, or a female mourner holds a basket containing offerings. In this way, chronologically separate events are brought together in a symbolic synthesis of the whole funerary rite (Oakley, 2004).

### 3.2.2 Ritual Lament and Women's Role in the Funerary Vigil

The lament, traditionally entrusted to women, is the culmination of the first farewell ceremony for the deceased. The gestures of lament illustrated in iconography and literary texts follow certain patterns, and anthropologists studying Mediterranean folklore of the twentieth century have recorded the continuing presence of these same formal components (De Martino, 2000).

Because artistic representations employ a narrow range of gestures to illustrate more complex expressions of grief, the folkloric relicts of ritual lament help reconstruct the whole sequence of ancient gestures. In iconography, women around the bier are occasionally shown leaning forward with their legs bent unusually and one foot raised, suggesting rhythmic oscillation of the torso and a circular dancing movement around the deceased. Beginning with the Geometric period, ritual dance has been depicted on vases only by rows of lamenting women all making the same gesture or—especially on the necks of some *loutrophoroi* (water jars) from the late sixth century B.C.—raising their hands to their head, with their arms interlinked. Geometric depictions of male figures with one hand raised to the head and the other by the side or on the thigh—a gesture different from the salute to the deceased—may represent dancers (Ahlberg-Cornell, 1971; Pedrina, 2001; Catoni, 2008). And women's gestures from the

same period are also extremely stylized. The synchronized raising of the arms above the head is an identical movement both in scenes of ritual funerary dance and of lament around the deceased. In both, the hair is loose and the hands either beat rhythmically on the breast and head (*kopetos*) or scratch the cheeks until they bleed. These latter details are obvious only on later Attic pottery.

In the fifth century, gestures of mourning become less violent. Rather than show hair being torn out, it is symbolically cut short. The number of women gathered around the body in lamentation is reduced to no more than three or four, which permits a simpler, more controlled composition. The mother or wife, who leads the ritual lament and therefore is closest to the deceased, addresses him as if he were able to hear, and she accompanies the *goos* (lament) with affectionate gestures, leaning over him and holding his face in her hands. This same gesture, depicted in sixth- and fifth-century B.C. figures, was also performed by Hecuba and Andromache, for example, when they received the body of Hector (*Il.* XXIV 710–12), and Andromache repeated it, in a controlled and sober manner, during her formal lament (*Il.* XXIV 724).

The antiphonal mourning structure involves a series of individual laments followed by choral refrains that include groans, cries, and emotive interjections. Hector's mourners include *aoidoi* (professional singers) paid to intone *threnoi* (mournful monodies; later the name of a lyric genre) with more elaborate technique and greater emotional control than the kinswomen (*Il.* XXIV 720–22). Nevertheless, all laments handed down to us in epic poetry are sung by nearest women. His mother, his wife, and his sister-in-law each address an individual lament to him before a reprise of the collective laments, described in the hemistich "and the women were mourning beside them" (*Il.* XXIV 722, 746; cf. XIX 301, XXII 515). Variations of the formula occur at XXIV 776,

when the whole population joins in the lament, at XIX 338, when the elders respond to Achilles' lament, and at XXII 429, when the citizens echo Priam's lament. Achilles' lament in XXIII 17–23 is the only formal *goos* sung by a man in Homeric poetry, and it contains no shortage of exceptional features: Patroclus' *prothesis* merges with a process of revenge, and the lament marks this out as the fulfillment of a promise made to the deceased. The excessiveness of the funerary ritual, paralleling the dishonor done to Hector's remains, is in marked contrast to the passive, resigned sadness of the female laments (XVIII 333–42; Derderian 2001).

Physical contact is an essential means of establishing communication with the deceased. Apparently the dead person is deaf to laments by the *exarchos* (leader) when—in the typical “egoistic” style of female lament—the mourner calls him/her by name and asks why he/she has abandoned them. Often the women's mild rebuke for the loved one's having left them is mixed with expressions of acute distress regarding their future. Andromache's lament, for example, explores the theme of a deprived life and the desolation of an orphan's fate:

My husband, you were lost young from life, and have  
left me

a widow in your house, and the boy is only a baby  
who was born to you and me, the unhappy. I think he  
will never

come of age, for before then head to heel this city  
will be sacked, for you, its defender, are gone, you who  
guarded

the city, and the grave wives, and the innocent children,  
wives who before long must go away in the hollow ships,  
and among them I shall also go, and you, my child, follow  
where I go, and there do much hard work that is unworthy  
of you, drudgery for a hard master; or else some Achaean

will take you by hand and hurl you from the tower into  
horrible

death, in anger because Hector once killed his brother,  
or his father, or his son; there were so many Achaeans  
whose teeth bit the vast earth, beaten down by the  
hands of Hector.

Your father was no merciful man in the horror of battle.  
Therefore your people are grieving for you all through  
their city,

Hector, and you left for your parents mourning and sorrow  
beyond words, but for me passing all others is left the  
bitterness

and the pain, for you did not die in bed, and stretch  
your arms to me,

nor tell me some last intimate word that I could remember  
always, all the nights and days of my weeping for you.

(Il. XXIV 725–45)

Astyanax's fate depends upon his father, and now that his father is dead, advance laments are offered for the baby. The impossibility of handing on naturally to the next generation signals the end of the hero's descendants and a traumatic interruption of the family line. The central part of Andromache's lament is addressed directly to the child, before she turns once again to Hector (from line 741). The presence of children at the *prothesis* is also evident in iconography since the great Attic kraters from the tombs of the Dipylon cemetery, in which they are pictured sitting on their mother's lap or by her side, holding her hand (fig. 2).

Andromache's praise of the deceased is followed closely by her reprimand: Hector was the city's strong, irreplaceable defender, but now its fate, together with that of his loved ones, is fixed. The bloody battle in which the hero proved himself



Figure 2. Geometric Dipylon Krater (detail) with a scene of *prothesis*, c. 750 B.C. Originally it stood above a grave as a marker. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Inventory no. 14.130.14.

calls for celebration. But even though he fell in accord with his sense of duty and the heroic code, Andromache is denied the comfort of recalling a domestic death with treasured gestures and final words of farewell on the deathbed. The end of her lament, therefore, in contrast with her eulogy, contains bitter recrimination. Andromache would have preferred a perfect farewell that she could treasure in memory as a painful legacy, slightly mitigating the catastrophic, premature loss of her husband. This farewell, however, would be compatible, not with the “beautiful death” of a young hero (cf. § 5.1), but with the “good death” that, in epic poetry, is necessarily beyond the horizon of war, when the victorious Greeks would return to their families. The natural death that Andromache envisions here contrasts with the emptiness and mourning she foresees—the end of all her hopes and affections (cf. *Il.* VI 429–65). The female lament, which highlights the tension between familial expectations and the requirements of heroic behavior, foreshadows an emerging societal crisis, in which the death of a warrior demands a problematic redefinition of his close family relationships (cf. *Il.* XXII 487–507; Derderian, 2001).

Briseis’ lament over the body of Patroclus speaks of the frustrated hope that she might free herself from her humiliating servitude. Patroclus’ corpse represents the bereavement that the war has inflicted on her: the conquest of her city and the deaths of her husband and her three brothers. Her survival as a slave had required that she restore a network of relationships. Patroclus had eased her suffering, mitigated her grief following the loss of her relatives at the hand of Achilles. He affirmed Achilles’ intent to marry her, reviving her hope of achieving dignity as a legitimate wife. Briseis’ lament, which is echoed by the other slaves, reveals the unusual perspective of prisoners of war. These women, who have become plundered goods, endure incurable moral wounds, but they can



Figure 3. Red-figure Attic *loutrophoros* with a scene of *prothesis* attributed to the "Painter of 'Bologna,'" c. 460 B.C. The diadem might indicate that the young woman, who was unmarried, becomes a bride in death. Courtesy Athens National Archeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. NM 1170.

express their loss freely only when the victors also are weeping. They can express personal grief only while respectfully mourning the death of their master. In this way customs may be respected and a chorus of weeping women may be gathered around the bier of a warrior who has been killed far from his homeland and family (*Il. XIX* 282–302). On an Attic red-figure *loutrophoros* (vessel used to hold water during marriage and funeral rituals and placed in the tombs of the unmarried) datable to about 460 B.C., the short red hair, the



hooked nose, and the tattoo on her neck identify the nurse cradling the head of a dead young woman as a slave of Thracian origin (fig. 3).

On the fifth-century stage, female pacifism is expressed in the movements and motifs of lamentation. Speaking of the "wailing, weeping and lamentation" that have taken over her life since she became a slave, Euripides' *Andromache* mentions, as a type of satisfaction inherent to women, the gratification that comes from abandoning oneself repeatedly to uncontrolled outpourings of grief (*Andromache* 91–95). In Euripides' tragedies we find male and female characters breaking the antiphonal balance in lines and inverting roles—almost competing against each other for the privileged role of leader in the lament. In the *Andromache* (lines 1197–1225), for example, Peleus agrees to offer his laments as an echoed reply to those of the chorus of Phthian women mourning over the body of his grandson Neoptolemus, who had been killed in an ambush at Delphi. That the position given to a relative of the deceased is subordinate to that of a group of female mourners emphasizes how inconsolable is Achilles' old father. Left without descendants, in despair he discards his now-useless regal insignia (line 1223).

Euripides' *Suppliants* carry out the funerary ritual for the seven Argive heroes who fell in the unfortunate expedition against Thebes and whose right to burial the victorious Thebans denied. After the Athenians' subsequent victory in battle over the Thebans, the biers are brought onto the stage, where the mothers of the fallen fighters can begin their lament. Adrastus, king of Argos, chief and sole survivor of the expedition, is also present, having accompanied the mothers and presented to Theseus, king of Athens, their plea for the heroes' right to burial. In this tragedy the ritual for the war dead reflects real practice in the contemporary *polis* (city-state) and the mothers' role is far more central than that of the choral



groups. In the *kommos* (defined by Aristotle, in *Poetics* 1452 b 24, as a tragic lament in dialogue form between chorus and actors) that forms the second part of one of the choral songs (lines 798–837), the mothers deny Adrastus the position of *exarchos* (leader of choral lament), in part responding to his requests and in part correcting his assertions so as to extend the lament toward their own destiny. Indeed, in line 771, Adrastus had already called them *didaskaloi* (teachers) in recognition of their dominant role in the expression of grief. Later, however, Theseus, persuading the Argive king to forget the archaic logic of a mourning ritual firmly based in the family, obtains his agreement that, as an example to the city youth, the fallen should be celebrated rather than lamented.

Pity for the dead is now defined in relation to the mothers' inconsolable sorrow and their lyric outpouring of this suffering. Statesmen draw up logical arguments relating to politics and the costs of war, and they show young people what an example may be drawn from the courage and civil merits of the brave who have given up their lives. But women remain closed within a private, domestic sphere. The archaic model of aristocratic ethics is also seen in the close connection between lament and revenge (cf. line 1145), a link noted as well in anthropological studies of modern accounts of the rite in the Mediterranean region. Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* clearly illustrates this link: after Electra and Orestes, accompanied by a chorus of oriental slave women, intone a long *kommos* over Agamemnon's tomb, they avenge his murder (lines 306–478).

Finally, the emotional and cultural differences between men and women in mourning are evident in Euripides' *Suppliants*. Theseus and Adrastus decide to keep the mothers away from the bodies, excluding them from the funerary rituals until the cremation has taken place, at which time the cinerary urns will be handed to them. On the pretext of saving the women from the intense pain of seeing their sons' disfigured bodies,

the men deprive them of what they had gone to such lengths to secure: the consolation of giving their sons the final pre-burial care. Therefore, because female lament is too ambiguous and emotional to fit into the rhetoric of the *polis*, *Suppliants* relegates it to the background of funerary ritual (Mirto, 1984). It is feared precisely because it carries the risk of disrupting the classical city's social cohesion and overshadowing the ideology of death *pro patria* (for one's country). Indeed the lament is inspired by a pessimistic rhetoric that questions the fundamental role of the woman: why marry in order to have children if you then must suffer their loss (cf. *Suppliants* 786–93; 822–23; Foley, 1993)? Furthermore, even when praise and blame coexist in a traditional lament—as Andromache's *goos* alternates between eulogy for Hector's past merits and reprimand for his abandonment—the focus is on the surviving relative's state and the painful impossibility of communicating with the deceased: As a consequence, the democratic *polis* placed the rituals of mourning within its own framework of values and, in so doing, diminished the woman's role in the laments and in the ceremony more generally (cf. § 5.2, § 5.3). Thus the record of the state funeral in Kerameikos notes that the cremated remains from the battlefield were displayed publicly for two days, at which time they received homage and offerings from relatives. Only then is the presence of weeping female relatives mentioned briefly—and that after a description of the crowded procession, which included foreigners as well as citizens (Thucydides II 34, 4).

### 3.2.3 The *Ekphora*

The *Iliad* describes the transportation of Patroclus' body from Achilles' tent to the funeral pyre as a solemn procession of armed warriors, the Myrmidons followed by the entire Greek army. The leaders, each in his own chariot, are followed by

numerous foot soldiers who carry Patroclus' litter on their shoulders in the center of the cortège. During the journey the corpse is covered with locks of hair that the Myrmidons have cut off as a sign of mourning. After placing his own lock of hair in the dead man's hands, Achilles remains behind his friend's body, supporting his head in a gesture that denotes his special bond of affection (*Il.* XXIII 128–53). In comparison with the solemn grandeur of this procession, classical accounts of the *ekphora*—the dividing line between public mourning and the more private funeral—demonstrate an effort to minimize any adverse impact on the wider community. Because this is a ritual of separation, in which the corpse is removed from the home and all other living spaces and in which the mourners offer up a symbolic part of themselves by cutting their hair, the transferral to the burial site represents a stage in which the anxieties of death break into social life.

Depictions of the *ekphora* on vases of the geometric, archaic, and classical periods are relatively uncommon. A stylized depiction on a large Attic krater dating from 750–735 B.C. (by the so-called Hirschfeld Painter, National Archaeological Museum, Athens) shows the funeral bier on a two-wheeled racing chariot drawn by two horses identical to those shown in the war parade on the lower frieze. Armed men lead the procession; women follow, beating their heads with both hands. An unusual terracotta model of a funeral cart from the first half of the seventh century B.C. found at Vari, in Southern Attica (fig. 4), carries a coffin covered with a shroud that can be removed to reveal the body. Around the coffin three female mourners have their hands raised in the beating gesture. Above the shroud is perched a bird, probably symbolizing the *psyche* of the deceased. The figure of a weeping child shows that even the youngest family members were permitted contact with the corpse.

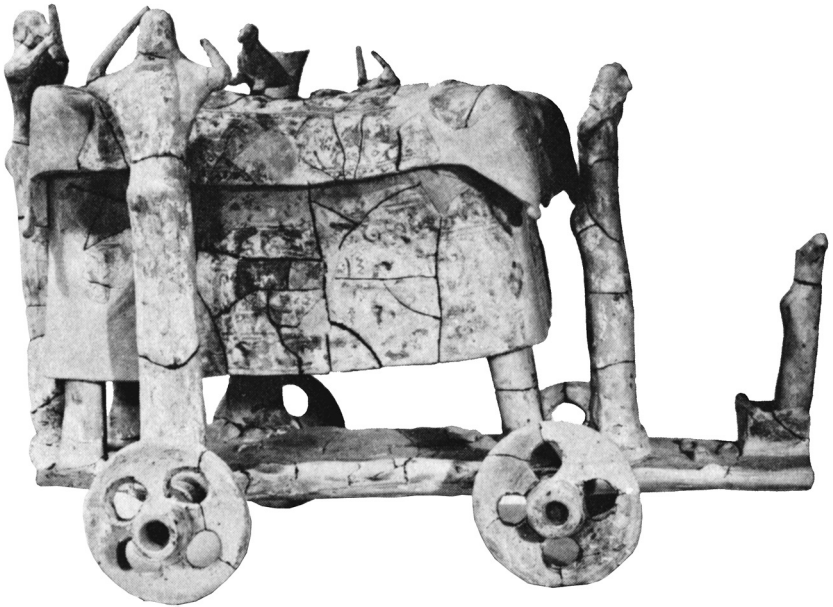


Figure 4. Terracotta figure group, Vari, Greece, c. 650 B.C. This model of an *ekphora* represents a four-wheeled cart on which stands a bier surrounded by mourners. Courtesy Athens National Archeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. NM 26747.

During the Classical period, the law of Solon specified that the funerary procession had to carry the body to the place of burial before sunrise on the day after the vigil (cf. § 5.3). This rule was supposed to ensure that only family members participated in the ceremony, to prevent sumptuous cortèges with a strong emotional impact. On a number of vases is a scene in which the bier is either carried or brought by mule-drawn cart by the light of torches. Hired flautists provided musical accompaniment. (Their instrument, the *aulos*, generally had two pipes and a single or a double reed.) Despite the restrictions of sumptuary law, music was never forbidden, and the Carian rhythm was most common (Plato, *Laws* 800e).

Various Asiatic regions are cited as the source of the Oriental melodies (cf. Aeschylus, *Persians* 935–40, 1054, *Choephoroi* 423). The practice that Plato proposes in the *Laws* (960a) does not, however, permit wailing or lamentation audible to those outside. A composed, silent cortège accompanying a fully covered bier is also prescribed in the laws of Ioulis on the island of Keos (late fifth century B.C.) and in the funerary regulations of the *phratry* (religious confraternity) of the Labiadaï at Delphi (first half of the fourth century B.C.), which also forbid the procession from stopping to put the bier down at junctions along its way (to prevent contamination of the area and repetition of laments). These documents are evidence of a widespread effort to confine the disruptive *pathos* of mourning within the home area, preserving the social space from any irrational behavior that might upset its balance (Frisone, 2003; cf. § 5.3).

### 3.3 CREMATION, INHUMATION, AND THE FINAL RITES

In Homeric poems burial takes place only after the body has been cremated, a practice unknown in the Mycenaean age but present in many Greek regions at the beginning of the Iron Age (between the end of the Bronze Age, c. 1100 B.C., and the beginning of the archaic period, ca. 700 B.C.). During the Geometric period, inhumation was equally common in Greece. At first the corpse was not enclosed in a coffin but was wrapped in a shroud and laid on a bed of leaves. According to Plutarch the Spartans maintained this practice (*Lycurgus* 27, 2). These two procedures alternated through the ages: incineration is predominant in the archaic period; in the classical age no clear preference emerges. Tragedies—which evoke an unspecified heroic era—describe the burning of the body as standard practice, but a number of exceptions were dictated by

dramatic needs or particular circumstances. Alcestis has to “rise again” at the end of the tragedy, and there is every suggestion that she is buried. Not least of these are Admetus’ promise to be buried in the same coffin (Euripides, *Alcestis* 365–68) and the chorus’s wish, “May the earth lie light upon you” (line 463), which would become frequent in tomb epigrams. In what seems a slip of the pen, however, Euripides refers to Alcestis’ grave as *pyra*, which describes heroic funeral pyres (line 608). Funerals for the defeated, such as Polyxena and Polydorus (Euripides, *Hecuba* 571–80, 894–97), could also include pyres as a special honor, but theirs was more often a hurried inhumation following a sober homage from enslaved family members—as for Astyanax, in Euripides’ *Trojan Women* (lines 1141–55). After his suicide, Ajax is simply buried. The leaders of the army wanted to prevent his burial, much as Creon in the *Antigone* wished to prevent the burial of Polynices who was also considered a public enemy. Thus for the tragic heroes, inhumation is a burial in keeping with ritual requirements but devoid of solemnity (cf. Sophocles, *Antigone* 194–206; *Ajax* 1129–32, 1164–67, 1326ff., 1385–88, 1402ff.).

