Chapter 2

"A BEAUTIFUL DEATH" AND THE DISFIGURED CORPSE IN HOMERIC EPIC

He whom the god loves dies young.

—Menander

Recent the walls of Troy that have watched him flee in desperation before Achilles, Hector now stands still. He knows he is about to die. Athena has tricked him; all the gods have abandoned him. Fate (moira) has already laid its hand on him. Even though it is no longer in his power to cope and survive, he must still fulfill the demands that warrior status makes on him and his post: he must transform his death into eternal glory, change the fate of all creatures subject to demise into a blessing that is his alone and whoseuster will be his forever. "No, I do not intend to die without a struggle and without glory (ashedere), or without some great deed whose fame will live on among men to come [essemencoi pusethus]" (II. 22.304–5; cf. 22.110).

The first calls aneris (andres) those men who are in the fullness of their masculine nature, both male and courageous, who have a particular way of dying in battle: at the acme of their lives. As if it were an initiation, such a death endows the warrior with the set of qualities, honors, and values for which the sires, the aristeus, compete throughout their lives. This "beautiful death," this kalos thnatos, to use the term employed in Athenian funeral orations, is like a photographic developer that reveals in the person of the fallen warrior the eminent quality of the unit resultus, the man of virtue and valor. It guarantees unassailable renown to the man who has given his life for his refusal to be dishonored in battle, or to be shamed as a coward. A beautiful death is also a glorious death (exeleuethanatos). For all time to come, it elevates the fallen warrior to a state of glory and the bester of this celebrity, this fagist, that henceforth surrounds his name and person is the ultimate accolade that represents his greatest accomplishment, the winning of aretē. Through a beautiful death, excellence no longer has to be continually measured against someone else or to be tested in combat. Rather, excellence is actualized all at once and forever after in the deed that puts an end to the hero’s life.

This is the meaning of the fate of Achilles, whose character is both exemplary and ambiguous, embodying not only the demands but also the contradictions of the heroic ideal. If Achilles seems to push the logic of honor to an extreme—to absurdity—it is because he somehow places himself above the standard rules of the game. As he himself explains, since his birth he has been offered two destinies to carry him to where all human existence finds its limit, two destinies that are mutually exclusive (II. 9.410f.). He can have either the warrior’s imperishable glory (kleist opthphon) but a short life, or a long life in his own home without any renown whatever. Achilles did not even have to make the choice; he found himself always leaning toward the short life. Dedicated from the outset—one might say by nature—to a beautiful death, he goes through life as if he were already suffused with the aura of the posthumous glory that is his all the more his goal. That is why he finds it impossible, in applying the code of honor, to negotiate, to compromise, to yield to circumstances or power relations; even settlements are, of course, out of the question, but he cannot make even the necessary adjustments without which the system can no longer function. For Achilles every insult is equally intolerable and unforgivable, no matter where it comes from and however high above him the agent’s position on the social scale. Any apology, any honorable offer of compensation (no matter how satisfying to his pride it might seem from its size and public nature) remains empty and ineffective. Like a crime of treason, an insult to Achilles can only be repaid, in his eyes, with the complete and utter humiliation of the guilty party. Such an extreme sense of honor makes Achilles a marginal figure, isolated in the lofty solitude of his wrath. The other Greeks criticize this excess as aberrant, an instance of Error personified, of Are (II. 9.510–12). Agamemnon accuses him of pushing the spirit of competition to the point that he has to be first always, everywhere, and in everything.


2 As early as book I, Achilles declares, "since my ruler, your son, has been born to be a man with a short life, therefore Zeus of the loud thunder on Olympos should grant me honor at least," like an echo, Thetis replies "indeed your lifetime is to be short, of no length. Now it has happened that your still must die first and better beyond all men." II. 1.352–54 and 1.46; 18; see also II. 19.329, 421.
and that as a result he can think of nothing but rivalry, dispute, and combat (ll. 1.288, 177). Nestor reproaches him for his conduct in its disregard of the customary order of precedence, in that he goes so far as to content with a king to whom Zeus has given not only the scepter, power, and command but also the right to the highest honors (ll. 1.278). Odysseus, Phoenix, Ajax, and even Diomedes deplore his intractable hardness, his licentious excess, and his savage and inhuman heart that is deaf to pity, and as oblivious to the pleas of his friends as it is to the apologies and reparations that ought to satisfy him.

Could Achilles then be immume to aildos? Aildos is the feeling of reserve and restraint that fractions like a brake in both upward and downward directions to maintain equilibrium in situations in which differences in status or disparities in strength make open, equal competition impossible. It is also the respectful fear that keeps a safe distance between the weakest and the strongest. In making explicit the inferiority of one of the actors, aildos puts him at the discretion of the other, so that, disarmed by this submissiveness, the stronger might take the initiative in establishing friendly relations (philia) by according the one who puts himself under the other's protection the share of honor that is due to him. But conversely, aildos is also the renunciation by the stronger of violence and aggression toward the weaker who is at the other's mercy and therefore is no longer a rival. Now it is the reconciliation between the injured party and the one who has agreed to abstain himself by an offer of compensation, and thus publicly to acknowledge the honor (timos) he had first insulted. Finally, aildos is the relinquishing of vengeance and the restoration of unity between two groups when, after a murder, the blood price representing the sum of the victim has been agreed on and paid in full to his kin.

At an assembly of the gods, Apollo too accuses Achilles of having lost all sense of pity, and thereby of disregarding aildos (ll. 24.44).

Nonetheless, the weight of such evidence is not primarily psychological in nature. It has less to do with Achilles' character than with the ambiguities of his position, the equivocation of his role within the value system of the epic tradition. Achilles' attitude and behavior contain a paradox that is disturbing as long as one concentrates on individual psychology. Achilles is completely convinced of his superiority in the realm of war and, this occupies the highest position on the scale of qualities that make for excellence in his eyes as well as those of his companions in battle. Moreover, there is no Greek, no Trojan, who does not share Achilles' belief and does not recognize him as the undisputed exemplar of martial arete (ll. 2.768-69). Although his self-confidence is supported by unanimous agreement among others, it hardly guarantees him safety and security; it is yoked instead to an edgy irritability and a profound obsession with humiliation.

