The Epic Hero

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Introduction

§1. The words "epic" and "hero" both defy generalization, let alone universalizing definitions. Even as general concepts, "epic" and "hero" do not necessarily go together.[1] While recognizing these difficulties, this presentation explores the most representative examples of ancient poetic constructs generally known as "epic heroes," focusing on Achilles and Odysseus in the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Points of comparison include Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite cuneiform records; Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍava-s in the Indic *Mahābhārata*; and Aeneas in the *Aeneid* of the Roman poet Virgil. These constructs - let us call them simply "characters" for the moment - are in some ways radically dissimilar from each other. Even within a single tradition like Homeric poetry, heroes like Achilles and Odysseus seem worlds apart. In other ways, however, "epic heroes" are strikingly similar to each other, sharing a number of central features. The question is, how to explain these similarities?

§2. Two kinds of general explanation are current. Some have argued that these similarities are the heritage of a poetic system stemming from a prehistoric time when Indo-European languages like Greek and Indic were as yet undifferentiated from each other. A standard book using this kind of argumentation is *Mythe et épopée*, by Georges Dumézil.[2] Others, focusing on similarities between the ancient Greek epic traditions and various comparable traditions stemming from the ancient Near East, have argued that these similarities stem from a network of cultural exchange that existed between these linguistically unrelated traditions.

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[1] Lord 1960:6.

[2] In the Bibliography, Dumézil 1995 is an updated consolidation of the original three volumes of *Mythe et épopée* = Dumézil 1968, 1971, 1973a. In its English-language version, *Mythe et épopée* has been broken up into smaller books with new titles that do not correspond to the French-language version: Dumézil 1973b, 1980, 1983, 1986. Dumézil's methodology has been oversimplified by some of his critics, and some of these oversimplifications have become clichés that are at times mindlessly repeated in secondary sources. For a corrective, see Davidson 2000, especially pp. 85-87.

A standard book using this kind of argumentation is *The Orientalizing Revolution*, by Walter Burkert.[3]

§3. These two kinds of general explanation make use of a wide variety of specific approaches. Some of these approaches, like the one worked out by Georges Dumézil, are more systematic than others, but none seems self-sufficient. Each has something to add to an overall picture of the "epic hero," but, taken together, most comparative approaches seem to be mutually exclusive. What is needed is an integration of comparative perspectives. In order to achieve the broadest possible formulation, I propose to integrate three comparative methods, which I describe as (1) typological, (2) genealogical, and (3) historical.

§4. The first of these three methods is the most elusive, though it happens to be the most general. It involves comparisons of parallels between structures that are not necessarily related to each other. I describe this comparative method as <u>typological</u> - meaning that it applies to parallelisms between structures as structures pure and simple, without any presuppositions. Such a mode of comparison is especially useful in fields like linguistics: comparing parallel structures in languages - even if the given languages are unrelated to each other - is a proven way of enhancing one's overall understanding of the linguistic structures being compared.[4] From the very start, I emphasize the word <u>structure</u>, evoking an approach generally known as <u>structuralism</u>; this approach stems ultimately from the field of linguistics, as pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure.[5]

§5. The second method involves comparisons of parallels between structures related to each other by way of a common source. I describe this comparative method as <u>genealogical</u> because it applies to parallelisms between <u>cognate</u> structures - that is, structures that derive from a <u>common source</u> or <u>proto-structure</u>. In the field of linguistics, such a genealogical method used to be called simply "la méthode comparative," as we see in the title of a most influential book by Antoine Meillet, *La méthode comparative*.[6] What is really meant by this title, however, is something more specific than just any kind of comparative method. That something is a <u>structuralist method of comparison</u> that depends on both <u>synchronic</u> and <u>diachronic</u> analysis of <u>cognate structures</u> being compared. While synchronic analysis views language as it exists at a given time and place, diachronic analysis views language as it evolves through time.[7] The work of Meillet, who was a student of Saussure, exemplifies both these kinds of analysis, which are based on a structuralist understanding of language. As Meillet defines language, it is a <u>system</u> in which everything holds together: "Une langue constitue un

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[3] Burkert 1984 / 1992.
[4] A classic example is part III of Benveniste 1966, "Structures et analyses."
[5] The most definitive account is given by Benveniste 1966:91-98.
[6] Meillet 1925.
[7] These definitions follow the formula of Saussure 1916:117: "De même synchronie et diachronie désigneront respectivement un état de langage et une phase d'évolution."

système complexe de moyens d'expression, système où tout se tient."[8] In short, the <u>genealogical method</u> is fundamentally structuralist in perspective,

§6. The third comparative method, which I describe as <u>historical</u>, involves comparisons of parallels between structures that are related to each other by way of <u>intercultural contact</u>. One form of such contact is a linguistic phenomenon known as *Sprachbund*.[9] In terms of this concept, whatever changes take place in a language that makes contact with another language need to be seen in terms of the overall structures of both languages.[10] This concept of *Sprachbund* can be applied to any situation where the structure of one culture is affected by a corresponding structure in another culture, whether by borrowing or by any other kind of influence. Any such contact needs to be viewed as a historical contingency, which requires historical analysis. Diachronic analysis is in this case insufficient, since it cannot predict history.[11] That is why I describe as <u>historical</u> the comparative method required for the study of parallels resulting from intercultural contact. As in the case of the genealogical method, the <u>historical method</u> depends on synchronic analysis of the parallel structures being compared. But it cannot depend - or at least it cannot fully depend - on diachronic analysis, which cannot independently account for historical contingencies.

§7. Having outlined the three kinds of comparative methodology to be applied, I now propose to fill in by surveying the actual comparanda. By "comparanda" I mean simply the evidence to be compared, and I will be referring to the comparanda in terms of the same three methodologies I have just outlined: (1) typological, (2) genealogical, and (3) historical.

§8. In the case of typological comparanda, the comparative methodology involves, to repeat, a structuralist perspective. Earlier, I mentioned the linguistics of Saussure as the historical prototype of what we know today as structuralism. In its more recent history, however, the term has been detached from its moorings in linguistics. It is nowadays associated mostly with the study of literature. In its newer applications, structuralism has become an unstable and even unwieldy concept, which cannot any longer convey the essence of the methodology it once represented. My object here is not so much to advocate a reform of structuralism for future applications to the study of literature but to record an early moment in its past history when structuralism was first applied to the study of pre-literature, that is, to the study of oral traditions as the historical sources of literature as we know it.

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[8] Meillet 1921:16. The structuralism of Meillet was strongly influenced by Saussure, who was a teacher of his. See the account of Benveniste 1966:93 and 1974:11-12 (cf. also Vendryes 1937). It is sometimes forgotten that Saussure, before his years in Geneva, taught at the École des Hautes Études in Paris (from 1881 to 1891). It is relevant to add here that Meillet himself was a teacher of Emile Benveniste.
[9] Jakobson 1931.
[10] Jakobson 1949.
[11] Jacopin 1988:35-36.

§9. Here I return to Meillet. It was this former student of Saussure who advised one of his own students, a young American in Paris named Milman Parry, to undertake a typological comparison of ancient Greek epic with modern South Slavic "heroic song," as represented by the living oral traditions of the former Yugoslavia.[12] The work of Parry was cut short at an early stage of his career by his violent death in 1935, but it was continued by one of his own students, Albert Lord, who ultimately published in 1960 the foundational work on oral poetry, *The Singer of Tales*.[13] This book, reflecting the cumulative research of Parry and Lord, is a masterpiece of scientific methodology. It is empirical to the core, combining synchronic description with typological comparison. The object of this typological comparison in *The Singer of Tales* is oral poetry, specifically the medium that we know as epic. But what is "epic"? And what, for that matter, is an "epic hero"?

§10. In terms of this combination of words, "epic hero," we could answer that <u>epic</u> is the medium that defines the message, which is, the <u>hero</u>. Still, Lord himself had reservations. The more he learned from typological comparanda, the less certain he became about the cross-cultural applicability of either of these two terms, "epic" and "hero."[14]

§11. Lord's most extensive typological comparisons linked the epic heroes of ancient Greek traditions, especially Achilles and Odysseus, with modern South Slavic analogues. Such modern epic comparanda are relevant to ancient epic, since typological comparison is not bound by time. The same observation holds for medieval comparanda: in *The Singer of Tales*, Lord's typological comparisons extended to such "epic heroes" as Beowulf in Old English, Roland in Old French, and the Cid in Old Spanish traditions.

§12. It was left for others to extend the comparison to other relevant figures in other medieval traditions - as in the Old Norse *Volsunga saga*, the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, and the Old Irish "Finn Cycle."[15] Moreover, ever since *The Singer of Tales*, there has been an unabated stream of further comparisons centering on modern collections of living oral traditions. The comparative evidence comes from Eastern Europe,[16] Central Asia,[17] the Indian subcontinent,[18] Africa,[19] and so on.[20] Even with all the additional new evidence, however, the basic pairing of typological comparanda remains what it was in *The Singer of Tales* - that is, the

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[12] Documentation in Lamberterie 1997 / 2001; see also Mitchell and Nagy 2000:viii n5, xvii n44 and n45. The collected papers of Milman Parry have been published as one volume, Parry 1971.
[13] Lord 1960; 2nd ed. 2000, by Mitchell and Nagy.
[14] Lord 1960:6; cf. Nagy 1999a:23.
[15] Mitchell 1991; [J. F.] Nagy 1985.
[16] Lord 1991.
[17] Reichl 1992.
[18] Blackburn, Claus, Flueckiger, and Wadley 1989.
[19] Okpewho 1979.
[20] See in general the valuable bibliography of Foley 1985.

juxtaposition of ancient Greek epic with modern South Slavic "epic." The Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of ancient Greek epic traditions remains the initial point of comparison, while the original evidence of the South Slavic songs collected by Parry and Lord "still has a claim to being one of the best comparanda."[21] And the basic question dating back to the original comparanda still remains: how are we to define the terms "epic" and "hero"?

§13. Typological comparanda cannot provide a unified definition. In his typological comparisons, Lord could go only so far as to explain "heroes" in terms of the "epics" that framed them: in other words, he analyzed the "heroic" character as a function of the "epic" plot. (By "plot" here I mean *muthos*, as Aristotle uses that word in his *Poetics*.) To this extent, at least, the compound term "epic hero" continues to provide an adequate point of typological comparison, even if the simplex terms "epic" and "hero" seem inadequate of and by themselves.

§14. It made sense for Lord to choose the ancient Greek epic tradition of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the first comparandum, to the extent that the concepts of "epic" and "hero" are derived from this tradition. Once we invoke the facts of derivation, however, we leave behind the methodology of <u>typological</u> comparison, shifting to <u>genealogical</u> and <u>historical</u> comparison.

§15. Let us turn, then, to the genealogical and historical comparanda, starting with the <u>genealogical</u>. Whereas typological comparison involves only synchronic analysis of the structures being compared, genealogical comparison combines, as I already indicated, synchronic and diachronic analysis. Moreover, as I also already indicated, the structures being compared must be <u>cognate</u>.

§16. A most prominent case in point is the genealogical comparison of ancient Greek epic with its cognate in the ancient Indic (by "Indic" I mean, broadly speaking, the language that evolved into classical Sanskrit). In both form and content, ancient Indic poetry is cognate with ancient Greek poetry. Even the meters of ancient Indic hymns and epic are cognate with the meter of ancient Greek epic, the dactylic hexameter.[22] The ancient Indic and Greek poetic traditions are cognate also in phraseology.[23] Moreover, there are remarkably close parallels in both plot- and character-formation linking the monumental Indic epics of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* with the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[24] As we will see later on, some of these comparanda are relevant to the concepts of "epic" and "hero," even if the comparison fails to yield a unified answer to the question of reconstructing these concepts back to a common source.

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[21] Martin 1989:150.
[22] Nagy 1998, with reference to earlier work in Nagy 1974.
[23] Nagy 1974.
[24] Vielle 1996 (cf. Nagy 1999c), Baldick 1994, Allen 1993; cf. also Gresseth 1979.