In the Hellenistic period, inhumation prevails. Even so, the choice between inhumation and cremation seems to entail no fundamental difference between the funerary ceremonies nor a change in belief about the body after death. The predominance of one practice over the other varied from place to place and according to personal or family preference but was not necessarily linked to economic factors: rites and offerings at the tomb do not differ substantially. If it is right that “Orphic” golden tablets accompanying the initiates of Dionysian sects on their journey to the afterlife (§ 2.4) have been found both with cremated remains (as at Thurii) and at sites of inhumation, not even religious beliefs privileged one method over the other. Burial treasures frequently

accompany cremations and sometimes are richer than those accompanying inhumations. That inhumations and cremations both contain tubes through which libations were poured into the tomb—a practice that, despite Church disapproval, continued in the Balkans until almost the present—shows that burning is not intended to accelerate the separation of *psyche* from the body. Rohde (1925, pp. 21–22) advanced this erroneous hypothesis on the assumption that, following the demise of the Mycenaean culture, a spiritual revolution used cremation in an attempt to shatter the power of the deceased by banishing their souls from the land of the living. But it is likely that the irrational habit of caring for the dead as if they still needed to eat, drink, and be clothed was so rooted in the cultural mindset that mourners could ignore the fact that burning the body makes hopes or fantasies about the deceased's continuing needs even more irrational. There is a tendency to distinguish "corpse" from "ghost," but funerary practices take no notice of such a distinction, considering them "consubstantial" (Dodds, 1951, p. 136).

The offerings Achilles lays at Patroclus' funeral pyre are thought to be a distorted picture of historical reality. No parallels in quantity or variety have been found, even in the Homeric poems themselves. (Only a few details are repeated in the description of Achilles' funeral [*Od.* XXIV 65–68].) This excess has been particularly noted where sacrifices are concerned: twelve Trojan prisoners are burned on the pyre together with prized animals—two dogs and four horses—as well as sheep and cattle whose fat is laid around the body to accelerate combustion (*Il.* XXIII 166–76). Archaeological data suggest that amphorae of honey and oil are, generally, propitiatory offerings destined for the tomb rather than the pyre. Achilles sets afire all Patroclus' possessions, which he wanted destroyed at his death to show his dignity and prestige, together with an enormous array of riches from his friends,

given to honor him and demonstrate their affection. At the same time a number of findings from Bronze- and Iron-Age Greece have given us historical examples to match the image we find in heroic epic poetry. The most relevant is the large burial at Lefkandi, on the west coast of Euboea, which dates from the mid-tenth century B.C. (cf. § 4.3). It consists of an apsidal building nearly fifty meters long. (Because of its size, and because it probably was never inhabited, archaeologists named it *heroon*—even though there are no signs of a heroic cult.) It covered two burial pits, and after these had been used, it was filled entirely with earth and stones and turned into a funerary tumulus. Four horses were found in one pit. The other contained a bronze jar in which, wrapped in a fringed linen cloth, were the bones of a cremated warrior and, nearby, the inhumed corpse of a heavily bejeweled woman. Next to the woman's head was an ivory-handled iron knife. It is possible that this was a double burial of a warrior and his companion who died at similar times, but the presence of the weapon suggests that the woman was killed in his honor. The most valuable objects are of Oriental origin and date from long before these burials: the cinerary urn comes from late Bronze Age Cyprus (ca. 1225–1125 B.C.), and the woman's Babylonian gold pendant dates from a full eight hundred years before the burial. To own valuable objects from the distant past was clearly a mark of prestige for the aristocracy, as was ownership of certain heirlooms handed down by epic heroes from one generation to the next. An example is the leather helmet covered with plates made of wild-boar tusk, characteristic of the first Mycenaean age, that Meriones lent to Odysseus (*Il.* X 261–71; Boardman, 2002; Crielaard, 2002). In eighth- and seventh-century B.C. tombs at Salamis, in Cyprus, spectacular remains of horse sacrifices have been found: one or more couples buried with whole chariots and probable human victims (Andronikos, 1968). Although human sacrifice is at



the center of many myths, it has a marginal place in religious rituals. Only on extraordinary occasions were human victims sacrificed together with animals. Herodotus attested that the killing of horses for burial with the deceased—a custom at the lavish funerals of Scythian sovereigns (Herodotus, IV 71, 4)—was still practiced in Athens around 524 B.C. (VI 103, 3): the mares of the quadriga (chariot drawn by four horses) with which Cimon, the father of Miltiades, had won three Olympic victories were buried opposite his grave when, shortly after his third victory, the sons of the tyrant Pisistratus had him killed.

When the funeral pyre is extinguished—the last flames of Patroclus' and Hector's pyres are doused with wine (*Il.* XXIII 250ff., XXIV 791ff.)—the bones are carefully collected and wrapped in a cloth, which also might be precious (for Hector it is purple: *Il.* XXIV 796) and then placed in a terracotta urn, which is buried either directly or after having been placed in a protective wooden or stone container. Sometimes the cinerary urns were of metal. Two bronze cauldrons, one upturned on the other, enclose the wrapped bones of a warrior killed at Eretria, in Euboea, around 720 B.C. (Crie-laard, 2002). Poetic license tends to make the material more precious: gold vases are mentioned for the great epic heroes (cf. *Il.* XXIII 253, XXIV 795; *Od.* XXIV 74–77). In the archaic period, on the other hand, "primary" cremation is most common: the fire is constructed inside the burial pit, eliminating the need to place the bones in an urn. (In *Il.* VII 419–36, the cremation and interment of the Greek and Trojan casualties, occur in the same location.)

Not much is known of the rites that marked the separation of the living from the remains of the deceased at the moment of tomb closure, although it seems probable that relatives poured out libations in honor of the deceased, as Antigone does when giving Polynices a symbolic burial by scattering dust

over him and offering three libations (Sophocles, *Antigone* 429–31). This rite, which reflects the idea that the corpse would be completely removed from the human sphere through “consecration” to the gods of the underworld, helps to explain the taboo surrounding the corpse (Garland 2001). If it is true that the dust Antigone scatters over her brother’s body is sufficient to satisfy “the unwritten and unfailing statutes fixed by the gods” (Sophocles, *Antigone* 454–55), then the same objective can be attributed to both inhumation and, even more clearly, cremation. The fire of the funeral pyre is above all a cathartic means of making the body “holy.” In tragedy the same verb *hagnizo* (“to purify”) and its compounds are used for sacrificial offerings burning on altars, for bodies burning in the funeral pyre, and for the rites accompanying inhumation (cf. Sophocles, *Antigone* 196, 545; Euripides, *Ion* 707–708, *Suppliants* 1211, *Orestes* 40). In the *Alcestis*, when the protagonist is about to descend to Hades (lines 74–76), Euripides speaks of a destructive rite of “consecration” to the Chthonian gods. In the happy ending a “deconsecration” is therefore required. It takes place over three days—the conventional length of funerary rituals—during which the revived Alcestis is unable to speak (lines 1144–46).

During the classical period the *perideipnon* (final funeral banquet) was held in the house of the deceased, probably immediately following the *ekphora*. This timetable is respected both at Hector’s funeral (*Il.* XXIV 801–803) and following the cremation of Greek and Trojan casualties during the truce (*Il.* VII 476–77). Patroclus’ funerary banquet is unusual in that Achilles offers it to the Myrmidons between lament and cremation (*[Il.* XXIII 29–34]; Herodotus V 8 describes a similar sequence, also in the classical period, for the richest Thracians: the *prothesis* and mourning are followed by the banquet, the burial, and the funeral games.) At the banquet the dead person is believed to be present for the last time (cf. Artemidorus,

*Onirotica* 5, 82). The relatives gather in his honor both to reinforce their solidarity as a group and, as a sign of returning to normal life, to end the fast they have kept during the three-day mourning period (Lucian, *On Mourning* 24).

In the archaic age a famous person's burial was followed by funeral games, which are often depicted on Geometric-period funerary vases. The *Iliad* describes the games that Achilles organized in memory of Patroclus (*Il.* XXIII 257–897), and Hesiod tells of his only voyage to Chalcis, in Euboea, to attend funeral games in honor of the local prince, Amphidamas, in which he won a tripod in a poetry competition (*Works and Days* 654–57). From the seventh century B.C. these games became increasingly focused on heroic cults in certain sanctuaries, and when these celebrations acquired Panhellenic importance, games instituted occasionally were relegated to secondary significance.

The end of the transition period, considered necessary in all cultures for the delicate and definitive passage of the soul into the world of the dead, was also marked by *triakostia*, *triakas*, or *triakades*, ritual banquets and sacrifices on the thirtieth day after death. Sources also refer to ceremonies at the tomb on the third day (*trita*) and the ninth day (*enata*), although the former—if the days are counted from the death itself—would be the concluding rites on the day of burial. Liquids, including milk, honey, wine, oil, water, and the blood of sacrificial animals, are sprinkled over the tomb. Sumptuary laws did, however, place limits on the use of expensive animals for this purpose. Solon, for example, prohibited the sacrifice of oxen (Plutarch, *Solon* 21, 6). In Athens the official mourning period lasted thirty days, but elsewhere the duration depended upon local customs. The family would hold annual commemorations, and the cult of the dead was practiced intently, as shown by the number of tomb-visiting scenes on vases destined for funerary use. On the Attic white-ground

*lekythoi*, relatives, particularly women, pour libations onto tombstones and monuments and leave offerings, ribbons, and crowns. An annual public holiday dedicated to the dead, the *Genesia* was celebrated in Athens on the fifth day of Boedromion (September). Care for the dead derived not only from ritual obligation—later turned into a duty sanctioned by law with a decree, mentioned in the pseudo-Demosthenic speech *Against Macartatus* 43, 57–58—but also simply from a desire to demonstrate that one is a legitimate heir of the deceased. From the Athenian orators of the fourth century we learn that it was not rare for either the prosecution or the defense in a tribunal to draw on completion or neglect of funerary obligations as proof or disavowal of a family tie and the attendant rights of succession (cf. Isaeus, *Nicostratus* 4, 7; 19; 26; *Philoctemon* 6, 40–42; *Ciron* 8, 21–27; 38–39).

## CHAPTER 4



# THE FINAL RESTING PLACE AND A NEW BOND

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Popular beliefs about the dead and how they interfere in the affairs of the living run through literary texts like an underground stream. Occasionally they surface, particularly in the tragedies of fifth-century authors, which describe the possibility of calling forth the dead from Hades, either by means of propitiatory rites for the gods of the underworld (as when the ghost of Darius appears on his tomb in Aeschylus' *Persians*) or by consulting them directly via the oracles of the dead (as Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, does with his wife, Melissa, in Herodotus V 92 η, 2–4). The idea that victims of assassinations are transformed into irate spirits recurs frequently; these spirits then are capable of inflicting famine, sterility, madness, and other evils on the living either directly or, for crimes involving blood relatives, through the agency of archaic divinities such as the Furies. The ghost of Clytemnestra appears in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, as does that of Polydorus in Euripides' *Hecuba* (in which the epiphany of Achilles on his tomb also is narrated). For Plato, on the other hand, ghosts are the impure, contaminated souls of the wicked who, unable to free themselves from their bodily matter, wander around tombs and monuments, "through fear of

the invisible and of the other world" paying the penalty for past misconduct (*Phaedo* 81c-d).

In popular understanding, the restless dead who cannot find peace—either because they met a premature or violent end or because they were deprived of funeral honors and burial—can be transformed into malicious, aggressive, and dangerous daemons. In the second half of the fifth century the orator Antiphon pointed out (in various passages of his *Tetralogies*) a strong relationship between moral guilt and contamination and between penal norms and religious sanctions, and he maintains that the wrath of the dead—in the form of *aliterioi* (vindictive spirits)—affects not only the criminal himself but also the judges and the entire city that fail to condemn him. The belief that magical techniques can be used to manipulate the negative energies of the deceased—as suggested by encounters with Oriental cultures from Mesopotamia and Egypt—gave rise to the *goes* (magus or enchanter), a specialist capable of communicating with the dead in order to direct their interaction with the living. In Greece this happened during a period when funerary legislation (§ 5.3) reduced communication with the dead through *goos* (ritual lament; cf. Johnston, 1999).

In the classical age it was commonly believed that the living can interact with the dead and use their power to assist in good and evil. (In the Homeric worldview this was unthinkable: the *psychai* are unfeeling and lethargic. They are separated forever from this world. The most they can hope for is that divine wrath will intervene if someone offends their mortal remains [§ 1.1].) The borders between the underworld and the land of the living are crossed in both directions, and in the literature of the time the dead are active and responsive. From the fifth century until the Roman era, there is even evidence that *katadesmoi* (curse tablets: thin sheets of lead engraved with spells) were used to “bind,” that is, to obstruct,

harm, or even kill, an enemy. Usually these were placed in the tomb so that the dead person could deliver them to the chthonian gods Hecate, Hermes, and Persephone.

Nevertheless, doubts about whether actions and conversations in the real world can be perceived in the afterlife were expressed frequently and with no consistency. The living could only hope that the deceased person was pleased with rites performed in his/her honor and approved (or disapproved) the behavior of his/her loved ones. This hope inspired a growing piety that is evident in tomb inscriptions. At the same time, however, orators celebrating those who had died for their country did not always succeed in hiding their fear that eschatological beliefs might be an illusion reflecting the value system of the society that nourished them. As we read in the *Funeral Speech* (attributed to Demosthenes) concerning the Athenians killed at Chaeronea in 338 B.C.:

With excellent reason one might declare them to be now seated beside the gods below, possessing the same rank as the brave men who have preceded them in the islands of the blest. For though no man has been there to see or brought back this report concerning them, yet those whom the living have assumed to be worthy of honors in the world above, these we believe, taking for oracle our own opinion, receive the same honors also in the world beyond.

(60, 34, transl. N. W. DeWitt)

In the eighth century B.C., a period of great cultural, social, and political change, the Greeks saw a wide gulf between themselves and their ancestors who had built impressive fortifications at Mycenae and Tiryns and placed their dead in *tholoi* (monumental chamber tombs). As a consequence, a

special “rank” of dead from the past came on the scene. These were thought both to enjoy the gods’ favors because they had lived in a heroic age and to be able to interfere, for profit or harm, in the activities of the living (at least in the vicinity where they were buried). The result was the rise of the hero cult (§ 4.3), a form of religious devotion in a zone between the cult of the chthonian divinities and that of the celestial gods. Thus, behind the various reasons why the hero cult flourished we can also see a certain desire to establish a link with glorious forefathers who could plausibly be thought distinct from the vast crowd of the dead in the afterlife because they had been worthy of honor in their lifetime.

#### 4.2 STELAE, MONUMENTS, AND EPITAPHS

For ordinary people, funerary inscriptions on commemorative stelae and monuments were a more accessible means of resisting total erasure from human memory than were the heroic encomium, which typically was offered to aristocrats. To the extent that the *sema* (tomb marker) records a person’s life, it afforded ordinary people, those ignored by epic poetry, escape from oblivion. Through the engraved word a person could hope to be remembered, not for acts of bravery and social prestige, which are celebrated in song, but simply for having lived and formed relationships with others (Nicosia, 1992).

The oldest epitaphs, found on the islands of the Aegean and in continental Greece, appeared during the first half of the seventh century B.C., when tombstones began to be marked with the name of the deceased. The Homeric poems seem unaware of such a practice, and Nestor cannot determine the original function of the tree stump held up by two white stones that Achilles chooses as the turning post in the chariot race during Patroclus’ funeral games: there is no inscription



to clarify whether it had been a grave marker or the turning post in a previous racecourse (*Il.* XXIII 326–32). Before his duel with a Greek hero, Hector imagined his opponent's imposing tumulus erected on the banks of the Hellespont so as to be visible to sailors well into the future (*Il.* VII 85–91), but the recollection of their fatal battle is passed down in oral form, not as an inscription. Rather than record only the identity of the fallen man, as an epigraph would, the tale also celebrates the killer's name through future generations. Thus, consistent with Hector's plan, the defeated warrior gained heroic status for having fallen at his hands.

Across the plain of Troy a number of burial places are simply landmarks, such as Myrine's tomb (*Il.* II 814) and, in the center of the plain, the tomb of Ilus, where Hector held a council of war while Paris hid behind the stele in order to aim his arrows at Diomedes (*Il.* X 415, XI 166, 370–72, XXIV 349). The tomb of old Aesyetes, in a raised area outside the city gates, served as a lookout point for observing the besiegers (*Il.* II 793). In the *Odyssey*, Elpenor's shadow begs Odysseus to give him a dignified burial once his body and armor have been cremated: a single oar is to be fixed in the tumulus to show that he was a humble sailor who met an obscure death and has no heroic feats to boast about (XI 71–78, XII 8–15).

In the archaic age the activation of memory is developed still further by the funerary monument; alongside *sema* (sign) and *tymbos* (grave, burial mound), the term *mnema* (monument, tomb, memorial) starts to appear in literary texts and inscriptions. Later it would become the most common term in this context. Indeed, the stele and the funerary monument do not simply mark the location of a burial; they are also the continuing metonymic presence of the deceased, a surrogate that receives offerings and ritual attention. Stelae, for example, are washed, anointed, and decorated with ribbons, reminiscent of the preparation of a body for a funeral. In time the

rough-hewn stele or pillar would be replaced by a painted or carved decoration that, like all ancient sculpture, was colorful. This took the form of an *acroterion* (decorative element on the pediment of a small shrine) in the shape of a palmette, a sphinx, a siren, or acanthus leaves or in a geometric pattern.

Some statues are idealized representations of the deceased. Within clearly distinguished roles—the women firmly linked to the *oikos* (household) and family, the men outside the private sphere—a social dimension linked to individual memories of the deceased emerges from the very earliest evidence of funerary monuments. It is plausible, for example, that the archaic *korai* (statues of young girls sometimes used as tombstones) did not represent a generic feminine model, as has been claimed, but instead were iconographic syntheses of the “incomplete” status of an unmarried virgin (marriage being the goal in life for every Greek woman). The symbols generally appearing on these statues—including the pose, the rich clothing and jewelry, and the pomegranate or lotus flower that the girl sometimes holds—suggest a similarity to Persephone, and together they depict one of her devotees. The metaphor often used in literary texts to define a girl who died unmarried, namely “Hades’ bride,” supports the hypothesis that she was depicted as an eternal maiden, whose normal human itinerary has been cruelly interrupted by death and fixed eternally at what should have been only a temporary stage (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995). Additional support is embodied in at least one epitaph: the statue dedicated to Phrasikleia bears an inscription on its base resignedly mourning her missed marriage opportunity. Ritual lament and eulogy are expressed together in the first person by this “speaking object” and are echoed forever by those who read the epitaph aloud (Day, 1989). The work of the sculptor Aristion of Paros, discovered in 1972 at Myrrhinous (Merenda), in eastern Attica, damaged by natural disaster or Persian invaders, had been

removed from its base and carefully interred alongside a male funerary statue. Its limestone base has been known for a long time, along with its inscription (fig. 5): "Phrasikleia's *sema* [marker]. / I will be called *kore* [maiden] forever: / this name is my lot from the gods instead of marriage."