To be sure, Agamemnon's taking Briseis away is an insult that strikes Achilles at his most sensitive point. It strips him of his gerus, the special portion awarded him from the communal booty. A gerus is an extraordinary privilege granted under exceptional circumstances; it acknowledges superiority, either in rank or in status (as for Agamemnon) or in valor and daring (as for Achilles). Over and above any material advantage, a gerus has value as a mark of prestige and a consecration of a social supremacy: everyone gets a share, determined by lot, but the elite and only the elite receive a gerus in addition. Consecrating Achilles' gerus, then, somehow denies his presence in battle, the very heroic quality that everyone conceives to him. The other soldiers maintain silence—admittedly tinged with disapproval—in the face of the king's misconduct, and it makes them accomplices with him in the crime for which they will have to pay the price. Nonetheless, Achilles' reaction displays a number of troubling characteristics. Agamemnon is not trying to insult him personally, and never, even at the heston point of the argument, does he denigrate Achilles' outstanding martial prowess. Achilles demands that Agamemnon give up his own prize, Chryseis, for the sake of the common good; in order to rid the Greek camp of the plague, the girl must be returned to her father, who is a priest of Apollo. Agamemnon is willing to do so, on the condition that he receive a gerus in return, so that he, the king, might not be the only one who has to live without his portion of honor (ll. 1.119). If it means that he will have to get the gerus of one of his companions—he it Ajax, Odysseus, or Achilles—no matter, although he predicts that the other will be further inflamed (ll. 1.158-39, cf. 145-46). It is at this point that Achilles explains and his wrath reveals the real split that divides the two men. Achilles sees no common ground between the time inherent in kingly status, the kind of time Nestor extols as coming from Zeus (ll. 1.378-79), and the kind the warrior gains by his ceaseless toil "in the front rank," where danger is omnipresent. So far as he can see, in this war that belongs primarily to Agamemnon and his brother, Agamemnon constantly leaves it to others to give their lives in the heart of the fray; lagging back (opistes eminens) in the shelter of the camp (ll. 9.333; cf. 1.227-29), near the ships, he is not a man to join his noble companions in an ambush; nor does he offer himself as a combatant in a duel to the death. "All that," Achilles tells Agamemnon, "seems like death to you (mode soli kér kídeutai eloi)" (ll. 1.228). For all that he is the kingliest (basi-leutas) among the lords, he has not crossed the boundary that separates ordinary men from the truly heroic. The latter, by accepting from the beginning the fact that life is short, devote themselves completely and single-mindedly to war, adventure, glory, and death. For the man who adopts Achilles' chivalry...
the perspective, it is one's own life itself that is at stake in every test of honour (II. 9.322). Since a reversal means that one has lost once and for all, that one has lost life itself, success must carry value with it at a level that surpasses, and is not measurable by, normal distinctions and awards. The logic of heroic honor is one of all or nothing, and it operates outside of and beyond hierarchies of rank. If Achilles is not recognized as supreme and in a way unique, he feels himself reduced to nothing. Without meeting any overt resistance, he declares himself a traitor Achaeinon, the best of the Greeks, and he boasts that in the past he has carried the burden of the war and in the future will be the only defense against the Trojan onslaught. Therefore he can present himself not only as a disowned, anaimet, due to the insult he has suffered (II. 1.171, 356), but also if he lets it pass without comment—as the feeblest coward, a less than nothing (outanousia), a homeless and worthless drifter, a kind of nonperson (II. 9.648). Between the perpetual glory that is his destiny and the lowest degree of contempt there is no intermediate level where Achilles can find a place. Every affect to his dignity brings him from the heights to the depths, because what is being challenged through him is a set of values that must be accepted without reservation or equivocation if it is not to be wholly diminished. To insist Achilles is to put the coward and the traitor in the same category and to give them, as he says, the same time (II. 9.319). Hence, action is now stripped of its function as an absolute criterion, a touchstone that shows what a man is worth.

It is for this reason that Odyssyus, Phoinix, and Ajax fail in the mission entrusted to them to soften Achilles' resolve and persuade him to give up his anger. Although they use the same words, Achilles does not speak the same language as the envoy sent to fetch him. Agamemnon has come to his senses, and on his behalf the ambassadors offer all that a king can give and more in such circumstances: first, Briseis herself whom he is ready to give back, just as she was when she was taken, along with an oath that Agamemnon has not slept with her; tripods, gold, pitchers, horses, female slaves and concubines; finally, whichever of Agamemnon's own daughters Achilles might choose as a wife, along with a lavish dowry and, to go with this marriage that would make Achilles his son-in-law, the rule over seven cities in his kingdom. Achilles refuses. If he were to accept, he would put himself on the same ground as his enemy. Such goods are only an advance on the time of the king and signs both of his power over others and the privileges attached to his rank. To accept the king's offer would be an admission that the sheer quantity of his possessions counterbalances true valor, such as Achilles alone brings to the Achaean army. In all that they symbolize, the gifts are hateful (II. 9.378). Their very abundance serves to express contempt for the warrior, whose participation in battle does not put at risk his sheep or oxen, tripods or gold, but his very life, his fragile puicn (II. 9.322). Agamemnon's treasure, like all the riches the world covets, consists of things that can always be acquired, exchanged, recovered if they are lost, or obtained in one way or another. The price the warrior pays to attain virtue is of a completely different order. "A man's life cannot come back again, it cannot be lifted nor captured again by force, once it has crossed the threshold of life" (II. 9.406-9). It is his life—his very identity, in his heroic form—that Achilles has put at the service of the army. And it is his life that Agamemnon has insulted in treating the hero the way he did. For Achilles, no wealth, no mark of honor, no social distinction could take precedence over a puicn that nothing in the world can match (ou gar emoi puicntas antastat); by risking his life fearlessly in all the battles that Agamemnon shuns like death, Achilles has already dedicated himself to glory inspired by action.