§17. Pursuing the question further, we look to evidence about the "epic hero" in publications of new collections of living oral traditions from modern India.[25] Some of these modern traditions are cognate with the ancient Indic traditions, though many are not - derived instead from non-Indo-European linguistic communities. While both the cognate and the non-cognate traditions contain a wealth of typological comparanda about the "epic hero," only the cognate traditions provide genealogical comparanda. As we will see later on (§84), some of these modern comparanda, like their ancient counterparts, are relevant to the concepts of "epic" and "hero."

§18. Also relevant is the evidence of the South Slavic oral poetic traditions themselves. Here too we find genealogical as well as typological comparanda, since these Slavic traditions are cognate with the Greek and the Indic.[26] Further, there are important genealogical comparanda to be found in the poetic traditions of medieval Europe: the evidence comes from a wide variety of poetic forms in a wide variety of cognate languages, such as Old Irish, Welsh, Old English, Middle High German, and Old Norse.[27] Some of these poetic traditions, like the Old English, had already been compared typologically by Lord in *The Singer of Tales*, but the comparison needs to be continued - and extended to the genealogical level. The same observation applies to medieval Greek poetic traditions, as represented by the "epic" poetry about the "hero" Digenis Akritas: in *The Singer of Tales*, Lord had studied the themes and characters of this poetry from a purely typological perspective, but the added perspective of a genealogical approach can in this case help further highlight the comparandum of the "epic hero," especially since the Digenis tradition is at least in part a continuation of heroic constructs stemming from the ancient Greek poetic past - as well as extending into modern Greek oral traditions.[28] Looking even further east, we find that the Iranian "heroic" traditions in the medieval Persian "epic" *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi are also derived, like the corresponding Indic and Greek traditions, from a common Indo-European poetic source.[29] Further, there is a strong continuity between the medieval Iranian epic traditions and ancient Iranian counterparts.[30] Relevant too are the modern Ossetic *Nart* ('hero') narratives, derived from the ancient nomadic Iranian "epic" traditions of the Scythians.[31]

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[25] A most useful starting point is Blackburn, Claus, Flueckiger, and Wadley 1989.
[26] Jakobson 1952.
[27] For background, a useful starting point is Schmitt 1967.
[28] Jeffreys 1986, especially pp. 515-516. Most valuable are the comments at p. 523 on the typological comparandum of Parry's diachronic perspective in analyzing the "Arcado-Cypriote" and Aeolic elements of the Homeric *Dichtersprache.*
[29] Davidson 1994 and 2000.
[30] Skjærvø 1998a and 1998b.
[31] Vielle 1996:159-195.

§19. The examples can be multiplied, but the case has already been made. In short, there is a wealth of comparanda about the "epic hero" that are genealogical.[32] Still, the details of the genealogy have in many cases not yet been fully worked out.[33]

§20. Finally, we turn to the historical comparanda about the "epic hero." In this case, the comparative methodology involves synchronic analysis of structures in intercultural contact with each other. The most important example is ancient Roman epic, especially Virgil's *Aeneid*, a vast literary achievement that took shape in the social milieu of the imperial world of Augustus in the late first century BCE. The actual form of this epic is not so much cognate with Greek epic but derived - or, better, appropriated - from it.[34] I will have more to say at a later point about such appropriation of ancient Greek epic - and of its "epic heroes."

§21. In the history, as it were, of ancient Greek "epic heroes," the second most important example of intercultural contact dates from many centuries earlier, back to the first half of the first millennium BCE, especially around 750 to 650. In that era, aptly described as the "orientalizing period," the Greek-speaking world was strongly influenced by the civilizations of the Near East, as represented most prominently by the various dynasties of ancient Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean east coast facing Cyprus, and Egypt; in *The Orientalizing Revolution*, Walter Burkert has surveyed the most salient comparative evidence, viewing the Near Eastern comparanda from the historical standpoint of a number of linguistically diverse societies that were making contact with Greek-speaking societies, especially in the eastern Mediterranean.[35]

§22. Such contact between ancient Greek and Near Eastern "epic" traditions in the early first millennium BCE presupposes a cultural *lingua franca*. I am invoking a linguistic metaphor here because it conveys the idea of structural causes and consequences in the course of any such contact. In the sense that contact between cultures is equivalent to contact

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[32] For two most useful collections of relevant evidence, see Puhvel 1987 and Watkins 1995.

[33] On the problems of applying both typological and genealogical methods of comparison in approaching Indic / Greek poetic comparanda, see Gresseth 1979, especially pp. 70-73.

[34] Since the Greek and the Latin languages are cognate, we can expect to find traces of native Latin (Italic) poetic traditions that are independent of - though cognate with - the Greek. A prime example of cognate comparanda between the Greek and the Latin evidence is the beginning of the translation by Livius Andronicus of the Homeric *Odyssey*, where the Latin words *insece* and *Camena* are used to render the Greek *ennepe* 'sing' and *Mousa* 'Muse' ('sing me the man, Muse!) in *Odyssey* i 1. Both *insece* and *Camena* are independent survivals from the Indo-European poetic language - independent, that is, from the corresponding Greek *ennepe* and *Mousa*. Further, in the case of Latin *insece* and Greek *ennepe*, the two words are actually cognate.

[35] Burkert 1984 / 1992 (citations will follow the 1992 versions). A reference was made to this work already in the Introduction.

between systems of thinking - let us call them "structures" - the linguistic metaphor of *Sprachbund*, as I introduced it earlier, is apt.[36]

§23. Following Burkert's *Orientalizing Revolution*, others too have attempted to address the relevant Near Eastern comparanda. A notable example is *The East Face of Helicon*, by Martin West.[37] Unlike Burkert, West confines himself to what he calls "West Asiatic elements," eliding Egypt.[38] Like Burkert, West concentrates on the Mesopotamian traditions, paying special attention to the narratives about Gilgamesh.[39] These narratives were codified over many centuries in a scribal tradition that made its way through various dynasties and various languages - from Sumerian to Akkadian to Hittite; the most canonical surviving form of the narratives is a standard Babylonian "library tablet version," composed in Akkadian and thematically formatted in twelve tablets.[40] An example of this version is the Gilgamesh text that was once housed in the library of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal in Nineveh (668-627), and it is this version of the Mesopotamian "epic" that contains some of the closest parallels to what we know about the "epic hero" in the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[41]

§24. West speculates about a "hot line" connecting Nineveh in the seventh century BCE with Greek-speaking transmitters of Gilgamesh themes that made their way ultimately into the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[42] Such speculation seems unnecessary. It is enough to say that the Gilgamesh "epic," as preserved in the "library tablet version" at Nineveh in the seventh century BCE - as also most likely in other versions as well - came into contact with analogous "epic traditions" of Greek-speaking poetic craftsmen. In fact, that is what Albert Lord says in *The Singer of Tales*, on one of the rare occasions where he explains a comparandum not typologically but historically: Lord actually posits a phase of cultural contact, starting with the eighth century BCE, between the library lore of Assyrian Nineveh and the oral poetic traditions

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[36] Burkert 1992:6 offers the model of itinerant craftsmen as a potential source of cultural diffusion, citing *Odyssey* xvii 381-385. See my analysis of this Homeric passage in Nagy 1979:233-234 and 1996a:56-57, where I explore the traditions of juridical immunity accorded to practitioners of crafts like traveling poets. By implication, such travelers could of course be bilingual or even multilingual.

[37] West 2000.

[38] West 2000:vii gives his reasons for this elision. On the value of Egyptian comparanda for the study of the "epic hero," see Hendel 1987a:122-125.

[39] Burkert 1992:116-118; also West 2000, especially pp. 336-347: "Achilles and Gilgamesh."

[40] Cf. Foster 2001:xi-xiv.

[41] West 2000:587.

[42] West 2000:587, 627-630; he actually uses the expression "hot line" at p. 627. West writes at the very end of his book, p. 630: "In the final reckoning, ... the argument for pervasive West Asiatic influence on early Greek poetry does not stand or fall with explanations of how it came about. A corpse suffices to prove a death, even if the inquest is inconclusive." But early Greek poetry was not a "corpse" at the time when the purported "influence" took place.

of contemporaneous Greek-speaking peoples.[43] Moreover, Lord actively compares the figure of Gilgamesh with the epic heroes of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[44]

§25. Most revealing is Lord's analysis of the poetic themes centering on the death of Enkidu, the feral companion of Gilgamesh: "Here is our earliest example in epic of death by substitution. Enkidu dies for Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh like Achilles struggles with the horror of his own mortality and is reconciled to it."[45] Curiously, neither Burkert nor West acknowledge the pioneering work of Lord on such relevant Near Eastern comparanda.[46]

§26. Besides the Gilgamesh "epic," Lord stresses the comparative value of other Mesopotamian traditions as well, including the various cosmogonies (foremost are the *Enûma elish* and the *Atrahasis*), which he connects with West Semitic "epic" narratives to be found in the Hebrew Bible.[47]

§27. In his work on biblical comparanda, Lord notes the characteristics of the "epic hero" in such celebrated passages as Chapter 32 of *Genesis*, where Jacob wrestles with the "angel"; Lord compares the passage in *Iliad* XXI where Achilles struggles with the river-god Xanthos.[48] The parallelisms can be extended by including other West Semitic traditions besides the Hebrew, especially the Ugaritic and the Phoenician. Discovery of the Ugaritic tablets at Ras Shamra (tablets attested from the 15th to the early 12th century) has yielded a vast new reservoir of comparanda.[49] There is also some fragmentary but telling comparative evidence in the Phoenician lore retold by the Greek-speaking Philo of Byblos.[50]

§28. Having noted the historical background of contacts between the Near East and the Greek-speaking world of the "orientalizing period," I stress that some of the comparanda from Near Eastern sources may be a matter typological parallelism, not cultural contact.[51]

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[43] Lord 1960:156, 158.

[44] Lord 1960:197, 201; see also Lord 1991:7, 37, 102, 142-145; Lord 1995:12, 104, 107.

[45] Lord 1960:201; he adds important observations about the themes of sacrifice and the "dying god." Cf. Sinos 1980:58. For a most perceptive elaboration of the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the overall Gilgamesh narrative tradition, see Hendel 1987a, especially pp. 116-121, where he compares the feral and hirsute Enkidu with the character of Esau in the Hebrew Bible.

[46] In the case of West 2000, there is in fact no citation of Lord - or Parry - anywhere in all 662 pages of the book.

[47] Lord 1960:156. See further Burkert 1992:91-95 on striking parallelisms between the Mesopotamian *Atrahasis* and *Enûma elish* on one hand and, on the other, the Homeric *Iliad*.

[48] Lord 1960:196-197. Lord's insights here have been developed into an important full-length book by Hendel 1997a.

[49] Hendel 1997a:73-81.

[50] Hendel 1997a:125-128.

[51] Nagy 1990b:81.

§29. Rounding out this list of Near Eastern comparanda, we come to the Indo-European languages of Anatolia, especially Hittite, Luvian, and Lycian. Of these three languages, Hittite represents the dominant imperial culture of Anatolia in the second millennium BCE - until the destruction of Hattusa, the capital of the Hittite empire, around 1180 BCE.[52] Luvian, the main language of West Anatolia, is amply attested in texts dating from the Hittite empire, and the language continued to thrive in later periods;[53] as for Lycian, it was the dominant language of southwest Anatolia in the early first millennium BCE.[54] Taken together, these Anatolian languages represent an important source of comparative evidence for heroic traditions that were cognate with those of Greek and other languages of Indo-European origin.[55] Just as important, however, is the fact that these Anatolian languages were in actual contact with Greek as spoken in the East Mediterranean not only in the "orientalizing period" but even before, in the era of the Hittite Empire.[56] Homeric poetry shows clear traces of this contact. A striking example is the Homeric usage of the ancient Greek word *therapōn*, conventionally translated as 'attendant', which is evidently derived from one of the Anatolian languages; in Hittite ritual texts, *tarpanalli-* means 'ritual substitute'.[57] Comparable is the application of the Greek word *therapōn* to Patroklos, the faithful attendant and best friend of Achilles in the Homeric *Iliad*: the word is applied to this hero in the context of narrating the ritualized death of Patroklos as a substitute - even a body double - for Achilles.[58]

§30. Another example of ongoing contact between ancient Greek and Anatolian cultures is the use of the Greek word *tarkhuein* 'make a funeral for' in *Iliad* XVI 456 / 674: the funeral here is for Sarpedon, hero king of the Lycians, and it takes place in his homeland of Lycia. The word is evidently a borrowing from the Lycian language: *Trqqas* in Lycian texts designates the god who smashes the world of the unrighteous, and his name is cognate with

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[52] There is a brief survey by West 2000:101-106, concentrating on the links between the Hittites with the non-Indo-European population of the Hurrians, who represent an earlier political power that strongly influenced Hittite culture.