Funerary statues dedicated to *kouroi* (young men) during this same period (from the second half of the sixth century to the first decade of the fifth century B.C.) also represent aristocratic youths. They are standing naked, usually with their arms by their sides and one leg forward, as though walking in a dignified manner. Their nudity is reminiscent of depictions of athletes and Homeric warriors on the oldest red-figure ceramics, in which, illogically, heroes were shown naked, even in battle (Shapiro, 1991). The archaic *kouros* seems to be an iconographic synthesis symbolizing aristocratic youths—ephebi (adolescents) or men of fighting age, up to age thirty—who died without having formed a family (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995).

The epigraph on the base of a statue dedicated to Kroisos of Anavyssos (ca. 540–530 B.C., National Archaeological Museum of Athens), a magisterial couplet, shows how a eulogy for a fallen warrior was modeled on epic poetry; its imperatives demand the mimesis of the funeral ritual, but its repetition by the voices of passersby takes the form of a miniature encomium (Day, 1989): "Stop by the tomb of dead Kroisos, and mourn him: / raging Ares killed him, one day, among the front-rank warriors."

The vast majority of archaic funeral monuments were dedicated by parents to their sons and daughters who died young. As such they reflect neither the strong sense of family unity and continuity between generations that is evident in monuments of the fourth century B.C. nor children's' sacrosanct duty to honor their fathers at the end of their lives. Later, during the years of the Peloponnese war, young nude



Figure 5. Marble grave statue of the Kore Phrasikleia by Aristion of Paros, in Attica, c. 550–540 B.C. Courtesy Athens National Archeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. 4889.

males appear on Attic white-ground *lekythoi* as visitors to a tomb. As the form of funeral pottery least influenced by official Athenian ideology, Attic white-ground *lekythoi* provide the most clues about surviving family members' private mourning. In accordance with heroic nudity of the archaic period, such a figure undoubtedly represents the epiphany of the deceased before his own tomb. Sometimes these figures are portrayed as athletes, sometimes as musicians carrying a lyre—sport and music being characteristic of aristocratic education and recreation—and sometimes they are seated, pensive and melancholic, or standing, clad only in armor.

Indeed, nudity, scanty clothing, and instruments not used in funerary music distinguish these figures from others in the scene, often women, who appear to be paying homage at the tomb. In fifth-century Athens, the cult of the dead was considered an avenue to communicate and keep in touch with deceased loved ones. In a number of later examples, scenes of hunting or combat, whether afoot or on horseback, are used to idealize the dead person as either an ephebe or a warrior (Oakley, 2004).

Simple clay vases and then (in the second half of the fifth century B.C.) vases of marble often were used as tomb markers. The earliest examples are large eighth century B.C. Geometric-style vases from the Dipylon cemetery in Athens. The use of vases as tomb markers, which was particularly common between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C., continued across the Greek world until the time of the Roman empire. The shapes appearing most frequently were the *lekythos* (an elongated, one-handled vase for oils and aromatic ointments) and the *loutrophoros* (a tall, two-handled vase used for water, particularly for the wedding bath), which marked the tombs of adolescents who died unmarried.

As time passed, the stele took on the shape of a little shrine: the upper part was a small sculpted pediment supported by

pilasters. The relief usually portrayed scenes from the life of the deceased that summarized familial and social surroundings: the artisan with his tools, the athlete performing his sport, the soldier arming himself or astride his horse, the old man leaning on his stick, the woman in her room with a maid waiting to serve her or with a baby on her lap.

The epigraph, an essential feature of the stele, is usually found beneath the relief but sometimes is also above. If the name of the deceased is carved above a figure in the scene, it is easy to identify him/her; otherwise such recognition is less certain or impossible. Craftsmen produced standard reliefs from which families could choose rather than having to commission a scene. Furthermore, the same relief could sometimes be reused by adding the names of children to that of their father, by replacing the old inscription with a new one, or by removing figures or altering their appearance (Guarducci, 1974; Kurtz and Boardman, 1971). The iconography of these reliefs is not always easy to decipher. For example, when the scene shows two women, one seated and one standing and facing her, often saying goodbye by means of *dexiosis* (a handshake), it is not clear whether the deceased is portrayed by the seated, melancholic figure or by the one who is standing as if about to take her leave.

From the end of the fifth century B.C., the handshake motif is very common in funeral stelae, particularly for spouses, as a symbolic indication that family bonds are not broken by death. It could, however—if we consider the flexibility with which it lends itself to the emphasis on family unity (Davies, 1985)—represent a couple's hope for reunion in Hades, an event to which literary texts refer frequently. The image of Iphigenia on the banks of the Acheron welcoming Agamemnon by kissing him and throwing her arms round his neck is Clytemnestra's sarcastic way of prefiguring an otherworldly meeting between a father and the daughter whom he had

sacrificed (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1555–59). Being buried together increased the chance of such a meeting: Admetus exhorts the dying Alcestis to wait for him and to prepare the house that they will share together: “For I shall command my children here to bury me in the same coffin with you and to lay out my body next to yours. Never, even in death, may I be parted from you, the woman who alone has been faithful to me!” (Euripides, *Alcestis* 365–68, transl. D. Kovacs).

Despite the emphasis on life together in the hereafter, few stelae depicting two people contain an inscription that explicitly refers to them both being dead. A touching example is the stele of Ampharete (fig. 6), in which the relief portrays a cloaked, seated young woman sadly contemplating the little boy lying in her lap, whom she supports with her left arm while showing him a little bird with her right hand, and the child stretches one hand toward her. The epigraph above this—an elegiac couplet followed by a hexameter—identifies the tomb as that of a grandmother and her grandson: “I am holding my daughter’s dear son. When we were both / alive and saw the sun’s rays, / I held him on my knees, and now that I am dead, I also hold him, dead.”

The women described in these inscriptions as having conventional roles (wife, mother, sister, daughter) have domestic objects, such as baskets of wool, near them and are holding spindles or mirrors. The men’s accessories (sticks, shields, and hunting dogs) generally denote their role outside the family sphere. The moment of death is only alluded to in a veiled manner, through melancholic expressions or symbols of the risks a man takes in life. Demokleides’ stele, from the early fourth century B.C. (fig. 7), is remarkable for its refined composure: the dead young man, singled out in the upper right-hand corner, sits in the prow of a ship looking pensive and with his shield and helmet behind him—evidence that he died in a naval battle.

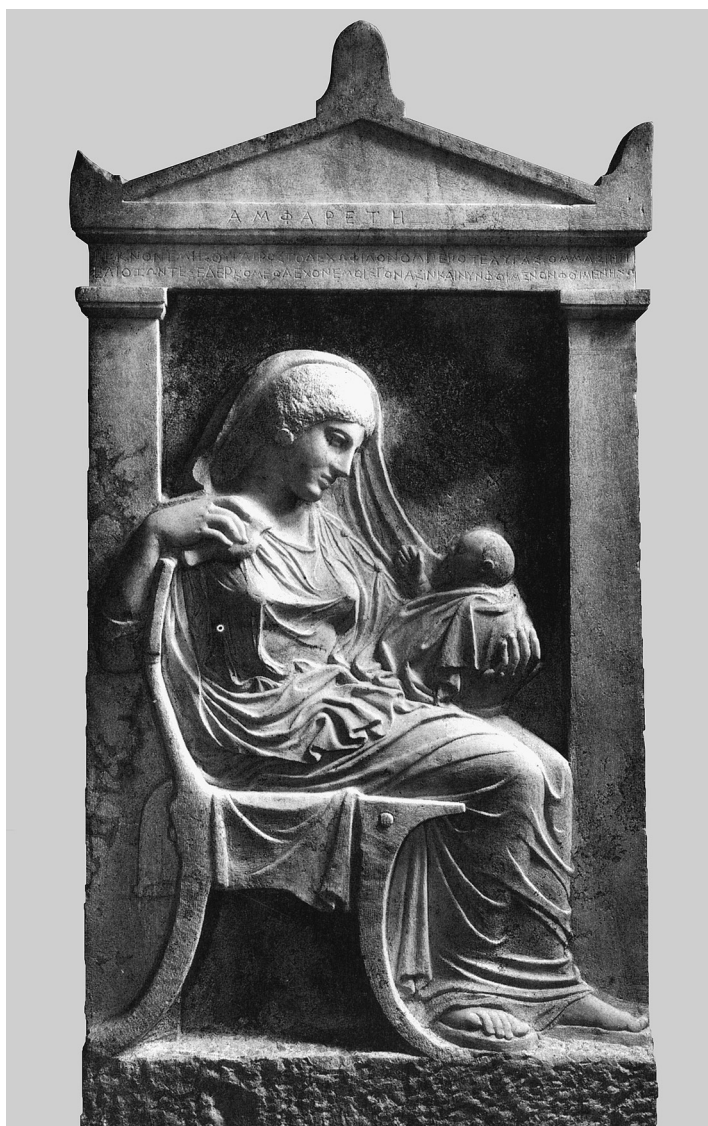


Figure 6. Marble relief depicting Ampharete with her grandchild, c. 410 B.C. Courtesy Archeological Museum of Kerameikos, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. P 695.



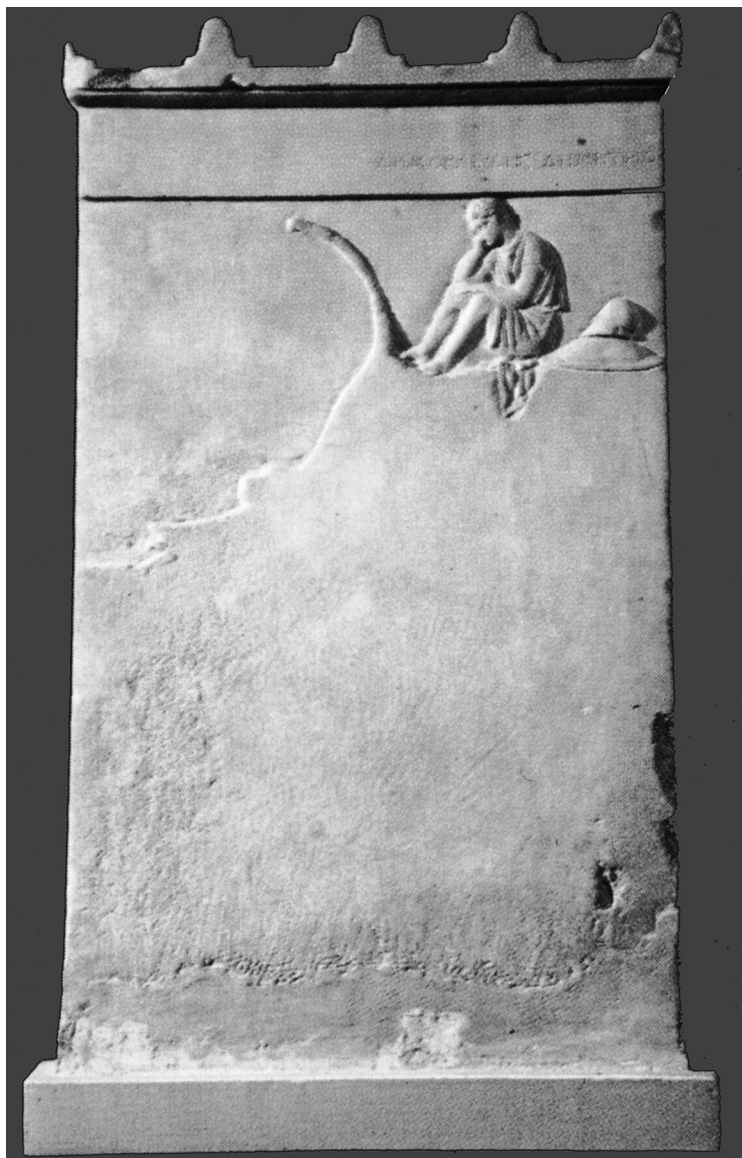


Figure 7. Early fourth-century marble grave stele depicting a warrior sitting on the prow of a ship. The name Demokleides son of Demetrios is inscribed. Courtesy National Archeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. NM 752.

In a number of stelae from the end of the fifth or the beginning of the fourth century B.C., the presence of a newborn baby in the arms either of the deceased or of a servant or relative seems to allude to a death in childbirth, although through respect for the formal dignity of funerary art, no details are provided. (The stele of Ampharete, described above, uses the same pattern to portray a different family bond; only the accompanying epitaph prevents a misreading.) Beginning in the second quarter of the fourth century B.C., a very few stelae or marble *lekythoi* depict this scene explicitly (and with extraordinary pathos) instead of employing an idealized image with few indicators of place or time. (In so doing they violate the convention by which the effigy never shows the deceased in the agony of death or in the circumstance that caused the death.) In these a woman is shown suffering, lying on a seat or bed, her hair loose over her shoulders, while a young maid supports her from behind and an older woman—the midwife or a relative—runs toward her. Sometimes the older woman is replaced by a person in a gesture of lament, with one hand on his/her chin or head. Plangon's stele, which dates from the last twenty years of the fourth century, is the most complete version of this iconographic scheme (fig. 8). It includes all four figures: a man—probably her father, Tolmides (who is mentioned in the inscription)—stands on the far left in a gesture of lament, and the midwife runs with arms outstretched toward the woman in labor, whose maid holds her up by the shoulders but who is about to collapse in an unseemly manner on a *kline* (Stewart and Gray, 2000; Catoni, 2005).

Because stelae representing women at the moment of death in childbirth are rare and appear for only a short time in Attic funerary art, they do not support the establishment of a correspondence between death in childbirth and a man's heroic death in battle, as may be suggested in a passage from Plutarch

(*Lycurgus* 27, 3). It has been suggested that a regulation dating from the mythical Lycurgus' legislation in Sparta forbade inscribing the name of a dead person on his/her tomb, excepting only men who died in battle and women who died during childbirth. However, this is not exactly what manuscripts have handed down to us: the second exception is the result of an amendment to the text—probably corrupt and certainly unclear—which seems in fact to refer to women who died while in priestly office (Brulé and Piolot, 2004; Dillon, 2007). Kurt Latte made the correction based on several late Laconian epitaphs, in which the name of the deceased man or woman is accompanied by "in war" or "in childbirth." It seems likely, then—and scholars took up the idea with rash enthusiasm—that Sparta paid homage in this way to citizens who had given their lives for their country in their respective roles, either by defending it with their weapons or bringing a new life to ensure its continuity. In this way, the society would have turned private memorial and eulogy to a didactic function, as a model of civic conscience for the younger generations. There are, however, serious doubts about the existence of any such measure in Sparta, and it would be even more careless to suggest that in Athenian civic ideology any celebration of these two causes of death presupposed a symmetry between war and childbirth (as Loraux, 1995, suggests). Indeed, Medea's famous complaint demonstrates that the dominant mentality did not recognize the risks involved in the secluded and sheltered lives of women: "Men say that we live a life free from danger at home while *they* fight with the spear. How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once" (Euripides, *Medea* 248–51, transl. D. Kovacs). In Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (lines 919–21), by contrast, Orestes asserts that women, who are safe inside the walls of their home, exploit the efforts of men who are forced to travel far away to war.



Figure 8. Hellenistic period (c. 320 B.C.) marble grave stele found at Oropus, in the territory between Attica and Boeotia. Courtesy Athens National Archeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. NM 749.

The idealistic transfiguration of military virtues typically found on the stelae of warrior males contrasts with the realistic representations of childbirth, in which small but significant details emphasize the woman's physical pain. When Dexileos died in a cavalry clash near Corinth in 394/393 B.C. and was buried with his fellow warriors, his family—as if to reclaim his individual physiognomy (Loraux, 1982, p. 31)—built in their burial plot a cenotaph with a splendid relief depicting him on a fiery horse trampling his defeated enemy (fig. 9).

That warriors were portrayed as triumphant even when their last battle saw them defeated compounds the difficulty of establishing a conceptual equivalence between male valor and female fragility as displayed in fatal childbirth (as Stewart and Gray, 2000, suggest). Both the inscription and the monument offer a substitute image for the man who died in war, leaving no room for realistic detail even when the very manner of his death brought him glory. His complex biography is reduced to the abstract permanence of an ideal death, seen in the artificial light of moral and physical perfection, features well-known to contemporaries familiar with literary encomium and commemorative art (Day, 1989).

The epitaph might name, together with the deceased, those who took care of the burial: a child, a parent, or a relative or friend who carried out his/her religious duty by giving the dead the appropriate honors. (The stele and the tomb as well as the funeral are described in epic as *geras thanonton* [the honor of the dead; cf. *Il.* XVI 457, 675, and, in relation to mourning, *Il.* XXIII 9 and *Od.* IV 197, XXIV 190].) The caregiver commits to remember the dead, and the inscription communicates this to others, strangers and those who will live long after the people who knew the deceased. A couplet engraved on the base of an Attic stele (ca. 540–530 B.C. Kera-meikos Museum, Athens) is even addressed to passersby absorbed in their own thoughts: “Man walking along the



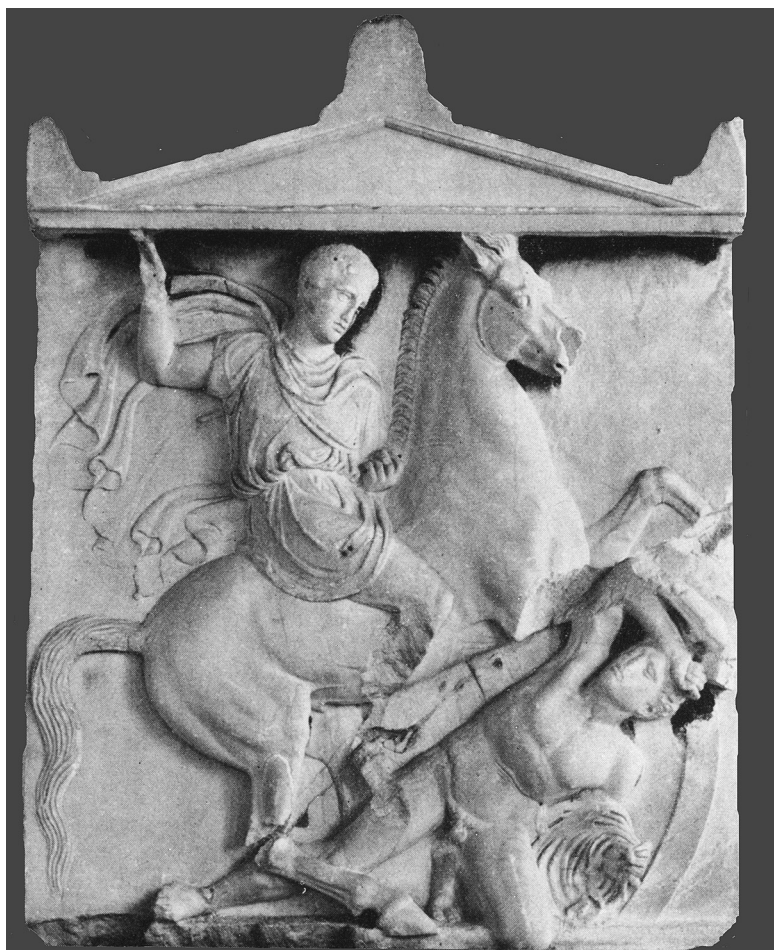


Figure 9. Cenotaph for Dexileos, the son of Lysanias of Thorikos, killed at Corinth in 394-393 B.C. An inscription below the relief records the dates of his birth (414-413 B.C.) and of his death. Courtesy Archeological Museum of Kerameikos, Athens, Greece. Inventory no. P 1130.

road, thinking of other things, / stop and have compassion at the sight of Thrason's *sema* (marker)."