After Odysyus speaks, old Phoinix argues that if Achilles accepts the reparations, as is customary and correct, and returns to battle, the Achaeanas "will honor [him] like a god"; but if he refuses, they will never give him the same respect (oukhele homos times exeis), even if he comes back later and saves them from the misery of war (II. 9.605). It is a wasted effort. By now Achilles sees a sharp division between two kinds of glory, two kinds of honor. The one is ordinary time: public esteem, ready to extol him, to reward him with a literal king's ransom, if and only if he yields. The other is extraordinary time: the eternal glory that is his destiny if he remains the same as he has always been. For the first time, Achilles openly rejects the Achaeanas' praise, which he had once sought more than anything else. He tells Phoinix that he now has so little need of this latter time (ou ti me toutos chronos, II. 9.607-8) as he does of Agamemnon and his offer—they mean as much to him as a splinter of wood (II. 9.378). He is concerned only with the honor in the destiny controlled by Zeus (Oous aitai, II. 9.608), the early death (odummoies, II. 1.417; 18.95) that his father had foreseen: "Now it has befallen [us] that your life must be brief and bitter beyond all men's" (II. 1.417). Once it has been accepted, however, an early death has its corollary in immortal glory, of which the epic hero sings.

Achilles' refusal highlights the tension between ordinary honor, the societal approval necessary for self-definition, and the much greater demands of heroic honor, in which one still needs to be recognized, but now as set apart on an other level, to be famed 'among men to come.' This tension appears in outline at those points where the two types of honor are so closely linked as to seem almost blended.

This is the book II when Sarpedon exclaims Glaukos to take the lead among the Lycians in attacking the wall the Greeks have built (II. 12.310-28). Why, he asks, are we honored in Lycia with all the privileges and honors of a king? Why do men treat us as if we were gods? Is it not because we feel obliged always to stand in the Lycians' first line of battle (Lukiotes meta probatain) so that all the Lycian warriors can say, "Indeed they are not void of
glory (古代), these kings of our time... since they fight in the forefront” (Il. 17.318-21). Just as Achilles is a son of Thetis, Sarpedon is a son of Zeus, among the Troadan warriors, in his courage and his prowess in battle, he is like a lion whose gory hunting drives him, heedless of danger, after his prey. He does not care that the flock is in an enclosed pasture, guarded by herdsman armed with pikes and accompanied by dogs. Once he is on the attack, nothing will turn him away. There are only two possible endings: either he will snatch his victim, against and despite all odds, or he will be trucd by a spear and fall (Il. 12.305-6). The same spirit makes Sarpedon ready to attack the Greeks’ barricade, behind which death awaits him. Without hesitation he leaps over the parapet and plungs into the fray. When he sees his companions flee before Pothos, who is wearing Achilles’ armor and is in a furious fury, he rebukes them; he calls out his intention to go into single combat with the man we know is destined to kill him (Il. 16.434). Sarpedon meets him in order to “know” him, to find out what he is, that is, to use a fight to the death to determine his “worth” as a warrior (Il. 16.423). Leaving aside the love Zeus feels for him and the special treatment accorded by the gods to his corpse, Sarpedon’s attitude makes him resemble Achilles: both of them belong to the same sphere of heroic existence, and they share a radical definition of honor.

Nonetheless, if we believe Sarpedon’s words, there seems to be a direct correspondence between the status of a king and the excellence of a warrior, between the timé due to the former and the kleos sought by the latter. To fight in the front line, as Achilles and Sarpedon do, underlies and justifies their royal privileges; it could be said that to be a king, one must behave like a hero, and to be a hero, one must be born a king. Such an optimistic vision joins together the diverse factors of social prominence and personal virture. It also reflects the ambiguity of Homeric terminology, in which, according to their context, the same words—agathos, eudaimon, aretē, and timé—can denote high birth, wealth, success, martial courage, and fame. There is no clear distinction among the concepts.

Still, in Sarpedon’s own speech we find a trace of the fissure that, in Achilles’ case, brutally separates heroic life—with its hopes, its demands, its peculiar ideals—from ordinary life controlled by a social code of honor. First Sarpedon lists the advantages granted a king, such as comfort, good land, good wine, renown, and a place of honor, and he says that they are like the price men pay for the benefits wrought by the king’s exceptional valor on the battlefield. Sarpedon, however, then adds a comment that lays bare the true nature of heroic activity and thus undercuts the previous statement: “Suppos-

9 The phrase is ophoreis atakrisiis in Hesiod. Hesiod displays the same attitude toward Dido: at H. 8.332 and 535; at Il. 3.53, Hesiod urges Paris to confront Menelaus “to learn what sort of man he is.”

10 In this context, see the classic studies by A. W. W. Adkins for example, Menelaus, Phaethon and Ptolemaic Behaviour in Ancient Greece (London, 1972), 12-16.