[53] On the Luvian cultural background of Troy / Ilion, the focal point of the Homeric tradition about the Trojan War, see in general Mellink 1986. On the dating of the Trojan War, see Burkert 1995. The Homeric portrayal of Priam, Hektor, Alexander / Paris, and other Trojan heroes as Greek-speakers (not, say, Luvian-speakers) can be explained in terms of Greek-speaking traditions about the notion of 'the enemy' - or simply about 'the other'. For a parallel, see Davidson 1994:102-109 on the Turanians, the programmatic enemies of the Iranians in Iranian epic traditions: in the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi, the epic heroes of the Turanians are Iranian-speaking personalities.

[54] Mellink 1995.

[55] For rich collections of Anatolian comparanda, see especially Puhvel 1987 and Watkins 1995.

[56] See again Mellink 1986.

[57] Van Brock 1959.

[58] Nagy 1979:33, 292-293. The case of *therapōn* is not discussed by West 2000.

Luvian *Tarhunt-,* the thunder-god who is head of the Luvian pantheon.[59] These associations, as we will see later (§75), are relevant to the theme of the divine thunderbolt as an instrument of heroic immortalization.

The "Epic Hero" as grounded in the epic poetry of the Iliad *and* Odyssey

§31. Having surveyed the three kinds of comparanda for the "epic hero," I reach the primary point of comparison, ancient Greek epic. I propose to start with the characters of Achilles and Odysseus in the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Why these two epic heroes? Although they are by no means prototypical for defining the "epic hero," both represent an ideal point of entry for typological comparison because both embody a convergence of the concepts of "epic" and "hero" in a specific historical time and place. The time is the fourth century BCE, and the place is Athens. The convergence is most clearly visible in the works of Plato and Aristotle, which stem from that time and place. Here is where we find an apt point of departure for a systematic comparison. This particular point, I must stress, is not preordained: it is simply a historical contingency, most suitable for typological comparison.

§32. Plato and Aristotle, as we see especially in the *Ion* and in the *Poetics* respectively, both offer a grounded idea of what is "epic," what is a "hero," as we see from their use of the words *epos* (plural *epē*) and *hērōs* (plural *hērōes*).

Epic as genre

§33. I start with epic. At the beginning of the *Poetics* of Aristotle (1447a13-15), *epos* (plural *epē*) 'epic' is defined synchronically as a genre, and the definition operates in terms of an active comparison with the other genres listed here by Aristotle: tragedy, comedy, dithyramb, lyric accompanied by *aulos*, lyric accompanied by *kithara*. All these genres listed at the beginning of Aristotle's *Poetics* correspond to genres performed at the two major festivals of the Athenians: (1) the Panathenaia (epic, lyric accompanied by *aulos*, lyric accompanied by *kithara*) and (2) the City Dionysia (tragedy, comedy, dithyramb).[60] In Aristotle's listing, he ostentatiously pairs the genre of epic with the genre of tragedy (*epopoiia... kai hē tēs tragōidias poiēsis*).[61] Elsewhere, he says that he views these two particular genres, epic and tragedy, as cognates (*Poetics* 1449a2-6).[62] In the works of Plato as well, epic is viewed as a cognate of tragedy, and Homer is represented as a proto-tragedian (*Theaetetus* 152e; *Republic* 10.595c, 598d, 605c, 607a).

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[59] Nagy 1990b:131-132. See also West 2000:386, who omits references to work on the derivation of Greek *tarkhuein* from Lycian.
[60] Nagy 1999a:27.
[61] Nagy 1999a:26-27
[62] Nagy 1979:253-256.

§34. Plato's identification of tragedy with Homer - and of Homer with epic in general - can be understood in light of the history of Athenian institutions. In Athens, from the late sixth century BCE onward, the genre of epic as performed at the Panathenaia and the genre of tragedy as performed at the City Dionysia were "complementary forms, evolving together and thereby undergoing a process of mutual assimilation in the course of their institutional coexistence."[63] In the classical period of the fifth century BCE, extending into the age of Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century, the only epics performed at the festival of the Panathenaia were the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the performance traditions of these two epics both shaped and were shaped by the genre of tragedy as performed at the festival of the City Dionysia.[64]

§35. Other ancient Greek epics, attributed to poets other than Homer, were less compatible with tragedy. They belong to an ensemble known as the epic Cycle.[65] For Aristotle, the Cycle was categorically non-Homeric. In his *Poetics*, where he mentions two of the Cyclic poems he knew - the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad* - he makes clear his view that the authors of these epics were poets other than Homer, and he chooses not even to name these poets (1459a37-b16). Other sources offer specific names and proveniences: for example, the author of the *Cypria* was reportedly Stasinus of Cyprus; of the *Little Iliad*, Lesches of Lesbos; of the *Aithiopis* and the *Iliou Persis*, Arctinus of Miletus.[66]

§36. Aristotle viewed Homer as the author of only two epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (*Poetics* 1459a37-b16; cf. 1448b38-1449a1).[67] Plato, as we see in such works as the *Ion*, evidently held the same view. In general, the verses that Plato quotes explicitly from 'Homer' are taken exclusively from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not from the epic Cycle.

§37. In the sixth century BCE, by contrast, the epics of the Cycle were attributed to the authorship of Homer.[68] In that earlier era, Homer could be viewed as the notional author of all epic, as represented by the idea of the epic Cycle before it became historically differentiated from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In that era, moreover, the traditions represented by what we know as the epic Cycle were still the program, as it were, of the Panathenaia.[69] The evidence of Athenian vase paintings dated to the sixth century BCE shows that the epic repertoire at the

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[63] Nagy 1996a:81.
[64] Nagy 2002:36-37.
[65] For a thorough collection of fragments from the epic Cycle, along with testimonia, see Bernabé 1987.
[66] Nagy 1990a:74-79; on the epic Cycle, see in general Burgess 2001.
[67] Aristotle makes one theory-driven exception. In the *Poetics*, he theorizes that the author of the mock-epic *Margites* was Homer.
[68] This earlier state of affairs can be reconstructed from such sources as the (pseudo-) Herodotean *Life of Homer*. See Nagy 2004b.
[69] Nagy 2001a.

Panathenaia was not yet exclusively the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* but included the heroic themes of what we know as the epic Cycle.[70] In the archaic era of the Panathenaia, the idea of the Cycle was simply the idea of epic as a comprehensive totality: the term 'Cycle' or *kuklos* was sustained by metaphors of artistic comprehensiveness.[71]

§38. In the classical era of the Panathenaia, however, newer ideas of comprehensiveness had replaced the older idea. These newer ideas were now being determined by the artistic measure of tragedy. Aristotle says explicitly that only the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are comparable to tragedy because only these epics show a comprehensive and unified structure, unlike the epics of the Cycle (again, *Poetics* 1459a37-b16). In Plato as well, as we have seen, the standards of tragedy are evident in descriptions of Homer as a proto-tragedian in his own right. For Plato and Aristotle, the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* measured up to the standards of tragedy, whereas the epics of the Cycle did not.

§39. Thus the criteria of epic comprehensiveness vary from age to age - from the archaic notion of the epic Cycle to the classical notion of Homer the tragedian. What remains an invariable, however, is the basic institutional context in which the very idea of epic comprehensiveness took shape: that context is the festival. In the case of epic as performed in Athens, that context remained the festival of the Panathenaia. In its archaic phase, to repeat, the Panathenaia featured the epic Cycle, including the repertoire of what we know as the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[72] In its classical phase, this same festival of the Panathenaia featured only the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, excluding the repertoire of the epic Cycle. Even the term 'Cycle' was no longer appropriate, since the epic Cycle no longer embodied the notion of epic as a comprehensive totality.

§40. A typological comparandum for the notion of epic as a comprehensive totality is the case of heroic epics and dramas at festivals in latter-day India: the measure of totality in the performing of these epics and dramas is determined by the ideologies of the festivals that serve as the historical contexts for such performances.[73] Impartial observers of actual performances of epics at festivals in latter-day India have found that there are various different ways of imagining and realizing a notional totality for these epics.[74] There are even cases of differences determined by gender: when women instead of men sing the "same" epic,

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[70] Lowenstam 1997.

[71] Nagy 1996b:38, 89.

[72] In the *Lives of Homer* traditions, we can see that the repertoire of what we know as the epic Cycle was not restricted to the festival of the Panathenaia in the archaic age. The Cycle was featured also at festivals in Asia Minor and in the major islands facing Asia Minor, especially Lesbos, Chios, and Samos. A case in point is the Apatouria in Samos (according to the Herodotean *Life of Homer*). See Nagy 2004b.

[73] Nagy 1999a:28.

[74] Flueckiger 1996:133-134.

observers have found differences in form (meter, melody, phraseology) and even in content.[75] There are close parallels to be found in the songs of Sappho about epic heroes like Hector and Andromache (Sappho F 44).[76] Still, despite all the variables, the actual notion of epic as a totality remains a constant.

The hero in epic: Achilles and Odysseus in the Iliad *and* Odyssey

§41. Having first considered the form of "epic," both historically and comparatively, I will now move on to consider the content. In other words, I shift from "epic" to "hero." Just as *epos* (plural *epē*) is 'epic' in the age of Plato and Aristotle, so also *hērōs* (plural *hērōes*) is 'hero'.

§42. This word *hērōs* is used in the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to refer to the human characters in these epics. And the two central human characters of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Achilles and Odysseus respectively, interact pervasively with the plots of these two epics.

The narrating of the story of Achilles in the Iliad

§43. Let us begin with Achilles. Here is a monolithic and fiercely uncompromising man who actively chooses violent death over life in order to win the *kleos* 'glory' of being remembered forever in epic poetry (*Iliad* IX 413). Here is a man of unbending principle who cannot allow his values to be compromised - not even by the desperate needs of his near and dear friends who are begging him to bend his will, bend it just enough to save his own people. Here is a man of constant sorrow, who can never forgive himself for having unwittingly allowed his nearest and dearest friend, Patroklos, to take his place in battle and be killed in his stead, slaughtered like a sacrificial animal - all on account of his own refusal to bend his will by coming to the aid of his fellow warriors. Here is a man, finally, of unspeakable anger, an anger so intense that the poet words it the same way that he words the anger of the gods, even of Zeus himself.[77]

§44. The gods of the Homeric *Iliad* take out their anger actively, and this anger is poetically visualized in the form of destructive fires and floods unleashed by Zeus. The central hero of the *Iliad* at first takes out his anger passively, by withdrawing his vital presence from his own people. The hero's anger is directed away from the enemy and toward his own people, whose king, Agamemnon, has insulted Achilles' honor and demeaned his sense of self. This passive anger of Achilles translates into the active success of the enemy in the hero's absence, and the enemy's success is compared, ironically, to destructive fires and floods unleashed by Zeus. In this way, the passive anger of the hero translates symbolically into the active anger of

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[75] Flueckiger 1989:36-40; Nagy 1996b:56-57.
[76] Nagy 1996b:57.
[77] This description has been taken from Nagy 1992:xii.

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the god.[78] This epic theme, as we will see, is linked with cosmogonic and anthropogonic themes in myths about primal conflagrations and floods.

§45. Then, in response to the death of Patroklos, Achilles' anger modulates into an active phase - active no longer in a symbolic but in a real sense. The hero's anger is redirected, away from his own people and back toward his enemy.