In the Archaic period, mourning is expressed directly by the exclamation *oimoi* (Alas!), which was placed either at the

beginning of the epigraph, where it was followed by “O” and the name of the deceased (in the vocative), or on its own at the end. This formula is found most often in sixth- and fifth-century B.C. epitaphs from Selinus, in Sicily. Clearly it is inspired by the funeral lament and is designed to preserve memory by involving the passerby, an anonymous “I” who did not take part in the *prothesis* or the funeral but who, reading the inscription aloud, re-creates that ceremonial atmosphere, participating in the mourning in a new dimension, no longer exclusively private and incidental. One terracotta tablet dating from around 500 B.C. (fig. 10), a *pinax* painted with a black-figure *prothesis* scene, uses unusual inscriptions to indicate the degree of kinship to the dead man among the women shown gathered around him and of the men who have come to say their last goodbye; besides, the interjection *oimoi* is a verbal indicator of their lament, which increases the pathos embodied in figurative representations of ritual gestures.

Similarly, an inscription from Selinus in the second half of the sixth century B.C. (Palermo, National Museum) mentions the deceased in the “self-deictic” form (the object introduces itself to the onlooker and explains its function): “I am the tombstone of Agasias, son of Karias. Alas!” (Guarducci, 1974).

Archaic tomb monuments express, above all else, grief and desolation at the loss of the deceased. They give no space to the emerging eschatological beliefs associated with mystery cults or marginal sects. The preference is to commend the social physiognomy of the dead to common memory rather than to express beliefs not yet widely shared (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995). Only in the fourth century do private funerary inscriptions begin to greet the deceased, using the imperative *chaire* (“rejoice” and “farewell”). As it came to dominate epigraphs—following the model of collective public epitaphs such as the *polyandria* dedicated by the Athenian community to their fallen—it replaced the usual homage of compassion

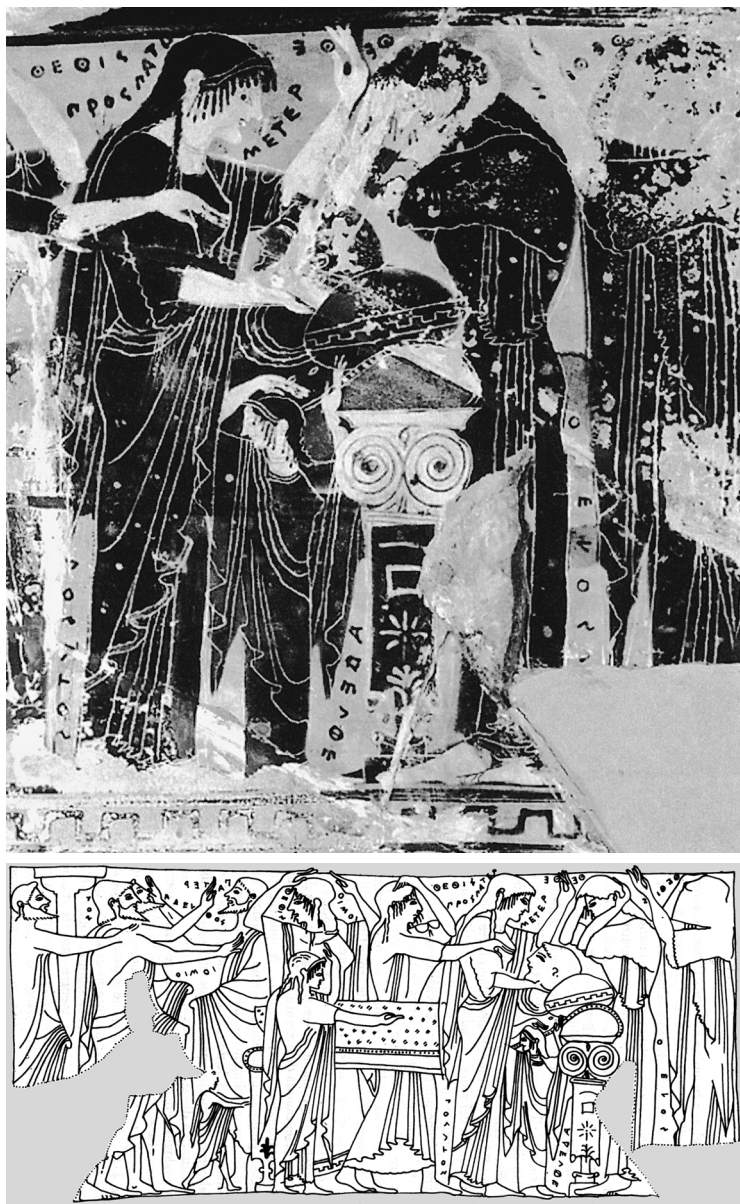


Figure 10. Scene of *prothesis*. Above: Attic black-figure *pinax* by the Sappho Painter, c. 500 B.C. Below: A diagrammatic representation of this black-figure image. Courtesy Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Inventory no. MNB 905 (L4).



and sadness with an understanding of death more open to hope. Within the funerary ideology developed by the Athenian democracy (§ 5.2), mourning and lamentation are excluded from official rhetoric at state celebrations of citizens killed in war. Instead the focus is on eulogy, and a formula is developed for addressing the “excellent” dead, who have gained glory on the battlefield and with it immortal heroic status. *Chairete aristees* (“Hail to you, O courageous ones”) first appears at the beginning of the epigram attributed to Simonides, perhaps dedicated to the Athenians killed at the battle of Tanagra, in 458–457 B.C. (*Anthologia Palatina* VII 254). The circumstance celebrated is unknown, however; possibly the date should be moved forward a few decades (Bremmer, 2006, p. 25).

Nevertheless, during the archaic and classical periods, even when the deceased gave his life for his native land, private epigraphs were dominated by pity for the individual’s fate and the family’s sense of loss. Although the farewell formula, with its wishes for happiness, might appear today to be trite, at the time it likely was the mark of a change in ideology, when hope for a blessed survival was being extended gradually from exceptional individuals, who were guaranteed heroic status, to all the dead (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995). Moreover, as is seen frequently in the *Homeric Hymns*, this formula was an expression of respect used to address the gods in prayer and hymns. When it appears on a golden tablet from Thurii, it is in the context of the initiate’s deification after death (Graf and Johnston, 2007, n. 3; cf. § 2.4). In tragic literature, “Farewell” is also used as a propitiatory greeting to the deified dead or to the object of a heroic cult, as when Menelaus addresses Helen following her apotheosis (cf. Euripides, *Orestes* 1673–74). Thus when Alcestis’ exceptional virtues win her the respect and worship of the chorus, they imagine her to be transformed into a beneficent deity and

so change the terms of their address: many epitaphs invite passersby to stop and meditate on the fragility of human life, offering a compassionate tribute, but at this one they will bow in admiration to win the favor of the deceased heroine:

Let not the grave of your wife be regarded as the funeral mound of the dead departed but let her be honored as are the gods, an object of reverence to the wayfarer. Someone walking a winding path past her tomb shall say, "This woman died in the stead of her husband, and now she is a blessed divinity. Hail [*chair'*], Lady, and grant us your blessing!" With such words will they address her.

(Euripides, *Alcestis* 995–1005, transl. D. Kovacs)

On the other hand, Achilles' touching words of farewell to his beloved friend during the funeral rite are only a temporary farewell between two individuals who are linked in a special way: "Farewell [*chaire*], Patroclus. I hail you in Hades' house too" (*Il.* XXIII 19, 179), that is, "even if the dead do not rejoice." Even death cannot interrupt their heroic friendship, not only because Achilles sees Patroclus' death as a prefiguration of his own, but also because he imagines their affection continuing, in a paradox that overturns and challenges the usual understanding. When Achilles reaffirms his desire that their bond be maintained at least in memory, he is thinking little of the difficulty of letting his dead friend perceive his feeling. Nor are his thoughts on their destined future reunion. (The first *Nekyia* shows them next to each other, and the second tells of how their bones were placed in the same urn [*Od.* XI 467–68; XXIV 76–77].) Rather, aware that he himself is close to oblivion, he asserts that his willpower can oppose the dismal Homeric phenomenology of death:

And I will not forget him, never so long as  
 I remain among the living and my knees have their  
 spring beneath me.  
 And though the dead forget the dead in the house  
 of Hades,  
 even there I shall still remember my beloved companion.  
 (Il. XXII 387–90, transl. R Lattimore)

Although verse epitaphs derive their themes, formulae, and conventions from encomiastic poetry and archaic epic, no epitaph contains a declaration comparable to this one. Achilles challenges death without holding back, denying its power to terminate or even attenuate his feelings for Patroclus. He confidently replaces the usual dream (resuming a previous friendship in the afterlife) with the conviction that his condition will be unchanged and stable, that his memory will resist even the laws of Hades. In a funerary epigram from the first century B.C. a similar sentiment appears in words attributed to a dead woman (cf. Graf and Johnston, 2007 p. 117). If, however, the usual contrast between survivor and deceased is reversed—so that the deceased benefits more than the survivor from not forgetting a loved one—relying on continuing affection is not enough. A concrete stratagem must be called upon to explain how this memory escapes the rules of oblivion: “I have not drunk the last water of Lethe in Hades, so I shall have you as my consolation even among the dead, Theios, you who are even more unhappy because you are in mourning as a widower” (Merkelbach and Stauber, 1998, pp. 10–11, lines 11–14). In an ironic elaboration of this motif in literature, consolation becomes torment when Protesilaus, the first Greek warrior who fell at Troy, continues to be consumed by desire for his young bride, whom he left at home. His passion endures even after he drinks the water of Lethe (Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead* 23, 3).

Not until the Hellenistic period will funerary epigrams express hope for the salvation and happiness of initiates in mystic religions. In the third century B.C., Posidippus of Pella (Macedonia), a poet active at the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria, offers a few examples. That he himself was an initiate of the Dionysiac rites we learn from one of his epigrams, in which he wishes to travel the "mystic path" leading to Rhadamanthys, judge of the dead, without being mourned by anyone, because, although old and famous, he is still lucid and strong (118, 24–28 Austin-Bastianini). One text that has come to light recently, in the papyrus of Milan (which contains an anthology of his epigrams), celebrates the death of a follower of the mysteries of Demeter and Kore as follows:

Nicostrate came to the place of the blessed, the sacred rites  
of the initiated and the pure fire, before Triptolemus.  
The [friendship] of Rhadamanthys [called] her back,  
[as did]  
Aeacus, to the gloomy dwelling and the gates [of Hades]  
after she had seen [the children] of children. Thus  
[gentler] always  
for mankind is the harbor of [mournful] old age.

(43 Austin and Bastianini; see Ferrari, 2007, p. 163,  
transl. C. Austin, slightly modified)

The gaps in the text do not prevent us from understanding its basic motifs. After noting the privileged fate granted to the deceased woman as a reward for her faith and for the purity she obtained through rites that she will continue to celebrate in the afterlife, the epigram adds a much more concrete and earthly motif: the happiness that brightened the last part of Nicostrate's life, namely the certainty of living on through her descendants, is guaranteed to all who die leaving children and grandchildren.

## 4.3 TOMB CULT AND HERO CULT

From the end of the eighth century B.C., the hero cult is established in Greece. The term *heros* is no longer used, as in epics, to denote only the great legendary warriors of the past whose actions are remembered in song. Now, in addition to the superhuman characters who lived in a time that is remembered as glorious and splendid (but a time that is past), local heroes, founders, and sovereigns of mythical dynasties in Greek cities appear beside the heroes of the great wars of Troy and Thebes. There are also such singular figures as Perseus, Theseus, Jason, and Heracles. The most famous, Heracles is also the least typical: he is a Panhellenic hero who achieves divine status after his death; no tomb of his exists; and he is offered sacrifices both as a hero and as an Olympian divinity. These great heroes resemble both the culture heroes of primitive myth and the characters found in common fables around the world.

The various heroes' adventures give sense, stability, and order to the real world and are the basis for norms, rites, and customs in the society that remembers those heroes. The Homeric epics contain no reference to a cult reserved for warriors killed in the Trojan war and certainly no mention of their having miraculous powers. Yet later their semidivine nature is emphasized (*Il.* XII 23; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 156–65; fr. 204, 100 Merkelbach and West; cf. § 1.3), and they are thought to have the power to exert a good or an evil influence upon the area surrounding their burial place. This is the motive for venerating them and offering sacrifice (García Teijeiro and Molinos Tejada, 2000). However, their extraordinary actions and adventures rarely serve as an edifying example: heroic mythology is generally a concoction of inhuman cruelty, crimes, and sexual excess. Angelo Brelich (1985) warns against a modern reading of the mythical tales, which

would be misled either by the Homeric emphasis on the heroes' nobler human aspects or by the cultural sensibility of intervening eras, such as the Roman world, humanism, and romanticism, that are devoid of contact with Greek religious ideas. He rightly points out that the heroes are models *not* to be followed, because, despite their extraordinary capacities, they fall prey to the same *hybris* (inhuman excess) that Greek religious trends attempt to prevent.

The indefinite past in which the heroic myths are set resembles the Mycenaean age and its royal dynasties in such cities as Argos, Mycenae, Tiryns, Thebes, and Athens. However, there is always a god somewhere in the hero's family tree, sometimes as parent or grandparent, and the hero's descendants include aristocratic families and even whole ethnic groups. Thus every Greek could explore his/her past, or reinvent it by blending myth with history, in a time when gods kept company with mortals. Only with the Trojan War, which Zeus devised in order to destroy men (just like all Oriental gods, he was mistrustful and bore a grudge), did this familiar relationship come to an end (Hesiod, fr. 1; fr. 204, 95–119 Merkelbach and West).

The distinguishing feature shared by all heroes is their place in the chthonian sphere: a constant involvement with death that sets them radically apart from the Olympian deities and is primarily evident in the funerary rites dedicated to them. Differences in forms of sacrifice during the classical period have been identified and codified by scholars of the past: for heroes, sacrificial victims must be dark, not white, and must be sacrificed in the evening or night, not during the day. Nor is the best meat reserved for a meal; instead the entire animal is consecrated for *enagismos* (ritual sacrifice) and burnt on an *eschara* (low altar), and its blood is collected in a sacrificial pit. Recent studies attribute these differences more to the polarization of gods and heroes in late-Antique

systematic classification than to a real contrast based on evidence. The texts describing these cults show that Greek heroes were not a homogeneous group but can be found at all levels on a scale running from the ordinary dead up to the gods. By honoring them in ways appropriate for one of the two groups, devotees intended either to minimize or to emphasize the distance between the divine and the heroic. Funerary rites are particularly connected with a hero's violent death and the possible presence of his tomb with its influence upon the surrounding area (Brelich, 1958, pp. 9, 17–18, following Nock, 1944, pointed out that because ritual differences were less clear than had been believed, they might be of secondary religious importance; Ekroth, 1999; Ekroth, 2000; Bremmer, 2006; Nagy, 2005).

Since the late nineteenth century, historians of religion have long debated the nature of Greek heroes and the meaning of hero cults. The greatest contrast can be found between Erwin Rohde (1890–94), whose thesis was that hero worship derived from the worship of dead ancestors, and Hermann Usener (1896), who asserted that heroes evolved from *Sondergötter*, individual functional gods each of whom represents a particular element of human activity. Nilsson (1950) agrees with Lewis Farnell (1921), who suggests as many as seven categories of hero, and he himself posits a direct continuation from the Mycenaean cult of the dead. After Farnell, the development of the hero cult was attributed both to the influence of epic poetry and to the rediscovery of Mycenaean tomb monuments, which eighth-century Greeks would have identified with burials of epic heroes. However, in 1980 a large heroic-type funeral mound was discovered at Lefkandi, in Euboea (cf. § 3.3), that may be dated to the mid-tenth century B.C., when epic poetry was in its formative, oral phase. Thus the contrary influence—or at least a reciprocal influence between Homeric epic and funerary practice—is plausible. This would

explain why Homeric custom involves cremation rather than inhumation in a grand tumulus: the result is a peculiar blend designed to highlight the status of the deceased and his family (Antonaccio, 1995). Indeed, archaic epic does not seem to arise from a simple nostalgia for a remote past. Rather, it is a complex eighth-century effort to legitimize an elite threatened by the abolition of distinctions and privileges in the new ideology of the *polis*. Thus in Homeric society, memories from the Mycenaean period are combined with later customs, incompatible with Bronze Age culture, to create “a “supra-quotidian” world and a timeless order that transcended the differences between past and present” (Crielaard, 2002, p. 284).

Archaeological investigations do not support generalizations. Indeed, within the “tomb cult”—a term by which scholars refer to the veneration of anonymous Mycenaean-age tombs in later periods—the renewal of interest in ancestors accompanied a phenomenon that resembled the later “hero cult” (formal veneration of named heroes linked to epic and myth) but was distinct from it and not necessarily its precursor. The rise of the hero cult was dependent on the *polis* and is instrumental in the consolidation of civic and political identity. This can be seen in the consecration of new heroes when historic city founders and colonizers were admitted to this category after their death. The cult at ancient tombs did not involve inscriptions that would identify its honoree as a hero, but probably such a burial—so visibly different from the contemporary style—was thought to be that of an ancestor of the family who took over the plot in a later period. Thus, although the gods had declared the heroic age ended, these tombs inspired local groups to create links with their mythic and historical past and to find among the heroes those ancestors and eponyms responsible for the physiognomy and identity of each group.

The controversy about the period in which various heroes were first considered worthy of religious veneration is far



from settled. Walter Burkert's hypothesis—that the rise of the hero cult should not be considered apart from either “a restructuring in spiritual life” under the influence of Homer or an increasingly rigid separation between the realms of the gods and of the dead—is still considered reasonable: “The gods are elevated as an exclusive group into an ideal Olympus; whatever is left behind is subsumed under the category of demigods” (1985, p. 205). On the other hand, no literary source prior to the last decades of the sixth century B.C., ascribed religious meaning to the term *heros*, and no earlier archaeological evidence confirms this form of veneration. There were “tomb cults, cults of ancestors, and cults of founders of cities” but only from the late archaic age onward were there “hero cults in the technical sense of the word” (Bremmer, 2006, p. 20). It has been proposed, therefore, that heroes were not promoted within religious phenomenology until a later date, but it still is likely that the hero cult had more ancient roots.