11 For the same theme appears in Callim., frag. 1.12.43 (Edmonds); also Pind. Ol. 1.84ff.

12 “Since we must die, why live in the shade and uselessly pass a hideous old age, far from all beauty?”, ala Lyr., Epitaph. 78.

marks of rank, in its quest for the absolute condition of hersis euphoniou, it
assumes the existence of a tradition of oral poetry, which serves as a repository
of shared culture and as societal memory for the group. In what we have come
to call the "Homerian world," heroic honor and epic poetry are inseparable.
Here is no hersis except that which is sung, and—except for the praise of the
very things—sung poetry has no purpose other than to recall the great deeds, kleos
andion, performed by the heroes of ages past. Epic poetry preserves such
deeds in memory by making them more vivid than the audience's small
gamation lives. 12 A short life, a feat of arms, a beautiful death: all these have
meaning only to the extent that they are contained and celebrated in a song
and thereby confirm the hero as aesthentes, worthy of being sung. The literary
transformation by epic endows the hero with the status, the fullness of exist-
ence, and the permanence that alone can justify the extreme demands of the
heroic ideal and the sacrifices it entails. When an honor is required that sur-
passes honor, it has a "literary" dimension. This is not to say that heroic
honor is only a stylistic convention and the hero only a fiction. The glorification
of a "beautiful death" in Sparta and Athens during the high classical
period shows that the heroic ideal retained its importance and its effect on
behavior, even in historical contexts as far removed from the Homerian world
as the city-state. Still, in order for heroic honor to stay alive at the heart of a
society and put its stamp on the whole system of values, poetry has to be more
than a pastime. Poetry must continue to play a role in education and upbringing;
it serves to transmit, to teach, and to make manifest within each individual
the alloy of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values that make up a culture.
Only epic poetry has the importance and power to confer on the hero the
meaning required for death worth glory both institutional solidity and societal approval.
without which the quest would be merely a subjective fantasy. We might be surprised
to find a yearning for an afterlife that was reduced, as we might think, to
"literary" immortality: if so, we would be misunderstanding the differences
that separate the archaic Greek individual and society from our own. There is
a structural relation between the ancient personality—exteriorized, grafted
onto public opinion—and epic poetry, that functions as paisia in its glorification
of exemplary heroes and their will to live on in "imperishable glory."

The modern personality—an interiorized ego, unique, apart—has the same
structural relation with its "purely" literary genres, like the novel, the auto-
biography, or the private diary, which preserve the hope of living on as a
special immortal spirit.

All of the characters depicted in the Iliad, Achilles is the only one who is
shown actually performing poetic song. 13 When the envoys sent by Agamem-
non arrive at the Myrmidons' camp, Achilles is in his tent. Accompanying
himself on the cithara, he is singing for himself and for Patroklos, seated
across from him. What does Achilles take pleasure in when he sings under
such circumstances? The very subject that the anawos, with Homer prime
among them, sing in poems like the Iliad: "He sings of the deeds of heroes"
(II. 9.189). Achilles is the model of the heroic warrior, in choosing a short life
and deathless glory, he embodies an ideal of honor so elevated that, in
name, he will reject both the gifts of the king and the omous of his own
companions in arms. He is the one the great epic shows, at this critical moment in his
career, singing about the exploits of heroes. What a literary tactic, what an image en abîme! 14 But the lesson of the episode is clear: Achilles' great deeds
are glorified by Homer in the Iliad, yet to exist fully in the eyes of the hero
who longs to perform them, they must be reflected and preserved in a song
that exalts their fame. As a heroic character, Achilles exists to himself only in
the mirror of the song that reflects his own image. The song also reflects, in
the form of Ika, the exploits to which he has chosen to sacrifice his life so
that he will forever after be the Achilles sung by Homer in the Iliad and by all
the Greeks to come.

To pass by death is also to escape the process of aging. For the Greeks death
and old age go together (Men. Trag. 2.5–7. Edmonds). Growing old means
that one must watch the fabric of life gradually becoming frayed, damaged,
torn by the same power of destruction, the kēr, that leads to death. Hēbēs
anthos, says Homer. It has been shown that this formula, taken up and developed
by the elegiac and lyric poets, directly inspired the funerary epitaphs that extol
the hero who is taken in "the flower's quest.

12 See Pierre Viénot-Naquet, "Hesiod sans trame." Preface to the French translation of the Iliad
13 See a similar scene in the Odyssey with a different meaning, see Francois Freyoli-Durouz, "Hermès et le temps rouver," Critique 348 (May 1986): 542. A parallel to Achilles' song about
herculean activity in Helen's depiction of it in seeing II. 3.128 and 3.357–58.
14 See Lurton, "La," p. 279. She writes: "When he celebrates the ascent of a warrior, every verse
epitaph tends to use epic formulae, of which agathon hēlaion is only one instance among
many in the demotic alima." (234). Regarding the use of the lexicon "kēr or they bring their
shining youths" to denote death on the battlefield, she notes: "Such continuity between the
aestheteist epithet, focusing an individual, and the collective, democratic epithet of the aimentos
alima deserves close attention, because it suggests the persistence of a specific representation of
the dead man at war." (209).
A Spartan death...
A "BEAUTIFUL DEATH" attributes: this is truly Patroklos, and this Hektor, but reduced to their external appearance, to the unique look of their bodies that enables others to recognize them. For the living man, of course, an imposing presence, grace, and beauty have their place as elements of personality, but for the warrior in action, such attributes are eclipsed by those highlighted by battle. What shines from the body of the hero is less the charming glow of youth (charioteeta hé hè) than the sheen of the bronze he is wearing, the flash of his sword and breastplate, the glitter of his eyes, the radiance of the armor that fires him (II. 19.365, 375–77, 381, 398). When Achilles reappears on the battlefield after his long absence, stark terror seizes the Trojans as they see him "shining in his armor" (II. 20.46). Beside the Scæan gates Priam groans aloud, batters his head, pleads with Hektor to return to the shelter of the walls. Priam has just been the first to see Achilles: "He swept along the flat land in full shining, like that star which comes on in the autumn whose conspicuous brightness far outshines the stars that are membered in the night's darkening, the star they give the name of Orion's Dog, which is the brightest among the stars and yet is wrought as a sign of evil and brings on fever for unfortunate mortals. Such was the luster of the bronze that girt his chest in his running" (II. 22.25–32).