§46. This new phase of Achilles' anger consumes the hero in a paroxysm of self-destructiveness. His fiery rage plummets him to the depths of brutality, as he begins to view the enemy as the ultimate Other, to be hated with such an intensity that Achilles can even bring himself, in a moment of ultimate fury, to express that most ghastly of desires, to eat the flesh of Hektor, the man he is about to kill. The *Iliad* is the story of a hero's pain, culminating in an anger that degrades him to the level of a savage animal, to the depths of bestiality. This same pain, however, this same intense feeling of loss, will ultimately make the savage anger subside in a moment of heroic self-recognition that elevates Achilles to the highest realms of humanity, of humanism. At the end of the *Iliad*, as he begins to recognize the pain of his deadliest enemy, of the Other, he begins to achieve a true recognition of the Self. The anger is at an end. And the story can end as well.[79]

The complementarity of the Iliad *and* Odyssey

§47. The monolithic personality of Achilles, central epic hero of the *Iliad*, is matched against the many-sidedness of Odysseus, the commensurately central epic hero of the *Odyssey*. Whereas Achilles achieves his epic centrality as a warrior, Odysseus achieves his own kind of epic centrality in an alternative way - as a master of crafty stratagems and cunning intelligence.

§48. There are of course many other heroes in Homeric poetry, but Achilles and Odysseus have become the two central points of reference. Just as the central heroes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are complementary, so too are the epics that centralize them. The complementarity extends even further: between the two of them, these two epics give the impression of incorporating most of whatever was worth retelling about the world of heroes - at least from the standpoint of the Greek-speaking people in the age of Plato and Aristotle. The staggering comprehensiveness of these two epics is apparent even from a cursory glance.

§49. In the case of the *Iliad*, this epic not only tells the story that it says it will tell, about Achilles' anger and how it led to countless woes as the Greeks went on fighting it out with the Trojans and striving to ward off the fiery onslaught of Hektor. It also manages to retell or even relive, though with varying degrees of directness or fullness of narrative, the entire Tale of

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[78] Nagy 1992:xii-xiii; more detailed analysis in 1979:321-323, 333-338.
[79] Nagy 1992:viii-ix. It is important to note the double meaning of Greek *telos:* (1) end of a line (2) coming full circle.

Troy, including from the earlier points of the story-line such memorable moments as the Judgment of Paris, the Abduction of Helen, and the Assembly of Ships. More than that: the *Iliad* foreshadows the Death of Achilles, which does not occur within the bounds of its own plot. In short, although the story of the *Iliad* directly covers only a short stretch of the whole story of Troy, thereby resembling the compressed time-frame of Classical Greek tragedy (Aristotle makes this observation in his *Poetics*), it still manages to mention something about practically everything that happened at Troy, otherwise known as Ilion. Hence the epic's title - the Tale of Ilion, the *Iliad*.[80]

§50. The Homeric *Odyssey* is equally comprehensive. It tells the story of the hero's *nostos* 'return, homecoming'. This word means not only 'homecoming' but also 'song about homecoming'.[81] As such, the *Odyssey* is not only a *nostos*: it is a *nostos* to end all other *nostoi*.[82] In other words, the *Odyssey* is the final and definitive statement about the theme of a heroic homecoming: in the process of retelling the return of the epic hero Odysseus, the narrative of the *Odyssey* achieves a sense of closure in the retelling of all feats stemming from the heroic age.[83] The *Odyssey* provides a retrospective even on those epic moments that are missing in the *Iliad*, such as the story of the Wooden Horse (viii 487-520). As we see from the wording of the Song of the Sirens in the *Odyssey* (xii 189-191), the sheer pleasure of listening to the song of Troy that is the *Iliad* will be in vain if there is no *nostos*, no safe return home from the faraway world of epic heroes: in other words, the *Iliad* itself will become a Song of the Sirens without a successful narration of the *Odyssey*.[84]

The narrating of the story of Odysseus in the Odyssey

§51. As we see from Albert Lord's far-ranging survey of typological parallels to the theme of the epic hero's return in the Homeric *Odyssey*, the idea of *nostos* is deeply ritualistic.[85] In fact, the *nostos* of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* means not only a 'return' or a 'song about a return' but even a 'return to light and life'.[86] This ritualistic meaning, as we will see, has to do with the epic "hidden agenda" of <u>returning from Hades</u> and the heroic theme of <u>immortalization after death</u>.

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[80] Nagy 1992:xv.

[81] Nagy 1999d:xii, with reference to Nagy 1979:97 §6n2.

[82] Nagy 1999d:xii-xiii.

[83] On the narrative of the *Odyssey* as an act of closure, closing the doors on the heroic age, see Martin 1993.

[84] Nagy 1999d:xii. In terms of the *Odyssey* as a successful *nostos*, the epic hero of the *Iliad* would be ready to change places with the epic hero of the *Odyssey* (as we see in *Odyssey* xi 488-491): see Dova 2000.

[85] Lord 1960:158-185.

[86] Nagy 1990b:218-219, following Frame 1978.

§52. On the surface, however, the *nostos* 'return' of the epic hero includes a wide variety of interactions between different characters and different plots. The following list is organized in terms of these different characters and plots, all of which fit both the multiform hero Odysseus and the multiform epic of the *Odyssey* as analyzed by Lord:

1. The returning king reclaims his kingdom by becoming reintegrated with his society. The king, as king, is the embodiment of this society, of this "body politic"; thus the society, as re-embodied by the king, is correspondingly reintegrated.
2. The pilot lost at sea finally finds his bearings and reaches home. The pilot or *kubernētēs* (Latin *gubernātor*) is the helmsman who directs the metaphorical 'ship of state' (the metaphor is latent in the word derived from Latin *gubernātor*, 'government').
3. The seer or shaman returns home from his vision quest.
4. The soldier of fortune returns home from his adventures and proceeds to reclaim his wife, whose faithfulness in his absence determines his true identity.
5. The trickster retraces his misleading steps, returning all the way back home, back where he had started, and thus showing the correct steps for all to take.
6. The son goes off on a quest to find his father in order to find his own heroic identity.

§53. The last of these interactions between character and plot is particularly instructive. In the *Odyssey*, we see it in the story of the quest of Telemakhos for the *kleos* 'glory' of his father Odysseus (iii 83). It is also the story of the son's quest for the father's *nostos* 'homecoming' (ii 360).[87] In the *Odyssey*, as I observed earlier, *nostos* is not only a 'homecoming' but a 'song about homecoming'; Odysseus achieves *kleos* 'glory' by way of successfully achieving a *nostos* 'song about homecoming'. Whereas Achilles has to choose between *nostos* 'homecoming' and the *kleos* 'glory' that he gets from his own epic tradition (*Iliad* IX 413), Odysseus must have both *kleos* and *nostos*, because for him his *nostos* is the same thing as his *kleos*.[88] Once again we see an active complementarity between the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The narrating of the story of Aeneas in the Aeneid *of Virgil*

§54. Such complementarity between the two Homeric epics becomes a classical model for the Roman epic of Virgil's *Aeneid*: the first half, Scrolls 1 through 6, re-enacts the *Odyssey*, while the second half, Scrolls 7-12, re-enacts the *Iliad*. On the other hand, the complementarity inherent in the contrast between Odysseus and Achilles, the two central epic heroes of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, is not directly replicated by the single character of Aeneas, the central epic hero of the *Aeneid*. This character can better be described as an amalgam of earlier epic heroes. Although the Aeneas of Virgil's *Aeneid* shares some of the characteristics of Odysseus and Achilles, his identity is shaped by other Homeric characters as well, including the Aeneas of the *Iliad*. Moreover, the identity of Aeneas as an epic hero transcends Homeric poetry,

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[87] On the role of the goddess Athena as 'mentor' of the young epic hero, as personified by the fatherly epic hero *Mentēs* in *Odyssey* i (also *Mentōr* in *Odyssey* ii), see Nagy 1990b:113.
[88] Nagy 1999d:xii.

incorporating aspects of generic figures like the "founding hero" and the "love hero" developed in the Hellenistic poetry of scholar-poets like Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes.

Contrasts between Homeric poetry and older forms of poetry

§55. Whereas the epic hero comes into focus through the lens of Homeric poetry, the picture gets blurred as we look further back in time to other forms of poetry that used to be performed along with Homeric poetry at the festival of the Panathenaia in the city of Athens in the sixth century. These older forms of poetry can be described as Cyclic, Hesiodic, and Orphic. We have already considered at length the first of these three forms, exemplified by the epic Cycle. As we have seen, the poetry of the epic Cycle can be considered a form of epic, though this poetry is less differentiated than the epic poetry of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. As for Hesiodic and Orphic poetry, they exemplify older poetic forms that are even less differentiated and that actually transcend the form of epic. All three of these forms of poetry, especially the poetry attributed to Orpheus, had become relatively neglected in the fifth century BCE, which was a time when Homeric poetry was becoming ever more central in the performance traditions of the festival of the Panathenaia in Athens.[89] Of special interest here is the fact that all three of these older forms of poetry overtly draw on cosmogonic and anthropogonic themes that are only latent in Homeric poetry.[90]

§56. So the picture of the epic hero is blurred in the preclassical period, but at least it shows the faint outlines of an older and more aristocratic alternative to the Homeric tradition as it existed in the classical period of the fifth century and thereafter. A case in point is Achilles in the Cyclic *Aithiopis*, attributed to Arctinus of Miletus, to be contrasted with Achilles in the Homeric *Iliad*. The *Aithiopis* stems from the aristocratic local epic traditions of the Ionic city of Miletus in Asia Minor, in close contact with the aristocratic local epic traditions of the Aeolic cities on the island of Lesbos and on the facing mainland of Asia Minor.[91] The Achilles of these elite Ionians and Aeolians is more exoticized, more eroticized, than his Homeric counterpart. The Ionic Achilles resembles a delicate Scythian archer in Milesian traditions,[92] while the Aeolic Achilles of Sappho's songs becomes the object of every young girl's erotic desires.[93] Achilles is a passionate lover in the *Aithiopis*: he falls desperately in love with the Amazon Penthesileia at the moment of killing her in battle, and then, in a fit of passion, kills Thersites for mocking that love (*Aithiopis* Proclus summary p. 105.22-27).[94] Retrospectively, the Achilles

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[89] Nagy 2001b.

[90] Nagy 1990b:74, 198; 2001b; on cosmogonic themes in particular, and on their relationship to epic, see Slatkin 1987 and Muellner 1996.

[91] Nagy 1990a:71, 75-76, 78-79, 277n16, 421, 463n121.

[92] Pinney 1983; Nagy 1990b:71n96.

[93] On Aeolic Achilles, see Nagy 1979:141; on Achilles in the songs of Sappho: see F 218.

[94] I use the page-numbering of Allen 1912 in making citations from fragments and ancient summaries of the Cyclic *Aithiopis*.

of the *Aithiopis* resembles in some ways the love heroes of later epics, such as Jason in Scroll 3 of the *Argonautica* of Apollonius or even Aeneas himself in Scroll 4 of the *Aeneid* of Virgil. True, the Homeric Achilles may be comparably passionate in expressing his love for the Aeolic girl Briseis in the Homeric *Iliad*, but the erotic aspects of his passion are understated by Homeric poetry.[95] Much the same can be said about the passion of Achilles for his best friend in the *Iliad*, Patroklos: the erotic aspect of that passion is made explicit in the version of the story as retold in the tragedy *Myrmidons*, by Aeschylus, and it is implicit in the version as told in the epic of the *Iliad*. At least, this passion is implicit according to a claim made by Aeschines in his speech *Against Timarkhos* (sections 141-153).[96] The orator goes out of his way to insist that there is such an implication in the Homeric *Iliad*, for the special understanding of the cognoscenti.

§57. Besides the differences we find in the Homeric *Iliad* and in the Cyclic *Aithiopis* when we look for characterizations of the hero Achilles, there are also radical differences in plot. In the *Aithiopis*, unlike the *Iliad*, Achilles is immortalized after death (*Aithiopis* Proclus summary p. 106.11-15).[97] In the *Iliad*, by contrast, the theme of heroic immortalization is nowhere made explicit for any hero, though there is reason to argue that this theme is implicit throughout Homeric poetry, even in the case of Achilles.[98] By contrast, as we will now see, heroic immortalization is a theme that is explicit not only in the Cyclic *Aithiopis* but also in other forms of non-Homeric poetry.