Except for physical remains such as ancient tombs and what was passed down in some confusion by the oral tradition, Greeks of the Iron Age had very little real knowledge of their Bronze Age past. This enabled them to elaborate upon their cultural heritage, developing myths based on relics and material sources. Sometimes these myths served to legitimize social status and positions of power; at other times they simply invited admiration, entertained, and in the end served to maintain Greek identity and national pride (Boardman, 2002). In Pausanias' time (the mid-second century A.D.), hundreds of heroic tombs were scattered across Greece, and when any hero was venerated in more than one place, multiple tombs would be “discovered” and disputes would arise as to which was the more genuine. The heroes' proximity to the human world, in contrast to the distant nature of the gods, is most evident in the existence of a body in a tomb. Even though there are no tombs at a number of heroic sanctuaries, including

those of Agamemnon at Mycenae and of Menelaus and Helen at Therapne (and cenotaphs at others), testimonies of the discovery of mortal remains attributed to mythical heroes became the bases of rituals at several sanctuaries. Developed through the manipulation of myth and popular religion, this practice had a strong ideological impact because of its political setting. The most famous example—which G. L. Huxley described as a “bones policy” that legitimated Sparta’s hegemony in the Peloponnese—is the transferral of the bones of Orestes (son of Agamemnon) in the mid-sixth century B.C. The Spartans had casually “discovered” these bones in their enormous casket measuring seven cubits (more than three meters), at Tegea, in Arcadia, a city with which they were waging a war they could not win. After interpreting an enigmatic Delphic oracle, a worthy Spartan citizen identified the bones and took them back to Sparta, ensuring victory. (Herodotus I 67–68; many centuries later, Pausanias [III 11, 10] saw the tomb of Orestes in the *agora* at Sparta.) Possession of these heroic bones—which had been a sort of talisman protecting the enemy’s land—enabled Sparta to gain superiority over Tegea. Orestes, son of the hero who led the Achaean army against Troy, must have seemed the most appropriate figure to represent both the unity of the Greek world and Spartan ambition (McCauley, 1999; Blomart, 2000, Coppola, 2008). Legend tells us that the Spartans, who were of Doric origin, had arrived recently in the Peloponnese while following Heracles’ descendants. There they had driven away the earlier inhabitants, who were descended from the Achaeans. The transferral of Orestes’ bones therefore signified the legitimation of their dominion and the integration of the pre-Doric ethnic group. Another hero took on a similar function in Athens. There, according to Athenian tradition, the ghost of Theseus, the mythical sovereign credited as founder of the city’s political structures, had led the army in battle against

the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C. (Plutarch, *Theseus* 35, 8). In the mid-fifth century B.C. *stoa poikile* (painted porch), Polygnotus had portrayed him emerging from the earth together with other heroes and gods who helped the Greek army (Pausanias, I, 15, 3). Later Cimon—son of Miltiades, who had won the battle of Marathon—conquered the island of Skyros, where the Delphic oracle had said Theseus' bones should be sought, and there discovered a tomb containing a large body with a bronze lance and sword beside it. The transferral of these bones to Athens took place not long after 475 B.C. There, in the center of the city, they were placed inside the *heroon* (shrine) constructed for his cult. Later the tomb became a place of sanctuary for slaves and all others who feared the powerful "since Theseus was a champion and helper of such during his life, and graciously received the supplications of the poor and needy" (Plutarch, *Theseus* 36, 1–4, transl. Bernadotte Perrin).

Heroic myths are peculiar because they are so closely linked to the environment, monuments, ancient evidence, and somewhat distorted memories of a relatively recent past, whose evocative power Boardman (2002) suggestively termed "archaeology of nostalgia." That Greek culture exploited this power in order to comment on the present is confirmed by the number of theatrical productions, with incessant variations and transformations, based on the myths. Thus, Sophocles' last tragedy, *Oedipus at Colonus* (staged posthumously in 401 B.C.), following what may have been a local tradition, transforms the tragic hero par excellence—the patricidal, incestuous king of Thebes—into the protector of Athens. Oedipus meets his death in a place that remains a secret known only to the sovereign, Theseus, who must communicate it to no one except his successor at the end of his life. The secrets about Oedipus' death and his tomb are *arcana imperii* that safeguard against foreign devastation and guarantee institutional

continuity among those who hold power in Athens (Coppola, 2008). The hero's tomb, sacralized in spite of his involuntary guilt, ensures the fortunes of Athens. With the sanction of the Delphic oracle, the same role is also given to the tomb of a decidedly negative character, Eurystheus, king of Argos and persecutor of Heracles and his sons. Euripides tells of his metamorphosis from an enemy of Athens into a benign foreigner who protects the city where he is buried (*Heracleidae* 1026–44). Oedipus' body does, in reality, mysteriously disappear among the trees of the Furies' sacred wood in the deme of Colonus. Thus Sophocles' dramatization is not simply an allusion to the possibility that enemies who know the location of the hero's tomb might offer him secret sacrifices so as to gain his support. (The sacred enclosure of the daughters of Erechtheus is inaccessible for the same reason [Euripides, fr. 370, 87–89 Kannicht]. And Kearns [1989, pp. 51–52] lists other examples of tombs in secret places.) It also acknowledges the talismanic function of unidentified tombs, which perforce receive neither offerings nor abuse, as symbols of the hero's ambivalent status. The intermediate zone inhabited by such exceptional characters—who “are not required to live saintly lives” (Burkert, 1985, p. 207)—reduces the distance between human suffering and unfathomable reality.

Oedipus' mysterious disappearance resolves the conflict between guilt and innocence, responsibility and predestination. The gods' curse on him gives way to the destiny they have reserved for him. Guided by oracles and heavenly signs—mysterious thunderclaps, flashes in the sky, the arcane voice of a god—he dies in a hospitable land (or, rather, vanishes miraculously) and dwells among the elect. Those present at the time cannot say whether he was snatched away by a god or swallowed up by the earth: “for the man was taken away with no lamentations, and by no painful disease, but, if any among mortals, by a miracle” (lines 1663–65, transl.

H. Lloyd-Jones). Although his remains ensure Attica's inviolability, the text seems only to allude to the place where he vanished into Hades rather than to suggest a sacred location for his tomb (lines 1544–46). Death does not extinguish his implacable anger toward the Thebans, who exiled him and forced him to wander with his daughter Antigone in search of refuge and protection. His passage into the beyond is ineffable: the only witness, Theseus, shields his gaze with his hand as if the sight were intolerable (lines 1650–52). But thereafter, in accordance with deep-rooted archaic morality, Oedipus' power is beneficial to friends and perennially inimical to enemies. His death is not to be mourned, as Theseus tells Antigone and Ismene, who would like to honor their father's tomb: "Girls, that man instructed me never to go near to those regions and not to tell any among mortals of the sacred tomb that holds him. And he said that if I did this I would keep my country always free from pain" (lines 1760–65, transl. Lloyd-Jones).

Because references to the mysteries pervade the whole tragedy, Sophocles' version of the hero's death achieves "the assimilation between the heroic status and the other-worldly blessedness of the initiate" (Ferrari 2007, p. 174). And Sophocles demonstrates familiarity not only with the language of the Eleusinian mysteries but also with the idea of hope for a good death (cf. fr. 837 Radt, and § 2.2). Self-discipline and purification—also mentioned on the golden tablets and the Derveni papyrus—overturn the hierarchy of values between life and death, winning the favor of the gods of the underworld and transforming grief into happy anticipation of a better existence (cf. lines 1751–53). Oedipus the outcast becomes the saving hero of a foreign city but excludes himself from any family cult; he offers a talismanic tomb to the Athenians while denying his own daughters the consolation of performing funerary rituals (lines 1732–33). It is as though, in freeing

himself from suffering and unhappiness and achieving the status of chthonian hero, he had to give up everything human, including connection to his close relatives through their offerings at his tomb. (It is no coincidence that Oedipus' transfiguration later gave rise to an anachronistic interpretation in the light of Christian culture [Rodighiero, 2007, in particular pp. 93–101].)

The hero cult, then, embodies a symbolic joining of the Olympian and the chthonic, which, in the Greek religious vision, are drastically opposed: "[A]ntagonism does not rule out an element of attraction (often a 'fatal attraction'). . . . [G]od-hero antagonism in myths—including those mediated by epic—corresponds to god-hero symbiosis in ritual" (Nagy, 2005, p. 87). The location of heroes' tombs next to altars and temples dedicated to Olympian divinities—at Olympia, where Pelops is venerated next to Zeus; at the Acropolis in Athens, where Erechtheus is next to Athena; at Brauron, where Iphigenia is next to Artemis; at Amyklai, where Hyacinthus is next to Apollo—is one way in which the hero cult reflects "the all-embracing richness of reality" but is also a reassuring, comforting result of the polarity between human and divine status. Without doubt individual expectations inspired by the mysteries were an effective and accessible means of overcoming desolation at the time of death, but "this was for a long time more a complement than a dangerous rival to the Greek system" (Burkert, 1985, p. 203).

## CHAPTER 5



# MAKING GOOD USE OF DEATH

### 5.1 HEROIC DEATH IN BATTLE

Glaukos, why is it you and I are honoured before others  
with pride of place, the choice meats and the filled wine  
cups

in Lykia, and all men look on us as if we were immortals,  
and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks  
of Xanthos,

good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughland for  
the planting of wheat?

Therefore it is our duty in the forefront of the Lykians  
to take our stand, and bear our part of the blazing of battle,  
so that a man of the close-armoured Lykians may say of us:  
"Indeed, these are no ignoble men who are lords of Lykia,  
these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed  
and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is  
strength

of valour in them, since they fight in the forefront of the  
Lykians."

Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle,  
would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal,  
so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost  
nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory.

But now, seeing that the spirits of death [*Keres*] stand  
close about us  
in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them,  
let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others.

(*Il.* XII 310–28, transl. R. Lattimore)

Here Zeus's son Sarpedon, the leader of the Lycians, is exhorting his cousin Glaucus to follow him in an attack on the wall that the Greeks have built to protect their camp and ships. His speech effectively summarizes the rationale for heroism: glory, gained through courage and contempt for life, can somehow compensate for the one good thing men cannot achieve, an existence free from old age and death. If the *Keres* (daemons of death), which come to every man, were escapable, heroic excellence would not continue as an imperative in the aristocratic society of the *Iliad*. Heroism is a means of defying the time limit given to humans, overcoming it before its time, and winning a sort of immortality, at least in the collective memory. Likewise Hector's final observation, before his fatal clash with Achilles, was that, in the memory of generations to come, his demonstration of courage will crown his defeat with glory (*Il.* XXII 297–305).

Even so, we should not overemphasize Sarpedon's perspective, or the clear acceptance of death shown in the Achilles story. Achilles is the only one fighting at Troy who knows—through the prophecy of Thetis, his divine mother—that he will soon die. Although a hero most often achieves success and glory through his triumph in combat, his fellow warriors' admiration, his enemies' fear, and ultimately through lasting posthumous fame—only Achilles' fame is so closely associated with death.

In the *Iliad*, however, there is no paradoxical case of not loving life, or of fascination with death, if through glory



this could be a way of avoiding oblivion. Like Achilles, Sarpedon is very much attached to life and its pleasures, not least the prestige that sovereigns win through bravery in battle (*Il.* XII 310–21). If we read his exhortation to Glaucus through the last solemn deliberations of lines 322–28, as though revealing the true dimensions of the heroic act would undermine his previous hedonistic vision, then we force aristocratic ethics in a direction not their own, and expand the warrior's valor, in a metaphysical sense, as though its only function was to prevent old age and death (Vernant, 1991, pp. 57, 86). As we see from Sarpedon's final encouragement, "let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others" (*Il.* XII 328; cf. XIII 327), the traditional invitation to put oneself to the test, to see who will win himself honors, associates *euchos* (glory) only with those who conquer and survive (Renihan 1987) and does not allow for the possibility of death in the battle. The last words in Hector's monologue (XXII 130: "We shall see to which one the Olympian giants the glory") convey a similar meaning, as do also the threatening words of a formulaic verse: "You will give me / glory, and give your soul to Hades of the famed horses" (*Il.* V 654, XI 445, XVI 625).

As the *Odyssey* unfolds there is also room for an apparently weaker use of the term *glory*, which is extended to include situations unknown in the previous poem. The cenotaph erected by Menelaus at the Nile delta should bring Agamemnon *asbeston kleos* (unquenchable fame) despite his ignominious death (*Od.* IV 584); Odysseus hopes Alcinous will maintain his promise of taking him home in one of his ships, because such a generous act to end the hero's wanderings will be a source of "undying glory" (*Od.* VII 333). Even if heroic glory in these cases is not secured in battle, the Odyssean vision of heroism does not represent a change in the war poem's code of values, unless the shift of focus from one main hero to another is misinterpreted as a clear break from

the preceding epic tradition. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus already possessed values and qualities far different from those of Achilles, although certainly not alien to the heroic world. Yet the *Odyssey* is by no means in contrast with the *Iliad* when it proposes the ideal success after the end of the war, not as death but as life and the enjoyment of a calm retirement at home. In reality, the two poems join together, drawing a complete panorama of the circumstances that define the heroic world during and after the Trojan expedition, both at war and in the surviving warriors' difficult return to their homeland. The Homeric poems demonstrate two possible outcomes of heroic action. The first is a radical understanding of honor, namely *kleos aphthiton* (undying glory), which is conferred once and for all by the death that is celebrated in the epic poem. The second is an ethic of compromise and pretense, the ability to devise unconventional strategies so as to overcome new obstacles never met in war, to survive at all costs. However, to assume that these two are ideological antipodes is to misunderstand the idealized vision of death attributed to the warrior aristocracy and handed down, ultimately, to Western culture. As Robert Renehan appropriately points out (1987, p. 112): "The high road to undying glory, *kleos aphthiton*, was to be found primarily in being the best and in being preeminent above others (*Iliad* VI 208, XI 784). A Homeric warrior's chief fame came from his victories, not from his death."

The idea of a "beautiful death," sought by young warriors in the name of sacrifice for their home community, was inspired by an aesthetic principle not limited to the Homeric paradox, whereby everything about a young man is beautiful, even when he falls in battle, and his body is torn apart by wounds (*Il.* XXII 71–73). This is rather a development of the war rhetoric of the *polis*, well represented in the elegiac poetry of Tyrtaeus in seventh-century Sparta. It starts with the peremptory affirmation: "It is a fine thing for a brave man to die

when he has fallen among the front ranks while fighting for his homeland" (fr. 10, 1–2 West, transl. D. E. Gerber) and goes so far as to exhort young men not to love life (line 18). Another fragment encourages young men not to be attached to life by suggesting that their valor be driven by a real desire for death: "Do not fear throngs of men or run in flight, but let a man hold his shield straight toward the front ranks, despising life and loving the black death-spirits [*Keres*] no less than the rays of the sun" (fr. 11, 3–6 West, transl. D. E. Gerber).

Naturally, Tyrtaeus also contemplates the idea of a calm old age: when honor and glory are provided by members of the community. But only "if he escapes the doom of death that brings long sorrow and by his victory makes good his spear's splendid boast, he is honoured by all, young and old alike, many are the joys he experiences before he goes to Hades, and in his old age he stands out among the townsmen" (fr. 12, 35–39 West, transl. D. E. Gerber). Hints of Sarpedon's speech also emerge in this elegy that exalts military virtues and whose allusions to the hierarchy between survival and death, though veiled and sometimes omitted, cannot be ignored. Tyrtaeus' poem, written for the archaic *polis*, has its ideological foundation in epic poetry, which maintains a didactic role that might be characterized as "Win or die." The citizen-soldier, however, must pursue glory not with a view to his individual success, but rather for the common good, as a member both of the class of free men who make up the civic body, and of the hoplite phalanx (adopted in the Peloponnese during the seventh century B.C.).

For the Homeric hero, glory does not depend exclusively on a short life, an act of valor, and a "beautiful death," although these do gain meaning through poetry and give the hero the privilege of being *aidimos* (worthy of being sung; Vernant, 1991, p. 58). Such glory can also be entrusted to the singer before the end of the hero's life, and without his having been

sanctified by premature death in combat. The *Odyssey* places great emphasis on the two singers Phemius and Demodochus, who dedicate their song to *klea andron* (heroes' glorious deeds), even if those are recently accomplished or, like Odysseus' homecoming, not yet complete. When introducing himself to the Phaeacians, Odysseus says he is known for his astuteness and adds that his *kleos* (fame) reaches the sky (*Od.* IX 19–20; for Penelope's opinion, see I 344). This boast is confirmed by the episode of the war that Demodochus has just retold at the request of the then unknown guest (VIII 492–98), an episode that moved Odysseus because it celebrated his best stratagem, the use of the wooden horse to conquer the citadel (VIII 499–522).

Even from the perspective of the *Odyssey*, however, glory consecrated in epic form is definitive and thus unalterable only once the hero's life is over. This is the point of the protagonist's meetings in Hades with the *psychai* of his companions who fell in battle and of earlier heroes and heroines: these experiences make him a privileged addressee and, at the same time, a "singer" of their deeds (cf. XI 367–69). On the other hand, the prophecies of the old man of the sea, Proteus (IV 561–69), and of Tiresias (XI 134–37) allow the poet to predict the ends of Menelaus' and Odysseus' lives, which lie well beyond the narrative horizon of the poem.

Occasionally the epics idealize old age. When Nestor returns home, the counselor of the army and a venerable sovereign, he is admired for the fortune Zeus has given him as a reward for his devotion: he will grow old in comfort, surrounded by many strong, wise children (*Od.* IV 209–11). The Homeric ideal foresees a hierarchy of destinies, each determined by the extent to which the hero achieves success as defined in the *Nekyia* and again in the final book of the *Odyssey*. On the highest level is Odysseus, the warrior who, having fought valiantly in battle, also succeeds in the difficult task of returning home,

thereby confirming his victory. Next is Achilles. He never came home to grow old, but having fallen among his warrior companions and received the honor of a grand burial, he will be remembered in epic as an admirable example of valor (*Od.* XXIV 36–94). When Telemachus fears that his father will never return home, and that he can no longer hope to be “son to some fortunate / man, whom old age overtook among his possessions” (*Od.* I 217–18), he confesses that he would have preferred to mourn his death in war rather than to know nothing and have to imagine he met an obscure end in an unknown place. At Troy his companions would have conducted a funeral for him and built him a tomb, and his death would have brought “great glory hereafter” to his son as well (lines 236–40). The lowest rung on the ladder of luck is reserved for those who, like Agamemnon, win the war but whose success is never celebrated in a joyful homecoming—not because he goes missing but because when he does return, his wife’s lover, Aegisthus, invites him to a banquet and there slaughters him ruthlessly, “as one cuts down an ox at his manger” (*Od.* XI 411).

For warriors, the prospect of losing one’s life in battle is less to be feared than the profanation of his corpse. Before a clash, soldiers threatened to dismember their adversaries and leave their bodies to voracious animals such as the dogs and birds of the *Iliad*—or the fish that, Achilles scornfully predicts, will “take care” of Lycaon’s body when he throws it into the river Scamander (*Il.* XXI 122–27). When the warrior’s mortal remains are thus disfigured, or when the wounds are not repaired by the nearest and dearest; when, rather than receive funeral rituals and burial, it putrefies; when the body is thus dishonored, the *psyche* cannot cross the threshold of Hades.

Jean-Pierre Vernant emphasizes the concept of “the beautiful death”—which he sees as the true ideal of the heroic act—

and in parallel, he sees the profanation of the defeated warrior's body and consequent negation of unending glory as the opposite of the epic warrior's aspiration: "If, in the heroic point of view, staying alive means little compared with dying well, the same perspective shows that what is most important is not to kill one's enemy but to deprive him of a beautiful death" (Vernant, 1991, p. 67). But neither verbal threats preceding battle nor victorious warriors' boasts can be considered definitive. It cannot be said that a hero's victory is fully realized only in the definitive annihilation and total disgrace of the defeated enemy's body—the anti-thesis of a "beautiful death." Nor can it be said that the gods spare from profanation only those true heroes whose deaths are recorded in the *Iliad*—Sarpedon, Patroclus, Hector—whose features are miraculously preserved regardless of decomposition and of the disfigurement inflicted by their enemies. Were it so, the gods' intervention would serve to illustrate that "war, hatred, and destructive violence cannot prevail against those who are inspired by the heroic definition of honor and are pledged to a short life" (Vernant, p. 74). Such a hypothesis seems too schematic, and implies *petitio principii* (circular reasoning): the *kleos* (honor) and *hebe* (youth) of the hero differ in kind from the honors and qualities common to all young people if, for the hero, *kleos* and *hebe* would be realized and fulfilled only through death in battle. Vernant quotes Loraux: "While youth is a pure quality for the hero, it is a prosaic physical fact for those whom the gods have less favored" (p. 62).