When Hektor himself catches sight of Achilles, on whom the bronze shines "like burning fire or the rising sun," he too is terrified; he turns and takes flight (II. 22.134–35). The active, terrifying radiance of the live warrior must be differentiated from the remarkable beauty of his corpse, preserved in a youthfulness that age can no longer mar. Hektor's psuche has scarcely left his body. "Young in his strength and his youth," before Achilles strips the armor from the torso. The Achaeans rush together in order to see the enemy who, more than any other, had done harm, and in order to aim more blows at his body. As they approach the hero, now no more than a some, an empty and inert cadaver, "they marvel at Hektor's size and at his admirable beauty (haut érotheia phuis kat rechtngon Hektoron)" (II. 22.370–71).

We might be surprised at this reaction if old Priam had not already illuminated the difference between the pitiable and frightful death of an old man and the beautiful death of a warrior cut down in his prime. "For a young man is decorous (paunt epereitkon) when he is cut down in battle and turns with the sharp bronze.

11 H. 24.348: the subject is Homer, who has disguised himself as a young prince whose beard has just begun to grow. At 3.44–45, Paris's beauty (haut érotheia) is no disguise. But he has neither strength nor courage (cf. 3.36–37). At 2.468, Achilles tells Lykomachos, who is pleading for his life, "I too, as you see, am handsome and tall (haut ep érotheia kai megain tel'... this means that Lykomachos's death is imminent. Beautiful as Achilles may be, death hangs over his head too: the day is near when his life will be taken in battle. This is not Achilles in the fury of action, but the hero seeing himself under the sign of death. On Agamemnon's beauty, "Simply... rather than solidarity, cf. 3.169–70.

12 cf. Od. 24.44: when Achilles has died, his "Beautiful body" is searched in waters and sea; also Hes. Theog. 783: the sight of the dead Argive soldiers is beautiful—beautiful through bitter.
and lie there dead, and though dead still all that shows about him is beautiful [panta kalon]." (II. 22.71–73).

In Priam’s mind, the description of the young warrior, beautiful in his death, hardly supplies a motive for Hector to go up against Achilles; rather it should have been Hector to take pity on the horrible death that awaits an old man like Priam if, deprived of his son’s assistance, he should die on the sword or the spear of his enemies. The repressive picture painted by the aged king strikingly explains how unnatural and scandalous it is when a warrior’s death, a “red” death, befalls an old man; the latter’s dignity calls for an end that is tranquil, almost solemn, surrounded by the quiet of his home and family. The blood, the wounds, and the grime on the corpse of a young hero recall his courage and enhance his beauty with masculine strength, but on an old man—gray-headed, gray-bearded, withered—the ugliness becomes almost obscene. Priam envisions himself not merely dead at his own gates, but dethroned and torn by dogs, not just any dogs but his own dogs, raised and fed by him in his palace, who will revert to savagery and make him their prey, and after feasting on his flesh and gnawing his genitals, will stretch out, sated, in the entryway they so recently guarded. "When an old man is dead and down, and the dogs maul the gray head and the gray beard and the parts that are secret, this, for all sad mortality, is the sight most pitiful." (II. 22.74–76).

Priam is describing a world turned upside down, with all its values reversed, basility installed at the center of the domestic hearth, and an old man’s dignity turned into an object of derision in its ugliness and shame, with everything human that belonged to his body destroyed. A bloody death is beautiful and glorious when it strikes the hero in the fullness of youth; it raises him above the human condition and saves him from common death by conferring sublime luster on his demise. The same kind of death, for an old man, drops him beneath the level of humanity and changes his end from a shared fate into a horrible monstrosity.

In one of the surviving fragments of his poetry, Tyrtæus imitates this passage of the Iliad, using some of the same formulas. The differences that often appear both in the details and in the overall picture derive from the Spartan context: the hoplites in the phalanx, standing shoulder to shoulder and shield to shield, is no longer the champion of Homeric epic. His duty is to stand fast without leaving his position, not to distinguish himself in individual combat. To ensure that “dying is a fine thing [techne mounai gen kalon] when one has fallen in the front rank, a man full of heart” (frags. I.1-2 Prato), it must occur in defense of the fatherland. Only then does the dead man’s glory remain forever, and only then is the hero immortal (atheneus) even though he has gone beneath the earth (frag. 9.33–32 Prato). Thus there is no longer so radical a breach as there was between heroic honor and honor plain and simple; at Sparta there is no incompatibility between long life and martial valor, between glory (as Achilles defines it) and old age. If the soldiers who are able to stand fast in the line also have the good fortune to return home safe and sound, they share for the rest of their lives in the same honor and glory as those who fell. When they grow old, their excellence deserves the respect of the whole city (frag. 9.39f. Prato).

Sparta thereby uses the prestige of the epic warrior’s achievement and of heroic honor as a means of competition and social advancement. From the argonauts on there is something like a codified rule of glory and shame, judging by military accomplishments, the city appropriates and assigns praise or blame, respect or contempt, marks of esteem or of abandonment, condemning the “triumphant” (priesantes) to the humiliating insults of women and to cenotaphs and dishonor (oneidos kal ateneus) in the community at large (cf. Herod. 7.213f).

For Tyrtæus, moreover, “the man who is older [patuileusos] and more revered [pereion],” whose death is contrasted with that of a youth (neos), is not the miserable dotard described by Priam to arouse Hector’s pity, but a brave hoplite; this old man courageously fought and died “in the front rank,” the place in the phalanx normally occupied by the neos. We could think that his sacrifice only deserves to be extolled even further. On the contrary, if fragment 6 was claiming that it was fine (kalon) to die in the first rank, this same death becomes despicable for the older man who falls ahead of the neos. In the “ugliness” decreed by the word atrichon there is a hint of “morri” disapproval: the honor of the scene serves to extort the neos not to yield their place in the forefront to men older than they. The whole context, however, with its contrast between beautiful and ugly and the “spectacular” quality of the entire description, reveals the persistence of an “aesthetic” vision in the broadest sense of the term—of heroic death in its close attachment to Helle.