The shaping of the epic hero in cosmogonic and anthropogonic traditions

§58. In order to pursue this non-Homeric theme of heroic immortalization in the ancient Greek traditions of the epic hero, I focus here on cosmogonic and anthropogonic traditions of poetry. Of special relevance is the story of the overpopulation of Earth personified, and of the solutions devised by the divine apparatus to remedy this overpopulation. According to the version of the story preserved in the epic Cycle, specifically in the *Cypria* (F 1), the divine solution was a war to end all wars, destined to decimate the vast numbers of heroes who were overpopulating the earth.[99] This primal war, according to the Cyclic *Cypria*, was the Trojan War, precipitated by a primal quarrel that took place on the occasion of the wedding of the mortal man Peleus to the immortal goddess Thetis (F 1 p. 117-118).[100] In the scholia for the *Iliad*, the relevant verses about this primal war are actually quoted from the *Cypria* (F 1 p. 118), and we learn from these verses that the Trojan War was ordained

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[95] Dué 2002.
[96] Dué 2000, 2001.
[97] Nagy 1979:164-165, 167, 172, 175, 205, 207.
[98] Nagy 1979:207-210.
[99] I use the page-numbering of Allen 1912 in making citations from fragments and ancient summaries of the Cyclic *Cypria*.
[100] On the cosmic function of Thetis in the epic tradition, see Slatkin 1991.

by the Will of Zeus (F 1 verse 7). From these scholia we learn also that the Will of Zeus ordained not only the Trojan War but also the Theban Wars that preceded it (F 1 p. 117). And we learn, finally, that Zeus considered two alternative ways to depopulate the earth before he decided on the Trojan War as the final solution: these two alternatives to a primal war were (1) a primal conflagration or ecpyrosis by way of the fiery *keraunoi* 'thunderbolts' of Zeus or (2) a primal flood or cataclysm, by way of *kataklusmoi* 'floodings' (F 1 p. 118). Whether it is war or ecpyrosis or cataclysm, all three of these themes of total destruction are treated here as alternative manifestations of the Will of Zeus. And we can find parallel themes of total destruction in the Hesiodic and the Orphic traditions. In the Hesiodic traditions (*Works and Days* 156-173; also F 204.95-143), we see various references to a composite epic version involving both the Trojan War and the Theban Wars,[101] and we see also various allusions to a cataclysm and other primal blights as alternatives to the theme of a primal war.[102] As for the Orphic traditions, we see a mediated version in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.253-259), where Jupiter / Zeus first considers the alternative of ecpyrosis before deciding on the alternative of cataclysm.

§59. There are striking parallels to be found in Near Eastern traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, *Genesis* 6:1-4, we find the familiar narrative of Noah's Ark and the Deluge, which is closely related to Mesopotamian traditions, especially as represented by the Babylonian *Atrahasis* and the *Enûma elish*.[103] In Tablets I and II of the *Atrahasis* and in Tablet I of the *Enûma elish*, the story is told that Earth is suffering from overpopulation, and the divine apparatus provides a solution in the form of a deluge, a primal cataclysm; in the *Atrahasis*, there are other primal blights, such as plague and famine, that take place as preludes to the eventual cataclysm.[104] These disasters are comparable to what we find in the Hesiodic traditions, where we see references to a primal blight as manifested in a failure of vegetation (F 124-143); presiding over this blight is a terrifying cosmic snake (*deinos ophis*: F 136). The snake is comparable to Tiamat, who is slain by Marduk in the festive context of the Babylonian New Year. In Greek terms, the snake is comparable to Typhon, slain by Zeus in his role as divine warrior.[105] Finally, the Gilgamesh narrative in Tablet XI (182-185) refers to the primal flood and to various other blights catalogued as alternatives to the flood, such as a lion, a wolf, and a primal famine.[106]

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[101] Nagy 1990b:15-16, 126.
[102] Koenen 1994. See especially p. 5 on the immortalization of all heroes of the "fourth generation" in Hesiod *Works and Days* 156-173; see also pp. 17-18 for Egyptian parallels.
[103] Hendel 1987b:13-17.
[104] Hendel 1987b:17-18; cf. Burkert 1992:101.
[105] Details in Koenen 1994:32-33.
[106] West 2000:491.

§60. But there are also striking parallels to be found in Indo-European poetic traditions other than the Greek traditions, especially in the Indic *Mahābhārata*.[107] This monumental epic, comprising over 90,000 *śloka*-s in its Northern recensions, is pervaded by the theme of the war of the Pāṇḍava-s. This primal war is precipitated by the overpopulation of the Earth personified.[108] On the basis of this comparison, I concluded in an earlier work: "In this way the major epic narratives of the Greek and Indic peoples are inaugurated with a cognate theme, and it is hard to imagine more compelling evidence for the Indo-European heritage of the epic traditions about the Trojan War."[109] Essential for understanding the Indo-European heritage of these epic traditions is the correlation, in both of these traditions, of the idea of a war of depopulation with the idea of demigods. In the Indic version of the myth as told in the *Mahābhārata*, the gods' decision to initiate a war of depopulation is correlated with their decision to initiate the incarnation of the five heroes known as the Pāṇḍava-s. These heroes are demigods, sons of five different male immortals who mated with one female mortal. As we will see later, the idea of these heroes as demigods is cognate with the idea of *hēmitheoi* 'half-gods, demigods' as defined in Greek poetic traditions about the Trojan War.

§61. Dismissing the comparative evidence of the *Mahābhārata* as "coincidence," West points to the existence of various historically unrelated myths about overpopulation and its divine remedies, such as war, flood, fire, famine, plague, noxious beasts, and so forth.[110] He adduces the existence of these typological parallels in order to back up his claim that the Indic myths about overpopulation and a resulting primal war are not genealogically related to the corresponding Greek myths. And then he goes on to claim that the Near Eastern myths about overpopulation and a resulting primal flood are the real historical source for the corresponding Greek myths, and that the Greeks borrowed these myths.[111]

§62. But the worldwide attestations of myths about overpopulation and a resulting primal flood can be used to make an altogether different argument, namely, that the parallelisms between the relevant Greek and Near Eastern narrative traditions are primarily typological. In making this alternative argument, however, there is no need to exclude the

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[107] Nagy 1990b:14-15.
[108] The most relevant passage, *Mahābhārata* 11.8.26, is analyzed in Dumézil 1968:168-169 = 1995:196-197. Other relevant passages in the *Mahābhārata* and elsewhere in Indo-Iranian traditions (including the Iranian *Vidēvdāt*) are analyzed by de Jong 1985. The Greek poetic concept of *platos* in describing the 'broad' surface of the Earth in *Cypria* F 1.2 is cognate with the Indic poetic concept of the Earth personified, whose name is *Pṛthivī*.
[109] Nagy 1990b:16, with further references.
[110] West 2000:482n128. For supplementing the bibliography, as cited here by West, I cite Hendel 1987b:24-26, who presents a broader perspective on the methods of typological comparison in considering world-wide myths about overpopulation.
[111] West 2000:482, where he also claims that the theme of overpopulation in the Indic *Mahābhārata* must have been somehow borrowed from the Near East.

possibility that these Greek and Near Eastern traditions about wars and floods actually made contact with each other, and that such contact resulted in mutual influences between typological parallels.

§63. The argument that the Greek myth about a primal flood is a borrowing from Near Eastern sources is linked with a second argument, that the borrowing took place at a relatively late period, no earlier than the second half of the sixth century.[112] This second argument, even if we accepted the questionable claim that the *Cypria* of the epic Cycle is to be dated to the same relatively late period, simply cannot stand. The myth of primal cataclysm is in fact deeply embedded in the overall structure of the oldest surviving epic of Greek literature, the Homeric *Iliad*. And the same can be said about the myth of primal ecpyrosis, A signal of these two myths is the theme of the Will of Zeus at the beginning of the *Iliad* (I 5), which is coextensive with the plot of the *Iliad* - just as the Will of Zeus in the *Cypria* (F 1.7) is coextensive with the plot of the entire Trojan War in the epic Cycle. As we have already seen, the Will of Zeus in the epic Cycle translates into three alternative divine solutions to the overpopulation of Earth: cataclysm, ecpyrosis, and war. So also in the *Iliad*, the Will of Zeus translates into cataclysm, ecpyrosis, and war, though the theme of overpopulation is absent, or at least not overt. More than that, the primal themes of cataclysm and ecpyrosis pervade the story of the war in the *Iliad*: the disaster of ecpyrosis applies to both the Trojans and the Achaeans, while the disaster of cataclysm applies only the Achaeans.[113] In the *Iliad*, both ecpyrosis and cataclysm are visible epic manifestations of the Will of Zeus.[114]

§64. Let us start with the theme of ecpyrosis. In the *Iliad*, the fire of the Achaeans that is destined to destroy the Trojans and, conversely, the fire of the Trojans that threatens to destroy the Achaeans are both pervasively compared to a primal fire of Zeus, which threatens to destroy the whole world.[115] Next, we proceed to the theme of cataclysm. In the *Iliad*, it is prophesied that the gods Poseidon and Apollo will one day gather all the waters of all the Trojan rivers combined and release them all at once to destroy the Achaean Wall situated on the Trojan plain, leaving no trace of that Wall - nor even any trace of the Achaean heroes who had built it and fought to defend it (XII 17-33). It has been argued persuasively that this divine flooding of the Trojan plain is described in language that evokes a primal cataclysm.[116]

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[112] West 2000:482.
[113] Rousseau 1996:403-413, 591-592, with special reference to the flooding of the Achaean Wall in *Iliad* XII 17-33 and the Battle of Fire and Water in *Iliad* XXI 211-327, on which see also Nagy 1996b:145-146.
[114] Nagy 2002:66.
[115] Nagy 1979:333-338; on ecpyrosis as the instrument of the *mīnis* 'anger' of Zeus, see Muellner 1996.
[116] Scodel 1982. See now also Boyd 1995, especially p. 201 on *Iliad* VII 461-462, where the destruction of the Achaean Wall is already being prophesied; also p. 202 on *Iliad* XV 381-384 and 674-688, passages where we see the attack of the Trojans against the Achaean Wall being

§65. A related scene of primal cataclysm in the *Iliad* is the battle of the epic hero Achilles against the Trojan river Xanthos, where the god who personifies the waters of Xanthos is on the verge of destroying the hero in the mode of a cataclysm: at the climax of this cosmic battle, the river-god roars like a bull (XXI 237); so also the cosmic river-god Akhelōios assumes the form of a bull when he battles Herakles (Archilochus F 286-287).[117] Such divine theriomorphism is paralleled in Near Eastern traditions. In Canaanite narratives, for example, the Divine Warrior Baal is conventionally pictured as a bull when he battles the forces of primal cataclysm.[118] Other comparanda include the theriomorphic aspects of the Canaanite god El ('Bull El') and even of the Israelite Yahweh (as we see from such epithets as 'the bull of Jacob').[119]

The hero as hēmitheos *'demigod'*

§66. It has been argued, as I just pointed out, that the destruction of the Achaean Wall in a flood induced by the gods is pictured in the *Iliad* as a vision of primal cataclysm (XII 17-33). I now highlight a word that signals this vision: it is *hēmitheoi* 'demigods' (XII 23), referring to the epic heroes whose Wall will be obliterated forever by the flood. Just as the Wall will be obliterated, so also any memory of the *hēmitheoi* who had fought once upon a time to defend it may also be obliterated. Nowhere else in the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do we find this word *hēmitheoi*. It belongs not to the epic tradition of Homeric poetry but to alternative poetic traditions having to do with cosmogony and anthropogony, as we see from the attestations of *hēmitheoi* in Hesiodic poetry (F 204.100 and *Works and Days* 160); relevant too are the attestations of this word in the poetry of the *Homeric Hymns* (31.19 and 32.19).[120]

§67. In the Hesiodic *Works and Days*, the word *hēmitheoi* signals the last generation of heroes, who were obliterated in the time of the Theban and the Trojan Wars (161-165) - but who were preserved after death and immortalized by being transported to the Islands of the Blessed (167-173).[121] This scenario of obliteration followed by immortalization for the *hēmitheoi* in the Hesiodic *Works and Days* must be contrasted with a scenario of obliteration followed by no mention of immortalization for the *hēmitheoi* in the Homeric *Iliad* (XII 17-33).[122] Matching the exceptional Homeric occurrence of *hēmitheoi* in the *Iliad* (XII 23) is an exceptional shift in the Homeric narrative perspective here: instead of viewing heroes through the lens of the

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compared to a cataclysm. The Achaean Wall threatens the epic status of the Trojan Wall, as we see in *Iliad* VII 451-453. I suggest that these verses point to the *kleos* of the *Iliad* (cf. VII 451) as a threat to the *kleos* of earlier epic traditions that concentrate on the Trojan Wall.