The "antifuneral," or negation of funerary rites, associated with disfigurement of the body is obsessively evident in the bitter final stage of the war. With the crisis in the Greek army provoked by Achilles' refusal to fight, being left as a prey to dogs and birds becomes not only the destiny promised the enemy or wished for traitors (cf. *Il.* II 391–93; IV 235–39),

but is also a fierce sign of cruelty toward the enemy. Mourning and burial are now the privilege of the winner. Only he will obtain them. Degradation and shame await the loser (Redfield, 1994). During his last battle, Odysseus pronounces cruel words of triumph over his dead enemy, abandoning him to the birds while predicting a ritual funeral for himself, should he happen to die (*Il.* XI 452–55). Before his duel with Ajax, Hector makes a chivalrous proposal: let the winner give the loser's body to his family or his companions so that they can give him funeral honors and build him a tomb (*Il.* VII 76–91). But later, deceived by the Trojans' temporary successes and his illusion that the gods have guaranteed him victory, when he again faces Ajax, he gives the Greek a sinister warning: if he defends the Greek ships, Hector will kill him, and after the lance has bitten his white flesh, the birds and dogs of Troy will satiate themselves on his body (*Il.* XIII 824–32). The poem shows a clear development in the destiny of the fallen warrior's body. In the recent past and until the end of the ninth year of war, it reveals respect and pity for the defeated. Then the cruelty and horror intensify, ending with Priam's supplication to Achilles to let him redeem Hector's body and celebrate his funeral. This meeting between sovereign of the besieged city and the champion of the Greek army, made possible by a ritual code that suspends the rules of conflict, closes the poem with an intense, emotional reflection on the pain that all warriors experience during war and its aftermath, and that everyone experiences as part of a universal suffering.

The *Iliad* reveals that once Achilles had accorded the honor of cremation and burial with all his arms to the father of Andromache—who was killed during the sack of Thebes—unusually forgoing his war trophy (*Il.* VI 414–20). And he, the pitiless killer of Hector, had captured two of Priam's other sons, Isos and Antiphos, but freed them on payment

of a ransom (XI 104–106; see also the first encounter with Lycaon: XXI 34ff.). But he grows progressively less willing to show clemency to his enemies, particularly after the death of Patroclus. And in fact the violence intensifies on both sides of the conflict. By the third day of fighting narrated in the poem, there is no longer any respect for the defeated enemy or his body. The cultural norm preventing the exercise of hatred toward the dead seems to be forgotten both by Hector, who plans to decapitate Patroclus and throw his body to the dogs (XVII 125–27, XVIII 175–77), and even more by Achilles, when he ties Hector's corpse to his chariot and drags it around Patroclus' tomb. Eventually, when this disfigurement has continued for days, it arouses divine indignation because Achilles is acting without pity toward a person who no longer has a voice to plead with him, reduced as he is to "dumb earth" (*Il.* XXIV 54).

This denial of honor and respect to the body of a defeated enemy is the nadir of a macabre regression from well-ordered social equilibrium, following rules of civil coexistence, to the savage violence of nature. Priam outlines this scandal effectively when he attempts to call Hector inside the walls and prevent him from facing Achilles alone when he has no chance of winning. He pleads for pity for himself, an old man destined to witness the sack of his city and the massacre of its people, including his family. And eventually he does fall, caught by an enemy weapon at the palace entrance, and is torn apart by his own guard dogs—

who will lap my blood in the savagery of their anger  
and then lie down in my courts. For a young man all is  
decorous  
when he is cut down in battle and torn with the sharp  
bronze, and lies there  
dead, and though dead still all that shows about him is  
beautiful;



but when an old man is dead and down, and the dogs  
 mutilate  
 the gray head and the gray beard and the parts that are  
 secret,  
 this, for all sad mortality, is the sight most pitiful.

(*Il.* XXII 70–76, transl. R. Lattimore)

In the topsy-turvy world described by Priam, we see the recurrent *topos* of bloody death as one that does not disfigure the beauty of a young body but is undignified for an older person. It is contradictory in this particular context, his aim being to arouse pity in his son and, at the same time, to dissuade him from placing himself in danger of death at the hands of a strong enemy. Tyrtaeus' elegy employs the same motif more coherently and as a warlike exhortation; the contrast between the young hoplite's "beautiful death" and the obscene spectacle of the elderly body, disfigured by old age rather than by his enemies, works perfectly within the aesthetic and moral canons on which the revival of the heroic code in seventh-century Spartan poetics was based:

Do not abandon and run away from elders, whose knees  
 are no longer nimble, men revered. For this brings shame,  
 when an older man lies fallen among the front ranks  
 with the young behind him, his head already white  
 and his beard grey, breathing out his valiant spirit in  
 the dust, clutching in his hands his bloodied genitals—  
 this is a shameful sight and brings indignation to behold—  
 his body naked. But for the young everything is seemly,  
 as long as he has the splendid prime of lovely youth;  
 while alive, men marvel at the sight of him and women  
 feel desire, and when he has fallen among the front  
 ranks, he is fair. Come, let everyone stand fast, with

legs set well apart and both feet fixed firmly on the ground, biting his lip with his teeth.

(fr. 10, 19–32 West, transl. D. E. Gerber)

On the contrary, Priam's words urge his son not to go to his death—even though the norm *pant' epeoiken* ("everything is seemly") still applies (*Il.* XXII 71; Tyrtaeus, fr. 10, 27 West)—but to consider the fatal consequences of such a selfish bid for glory, which would include an undeserved death for his old father, whose body would attract, not sensual admiration but pity or derision. The young man's death would be linked to battle and to a rhetoric of glorious challenges, but the death of the old king would symbolize the defeat of the city and the extinction of the race. To this extent the comparison works well. But we must not forget that, unlike Tyrtaeus, Priam does not compare the destiny of an old warrior with that of a young one when both encounter the enemy and both are willing to fight and die for their homeland: only the elegiac poet points out an aesthetic ideal and urges the young to take aged soldiers' place. On the other hand, Priam intends to remind Hector that the war will end with the massacre of a defenseless population and that killing the elderly is disgraceful precisely because they no longer have the energy to fight and at least win a glorious death. The recurrence of the same *topos* in these two contexts offers us an opportunity to evaluate how the war elegy takes up certain motifs of the archaic epic and molds them into a new rhetoric consistent with the ideals of the *polis* elite.

The Homeric poems establish various factors that together define heroic death in terms other than how it is usually perceived. The experience becomes an ideal. Its horrible reality is not underestimated, but the knowledge that the conscious, glorious deaths of a few exceptional men have been retained

in the social memory by means of poetic commemoration enables the living to overcome their fear of annihilation. Even so, life and its pleasures are preferable to heroic death, as is evident first in Priam's attempt to emphasize the contrast between the shame of his own death and Hector's daring but fatal choice, second in Sarpedon's observation that death would not be worth defying if it were not waiting for everyone, and third in Achilles' inconsolable disappointment when he reaches the realm of the shadows and proclaims his passionate love for life: "I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another / man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, / than be a king over all the perished dead" (*Od.* XI 489–91, transl. R. Lattimore).

Only when heroic death as an exemplary end promises to benefit the whole community can it be given all the ideological space in poetic composition, and only then is death "beautiful." (The wording *kalos thanatos* [beautiful death] appears first in Athenian funeral orations.) War elegies celebrate only the social continuity of the group. The individual emerges only in relation to a collective success—if, in the military position assigned him, he defends the community well. Like Sarpedon in the *Iliad*, Callinus (a seventh-century elegiac poet who set the warlike values of Homeric epic in an Ionian *polis*, Ephesus) confirms the inevitability of death. Its term is fixed; the destiny spun out by the *Moirai* (the Fates) cannot be changed either by an act of courage in battle or by cowardly flight (Callinus, fr. 1 West).

To survive in the memory of the *polis*, therefore, means being ready to sacrifice one's life in battle. All other aristocratic virtues—those essential for victory in athletic contests, as well as beauty, wealth, power, and eloquence—are subordinate to the desire for a "beautiful" death, one that would be useful for one's country (Tyrtaeus, fr. 12 West). In measuring the ideological progress of the war elegy against Homeric

epic, it is worth comparing the patriotic rhetoric of Callinus and Tyrtaeus—which anticipates Horace’s *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (“Sweet it is and honorable to die for one’s native land,” *Odes* III 2, 13)—with Hector’s words, which are less difficult to accept because they are mitigated by a *litotes* (“It is no shame” rather than “It is beautiful”):

Fight on then by the ships together. He who among you  
finds by spear thrown or spear thrust his death and destiny,  
let him die. He has no dishonor when he dies defending  
his country, for then his wife shall be saved and his  
children afterwards,  
and his house and property shall not be damaged, if the  
Achaeans  
must go away with their ships to the beloved land of  
their fathers.

(Il. XV 494–99, transl. R. Lattimore)

It follows that Vernant’s reading, which has greatly influenced the study of Homeric epic, is in danger of projecting backward a number of themes found in archaic elegy and seeing in the Homeric poems signs of a monochromatic and unchanging heroic ideal linked only to death at an early age, in the prime of strength and beauty.

## 5.2 THE *POLIS* AND FUNERARY IDEOLOGY

Athenian history teaches us that even death can be central to politics. Funerals and mourning customs lent themselves to the ostentatious display of wealth, arousing within the *polis* concerns sufficient to cause it to establish sumptuary laws to prevent the aristocracy from displaying excessive wealth in ritual contexts. On the other hand, awarding heroic honors

to fallen citizens provided opportunities to overlook their social condition, to celebrate only their sacrifice. The state has the power both to decide who has the right to extraordinary funeral honors and to determine their limits. Sumptuary laws and award ceremonies were produced by similar political principles, but historical evidence has not established the extent to which they were coincident (Garland, 1989).

Changes in the funerary ideology—the set of values by which a society can overcome the loss of a member—signaled the birth and development of the *polis*, as shown in the restrictive norms attributed to legislators of the archaic period, not only of Athens. What they seem to have shared is a redefinition of the circle of survivors who participate in mourning ceremonies promoting solidarity and cohesion. The basic cell of civic society, the group whose positive features and continuity are reaffirmed through ritual symbolism, was no longer the wider aristocratic *genos* (clan) but the *oikos* (close family). From this development arose limitations on displays of wealth and feminine grief at funerals and on the age and degree of kinship of women participating in the vigil and the funerary procession. Even if moral concerns rather than sumptuary or political considerations determined the Solonian norms that prohibited women from participating in strangers' funerals, such an emphasis on hierarchy between the sexes reminded the whole community to respect the rules on which social consensus was founded. The women's role was to organize the *prothesis* and ritual lament (§ 3.2.2), and the limits on their role seemed to confine their exercise of traditional mourning practices within the walls of the home. This rules out the display of professional mourning skills both during the procession and at the tomb, when mourning becomes a public spectacle viewed by strangers.

Funerals in archaic and classical Athens were surprisingly different from those described in the *Iliad*, pointing out the

extent to which the context had changed with respect to an aristocratic society. Solonian norms would have prevented Helen from expressing her *goos* for her brother-in-law Hector (*Il.* XXIV 762; cf. § 5.3): only women belonging to the *anchisteia* (kinship group with rights of succession) are admitted. Even before his body is returned, Hector's father and brothers mourn him in the palace courtyard and his sisters and sisters-in-law mourn him indoors (XXIV 161–66). Furthermore, according to Athenian rules, the war slave Briseis could not have led the mourning for Patroclus in Achilles' tent (*Il.* XIX 282–302). The exclusion of so many female figures, whose requests and themes differed considerably from those that traditionally inspired the close relatives' laments, changes radically the emotional climate of the funeral rite. For example, both Helen and Briseis mourn the deceased's loving kindness and sensitivity. One mourns Hector, who protected her from the hostility of the Trojan family environment; the other mourns Patroclus, who offered comfort and hope for a better future in Greece. Their homage thus addresses the humanity of the deceased, rather than his warrior virtues, without any concession to heroic values expressed in Hecuba's and Andromache's laments (cf. § 3.2.2).

Even taking into account the particular circumstances of the conflict, and the absence of family for the Greek warriors, a notable variety characterizes the relations who take charge of ritual funerary duties in the Homeric poems. The network of relationships involved in funerary honors extends far beyond blood relations, into acquired family. As regards luxury, expenditure of resources, and the duration of each phase of the rites, differences between the grand funerals for outstanding heroes and the minimal care for common warriors show that, in the society described in the poems, a ceremony reflects the status and value assigned to the dead person by his community more than it reveals cult obligations or any precise tradition (Garland, 1982).

Although archaic- and classical-age aristocracies continued to see funerals as occasions on which to express the pride and power of their class, this understanding no longer coincided with that of the civic community as a whole. Thus, spectacular displays of luxury and grief at such events became potentially disruptive. Consequently, even before Solon was elected archon in 594/593 B.C., the Cretan seer Epimenides had intervened to moderate and simplify Athenian funeral ceremonies, eliminating the "violent and barbarous" forms to which women had been accustomed (Plutarch, *Solon* 12, 8–9). One of the Seven Wise Men, Epimenides is said to have helped Solon with his constitutional reform, and his intervention to control the funeral rites did match the cathartic and propitiatory measures against the contamination of the city following the massacre of the supporters of Cylon, a noble who had tried to make himself tyrant (Plutarch, *Solon* 12, 1–4). Because theatrical displays of intense emotion publicized the solidarity of the mourning group with each other as well as with the deceased, they stirred up rivalry with opposing clans, especially when the dead person had been assassinated. Vendettas sparked by ritual lament could give rise to feuds and civil war. Solon's reform, undoubtedly intended to prevent uncontrollable sequences of hostile reactions, reduced the large families' opportunities for displaying their treasured prestige and cohesion.

Accompanying the political need for social harmony was a general intention to reduce the public impact of displays of family grief. Upon finding that mourning rites threatened the order and stability of its shared spaces, the community intervened in the customs to reduce superstitious fears and so improve understanding between the *oikoi* (families) that made up the society of the polis. Epigraphic examples of prescriptions for funeral regulations often reveal that the most critical phase was the transfer of the corpse from the house to the

place of burial: any interference or contact with the city of the living was a source of impurity and a reason for scrupulous cathartic measures. Practices allowing those most directly affected to resume their social role after a period of isolation placed a reasonable limit upon the period of mourning and abolished rites considered unacceptable or ineffective. Religious, cultural, and political aspects therefore must be considered together, without privileging only the presumed democratic motivation for these reforms. Within the process of structuring the *polis* (whose values and prerogatives are defined in the first formulations of an organized legal system) these normative interventions in funeral rites show that in the Greek world there was a fine line between sacred law and “lay” law, between cult and civil jurisdiction (Frisone, 2000).

An elaborate annual state funeral for the fallen, probably instituted soon after the laws to regulate private rites, seems to fit into the same ideological system of ideal equality. The procession transported the bones of the deceased to the Kera-meikos cemetery in ten cypress coffins, one for each tribe. This emphasis on tribal structure—on which the military order was based—rather than on family groups suggests that this *patrios nomos* (ancestral custom), of which Thucydides speaks (II 34,1), originated in the period of Clisthenes’ democratic reforms at the end of the sixth century B.C.

The suppression of the individual is required by the community but is also legitimized by the adoption of certain aristocratic values in an attempt to reconcile the model of personal glory promoted by epic heroism with the collective values of the hoplite class on which the *polis* is founded. In an effort to promote harmony within the community, all the restrictive norms decreed for the *oikos* (family) were systematically overturned in favor of a grand ritual of collective mourning for the bravest of the city’s sons. The native land now takes care of what had been managed by the relatives



and responds with generosity in time, expense, and participation (Seaford, 1994). In this way Athens developed a sophisticated, consistent ritual apparatus built on an ideology that justified and valued the sacrifice of individual lives for the city. The *polyandrion* (a monumental communal grave), which listed the names of the lost and fallen ordered by tribe, was both a collective tomb and a cenotaph. It was "the symbol of a communion in death, serving the function of making the dead a 'public possession,' taking them away from the privacy of individual burial, family memory and mourning, to include them in a higher integration, making them unconscious instruments in the reproduction of the ideology which was the cause of their own annihilation" (Longo, 2000, p. 12).

The *logos epitaphios* (funeral speech), given at the burial by a prestigious individual chosen by the city, was the final act of this ceremony. It probably derived from commemorative eulogies given at the elite private funerals that had been abolished under the restrictive norms that grew out of Solon's legislation (Cicero, *Laws* II 65). Pericles' speech in celebration of those who fell during the first year of the Peloponnesian War, recorded by Thucydides (II 35–46), is the most representative model of such a speech. Funeral speeches attributed to Lysias and Demosthenes also survive, as do a fragment of Gorgias' speech for the fallen of 421 B.C., Hyperides' speech for the dead of the Lamian war, in 323–322 B.C., and, in the *Menexenus*, Plato's parody of this genre of epideictic and consolatory eloquence. In his speech, Pericles' initial praise of Athens and its values illuminates his subsequent eulogies of those who died to preserve the city's freedom and grandeur: for Athenian warriors the glory of death in battle is both a reward and, when it presents itself, a duty not to be shirked. This speech is representative of Athenian propaganda during the city's most powerful period: it invites

young men to emulate the example of those who offered the precious gift of their lives for the city and received in return both a eulogy that “never grows old” and a monument that is much more than a stone object:

I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives, and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion both in word and deed. For the whole earth is the sepulcher of famous men; not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men.

(Thucydides, II 43, 2–3, transl. B. Jowett)

The offerings extended by the native land to its dead far exceeded the usual level of honor—funerary rites and tomb—that a family could offer its deceased. Moreover, the glory of the fallen and the gratitude of the city reflected on his parents, compensating their loss and, paradoxically, making their mourning as noble as his death. And because the happiest possible moment of a lifetime coincided with the very end of life, the concept of “premature death,” on which intense mourning for young victims of war was based, eventually disappeared (Thucydides II 44,1; Longo, 2000).

The civic funeral oration, which retold the history of the *polis* and extended the memory of the dead from the burial site to Athens’s sphere of influence and beyond, made eulogy political and resolved the problem of death by emphasizing continuity from generation to generation. The loss of an individual was incorporated into the history of the city, and Pericles underlined how even an individual who was without merit and had no virtues to boast of could transform his life

story by sealing it with a sacrifice for the homeland and thereby make the city an example, indeed a "school," to the whole of Greece (cf. Thucydides II 42,3; 41,1).

Funerary monuments disappeared almost completely from Attica for about half a century, from the end of the Persian Wars to the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Scenes painted on vases continue to depict tomb markers, tumuli, and stelae of every type, but it is doubtful that these reflect contemporary custom rather than expressing desires frustrated by sumptuary laws. Sculpted stelae begin to mark burials once more in the third quarter of the fifth century. It has been suggested that after a plague that began in 430 B.C. and raged for several years forced the city to abandon its usual funerary rituals and practices, piety for the dead was renewed. And when stelae did reappear, their iconography was decidedly private, not heroic. They depicted domestic scenes and family groups in a manner very different from those in the ceremonial context of *prothesis* and *ekphora* that had been recurrent in painted ceramics of the sixth century. The family no longer appeared in the context of funeral rituals but instead as a background to the figure of the deceased during moments of everyday life amid his loved ones.