Indeed it is an ugly thing when an old man, fallen in the front rank, lies before the young men, with his white head and gray beard, having breathed out his brave strength into the dust, clutching his bloody genitals—a horror for the eyes and shameful to see [atrachon to ophiathalos kal nemerous idion] in his nakedness. For the young men all is proper [loxo de pant epoiknon] when they are in the brilliant flowering of their youth, an object of admiration for men [andros men thetous idion] and desire for women [neiros de gnousia] in life [zoi oinoz], and beautiful in death in the first rank [kalon d en proskomnenei pesto]." (frag. 7.21–30 Prato)

It seems true, then, as Dawson suggests, that there is a double dimension to beauty, just as there is to honor and youth. At the end of his description of Tyrtæus, Dawson concludes, “Serious beauty may come in life, but true
beauty comes in heroic death.** Beauty in heroic death—this is certainly the source of the rule ascribed to Lycurgus, according to which Spartan warriors allow their hair to grow long and flowing, without cutting it and give it special care on the eve of battle. The hair on a man’s head is like the flower of his vitality, the foliage of his age. Hair shows the age of the person, whose head it adorns; at the same time, it is a part of the body that has a growth and a life of its own—when it grows back, it preserves itself without decaying—so that it can represent the individual. One can offer a clapping of one’s hair as if it were a gift of one’s self. Just as the old man is identifiable by his white head and beard, héba too is marked by the first appearance of a downy beard and by an adult’s haircut.26 There is a well-known connection between kouros and heirá, “to cut one’s hair”; moreover, the great phases in a person’s life, changes in status, are highlighted by the cutting and offering of a lock of hair, or sometimes even by cutting all of it off, as in the case of a new bride at Sparta. In the Iliad, the companions of Patroclus, including Achilles himself, cut off their hair over the corpse of their dead friend before consigning him to the pyre. They cover the whole body with their hair, as if they were clothing it for its last journey with their own youthful, manly vitality: “his corpse completely covered with hair that they cut from their heads and then placed on him.” (I. 23.135–36).27

His companions adorn the dead man with that which most embodies their era as fierce warriors, while his wife (if he has one) or his mother (as in Hektor’s case, for example) offer the precious garments they have woven for him; thus they connect him, even in the hereafter, with that female realm to which he was linked by being a son or a husband. When Xenophon explains the wearing of long hair as a way of making the Spartan soldiers look “taller, nobler, and more terrifying” (Rep. Lac. 11.3), he does not contradict the criterion of this custom confers on them; he only emphasizes that it is not a matter of any kind of attractiveness, like Paris’s sensuous beauty or feminine loveliness, but of the beauty unique to a warrior. It is this latter kind, no doubt, that was sought by Homer’s warriors, those the epic calls “long-haired Achaeanas [karé komonejous Achaioj].”28

Herodotus offers us a revealing episode (7.208–9). Before testing the resistance of the Spartan squadron guarding Thermopylae, Xerxes sends a Persian horseman to spy on them. On his return, the spy reports that he saw the Spar-

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26 Dawson, *Spartan Age.* 57.
27 Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 78–79: “What is an aged man when his foliage is all withered?”
28 For Achilles’ own hair, cf. 23.144–52; cf. Andromedah’s hentaes for her husband Hektor (4.22.208–14).
30 H. 2.448; 472: 18.359: 3.43. The last passage is particularly telling, for the “long-haired” Achaean just laug at the youthful beauty of Paris, who, far from being a brave warrior, has no courage, strength, or tenacity.

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36 Cf. Plut. *Lyc. 22.1:* “long hair will make the handsome more noble, and the ugly more terrifying.”
37 Cf. Louis Gernet, *Recherches sur le développement de la poésie juridique et morale en Grèce* (Paris, 1947), 211. The terms contain, with an alpha privative, the root -αι, which marks ownership, conformity, resemblance.
of the nous exposed on the field of battle, and the replacement of patula kola by aischron. Aikize in is also aischrizein, "make ugly," "deface." 11 It involves obliterating from the body of the dead warrior those marks of manly youth and beauty that are manifested three like visible signs of glory. In place of the beautiful death of the hero suffixed with bêhé, the effort is made to substitute the vision of the frightful doom that haunts old Prism’s thought: a body stripped of all youth, all beauty, all masculinity (that is the meaning of the strange allusion, in both Tyrtaeus and Homer, to the genitals devoured or held blood-soaked in the hand), and finally of all humanity. Why such relentlessness against what Apollo calls inert clay (ksphe goia, II. 24.54)? Why the desire to ferret out the person from an enemy’s corpse whose psuchê has already fled and is now only an empty husk? Why, unless the person remains connected to this dead body and to that which its appearance, its idios, represents? For the hero to assume kéres apothéke, it is essential that his name and exploits be known by men to come, that they persist in memory. The first condition is that he be celebrated in a song that will never perish; the second is that his corpse have received its portion of honor (geras thamnon, II. 16.457, 675), that he not have been deprived of the timê that is owed to him and that will let him enter into the farthest reaches of death, bringing him to a new state, to the social status of death, all the while remaining a bearer of life’s values, of youth, of beauty that the body incarnates and which, on him, have been consecrated by heroic death.

What does it mean to enter into the farthest reaches of death? The fatal blow that strikes the hero liberates his psuchê, which flies the limbs, leaving behind its strength and youth. Yet for all that, it has not passed through the gates of death. Death is not a simple demise, a privation of life; it is a transformation of which the corpse is both the instrument and the object, a transmutation of the subject that functions in and through the body. Funerary rites actualize this change of condition: at their conclusion, the individual has left the realm of the living, in the same way as his cremated body has vanished into the hereafter, and as his psuchê has reached the shores of Hades, never to return. The individual has disappeared then from the fabric of social relations in which his existence was a strand. In this respect, he is henceforth an absence, a void, but he continues to exist on another plane, in a form of being that is released from the attrition of time and destruction. The hero survives in the permanence of his name and the luster of his renown, both of which remain present not only at the memory of those who knew him when he was alive, but for all men in ages to come. This inscription in societal memory takes two interdependent and parallel forms. The hero is committed to memory, memorialized, in the field of epic song which, to celebrate his immortal glory, is placed under the sign of Memory, making itself memory by making him memorable. The hero is