[117] Nagy 1996b:145-146.

[118] Hendel 1987a:30, 104.

[119] Hendel 1987a:58, with special reference to *Genesis* 49:24, following Cross 1973:4. For more on Yahweh as a Divine Warrior, see Hendel p. 30.

[120] Nagy 1979:160-161; also 1990b:15-16, 54.

[121] Koenen 1994:5; Nagy 1996b:126.

[122] Koenen 1994:5n12 calls this Iliad scenario "the flip side of the same story."

heroic age, seeing them as they were back then, alive and hoping to be remembered, the poetry now views them through the lens of a post-heroic age, seeing them as already dead and about to be forgotten (XII 17-33).[123] So the cataclysm of the Trojan plain is primal for the world of the epic heroes who fought in the Trojan War, since it threatens to obliterate any memory of that world. A parallel idea of obliteration can be found in the language used by Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians, in inscriptions commemorating his destruction of Babylon in 689 BCE: after burning down the city, the king leveled it further by flooding it, and the inscription boasts that this leveling was more complete than the devastation that took place in the wake of the primal flood that destroyed the whole world.[124] Another parallel idea can be found in the language describing the Nephilim and the Rephaim in the Hebrew Bible. This generation of humans is literally destined for obliteration: they "exist in order to be wiped out" - by the flood (*Genesis* 6:4), by Moses (*Numbers* 13:33), by David (2 *Samuel* 21:18-22 / 1 *Chronicles* 20:4-8), and by others.[125]

§68. On the basis of the evidence presented so far, I am ready to make three points. First, the myths in the *Iliad* about war, ecpyrosis, and cataclysm as alternative primal disasters are evidently of great antiquity. Second, there is a corresponding degree of antiquity in the parallel Cyclic, Hesiodic, and Orphic myths about these primal disasters. And third, the very idea of these primal disasters is correlated with the idea of *hēmitheoi* in the sense of 'demigods', as we see most directly from the evidence of the Cyclic *Cypria*.[126] The third of these three points is essential for proving that the idea of the Trojan War as a primal disaster for the Earth's population, correlated with the idea of heroes as demigods, is cognate with a parallel set of correlated ideas in the Indic *Mahābhārata*. In that epic, as we have seen, the gods' decision to initiate a primal disaster for the Earth's population is correlated with their decision to initiate the incarnation of the five demigods known as the Pāṇḍava-s, sons of five different male immortals who mated with one female mortal. So I conclude that the Greek myths about *hēmitheoi* and the primal disasters that befell them could not have been selective borrowings from corresponding myths produced by neighboring civilizations in the Near East. Rather, these myths must derive ultimately from Indo-European traditions.

§69. Even though the word *hēmitheoi* is linked with non-Homeric poetry, the actual idea of a *hēmitheos* as a 'demigod' is all-pervasive in Homeric poetry. The epic heroes of this poetry can be defined as mortals of the remote past, male or female, who are endowed with superhuman powers because they are descended from the immortal gods themselves. In the *Iliad*, for example, the central hero Achilles is the son of Thetis, an immortal goddess with

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[123] Nagy 1979:159-161.
[124] West 2000:378. According to West, this idea of obliteration was borrowed into Greek traditions. As I argue, however, we are dealing here with typological parallels.
[125] Hendel 1997b:21.
[126] Nagy 1990b:15-16.

limitless cosmic powers who was forced to marry the mortal man Peleus. Achilles himself, then, can be described in non-Homeric terms as a *hēmitheos* or 'half-god'. This status of Achilles is confirmed in the epic Cycle. In the *Cypria* (F 1 p. 117-118), the story is told about the epic occasion that precipitated the Trojan War, initiated by Zeus in order to depopulate the Earth: this occasion was a grand feast attended by both immortals and mortals in celebration of the wedding of the mortal man Peleus to the immortal goddess Thetis, which led to the birth of Achilles the demigod hero .

§70. The meaning of this word *hēmitheos* shows a genetic understanding of the hero. The heroic potential is programmed by divine genes, as it were. There has to be a god involved in any hero's "family tree." Still, the literal meaning of the word *hêmitheos* as 'half-god' does not imply an exact half-and-half distribution of immortals and mortals in a hero's genealogy. Rather, this meaning measures the balancing of immortality with mortality in the hero's self. In the case of Achilles, for example, the divinity of his mother is not the only 'half' of immortality that he inherits, since his mortal father Peleus is descended, by way of that man's own mortal father Aiakos, from the immortal father Zeus himself. But the bitter fact remains that Peleus is a mortal. And, since Peleus as one of the two parents of Achilles is mortal, Achilles must be mortal as well, even though his other parent is Thetis, who is not only immortal but even endowed with limitless cosmic powers.[127] So Achilles, despite the limitless potential he inherits from Thetis, is subject to death. The same can be said about all other Homeric heroes: even though they are all descended in some way or another from the gods, they are all mortals. They all have to die, like ordinary mortals. No matter how many immortals you find in a heroic "family tree," the intrusion of even a single mortal will make all successive descendants mortal. Mortality, not immortality, is the dominant gene.[128]

§71. There is a close parallel to this Greek epic concept of *hēmitheos* in the Indic *Mahābhārata*. As we have seen, the five central heroes of this epic, the mortal Pāṇḍava-s, are begotten by five corresponding immortal gods, and each one of these heroes inherits the divine characteristics of his divine father.[129] For example, the hero Arjuna is begotten by the immortal god Indra, whose traits as the Divine Warrior are re-enacted by Arjuna throughout the *Mahābhārata*.[130] Nevertheless, all five Pāṇḍava-s are mortal because their shared mother is mortal. And it is the primal war of these mortal Pāṇḍava-s that ultimately fulfills the divine plan of alleviating the Earth of its overpopulation. This theme of mortality supports my ongoing argument that the Indic theme of this divine plan is cognate with the ancient Greek

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[127] Nagy 1979:346-347.
[128] Nagy 1992:ix.
[129] For a thorough analysis, see Dumézil 1968; summary in Nagy 1990b:14-15. On epic themes involving alternatives to the theme of semidivine parentage, see Lord 1960:218.
[130] Nagy 1979:323-325

theme of the Will of Zeus, who ordains the obliteration of the generation of humans known as the *hēmitheoi*.

§72. To say that the *hēmitheoi* are mortal is not to say that heroes do not become immortal: they do, but only after they have experienced death. After death, heroes are eligible for a life of immortality.

§73. Here I return to the case of Achilles in the epic Cycle - specifically, in the epic known as the *Aithiopis*. As we have seen, the hero is immortalized after he is killed at Troy: his dead body is transported by his goddess mother Thetis to a paradisiacal realm, where he is revivified (*Aithiopis* Proclus summary p. 106.11-15). In this same epic, an analogous immortalization awaits Memnon, the son of the dawn-goddess Eos, after he is killed at Troy. In the *Iliad*, by contrast, there are references to the ultimate immortalization of Achilles, but these references are kept implicit and are never made explicit.[131] So also in the *Odyssey*, the immortalization of the hero is kept implicit. Throughout this epic, the theme of immortalization is expressed only metaphorically, through the theme of *nostos* 'return, homecoming', in the transcendent sense of 'return to life and light'.[132] It all comes together in the *Odyssey* at the moment when the ship of Odysseus finally reaches the shores of his homeland just as the morning star signals the coming of the dawn, and the hero simultaneously wakes up from a deep sleep compared to death (xiii 79-95). The moment of the hero's homecoming is here synchronized with his figurative return from darkness and death to light and life.[133]

Herakles as a model hēmitheos *'demigod'*

§74. A most explicit example of the hero as a *hēmitheos* is Herakles, conceived by a mortal woman and fathered by the immortal god Zeus, chief of all the gods and executive of the universe.[134] Only after undergoing his Labors, culminating in the ultimate labor of his suffering and death on Mount Oeta, does this hero achieve immortality.[135] Suffering the most excruciating pain imaginable, Herakles in his agony mounts the funeral pyre built on top of the mountain and orders the lighting of the fire of cremation. The moment the fire is lit, the hero is struck by lightning. He is blasted by a thunderbolt sent as a coup de grâce by his father Zeus. All goes up in flames and nothing is left of Herakles - not even the expected bones. At the same moment of his disappearance from the world of mortals, he joins the world of immortals. Herakles now finds himself in the company of the gods, and at this point the goddess Hera,

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[131] Nagy 1979:207-210.
[132] Nagy 1990b:218-219, following Frame 1978.
[133] Nagy 1990b:219.
[134] Davidson 1980; Nagy 1996b:12-15.
[135] The story is retold most explicitly in Diodorus of Sicily 3.38.3-3.39.3. The rest of this paragraph is a paraphrase of that retelling.

who had been the ultimate cause of the labors suffered by the hero throughout his life, becomes his surrogate mother: she even goes through the motions of giving him birth (Diodorus of Sicily 3.39.3: *tēn de teknōsin genesthai phasi toiautēn: tēn Hēran anabasan epi klinēn kai ton Hēraklea proslabomenēn pros to sōma dia tōn endumatōn apheinai pros tēn gēn, mimoumenēn tēn alēthinēn genesin* 'And the birth happened this way: Hera mounted her bed and took Herakles next to her body and ejected him through her clothes to the ground, re-enacting the true birth').

§75. Birth by Hera is the hero's rebirth, a birth into immortality. Death by lightning is the key to this rebirth: the thunderbolt of Zeus, so prominently featured in the poetry of cosmogony and anthropogony, simultaneously destroys and regenerates: Elysium, one of many different names given to an imagined paradisiacal place of immortalization for heroes after death, is related to the word *en-ēlusion*, which designates a place struck by lightning - a place made sacred by contact with the thunderbolt of Zeus.[136] In a word, the hero can be <u>immortalized</u>, but the fundamental painful fact remains: the hero is not by nature <u>immortal</u>.[137]

The hero as a model of mortality and immortalization

§76. By contrast with heroes, the gods - at least, the gods who dwell on Mount Olympus - are exempt from this ultimate pain of death. When the war-god Ares goes through the motions of death after he is taken off guard and wounded by the mortal Diomedes in *Iliad* V, we detect a touch of humor in the Homeric treatment of the scene, owing to the fact that this particular "death" is a mock death.[138] In the world of epic, the dead seriousness of death can be experienced only by humans.[139]

§77. Mortality is the dominant theme in the epics of ancient Greek heroes, and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are no exception. Mortality is the burning question for the heroes of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and for Achilles and Odysseus in particular. The human condition of mortality, with all its ordeals, defines heroic life itself. The certainty that one day you will die makes you human, distinct from animals who are unaware of their future death - and distinct from the immortal gods.[140] All the ordeals of the human condition culminate in the ultimate ordeal of a warrior hero's violent death in battle, detailed in all its ghastly varieties in the Homeric *Iliad*.[141]

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[136] Nagy 1990b:140-142.

[137] Nagy 1992:x.

[138] The "mock death" of Ares has a ritualistic dimension. The Homeric poems are ambivalent about old-fashioned martial fury as represented by Ares. This figure of Ares is not the god of war per se but of old-fashioned war, as exemplified by martial fury. There will be more on this topic later, when we consider the word *lussa*, meaning 'wolfish rage'.

[139] Nagy 1992:x.

[140] Semonides 1.3-5 W.

[141] Nagy 1992:x.

§78. This deep preoccupation with the primal experience of violent death in war has several possible explanations. Some argue that the answer has to be sought in the simple fact that ancient Greek society accepted war as a necessary and even important part of life.[142]

§79. But the questions must go deeper. Besides engaging in the comparanda linking "epic heroes" to each other from the Panhellenic perspective of Homeric poetry, it is important to consider also the "local color" that anchors the individual hero to the locale that keeps his or her memory alive. This "local color" reveals the ritualistic nature of local acts of remembrance, and how such memorialization becomes ultimately formalized as poetry, "epic" or otherwise.

Evidence for the worship of heroes

§80. The concept of the hero transcends epic or drama or any other genre of verbal art. In the ancient Greek language, the *hērōs* (plural *hērōes*) is not just a character, not just a figure shaped by a genre of verbal art, whether epic or tragedy. The *hērōs* is also a figure of cult. In other words, the *hērōs* is a figure who is worshipped.