This change in the symbolism used to commemorate the dead placed a new emphasis on women, who now were depicted more often than men and brought to public attention. An interesting hypothesis is that the law passed by Pericles in 451–450 B.C. limiting citizenship to those freeborn persons whose mothers, as well as fathers, were Athenian may have contributed to this change:

Men secured their own claims to citizen status by advertising that their wives and mothers conformed to the ideals of Athenian womanhood, and that their homes were models of domestic regularity, unsullied by the

exotic. Such advertisement reinforced the stereotype of the Athenian woman but it also promoted the domestic setting as the chief source of citizen status and made it acceptable to put the man, so frequently previously figured in the gymnasium or on the field of battle, back into that setting. By doing so the agenda of masculinity was altered, the household acquired a new and different place in Athenian ideology and, if women's work itself remained essentially unaltered, it had at least ceased to be unseen and unsung.

(Osborne, 1997, pp. 32–33)

When *lekylthoi* and *loutrophoroi* took the place of more costly stone monuments, the scenes painted on them were meant mainly for friends and close relatives, not for all the citizens and strangers to whom the ambitious monuments of the period before the Persian wars had been addressed. The virtues of the sons who suffer premature death, praised by their parents in the inscriptions, were no longer those of the sixth century, intended to attract admiration from strangers. Instead of beauty, youth, and courage, they mourned more intimate qualities, which might be meaningful only to those who knew and loved the deceased. And babies were no longer depicted as adults but shown with features characteristic of their true age (Humphreys, 1980).

The commemoration of the dead in Athens did not, however, evolve as linearly as might be thought. Monuments of the archaic period were designed to influence a broader community, and even strangers, by declaring publicly the place of the deceased within the elite. During the succeeding, classical period, common citizens also received heroic honors, when state funerals gave all who had fallen for their country the glory of a grand common burial. Yet this very change,

which shifted responsibility for the celebration of rites and the focal point of memory from the family to the city, may have given rise to the production of monuments commemorating the domestic virtues of ordinary citizens during the late fifth and fourth centuries. If we give this hypothesis credit (Humphreys, 1980), the state intrusion, far from limiting family pity for dead relatives, might have engendered both the desire that everyone leave a monument visible to at least a restricted circle and the idea that through a monument an *oikos* may boast of its own continuity.

The dialectical interaction between survivors' expressions of grief, socially accepted channels for these expressions, and available material resources makes alternation between intimate remembrance and permanent commemoration even more complex and less predictable. In the Hellenistic age, for example, commemoration assumed the form of testamentary foundations designed to provide perpetual financing for periodic meetings and celebratory rites—as for the philosopher Epicurus. The dominant mentality and the prevailing customs continually oscillated between opposing poles that Humphreys defines as “the private and public faces of death” (1980, p. 123).

### 5.3 LEGISLATION AND FUNERARY REGULATIONS

The oldest funerary legislation known in detail was enacted by Solon in Athens at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. The sources that speak of this are later, but they agree about the spirit and measures of the legislation. The speech *Against Macartatus*, delivered in 341 B.C. and attributed to Demosthenes, mentions the law requiring that the *prothesis* take place inside the house, that the *ekphora* be held the following day before dawn, that men go first and women follow in the procession, and that women participating in the vigil and

in the funeral procession be relatives of the deceased—second cousins or closer—or over sixty years of age (43, 62; cf. § 5.2). Only women with the specified degree of kinship could return to the house of the deceased, probably to take part in the *perideipnon* (funeral banquet; cf. § 3.3 and Garland, 2001). The same limit—children of cousins—is set for the *anchisteia*, with the paternal line given priority over the maternal and men over women in the same degree of kinship. If the deceased was assassinated, these same relatives have the duty to avenge the victim by persecuting the killer.

The norms that determined the rights and duties of relatives who could dress in mourning were thus in harmony with inheritance laws, and—since the time of Draco (seventh century B.C.)—with state attempts to limit blood revenge both by specifying the circumstances within which the family itself had the right to punish a crime and by binding even these to judicial verification. All these measures were inspired by the need to restrict the number of relatives who, united by the same interests, would ally themselves and act to the detriment of consensus in the *polis*. To ensure that citizens without children did not have their inheritance passed on to their most distant relatives, Solon permitted testamentary adoption. This helped ensure the independence of the nuclear family from the *genos* (clan). If rights of succession were inseparable from an obligation to organize the funeral (cf. § 3.3), the rigorous rules determining which relatives had this obligation also determined the hereditary line. Limiting the presence of women in funeral rites and laments may have reduced their influence, both in the delicate sphere of revenge (§ 3.2.2) and in decisions related to inheritance (Alexiou, 2002). Male control over their actions would have been easier in the less flexible context of the *oikos* than in the broader structure of the *genos*.

Cicero (*Laws* II 59) listed Solonian rules that prohibited women from lacerating or beating themselves or wailing

lugubriously and that placed limits on funerary expense: three veils, one purple tunic, and ten flautists. (Later these rules were copied verbatim into Roman funeral legislation.) Plutarch (*Solon* 21, 5–7) likewise focused on Solon's laws limiting women's excesses when in public for feast days or mourning: besides restricting luxury in clothes and offerings, Solon reportedly prohibited the use of "set lamentations"—undoubtedly an allusion to the poetic *threnoi* (formal aristocratic dirges)—and of mourning people other than the deceased during his/her funeral. Furthermore, despite there being no kinship requirement for male participation in funerals, men were forbidden from visiting strangers' tombs.

That temporal and spatial limits were consistently placed on women's involvement makes clear that funeral rites were feared, most of all, as a window of power and propaganda for the elite. Displays of mourning that once took place in large open spaces in daylight were now restricted to private spaces by night, thereby reducing the social threat posed by screaming, excessive gestures, and incessant weeping, even for people long dead. Indeed, all of Solon's political actions were intended to promote moderation and neutralize contrasts. His law that banned speaking ill of the dead—which meant that the heirs had the duty to prosecute anyone who dishonored the memory of a dead person—is based on these principles: "It is piety to regard the deceased as sacred, justice to spare the absent, and good policy to rob hatred of its perpetuity" (Plutarch, *Solon* 21, 1, transl. Bernadotte Perrin).

Similar legislative measures in Athens must have been responsible for the decline in production of tomb stelae between the late sixth and early fifth centuries B.C. It is likely that the wealthy classes responded to the laws limiting funerals by using splendid monuments to display their power. Cicero reports that after Solon's legislation a law was passed forbidding the construction of sumptuous tombs:

the limit was set at what ten men could build in three days (*Laws* II 64–65). The location of burials also changed significantly, as shown by archaeological data. Whereas until the archaic age, before the development of the *polis*, burials commonly appeared inside settlement walls, in the fifth century they appear only along roads leading to urban settlements, and children alone were exempted from the requirement that the dead be separated from the living. Burial in the *agora* therefore became an exceptional honor, reserved for a city's founders and colonizers.

The demands of hygiene, religious convictions, and socioeconomic criteria such as a lack of space for urban expansion, might explain the shift away from urban burials. On the other hand, according to Plutarch, Lycurgus' legislation in archaic and classical Sparta allowed spaces used by the living and those for the dead to be in close proximity so as to restore familiarity with death: young people used to seeing tombs inside the city and near temples would lose their superstitious aversion to the concept of death. Bearing in mind the classical Greek obsession with contamination by dead bodies, this was a truly "illuminated," rationalistic approach (*Lycurgus* 27,1).

In late fourth-century Athens, when luxury had returned to funerary celebrations and monuments, Demetrius Phalereus—who, as governor from 317 to 307 B.C., wrote a lost work on funeral legislation that was Cicero's source—issued new sumptuary laws that might have been influenced by the rules of sobriety and austerity that Plato had proposed for his ideal community, rules inspired in turn by the norms of Greek cities (Plato, *Laws* XII, 958d–60b). It is noteworthy that, according to Plato, tombstones were to be large enough only to contain "a eulogy of the dead man's life consisting of not more than four heroic lines" (958e). To ensure that no citizen wasted his inheritance or was too munificent toward his



dead relatives, Demetrius not only restricted the size and shape of tombstones, but also insisted that the *ekphora* be performed before dawn, appointing magistrates to enforce this decree and instituting punishments for transgressors (Cicero, *Laws* II 66).

On the Greek mainland, laws governing funerals are known from Delphi (funeral regulations of the phratry of the Labiadaï, an epigraphic text from the first half of the fourth century B.C.) and Sparta (Lycurgus' legislation [Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 27, 1–4]). The restrictions placed on normal Spartan citizens contrasted with the grand funerals reserved for sovereigns—in which the populace was obliged to take part (Herodotus VI 58). In Ioulis, a town on the island of Keos (in the Cyclades), an inscription from the end of the fifth century B.C. includes sumptuary and cathartic norms, and an indication which female relatives may be considered “contaminated” by mourning. On the island of Nisyros, in the Southern Sporades, a fragmentary inscription from the third century B.C. includes a decree referring to a burial prohibition. Lastly, in the city of Gortyn, Crete, mid-fifth century B.C. epigraphic texts contain instructions for funeral processions on private property and for compulsory purifications following a death.

At Gambreion, near Pergamon, in Asia Minor, an inscription from about the third century B.C. contains a decree regarding mourning customs. While writing about Mytilene, Cicero (*Laws* II 66) reports that the tyrant Pittacus, who lived between the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., set norms prohibiting participation in strangers' funerals. In Sicily, at Catana, norms limiting the expression of grief are attributed to the lawgiver Charondas in the seventh century B.C. (Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 44, 40). And at Syracuse, even the tyrant Gelon observed the abolition of costly *ekphorai*—although the whole population joined in his funeral procession (Diodorus Siculus XI 38, 2).

Information about the archaic legislators confirms that measures imposing modesty on funerary practices so as to bridge the gap between social classes are a *topos* connected with semilegendary figures. However, comparisons of epigraphic evidence gathered from various places and times suggest that the motives or purposes for these measures were complex. They are not based on homogeneous cultural conditions or necessities. Thus, although they reflect an anti-aristocratic intention, they also reveal an urge to ensure that disturbances implicit in the traditional funeral—aggressive behavior, intense emotional outpouring, sobbing, and the sight of the dead person's face—do not interfere with the new sensibility desired by the ruling classes. By dictating rules that limit the ceremony and set time limits on participants' mourning, the living community could be reunited gradually and calmly.

The symbolic language and the details of each measure, which express the particular social or political group that issued it, cannot always be traced back to better-known or better-documented examples of Athenian legislation. Yet every measure tries, in the interest of community, to define a suitable model of ritual behavior, to control the money spent on the deceased, and to regulate the purification that concludes the mourning. Defending its stability against the disorder brought by death, the *polis* claims the right to control what happens in its public spaces even if this involves reshaping and transforming age-old customs and fears (Frisone, 2000).

The extent to which funerary legislation succeeded in changing more deep-rooted practices is uncertain, but in Sophocles' *Antigone* (1246–50), female mourning is condemned unless, in accord with fifth-century custom, it is performed within domestic walls. Certainly the popular belief that funeral rites and offerings at the tomb are at once a necessity for the

dead and useful for the living (protecting them from the wrath of the dead) provides a lasting incentive to follow a logic different from that on which city legislation is based. Widespread superstition and Greek acceptance of the irrational—emotions based on the conviction that the supernatural interferes in human experience—indicate that in the common view, the cult of the dead is simply a more-or-less-effective way to continue communicating with loved ones, to satisfy their desires and obtain personal gratification.

## APPENDIX



# STUDIES OF DEATH IN ANTHROPOLOGY, SOCIAL HISTORY, AND PSYCHOLOGY

This is not the place for an extended review of recent studies of the Greek understanding of death or of the ways, public or private, in which Greeks developed rituals and norms to transcend its emotional impact. Nevertheless, as a guide to the conceptual framework of these chapters, this last one will refer to particularly significant studies that have helped revive discussion in this area, studies that bring new perspectives either because they formulate broadly applicable theories or because they have demolished disciplinary barriers that impeded a complete understanding of complex cultural phenomena. Dying has always been both an emotional event for the family and a problem for the living as a social group. In the past, however, research into Greek civilization and the analysis of texts and archaeological data tended to evaluate material culture or reconstruct eschatological patterns in a detached, impersonal manner, without running the risks faced by scholars in recent decades who have attempted to trace the history of mentalities in a field previously thought—wrongly—to be conservative and resistant to change. Comparing the practices of our own society with those of the ancient world enables us to appreciate the strengths of the civilization in which our roots are set and to learn what has been lost in the development of the industrialized West.

At the beginning of the last century, French sociologist Émile Durkheim's brilliant pupil Robert Hertz laid the foundations of a new perspective in the field of funerary anthropology in his *Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort* (1907). Although it was many years before studies of death in the ancient world took full advantage of his work, Hertz was the first scholar to change the anthropological methods handed down from nineteenth-century positivism, to break away from the successful model presented by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890), which proceeded by accumulating all similar cases of a rite or custom present in human society (on death: Frazer, 1913–1924). Hertz, by contrast, analyzed in detail the funeral rites of Indonesian peoples, particularly the Dayaks of Borneo, to reconstruct the “mental dimension” of death. He theorized a law valid not only for “primitive” mentality but also for the cultural reality of traditional societies, which he summarized as follows:

For the collective consciousness, death is in normal circumstances a temporary exclusion of the individual from human society. This exclusion effects his passage from the visible society of the living into the invisible society of the dead. Mourning, at its origin, is the necessary participation of the living in the mortuary state of their relative, and lasts as long as this state itself. In the final analysis, death as a social phenomenon consists in a dual and painful process of mental disintegration and synthesis. It is only when this process is completed that society, its peace recovered, can triumph over death.

(1960, p. 86)

This survey of social dynamics also makes use of psychological categories: in order to ensure its own continuity and

regular functioning, the society frees itself from the threatening and destructive force of death by developing its relationship with the dead and transforming them from sinister presences into distant, benevolent protectors. Funerary ceremonies are regarded as part of a network of rites of passage (in age or status), as seen in the custom of double burial among the peoples of the Malay archipelago, which Hertz identifies as a practice characterized by ritual control of the long process of decomposition and modification of the body. (Just two years later, in 1909, Arnold van Gennep developed a theory of three-part *rites de passage*—a period of segregation from daily life, a state of transition, and a reintegration into the social order—which owed a lot to Hertz's contribution). Death is then seen as a phenomenon that not only terminates an individual's physical existence but also destroys his/her social existence. The close link between the destinies of the body and of the soul presupposes a mental connection that is only in part the result of collective understanding being unable to separate itself from the physical: the drama imagined for the soul becomes truly real only through the actions society performs on the body, its rites. Furthermore, emotional response, revulsion from the corpse, and ideas regarding contamination are variables that depend on the value and importance of the deceased within his community. It is therefore fundamental to emphasize the double conditions that influence forms of mourning in every culture: the deceased's social status and the conventions of a shared symbolic code. The French sociological school effectively identifies the element that constantly characterizes funeral rituality and that would direct the work of anthropological scholars studying the ancient world during the second half of the twentieth century. (The essays by Robert Hertz and Arnold van Gennep were translated into English only in 1960, becoming a reference point for anthropologists of the

Anglo-Saxon school; cf. Metcalf and Huntington, 1991). The social dimension of mourning comprises a series of group responses, techniques, and methods that help the individual to confront the traumatic event and then to redefine his/her role within the surviving community. The importance of this social dimension is evident in standard manifestations of grief, which control the expression of forces and drives that otherwise could disturb, undermine, or upset the ideal order of the social system.

Among Italian scholars, Ernesto De Martino produced an exemplary study of funeral laments (1958), the fruit of complex theoretical engagement and anthropological field research regarding rites in rural areas of Lucania, in southern Italy. *Morte e pianto rituale: Dal lamento funebre antico al pianto di Maria* ("Death and Ritual Mourning: From the Ancient Funeral Dirge to the Weeping of Mary") contains many noteworthy insights and an unmatched description of mourning as a code of gestures, physical postures, and psychological states that alternate between depression and violence. However, his work has not gained much recognition internationally, in part because subsequent studies once again inverted the hierarchy between individual and society when interpreting factors that shape ceremonies of mourning. According to Hertz, death is perceived as an external power that breaks into the community, shaking its very foundations until the appropriate rites succeed in redefining the status of the deceased and of the living. Thus, he concludes, the community goes on hoping that, unlike its individual members, it is everlasting and capable of regaining stability after the loss of a member. De Martino, on the other hand, traces a history of mourning that presupposes constants in the human psyche and that eclectically interconnects philosophical anthropology with psychology, and Marxism with existentialism and psychoanalysis. He maintains that the essential function of mourning is to

achieve protection for the individual psyche through the sequence of gestures and melodies in female dirges, the only social construct being the codification of these dirges in community tradition. His theory of the "work of grief," which is based on observations of Lucanian lamentation, suggests that the dirge is a symbolic practice in which the individual and the group collaborate to transcend the "crisis of presence," that is to say, the crisis of a person's existence in the world within a defined cultural situation. This formula, coined using philosophical and psychiatric concepts from Hegel to Heidegger and from Pierre Janet to Freud (including Benedetto Croce's idealistic historicism, a central part of De Martino's training), expresses the peril of succumbing before having found "cultural redemption," a constant risk for the human being who strives for personal unity. Failure in this attempt produces a pathological regression into deep anxiety, the loss of the self as a subject capable of transcending nature and taking up the values of culture:

The crisis of presence is thus the loss of one's place in a historical moment, and death is simply the most graphic example of such loss. The crisis of grief is related: it represents the possibility that the living will be overcome with their own loss and will fail to recover; that is, they may follow the dead into nothingness. Funeral ritual, including the stylized lament of the Mediterranean, helps to restore the living to historicity, but paradoxically does so by "dehistoricizing" the event of death, by assimilating it to other deaths that have occurred before, by reimagining the particular death as part of a timeless process. It helps the living overcome the crisis and leads to their social reintegration.

(Saunders, 1993, p. 883)



Analysis of folkloric remnants suggests the theoretical model, but a subsequent survey of the records of funeral lament in ancient Greek civilization and several Mediterranean cultures allows De Martino to project the protective function of the rite for the person and his cultural identity into an earlier time and to identify the epochal turning point at which it begins to decline, namely, the advent of Christian ideology, for which death is “birth” to true life. This change is also signaled by a semantic shift in the term *planctus*. Whereas in Latin it indicates the pagan custom of beating the head and breast, its Italian equivalent, *pianto*, simply means “weeping”—in line with the decrees of the new religion that put an end to theatrical excess and ritual pretense of grief. It was not easy for the Church to provide, even in the exemplary death of Christ, a substitute for such a deep-rooted archaic tradition. Sometimes compromises were necessary. For example, as a *Mater Dolorosa*, Mary is usually depicted in a state of composed inner suffering in front of the cross, but it is not rare in medieval iconography and sacred dramas for her to be shown in desperate lament. In Southern Europe the “Mother of Sorrow” is still prominent in impressive Easter rituals. In the 1950s, Christianity was still losing its struggle against the funeral lament in the rural society of Southern Italy, where poverty and social oppression seem to favor the persistence of a custom now devoid of meaning, because lay values and internalization of emotion mark out modern culture. Regardless, the symbolic code of a society does not derive directly from social conditioning; rather, it responds to a complex system of dynamics in which subject, emotions, and rituals for expressing those emotions all play a role. De Martino’s work cannot easily be summed up without doing injustice to the theoretical depth of his writing. However, his argument that a rip in the fabric that bound the ruling class with the peasant class in Southern Italy produced two levels and two

"cultures" does not account for the complexity of popular religion, in which ancient rites and the new vision of death coexist without contradiction. Nor does it account for the fact that, during its long history, the lament has expressed the culture of the whole society, not only of subaltern groups (Mirto, 1990). Even so, his ethnographic research helps explain why the lament (which was intended to respond to death, by "making the dead die within us" in a shameless objectification of grief) is, of all funeral ceremonies, the most distant from modern customs. Unlike Hertz's ideas, which proved persuasive for many in French and Anglo-Saxon historical anthropology, De Martino's remain on the edge of mainstream scholarship, but his observations about the survival of pagan mourning within European Catholicism deserve further attention (Amelang, 2005).