11 Cf. II. 22.75, which can be compared to 22.336, also 18.24, 27, 24.418.

also commemorated in the mnêma, the memorial constituted at the end of the funeral rites by the construction of a tomb and the raising of a zêma, serving like epic to evoke for men the creation (exomenos) of a glory that is now certain not to perish. 14 Its very fixity and stability contrast the grave marker with the fleeting, transitory nature of the values that grace the human body during life. "It remains without moving, changeless [empédron], once it has been placed over the tomb of a man or a woman who has died" (II. 17.432-35) Empedon means "immutable" or "immovable"; if the qualities that comprise a warrior's aristêa—ador (menos), might (bêé), the limbs (goia)—were that of his character, of his courage, his wisdom, he would be immune to old age. He would not have to lose his youth and beauty in a heroic death in order to acquire them definitively in the world beyond. In its own way, by the immutability of its material and shape, and by the continuity of its presence, the mnêma conveys the paradox of the values of life, youth, and beauty, which one can ensure for oneself only by losing them, which become eternal possessions only when one ceases to be.

The treatment of the corpse in the funerary ritual derives from a paradox of the same kind. First it is beautified; it is washed with warm water to cleanse it of soil and stain; its wounds are effaced with an anoint; the skin, rubbed with oil, takes on a special sheen; perfumed and adorned with precious materials, the corpse is then laid out on a litter to be viewed and mourned by the dead man’s near and dear ones (II. 18.346-53; Od. 24.44-46). In the Homeric tradition, the corpse is then burned on a pyre whose flames consume all that is made of flesh and blood, that is, everything both edible and subject to decay and detached to that ephemeral kind of existence where life and death are inextricably mingled. All that remains is the "white bones," incorruptible and not entirely burned to ash; these are easy to distinguish from the ashes of the pyre so they may be collected and deposited in a tomb. If we compare sacrifical ritual with funerary practices, we can say that the "fire’s part" is reversed: the flames of the funerary pyre consume that which the sacrifice preserves to be consumed by men. The victim’s flesh, laden with fat, is the share of the "mortal men" who die on it, since they must eat in order to subsist, obeying the exigencies of a perishable being that must be nourished indefinitely if it is not to be extinguished. The "white bones" of the sacrificed animal, edible and incorruptible—indeed because incorruptible—are burned on the altar as the share of the immortal gods who receive them in the form of fragrant smoke. In funeral rites, these same white bones remain under the earth as the trace—extended by the burial mound, the zêma, the stele—that is left behind.

14 The same formula to describe the zêma appears at Od. 11.376 and II. 22.305: kai exomenos

15 For the use of empédron, see Menos, II. 5.235; with bêé, 4.374; with enos, 23.627.
by the person of the deceased; in his absence, it is the form in which he remains, present to the world of the living. The fire of the funerary pyre, by contrast, consumes and sends into the realm of the invisible, along with the perishable flesh and blood, a person’s entire physical appearance and the attributes that can be seen on the body: stature, beauty, youth, individuality, glamour, flowing hair. These corporeal aspects incarnate values that are at once aesthetic, religious, social, and personal, and define the status of a singular individual in the eyes of the group. These values in turn are all the more precious for being so fragile and newly in bloom, as the life that made them flower immediately withers them. The visible form of the body, such as is displayed when it is laid out for viewing at the beginning of the funeral rites, can only be saved from corruption by disappearing into the invisible. If the beauty, youth, and masculinity of the corpse are to be definitively his and are to be attached to the figure of the deceased, they require that the body have stopped being a living hero.

This finality of funerary practices is most clearly revealed precisely where they are missing and especially where they are ritually negated in the procedures of outrage visited on the enemy corpse. In its attempt to deprive the enemy of access to the status of a glorious death his heroic end had earned for him, his mistreatment, by the nature of the cruelty it inflicts, allows us better to understand the means that funerary rites normally use to immortalize the warrior in his beautiful death.

One kind of cruelty consists in defiling the bloody corpse with dust and in tearing his flesh, so that the enemy will lose his individual appearance, his clear set of features, his color and glamour; he loses his distinct form along with his human aspect, so that he becomes unrecognizable. When Achilles begins to abuse Hector, he ties the corpse to his chariot to tear off its skin, by letting it—especially the head and the hair—drag on the ground in the dust: “A cloud of dust rose where Hector was dragged, his dark hair was falling about him, and all that hair that was once so handsome [paros chariou] was tumbled in the dust” (II. 22.401–3). By disfiguring and disfiguring the corpse, instead of purifying and anointing it, aika seeks to destroy the individuality of a body that was the source of the charm of youth and life. Achilles wants Hector to be like Sarpedon: “No longer could a man, even a knowing one, have made out the godlike Sarpedon, since he was piled from head to ends of feet under a mass of weapons, the blood and the dust” (II. 16.637–40). The reduction of the body to a formless mass, indistinguishable now from the ground on which it lies, not only eradicates the dead man’s unique appearance; such treatment also eliminates the difference between lifeless matter and a living creature. Thus the corpse is no longer the visible aspect of the person but the inert chid of which Apollo spoke. Earth and dust defile the body because their contact

pollutes it, inasmuch as they belong to a realm that is the opposite of life.

During the process of mourning, at the point when the relatives of the dead man bring him closer to life by making one last reflection of life grow on his corpse, they in turn draw closer to the deceased by simulating their own entry into the formless world of death; they inflict on their own bodies a kind of fictive outrage by defiling themselves and tearing their hair, by rolling in the dust, by smearing their faces with ashes. Achilles does the same when he learns of Patroklos’s death. “He bore his charming face [chariten d’iskhane prostron]” (II. 18.24) just as he defiles the fair face of Hector in the dust.