§81. We see in this simple formula an essential historical fact about ancient Greek religion. Not only were gods worshipped. Heroes too were worshipped, but this kind of worship was formally differentiated from the worship of gods.[143] The differentiation has to do with the ultimate derivation of the practice of worshipping heroes from older practices of worshipping ancestors.[144] In considering this derivation, we find a vital point of contact between the poetic form of epic and the poetic forms of anthropogony and cosmogony, as represented primarily by Hesiodic and Orphic poetry.

§82. As a most important and ancient typological parallel, I cite the case of Gilgamesh. The identity of this figure, as we trace it back to its earliest Mesopotamian cultural contexts in the Sumerian civilization of the third millennium BCE, was shaped by ideologies of the generic king and dynastic ancestor, who is worshipped as the generic embodiment of anthropogonic and cosmogonic power.[145] In the ancient Egyptian traditions of the Pyramid Texts, there is a comparable envisioning of the generic Pharaoh as the fusion of the divine antagonists Horus

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[142] Nagy 1992:x. Here I am thinking primarily of death in war, but we must not forget the epic theme of death at sea, as elaborated in the Homeric *Odyssey*.
[143] Extensive documentation and analysis in Brelich 1958.
[144] Nagy 1979:115; 1990b:11, 94, 116, 129.
[145] Hendel 1987a:99-100.

and Seth.[146] Also comparable is the evidence for the worship of dead dynastic ancestors in Ugaritic and other West Semitic texts.[147]

§83. The ritual aspect of worshipping Gilgamesh as a prototypical dynastic ancestor is parallel to the mythical aspect of envisioning him as the king of the underworld and judge of the dead.[148] In this context, the myth about the rejection of the proposal of marriage made by the immortal goddess Ishtar to the mortal man Gilgamesh can be seen as a parallel to the rejection of the nymph Calypso by the epic hero Odysseus in *Odyssey* v.[149]

§84. Besides the numerous typological parallels to the ancient Greek practice of worshipping heroes, there are genealogical parallels as well. A prime example is the Indic practice of worshipping heroes, which continues to this day in a wide variety of forms. A heroic figure like Arjuna, one of the Pāṇḍava-s in the epic *Mahābhārata*, is actually worshipped in the context of numerous local festivals in modern times, featuring sacrifices of animal victims and various re-enactments - both epic and dramatic - of the hero's life experiences.[150]

§85. From a survey of the ancient Greek evidence, it is clear that the worship of heroes was a fundamentally local practice, confined to specific locales.[151] Every locale had its own set of local heroes. The local hero being worshipped could be male or female, adult or child.[152] There were literally thousands of local heroes being worshipped in their own respective locales throughout the ancient Greek-speaking world. Some of these heroes are well known to us through poetry, including epic (every hero - major or minor - mentioned in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was potentially a local hero). Others are never mentioned in any poetry known to us.

§86. Even if we had no epic or drama surviving from the ancient Greek world, we would still be fairly well informed, on the basis of non-poetic evidence (prosaic references,

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[146] Hendel 1987a:124.

[147] Hendel 1987a:79, with documentation, including "the theme of the feasting of the royal dead and the rite that actualizes this theme" in an inscription that records the burial of an Aramaic king dated to the eighth-century BCE.

[148] Hendel 1987a:80-81n38.

[149] Hendel 1987a:81n38. For West Semitic parallels, see his p. 74. On Calypso see in general see Crane 1988.

[150] Sax 2002, who shows that the enemies of the Pāṇḍava-s in the epic *Mahābhārata* are likewise worshipped; on Indic practices of hero worship in general, see Harlan 2003; cf. also Smith 1980, 1989, 1990. For an in-depth study of the Indic epic hero as an object of worship, see McGrath 2004.

[151] Brelich 1958.

[152] On female cult heroes, see Larson 1995; on "baby" cult heroes, see Pache 2004. For alternative models of male heroes, see Ebbott 2003.

inscriptions, archaeological remains of cult sites, and so on) about the historical existence of hero worship in the period extending from (roughly) the eighth century BCE onward.[153]

§87. Still, the non-poetic evidence about the religious practice of hero worship can be systematically connected with the existing poetry and with what that poetry says - directly or indirectly - about this religious practice. Moreover, the poetry itself provides additional new evidence about the practice.

§88. Here is a summary of evidence from non-literary and literary sources combined:[154]

§89. In sacrificing to a hero, the worshippers' perspective was directed toward the earth (*khthōn*); when they sacrificed to a god, the perspective was directed toward the sky (*ouranos*), except for a special category of gods called 'chthonic' (*khthonioi*), who likewise required the downward perspective.

§90. When worshippers sacrificed to a god or a hero, the generic term was *thuein*. When they sacrificed to a hero, the specific term was *en-agizein*. When they sacrificed to a god, there was no specific term, unless the god was "chthonic" (in which case, *en-agizein* was the appropriate term). The word *en-agizein* can be interpreted literally as 'take part in the pollution'. The pollution, I take it, is the pollution of death.[155]

§91. In ancient Greek poetry, *thuein* 'sacrifice' is equated with the process of giving *timē* 'honor' to a given god or hero.[156] When worshippers sacrificed to a hero, they would kill a sacrificial animal (victim), cook its meat, and divide it among the participants in the sacrifice, keeping a choice cut of meat, called *geras*, as an offering to the hero. To give heroes their proper *geras* was to give them their proper *timē* 'honor'. The epic hero expresses this concern as an epic concern, as when heroes in the *Iliad* yearn for *timē*.[157]

§92. The most common sacrificial animal to be killed and cooked in worshipping a male hero was a ram. In any sacrifice to a hero, the process was conventionally visualized as happening beneath earth-level (the sacrifice was directed toward a depression in the earth, down into a pit or *bothros*). In any sacrifice to a god (with the exception, again, of the chthonic gods), the sacrifice was visualized as happening above the level of the earth (the sacrifice was directed toward an elevation in the earth, up on top of an altar or *bōmos*). A classic example is

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[153] Nagy 1979:115.

[154] What follows derives mainly from evidence and arguments presented in Nagy 1970, 1996a, 1996b, and 2001c.

[155] For more on *en-agizein*, see Nagy 1979:308.

[156] A classic example of *timē* in the context of hero cult is *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 261; see Nagy 1979:118.

[157] Nagy 1996b:132-138.

the ritual involving the sacrifice of a black ram at the Pit of Pelops during the night before the Olympics begin and the boiling of mutton at the Altar of Zeus after the night was over.[158]

§93. Another aspect of sacrificing to the hero was the ritual pouring of liquids, that is, libations; besides such liquids as water, wine, oil, milk, emulsified honey, and so on, the actual blood of the sacrificial victim could also count for the pouring of certain special kinds of libations. For example, the pouring of blood into the earth in order to make physical contact with the corpse of a hero below was thought to activate the consciousness of the hero, so that the hero could then give advice (= give a *diagnōsis*) from down below concerning questions of fertility and prosperity; in such contexts, the hero was sometimes given the euphemistic name of 'healer' (Iatros, Iasōn / Jason, and so on).[159]

The cult hero

§94. From here on, although I continue to use the verb "worship," I will substitute "cult" for the noun "worship," referring to the practice of worshipping heroes simply as "hero cult," and to the object of worship as the "cult hero."

§95. The choice of the word "cult" is apt. The metaphors historically associated with ancient hero cults are matched by the metaphors implicit in the noun "cult" - and explicit in the verb "cultivate," as in <u>cultivate</u> a <u>field, garden, grove, orchard, vineyard</u>, and so on. These metaphors are explicit also in the noun "culture" - as in the opposition of "cultural" to "natural": <u>culture</u> is opposed to <u>nature</u> to the extent that it is "man-made," but it includes nature to the extent that fields, gardens, groves, orchards, vineyards, and so on are all a <u>cultivation</u> of nature.[160]

§96. Ordinarily, the hero cult was based on the presence of the *sōma* 'body' (corpse) of the hero, lodged in the "mother earth" of the given locale. Whatever we may think about the historical identity of the dead body in any given case, the local inhabitants would have understood that body or body-part to belong to the cult hero. The practice of venerating bodies or body-parts (or, by further metonymy, various objects associated with the bodies) continued beyond ancient Greece; an aspect of continuity is the Christian practice of venerating the relics of saints.[161]

§97. The *sōma* of the hero, lodged in the "mother earth" of the local inhabitants that worshipped the hero, was considered to be a talisman of fertility and prosperity for the inhabitants. The fertility was pictured as the exuberance of plant life (as manifested in harvests from the fields, gardens, groves, orchards, vineyards, and so on), animal life (both

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[158] Nagy 1990a:123-124 on the testimony of Philostratus, *On Gymnastics* 5-6.
[159] Nagy 2001c:xxix.
[160] Nagy 1999b.
[161] Pfister 1909 / 1912.

domesticated and hunted animals), and human life (sexuality and the producing / nurturing of children).

§98. The hero was considered <u>dead</u> - from the standpoint of the place where the hero's *sōma* was situated; at the same time, the hero was considered simultaneously <u>immortalized</u> - from the standpoint of the paradisiacal place that awaited all heroes after death. Such a paradisiacal place, which was considered <u>eschatological</u>, must be contrasted with Hades, which was considered <u>transitional</u>. The name and even the visualization of this otherworldly place varied from hero cult to hero cult. Some of these names are: Elysium, the Islands of the Blessed, the White Island, and, exceptionally, even Olympus in the case of Herakles. Many of these names were applied also to the actual site or sacred precinct of the hero cult.[162]

§99. Heroes were thought to be capable of coming back to life (*anabiōnai*) not only eschatologically, in their timeless paradisiacal abodes, but also sporadically in the present time of their worshippers. Such sporadic "live" appearances were considered to be <u>epiphanies</u>.[163] At the moment of worship, the sacred precinct of the cult hero could become notionally identical to the paradisiacal abode of immortalization from which the cult hero returns to the worshippers. Metonymically, the sacred precinct of the cult hero needed to be a place of cultivation, such as a cultivated field, garden, grove, orchard, vineyard, and so on.

§100. The 'marker' of the *sōma* of the cult hero was the *sēma*, which ordinarily took the physical shape of a 'tomb'. The 'marking' of the *sōma* could also be a sign or signal or token or picture; the word for such a 'marking' was also *sēma*.

§101. The 'marking' of the *sēma* could be a sacred secret. The local details of ritual and myth surrounding a given hero cult were held to be sacred in any case; as such, they tended to be considered secret as well. Or, at least, some of the sacred details were screened by the local inhabitants as secrets that must not be divulged to outsiders. The "outsiders" were not only those who were non-local: they were also those of the local inhabitants who had not yet been initiated - the word for which is *muein* - into the secrets - the word for which is *mustēria* 'mysteries'.[164]

§102. In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we see "signatures" of the double meaning of *sēma* - 'sign' and 'tomb-marker of a hero'. In *Iliad* XXIII 326, *sēma* refers to (1) a sign that signals metaphorically a 'turning point' of life; at XXIII 331, the same word refers to (2) the 'tomb-marker' of a mystically unidentified hero.[165] In *Odyssey* xi 126 *sēma* refers to (1) a sign that

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[162] For an extended discussion, see Nagy 1979 ch. 10 ("Poetic Visions of Immortality for the Hero"); cf. also Lincoln 1981.
[163] Nagy 2001c:xxvi-xxviii.
[164] Nagy 1996a:31-32, 1996b:129-130.
[165] Nagy 1990b:208-222,

signals a critical point in the hero's life and (2) the 'tomb-marker' of the place where the hero's own body is buried in the local "mother earth," contact with which will make the local people *olbioi* (xi 137).[166] This word *olbioi* means 'prosperous' on the surface and 'blessed' underneath the surface. The meaning of 'blessed' applies both to the dead, that is, to the cult hero, and to the living who benefit from contact with the cult hero.[167]

§103. In terms of these Homeric "signatures," the tomb-marker of the cult hero is the meaning of the hero cult. That is, the medium of the *sēma* or tomb-marker of the hero (or ancestor) is the message of the hero (or ancestor). In order to understand his own *sēma*, an epic hero like Odysseus must have *noos*, which is a special kind of mentality that enables the hero to see more than one side of reality.[168] In the *Odyssey*, as we read at the very beginning of the epic (i 1-5), the hero must undertake a quest in order to achieve this kind of mentality or *noos* (i 3) and then he must experience a successful return or *nostos* (i 5). In other words, the epic hero must experience a "journey of a soul."[169]

§104. The fact that ancient Greek heroes were worshipped could never be grasped on the sole basis of the everyday usage of the English word <u>hero</u>, even though it was borrowed from the Greek. In ancient Greek usage, on the other hand, *hērōs* regularly conveys the sense of 'cult hero', not just 'hero' in the everyday sense of English hero.[170] So we must go beyond the word's ordinary levels of meaning in casual contemporary usage. We need to defamiliarize the English word <u>hero</u>, tracing it back to the semantics of ancient Greek *hērōs* (plural *hērōes*).