Philippe Ariès' research (1974, 1997) on Western attitudes toward death from the high Middle Ages onward begins with a reflection on the dismissive attitude toward death and mourning that is increasingly evident in contemporary society. Beginning with Geoffrey Gorer's well-known and provocative 1965 formulation, "the pornography of death," which asserts that, since the early twentieth century, death has taken the place of Victorian sex as a subject of shame and censure, Ariès attempted to outline the steps that led to such a radical change. To do so, he applied a critical socio-anthropological evaluation to contemporary industrialized culture. Presenting the various views relating to death during the last thousand years, he identifies five levels of transformation. Here it will be helpful to recall only his starting and ending points. In the early Middle Ages, *mort apprivoisée* (tame death) was experienced as a family event, feared but accepted as natural and circumscribed within a detailed ritual organized by the dying person with the participation of the whole community. The subsequent stages are linked

to the development of a more marked individual conscience and fear of the last judgment and, later, the transfer from fear for one's personal destiny to fear for that of others. The fifth stage is the *mort interdite* (forbidden, and eventually invisible, death) of contemporary society. Isolated in the aseptic environment of a hospital, deprived of control over his/her imminent end, the individual dies amid the silence of family and friends, who behave as if death were an obscenity, to be hidden and not mentioned in front of children, and for whom mourning is an embarrassment and a shame, in society and even in the close family circle. Thus death has changed from natural and domesticated to savage and inexpressible.

Ariès' theory has greatly influenced more recent studies. His comparison of medieval "tame death" with contemporary practices in Europe and in North America, which reveals many ironic reversals in emotions, personal achievements, and social solidarity, challenges prior perceptions of civilization as experiencing an unstoppable linear progression (cf. Metcalf and Huntington, 1991, on U.S. customs). Today the family is excluded from the management of death. Religion and the church likewise seem to be stepping backward and losing their age-old power over final rites. Control resides almost exclusively in medical science, bioethical debates about its limits, judiciary practices, and various impersonal institutions. However, Ariès asserts, it is impossible to identify constant psychological structures or homogeneous responses, even within the history of Western culture. Because Ariès used such a wide variety of documents and covered such a long time span, and because, in the absence of common peoples' experiences, he based his idealized generalizations on literary sources, his work has drawn considerable criticism. Even so, classical scholars fascinated by the theory have drawn from it the importance of distinguishing between times that focused

on a traditional or “family” model (corresponding to “tame death”) and times when particular fears influence funeral practices and representations of the afterlife. For example, Sourvinou-Inwood (1981, 1983, 1995) suggests that a similar change took place in Greece between the Dark Age and the eighth century B.C., which saw the abandonment of a resigned acceptance of death. Demographic growth, urbanization, and the development of the city-state as a new political unit, together with the broadening of horizons following improved communications and colonization, may have brought about changes in funerary customs (such as the removal of tombs to extramural cemeteries) and new eschatological ideas. Elements indicating a new orientation emerge sporadically in the Homeric poems and become more evident during the archaic period, when greater individualism gradually prevails (cf. chapter 1).

Ian Morris (1987, 1989) considers Ariès’ category of “tame death” too vague—useless when applied to ancient Greece—because it can be applied to all traditional societies, whose funeral ceremonies consist of a three-part rite of passage, and even to Western society, at least until the radical change in mentality during the eighteenth century. Interpreting the mass of silent documents provided by tombs and cemeteries, Morris proposes instead that perceptions of death and behavior (including rituals) pertaining to death were largely stable and constant because, even if there were changes, they would not be historically significant. To the judgment that data from different contexts, influenced by a poetic genre or by political, economic, or social factors not always easy to reconstruct, offer fragile support for the linear evolution of customs and beliefs regarding death, Morris replies: “If the Greeks had to any extent anticipated Western developments by two millennia, much thinking about the history of death would be challenged, and the theoretical basis for the

archaeology of burials would crumble" (1989, p. 296). But Sourvinou-Inwood's attempt to organize data from literary texts, monuments, and epigraphic, iconographic, and archaeological sources into a coherent pattern is valuable neither for its analysis of single phenomena nor for its acceptance of Ariès' model. Ariès himself, however, believed that "tame death" was an ancient notion still present in rural parts of modern Europe, among people who resisted the changes of mentality adopted by the intellectual and powerful elite. Rather, Sourvinou-Inwood's work is persuasive in that it identifies within Greek culture from the end of the Mycenaean Age until the classical period possible fluctuations between moments of greater and lesser acceptance of death and corresponding variation in the activities of everyday life. Future studies will demonstrate that forms of mourning, fear of contamination from the corpse, and clear separations in time and space between the dead and the living occur for specific reasons that are not necessarily identical across places and time. There is a sway, rather than an irreversible forward motion, between times when rituals focus on the dying individual and on choices made by his/her family and other times, when political authorities impose rules that govern mourning and memory, placing the interests of the community above those of the individual citizen.

We cannot conclude this brief and partial survey without mentioning Jean-Pierre Vernant's contributions to the debate on themes of death in Greece. He asserts that, in every society and at any moment in its history, death rituals are the most revealing indicators of socially significant aspects of the person: status, achievements, personal relationships—everything that confers individuality and that, in death, risks being swallowed up in oblivion. In the late 1970s, Vernant began investigating funeral ideology, which "no longer seems like that echo in which the society of the living would be duplicated. It defines

the entire effort that makes use of the social imagination in order to develop an acculturation of death, to assimilate death by civilizing it, and to assure its 'management' on the institutional level in keeping with a strategy adapted to the requirements of collective life" (1991, pp. 76–77). The Homeric model of heroic death characterizes Greek culture in a lasting fashion. Poetic celebration ensures a form of immortality because it transmits the memory of heroes from one generation to another. This, Vernant points out, is a way of consecrating a life that, in the prime of youth, met a glorious end on the battlefield. In defining the ideal behind heroism, however, Vernant connects death and glory too closely (see § 5.1). In fact the rhetoric of the beautiful death is fully defined in exhortations addressed to citizen-soldiers only when the *polis* has taken up the epic ideal and created a paradigm of behavior by which lasting glory is bestowed on young men who sacrifice their lives for their country. The very existence of the *polis* depends on the warrior qualities of its young men, and its perennial gratitude is a reward for new "heroes"—not leaders of a warrior elite but all members of the civic community. In this way common citizens in the classical age could aspire to fame. And sometimes personal success—such as that of a sovereign whose people enjoy prosperity and who lives to an old age comforted by his heirs—was sufficient for epic protagonists to be remembered by their posterity (*Od.* I 217–18, IV 209–11, XI 134–37, XIX 367–68). The *Iliad* describes clashes in battle as a series of vendettas between opposing factions. Sometimes it even removes any distinction between defeat of an enemy and family vengeance for an assassination (XIV 482–85). It situates the motives for war in a complex conception of honor, in which a victim's social standing and the status of his group depend on the injury received and on their ability to inflict a similar injury on the enemy. The *polis*, then, translates the narcissistic individualism of the

epic heroes into an ethics based more on the common good than on competition.

As regards funerary practices, Nicole Loraux (1986, 1982) demonstrates that in Athens public funerals for victims of war inherited a number of features of aristocratic glory: the individual soldier's name is inscribed on the monument together with the names of others who died the same year, but no soldier is named in the *epitaphios logos* (official eulogy). Funeral speeches, above all else, demonstrate the shift in focus *du beau mort à la belle mort*—from the body of the epic warrior, admired for its beauty, to “beautiful death,” which is simply a formal model of civic behavior, of moral rather than aesthetic value (1982, p. 34). Through a process of abstraction, the individual is diminished and reabsorbed into the collective ideal of the *polis*. Following Vernant, Loraux successfully emphasizes the ideology of the city: in celebrating the death of its citizens at war, democratic Athens creates an instrument of social cohesion that exalts its own power. Nevertheless, Homeric epic finds its true continuity only in an occasion that provides a backdrop for praising the excellence both of a single hero and of many brave citizens: the funeral.

There are many fundamental studies of Greek death rituals and perceptions of the afterlife, from Erwin Rohde's extraordinary collection of sources (1925) through Donna Kurtz and John Boardman's presentations of archaeological data (1971) and Margaret Alexiou's study of ritual lament (2002) to Sally Humphreys's sensitive positioning of her data from the ancient world within a historical, juridical, and anthropological context (1980, 1981, 1993). In a brilliant study of literature and art (1979), which explores the heterogeneous sources regarding Greek responses to death, Emily Vermeule resists drawing a scheme that can be decoded in any precise or sure way, and in so doing she highlights the necessary ambiguity “in a realm of thinking where thinking cannot really be done, and where there is no experience”

(p. 118). The studies discussed here have, on the contrary, chosen one key for their interpretations, and because that key sometimes is inadequate, they have missed important aspects of the relationship between Greeks and death and have overemphasized others. However, this is a deliberate risk. But precisely because there are obscurities in the development of any human civilization, scholars have undertaken the task as part of a larger attempt to understand the structures of archaic culture and mentality, to rationalize that which Vernant calls "the horror of chaos, the horror of what has no form and no meaning" (1981, p. 291). To choose this path is to challenge Vermeule's claim: "Logic is not fruitful in the sphere of death and was scarcely applied to it by any Greek before Lucian, although Plato's brilliant views mingle the rational and the poetic at their best" (1979, p. 118).

Whether it be dreadful or glorious, real or ideal, death is always the exclusive concern of those who are alive. It is the impossibility of conceiving death from the point of view of the dead that constitutes its horror, its radical strangeness, its complete otherness and that at the same time makes it possible for the living to bypass it by instituting within their social existence a constant commemoration of certain types of death.

(Vernant 1981, p. 288)

Hence our illusion of being able to understand and explain the strategies by which Greek civilization—which in some sense belongs to us, yet is radically different from ours—attempted "to affirm in the face of and despite everything, the social permanence of this human individuality which must, by its very nature, be destroyed and disappear" (Vernant 1981, p. 291). Today's classicists remain grateful to each one of these scholars for such a brave attempt.







## GLOSSARY

*amphora*: a two-handled pot with a neck that is considerably narrower than the body. It was used for the storage of liquids and solids such as grain.

*anchisteia*: (literally "closest") a legally defined bilateral kindred, with males preceding females in each degree of relationship, extending to the "children of cousins." Members of *anchisteia* bear special responsibilities toward one another, including obligations to bury the dead.

*demosion sema*: the public cemetery of Athens, extending just outside the Dipylon Gates along the ceremonial highway in the direction of the Academy. Here were both the communal graves (*polyandria*) of the war dead and tombs of distinguished individuals.

*dexiosis*: the handshake motif; in classical funerary art a symbolic gesture for various themes: marriage, parting from relatives at death, reunion with ancestors in the underworld.

*eidolon*: image, phantom, a more substantial apparition of the dead than *psyche*.

*ekphora*: the procession with a corpse from house to grave.

*enagismos*: sacrifice offered to the dead.

*enata*: rites performed on the ninth day after either death or burial.

*endyma*: a shroud.

*epiblema*: a wide covering that hides the whole body.

*epitaphios logos*: funeral speech given in honor of the war dead.

*Genesia*: anniversary rites dedicated to the dead; they probably involved a visit to the tomb (during which offerings of flowers, wreaths, or fillets were made) and a domestic gathering.

*genos* (pl. *gene*): "clan," a group of ancient Greek families claiming descent from a common ancestor. The families of the *genos* shared religious cults, resulting in a strong bond.

*goos*: the spontaneous weeping of kinswomen in their ritual lament for the dead, spoken rather than sung.

*hybris*: insolence, arrogance, reckless pride and outrageous behavior in general. The word was also used to describe actions of those who challenged the gods or their laws.

*katadesmos* (pl. *katadesmoi*): a lead curse-tablet placed in a grave with a spell to harm the living.

*ker* (pl. *keres*): a female death-spirit of uncertain origin and changing form.

*Kerameikos*: the name of the quarter of Athens northwest of the Acropolis. Technically, it included an extensive area both within and outside of the city walls. The "inner Kerameikos" (from the Greek Agora to the Dipylon Gates) was the "potter's quarter" of the city. The "outer Kerameikos" (from the city walls toward the Academy), included the famous cemetery and the *demosion sema*.

*kline*: any couch, particularly the one used for the laying out of the corpse, during the *prothesis*.

*kommos*: a formal lament in tragedy, in dialogue form between chorus and actors.

*kopetos*: the rhythmic beating of the head and breast as a sign of grief during the funeral rites.

- krater*: a broad mixing-bowl for wine, with two handles and a foot. Some large examples from the geometric era were used as grave-markers, and this funerary connection continues to be important. The volute-krater is named after its handles, tightly curled so that they look like the volutes on Ionic columns. The handles of the calyx-krater are placed low down on the vase's body. Their upward curling form lends the shape an appearance reminiscent of the calyx of a flower, hence the name.
- lekythos* (pl. *lekythoi*): a tall slender oil flask, with a narrow neck, a single handle, and a small, deep mouth; a common funeral gift.
- loutrophoros* (pl. *loutrophoroi*): an ovoid-bodied vessel with a tall neck and two or three handles, used for carrying and storing water. Used in marriage and funerary rituals, a stone version becomes common as a grave-marker in fourth-century Athenian cemeteries.
- makar* (pl. *makares*): "blessed," term applied to the gods and to the heroized dead.
- mnema*: memorial, remembrance, mound or building in honor of the dead, a grave monument, tomb.
- Moirai* (pl. *Moirai*): goddess of fate: the name means "part, share, allotted portion"; as a group, the three *Moirai* personified the inescapable destiny of man, and assigned to every person his or her share in the scheme of things.
- Nekyia*: the rite of raising ghosts; as literary description of the underworld is the name of the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, and also of the beginning of the twenty-fourth book (second *Nekyia*).
- oikos*: the household; the family, as the basic socio-economic unit of the city-state.
- perideipnon*: the funeral banquet, which took place at the home of the deceased after the burial.
- phratry*: "brotherhood," a kinship group constituting an intermediate division in the primitive structure of the

- Hellenic tribe (*phyle*), consisting of several patrilinear clans, and surviving in classical times as a territorial subdivision in the political and military organization of the Athenian state.
- pinax* (pl. *pinakes*): a tablet of painted wood or terracotta affixed as a memorial within a burial chamber.
- planctus*: the Latin equivalent of *kopetos*.
- polyandrion* (pl. *polyandria*): common burial at public expense of those fallen in war.
- prothesis*: the ceremonial laying out of the corpse; the wake or vigil.
- psyche* (pl. *psychai*): wind-breath, the soul manifested by the breath, the spirit-soul.
- sema* (pl. *semata*): a sign or token; the sign by which a grave is known; a tomb.
- soma* (pl. *somata*): body, flesh.
- stroma*: a covering laid over the *kline*.
- tholos* (pl. *tholoi*): a round building; a Mycenaean tomb, consisting of a circular subterranean burial chamber, roofed by a corbelled vault and approached by a *dromos* (entrance passage).
- threnos* (pl. *threnoi*): the set dirge composed and performed by the professional mourners, with a dominant musical element. In the classical period, a distinct type of lyric poetry.
- thymos*: the soul that is manifested by the passions; *thymos* was experienced as an inner wisdom coming from the emotions or the instincts, often associated with the heart or the midriff; used of life, sometimes of mind.
- triakostia* (also *triakas* and *triakades*): rites performed on the thirtieth day after either death or burial.
- trita*: rites performed on the third day after either death or burial.



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### SUGGESTED READINGS

#### Chapter 1

For a general overview of the cult of the dead and the mythology of the afterlife, see chapter 4 of Burkert (1985). Vermeule (1979) contains an informative comparison between literary and iconographic testimonies. On the *psyche* the canonical work remains Rohde (1925), thanks in part to the abundance of sources quoted. Sourvinou-Inwood (1995) offers a rich and exhaustive analysis of the afterlife in Homer and of the appearance of guides for the journey to Hades.

#### Chapter 2

As regards the mystery cults, see the sources in Colli (1977) and Scarpi (2002), which outline the various phenomena and pertinent discussions. The fundamental sources on the gold tablets are Pugliese Carratelli (2003), Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal's (2008) discussion of the texts and up-to-date bibliography, and Graf and Johnston's (2007) translation and commentary. See also R. G. Edmonds III, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion: Further along the Path*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press (2011). For the relationship between Dionysism and

Orphism, see Tortorelli Ghidini (2000), and for the various aspects of the Dionysiac cult, see Henrichs (1985). An overview of the interpretations of the Derveni papyrus is given in Laks and Most (1997). See also Janko (2002), Betegh (2004), Burkert (2005), and Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou (2006). All the texts considered "Orphic" are now collected in A. Bernabé, ed., *Poetae Epici Graeci. II, Orphicorum et Orphicis similibus testimonia et fragmenta*, 1–2 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana) Saur: Munich (2004–2005). Dodds's reflections (1951) on the creation of a dualistic concept of man are still useful, as is the picture offered by Bremmer (2002) regarding Pythagorean and Orphic beginnings of hope for immortality and new perceptions of the soul's destiny.

### Chapter 3

Garland (2001) is a useful overview of burial rites and attitudes toward death in ancient Greece. On beliefs about contamination deriving from contact with the dead, see Parker (1983). An informative work on the funeral lament is that of De Martino (2000). See also, particularly as regards the distinct role of women within a male culture, Alexiou (2002), G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*, London: Routledge (1992), and Foley (1993). For a recent collection of essays that deal comparatively with Greek texts, iconography, and rituals of mourning, see chapters 4–10 of Ann Suter, ed., *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008).

### Chapter 4

On changes in the relationship between the living and the dead in the classical age, see Johnston (1999). Kurtz and Boardman (1971) contains a general overview of archaeological data. For an analysis of the significance of archaic funeral monuments, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1995). Regarding epitaphs in particular, see Guarducci (1974), Nicosia (1992), and Day (1989). Oakley (2004), an important collection, gives an overview of the iconographic themes on Attic

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white *lekythoi*. On gestural expressions of mourning in vase paintings, see Pedrina (2001). Brelich (1958) on the hero cult is still valid. For the distinction between tomb cult and hero cult, see Antonaccio (1995). Boardman's (2002) discussion of relationships with the landscape, ancient monuments and relics, and Greek mythical reconstructions of the past is enlightening. Coppola (2008) analyzes all Greek examples of seeking, finding, and transferring the remains of a hero.

## Chapter 5

Concerning the hero's "beautiful death," see Vernant (1991), particularly chapter 2 ("A 'beautiful death' and the disfigured corpse in Homeric epic"). Loraux (1986) remains important for the Athenian funeral speech. On the Athenian ideology of death in war, presented in Pericles' funeral speech, see Longo (2000) and, in general, Seaford (1994). For an understanding of the changing mentality, based on archaeological data and information about sumptuary laws, read Humphreys (1980). Regarding funeral legislation, see the collection of epigraphic texts in Frisone (2000).

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