There is another type of aika: the body is dismembered, hacked up, torn into pieces; the head, arms, hands, and legs are removed, chopped up piece by piece (melēstis tamen, II. 24.409). Ajax, in fury, cuts the head of I amos from his delicate neck and hurl it like a ball (sphairēdon) to roll in the dust (II. 13.202). Hector would like to imitate Patroklos’s head on a stake after having severed it from his neck (II. 18.176–78). Agamemnon kills Hippolochos and then “cuts off his hands and severs his neck with his sword, and rolls him like a piece of wood [holosno hox] through the crowd” (II. 11.146–47). A head like a ball, a torso like a log: in losing its formal unity, the human body is reduced to the condition of a thing along with its disfigurement. In Python 4, Pindar says, “He comes to cut the branches of a great oak with a sharp-edged axe and defile its astounding beauty [aiskhune de hox thaton eldos]” (4.263–64). It is precisely such beauty that astonishes the Greeks when they look on the dead Hector, and that is the target of the outrage directed at the corpse, an attack on the integrity of the human body.

The disfigurement of the corpse, whose remains are scattered here and there, culminates in the practice described in the first verses of the Iliad and recalled throughout the poem: leaving the body as food for dogs, birds, and fish. This outrage carries horror to its height. The body is torn to pieces and devoured raw instead of being consigned to the fire that, in burning it, restores it to wholeness in the world beyond. The hero whose body is surrendered to the vory of wild animals is excluded from death while also having fallen from the human condition. He cannot pass through the gates of Hades, for he has not had his “share of fire; he has no place of burial, no mound of grave, no location for his body that would mark for his society the site where he is to be found; there he would continue his relations with his country, his lineage, his descendants, or even simply with the chance passers-by. Excluded from death, he is equally banished from human memory. Moreover, to hand someone over to wild animals does not mean only to deprive him of the status

38 We will pass over the problems of metathalamos, for which one should consult E. Rohde, Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks, 8th ed., trans. W. B. Hillis (New York, 1925; reprint, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 2, 582–86; these problems occupy another level of analysis which will be the subject of a future study.
of a dead man by preventing his funeral. It is also to dissolve him into confusion and return him to chaos, utter nonhumanity. In the belly of the beasts that have devoured him, he becomes the flesh and blood of wild animals, and there is no longer the slightest appearance or trace of humanity: he is no longer in any way a person.

There is one last kind of outrage. Free rein is given to the powers of corruption that are at work in the bodies of dead men, the corpse, deprived of burial, is left to decompose and rot on its own, eaten by worms and the flies that have entered into its open wounds. When Achilles is preparing to enter combat, he worries out loud to his mother. What will happen to Patroklos's body while the battle lasts? "I am sadly afraid, during this time, for the warlike son of Menoetius that flies might get into the wounds beaten by bronze in his body and breed worms in them, and these make foul the body, seeing that the life is killed in him, and that all his flesh may be rotted" (I. 19.23–27).

The body abandoned to decomposition is the complete reversal, or inversion, of a beautiful death. At one extreme is the youthful and manly beauty of the warrior whose body inspires amazement, awe, and admiration, even among his enemies; at the other is that which surpasses ugliness, the monstrousness of a being becoming worse than nothing, of a form that has sunk into the unspeakable. On one side is the imperishable glory that raises the hero above the common fate by making his name and individual appearance endure in human memory. On the other side is an infamy more terrible than the oblivion and silence reserved for the ordinary dead, that indistinct cohort of the deceased normally dispatched to Hades where they merge into the mass of those who, unlike the "glorious heroes," are called the "nameless," the θάνατον. The mutilated corpse shares neither in the silence that surrounds the ordinary dead nor in the song praising the heroic dead. Neither living, because it has been killed, nor dead, because it has been deprived of funeral rites; as a scrap of matter lost on the edge of existence, it represents that which can neither be celebrated nor forgotten—the horror of the indecipherable, absolutely unspeakable, which cuts you off altogether from the living, the dead, and the self.

Achilles, the glorious warrior, the fighter for heroic honor, exerts all his energy in dishonoring the corpse of the Trojan champion, who was his opposite number in the enemy camp and who, by killing Patroklos, killed someone like Achilles' other self. The man of imperishable glory plans to dooms his rival to the most extreme kinds of disgrace. He will not suffice. There is much talk in the Iliad of dead warriors surrendered to dogs and birds. But

CHAPTER 3

INDIA, MESOPOTAMIA, GREECE: THREE IDEOLOGIES OF DEATH

In organizing a joint colloquium on funerary ideology with our friends from the Istituto Orientale of Naples, our intention was to proceed together to two sorts of confrontations: first, between archaeological documents and written sources, and second, between different civilizations, especially Greek and those of the East.

These two different kinds of comparative studies could not quite mesh together. Each posed singular problems of method and substance. Above all, a notion of ideology was put into play that, according to the perspective adopted, entailed different implications and required strategies of research that in some respects were quite dissimilar.

The debate between archaeologists and historians of ancient societies in the field of funerary studies is well defined and its subject sufficiently precise. How can this mass of mute documents retrieved from tombs and necropoleis be made to speak? What relations are there between this special "language" of Realia and that other, ordinary, language that historians, attuned to texts, have to know? To what extent does this dual documentation, once the necessary adjustments have been made, allow us access to society as a whole, with its stratifications, hierarchies, opposing categories of status, age-classes, and gender, and also, in the background, its history with its changing course? Bruno d’Antinio and Alain Schnapp undertook to present this array of questions. My remarks will be limited, therefore, to another side of the inquiry. I will emphasize one point only. The objective in the line of research I have just outlined was to assemble, under the rubric of funerary ideology, all the significant elements that, in practices as in discourses pertaining to death, refer to forms of social organization and structures of the group, reflect the gaps, balances, and tensions within a community, and attest to its dynamic nature, the influences it has received, and the changes that have taken place. Through the grid of questions imposed on it, the world of the dead (or at least that which