Characteristics of the **hērōs** *'hero' as both cult hero and epic hero*

§105. In its historical context, the Greek word *hērōs* integrates the concept of the cult hero with the concept of the epic hero - as well as the tragic hero. From such an integrated perspective, we can see three basic characteristics of the *hērōs*:[171]

1. The hero is unseasonal.
2. The hero is extreme - positively (for example, "best" in whatever category) or negatively (the negative aspect can be a function of the hero's unseasonality).
3. The hero is antagonistic toward the god who seems to be most like the hero; antagonism does not rule out an element of attraction (often a "fatal attraction"), which is played out in a variety of ways. The sacred space assigned the hero in hero cult could be coextensive with the sacred space assigned to the god who was considered the hero's divine

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[166] Nagy 1990b:212-214.
[167] Nagy 1990b:127n21.
[168] Nagy 1990b:202-222.
[169] Nagy 1990a:231-232.
[170] The attestations of *hērōs* in Aristotle's *Poetics* are a case in point.
[171] A useful "data base" of myths associated with hero cults is Brelich 1958, who studiously avoids using poetic sources.

antagonist.[172] In other words, god-hero antagonism in myth - including the myths mediated by epic - corresponds to god-hero symbiosis in ritual.

§106. All three characteristics converge in the figure of the hero Herakles. His name *Hēraklēs* 'he who has the glory [*kleos*] of Hera' marks both the medium and the message of the hero.[173] Our first impression is that the name is illogical: it seems to us strange that Herakles should be named after Hera - that his poetic glory or *kleos* should depend on Hera. After all, Herakles is persecuted by Hera throughout his heroic lifespan. And yet, without this unseasonality, without the disequilibrium brought about by the persecution of Hera, Herakles would never have achieved the equilibrium of immortality and the *kleos* that makes his achievements live forever in song.

§107. At the core of the myth of *Hēraklēs* is the meaning of *hērōs* 'hero' as a cognate of *Hērā*, the goddess of seasonality and equilibrium, and of *hōrā*, a noun that actually means 'seasonality' in the context of designating hero cult (as in *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 265).[174] The unseasonality of the *hērōs* in mortal life leads to the *telos* or 'fulfillment' of seasonality in immortal life, which is achieved in the setting of hero cult. The cult epithet of Hera as *teleia* expresses this concept of 'fulfillment'.

§108. Let us consider Herakles in light of the three heroic characteristics I listed earlier:

1. He is made unseasonal by Hera.
2. His unseasonality makes it possible for him to perform his extraordinary Labors. He also commits some deeds that are morally questionable: for example, he destroys the city of Iole and kills her brothers in order to capture her as his bride - even though he is already married to Deianeira (Diodorus of Sicily 4.37.5). It is essential to keep in mind that whenever heroes commit deeds that violate moral codes, such deeds are not condoned by the heroic narrative.[175]
3. He is antagonistic with Hera throughout his lifespan, but he becomes reconciled with her through death: as we have seen, the hero becomes the virtual son of Hera by being reborn

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[172] A classic example is the location of the body of the hero Pyrrhos in the sacred precinct of Apollo at Delphi: see Nagy 1979:118-141. For a typological parallel see Hendel 1987a:104 on the relationship of Jacob with Yahweh, who is both his adversary and his benefactor; more at p. 108 on "the dark side of the god-hero relationship."

[173] The narrative about the name of Herakles is made explicit by Matris of Thebes *FGH* 39 F 2, as transmitted by Diodorus of Sicily 1.24.4 (where the attribution is made to Matris) and 4.10.1 (where the version of Matris is actually retold). On the linguistic validity of the etymology of his name, see Nagy 1996b:48n79; cf. Vielle 1996:15-16. The problem of the short *a* in the middle of the form *Hērăklēs* can best be addressed by comparing the short *a* in the middle of the form *Alkăthoos*, the name of a hero of Megara (cf. Theognis 774) who is closely related thematically to Herakles. I owe this solution to Alexander Nikolaev.

[174] Nagy 1990a:140, 1990b:136.

[175] For more on this point, with comparative evidence, see Davidson 1980.

from her. As the hero's name makes clear, he owes his heroic identity to his *kleos* and, ultimately, to Hera. A parallel is the antagonism of Juno, the Roman equivalent of Hera, toward the hero Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

From non–Homeric Herakles to Homeric Achilles and beyond

§109. The use of the word *kleos* in identifying Herakles as a hero is relevant to the fact that the same word is used in identifying Achilles as an epic hero in the Homeric *Iliad*. In the *Iliad*, *kleos* designates not only 'glory' but also, more specifically, <u>the glory of the hero as conferred by epic</u>. In the *Iliad* (IX 413), Achilles chooses *kleos* over life itself, and he owes his heroic identity to this *kleos*.[176] In other words, Achilles achieves the major goal of the hero: his identity is put on permanent record through *kleos*.

§110. We find in the figure of Achilles the same three heroic characteristics that we found in the figure of Herakles:

1. He is unseasonal: in *Iliad* XXIV 540, Achilles is explicitly described as is *pan-a-(h)ōr-ios* 'the most unseasonal of them all'.[177] His unseasonality is a major cause of his grief, which makes him "a man of constant sorrow."
2. He is extreme, mostly in a positive sense, since he is 'best' in many categories, and 'best of the Achaeans' in the Homeric *Iliad*; occasionally, however, he is extreme in a negative sense, as in his moments of martial fury.[178] In war, the warrior who is possessed by the god of war experiences this kind of fury, which is typically bestial. For example, martial fury in Greek is *lussa*, meaning 'wolfish rage'.[179] Comparable is the Old Norse concept *berserkr* and the Old Irish concept of *ríastrad* 'warp spasm' or 'distortion'.[180]
3. He is antagonistic to the god Apollo, to whom he bears an uncanny resemblance. When Patroklos stands in for Achilles, he displaces Achilles as his ritual substitute in the god-hero antagonism of Apollo / Achilles. At the moment when Patroklos dies, in *Iliad* XVI 786, he is called 'equal to a *daimōn*' - a sign of his status as ritual substitute.[181] The use of the word *daimōn* here, designating an unspecified superhuman force, signals the epic moment of god-hero antagonism. But we see here simultaneously a ritual moment as well, and this simultaneity indicates a convergence between the epic hero and cult hero.

§111. The death of Patroklos as a cult hero and, simultaneously, as an epic hero is visualized as the slaughter of a sacrificial animal. Relevant is the well-attested Greek custom of worshipping a cult hero precisely by way of slaughtering a sacrificial animal.[182] The description

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[176] Nagy 2003:39-48.
[177] Nagy 1996b:48.
[178] Nagy 1979:321.
[179] Lincoln 1975. In this connection, I repeat what I stressed earlier: that Ares is not the Greek god of war per se, but the god of martial fury.
[180] For a comparison of the Old Norse and Old Irish concepts, see Sjoestedt 1940:86. See also Henry 1982. For the translation of Old Irish *ríastrad* as 'warp spasm', see Kinsella 1969. For a lively description of 'warp spasm', see Rees and Rees 1961:248-249.
[181] Nagy 1979:143, 293.
[182] Nagy 1992:x.

of the death of the hero Patroklos in *Iliad* XVI parallels in striking detail the stylized description, documented elsewhere in Homeric poetry (*Odyssey* iii), of the slaughter of a sacrificial heifer: in both cases, the victim is first stunned and disoriented by a fatal blow from behind, then struck frontally by another fatal blow, and then finally administered the coup de grâce.[183] For another example, we may consider an ancient Greek vase-painting that represents the same heroic warrior Patroklos in the shape of a sacrificial ram lying supine with its legs in the air and its throat slit open (lettering next to the painted figure specifies Patroklos).[184]

§112. The era when the practices of hero-worship and animal-sacrifice were current matches the era when the epics of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* took shape. Yet, curiously enough, we find practically no direct mention there of hero-worship and very little detailed description of animal-sacrifice. Homeric poetry, as a medium that achieved its general appeal to the Greeks by virtue of avoiding the parochial concerns of specific locales or regions, tended to avoid realistic descriptions of any ritual, not just ritual sacrifice. This pattern of avoidance is to be expected, given that any ritual tends to be a localized phenomenon in ancient Greece.[185]

§113. What sacrificial scenes we do find in the epics are markedly stylized, devoid of the kind of details that characterize real sacrifices as documented in archaeological and historical evidence. In real sacrifice the parts of the animal victim's body correspond to the members of the body politic. The ritual dismemberment of the animal's body in sacrifice sets a mental pattern for the idea of the reassembly of the hero's body in myths of immortalization. Given, then, that Homeric poetry avoids delving into the details of dismemberment as it applies to animals, in that it avoids the details of sacrificial practice, we may expect a parallel avoidance of the topic of immortalization for the hero. And the local practices of hero-worship, contemporaneous with the evolution of Homeric poetry as we know it, are clearly founded on religious notions of heroic immortalization.[186]

§114. While personal immortalization is too localized in orientation for epics, the hero's death in battle, in all its stunning varieties, is universally acceptable. The *Iliad* seems to make up for its avoidance of details concerning the sacrifices of animals by dwelling on details concerning the martial deaths of heroes. In this way Homeric poetry, with its staggering volume of minutely detailed descriptions of the deaths of warriors, can serve as a compensation for sacrifice itself.[187] Similarly in the Indic epic of the *Mahābhārata*, death in war is equated with sacrifice.[188]

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[183] Lowenstam 1981.
[184] Nagy 1992:x-xi. On the images of Patroklos as a sacrificial ram, see Griffiths 1985 and 1989.
[185] Nagy 1992:xi.
[186] Nagy 1992:xi-xii.
[187] Nagy 1992:xii.
[188] Hiltebeitel 1976.

§115. Whereas the epic hero is generally shown as antagonistic toward the god who most resembles him - and the antagonism is most forcefully reciprocated by the corresponding god - the cult hero becomes conventionally reconciled in the ritual context of the actual cult.[189] Beyond the patterns of god-hero antagonism in epic and of god-hero symbiosis in cult, we find occasional narratives where both the antagonism and the symbiosis are accommodated, as in the story of Herakles' rebirth from Hera. There are parallels in Indian traditions, as in the stories about the Indian heroes Śisupāla and Jarāsandha in the epic *Mahābhārata*: the identities of these heroes become absorbed into the corresponding identities of their divine antagonists.[190]

§116. Finally, in one exceptional instance, the identities of god and epic hero are merged in the picturing of the poet who sings the epics of heroes. In *Iliad* IX 189 Achilles is pictured as singing the *klea andrōn* 'glories of heroes' while accompanying himself on the lyre.[191] In this picture we see the very image of Apollo's own self-accompanied performances.[192] The god prefigures the hero who sings the glories of epic heroes, but the hero in turn prefigures the poet. Just as the poet who "quotes" the hero becomes the medium of the hero and thus becomes identified with him, so also the hero of epic becomes identified with the poet of epic.[193]

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[189] Extensive analysis in Nagy 1979:118-141, with reference to myths and rituals connected with the hero Pyrrhos / Neoptolemos.
[190] Davidson 1980, building on evidence collected by Dumézil 1968.
[191] Nagy 1990a:201-202.
[192] On Achilles as a look-alike of Apollo, see Nagy 1994a:142-143.
[193] Nagy 2001c:xxx-xxxii. On the poet as hero, see especially Martin 1989, Reynolds 1995, Foley 1996.

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