Culture and Belief 22

Hour 07- The Sign of the Hero

Sema: on the surface it means sign, signal or symbol, but it also has a deeper meaning, which is tomb or tomb of a hero.

Semainein: a verb that means to indicate

Iliad XXII- Professor Nagy focuses on the importance of chariot racing. Symbolically, driving a chariot successfully is in the same category as living a successful life. In the chariot races, the right hand is dominant and the left hand is recessive, and the chariots move counter clockwise around the track, so the left turn is especially important.

PASSAGE A: Iliad XXIII: Nestor talks to his son Antilokhos about tips for the race because he has slower horses. The left turn is the most dangerous and most difficult part of the race. You must start to whip the right horse, and rein in the left horse to come in as close as possible to the turning post. You have to have a balance of intelligence, brute force [bie], and skill [metis]. If Antilokhos can get around the first left turn first and have perfect left turns for the rest of the race, even the best horses cannot beat him. Nestor says, “I will give you this certain sign [sema] which cannot escape your notice”, and “It may have been a tomb [sema] of someone who died long ago.” Sema as said before means a sign, but also a tomb of a hero. Nestor uses it in both ways in this passage.

Chariot racing is a part of the Greek way of life. It is the most prestigious athletic event. Athletics were not just for entertainment, but they were also a ritual activity to make up for death. If someone (normally a hero) died in a big, larger than life way, they would do athletics to make up for that death.

GUY P. SMOOT: Patroklos’ death could be symbolized as Patroklos failing to make the left turn. It is as if Achilles advised him to take the critical left turn, but Patroklos kept going so he dies. Patroklos dies before the Scaean gates of Troy, which in Greek has two meanings: 1) “Gates of the Left” and 2) “Western Gates” because the left-hand side was equated with the West, the “sinister” direction of the setting sun, which may represent death. GN: It is “sinister” (“of the left” in Latin). By dying before the Scaean Gates “Gates of the Left/ West,” Patroklos failed to make the left turn. You need a perfect balance of dominant and recessive forces for turning left, so it was as if Patroklos became imbalanced when Sarpedon accidentally killed Achilles’ mortal trace horse Pedasos, as he had aimed his spear at Patroklos himself. The two only other horses of Achilles left alive are the two immortal horses Xanthos
and Balios. The mortal horse Pedasos who dies can symbolically be Patroklos. So now all Patroklos has left are Achilles’ two immortal horses Balios and Xanthos, inferentially dominant horses of incitement and impulse, left unchecked by Pedasos.

VIDEO: The ordeal of chariot racing as re-enactment: this video depicts how hard it is to make the left turn, showing that many chariots were destroyed in these areas of the race.

PASSAGE B: The spirit [psukhe] of Patroklos comes to Achilles in a dream. The psukhe is the essence of life while one is alive; conveyor of identity while one is dead. Patroklos asks Achilles to bury him soon so he can go to Hades, and to put his and Achilles’ bones in a single urn.

VASE PAINTING: from Athens. It shows a chariot race where Achilles is running. It is describing a special athletic event involving a chariot race in which you have to jump off of the speeding chariot at a certain time, run with all of your armor on, then get back onto the chariot. At the top of the vase, one reads the inscription PHSUKHE (as described before). There is a white mass in the back, which is the tomb of Patroklos (and later on Achilles). Patroklos is at the top, hovering over his tomb.

GUY P. SMOOT: the name of Patroklos’ father Menoitios is a talking name, it means “he who awaits his fate.” The very first time Patroklos, he is ominously referred to by the patronymic (showing the name of his father) the son of Menoitios. It is almost as if, the name of his father predicts the character’s death in the Iliad.

PICTURE: Achilles is dragging Hector’s corpse in a chariot race.

Maori WAR SONG: “I die, I die, I live, I live” is sometimes chanted in athletic events, particularly rugby. Singing like this in an athletic event recovers heroes in the past. While singing, people often stick out their tongue as an act of intimidation and defiance against the enemy. A video is shown of a rugby player who has ripped off his shirt, chanting and sticking his tongue out at the enemy.

James Townshend: the Maori war dance is called a Haka; the Tongan war dance seen in the second video is called a Sipi Tau; other Pacific peoples have similar challenges, e.g., the Samoan Siva Tau and Fijian Cibi (pronounced Chibi).

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1 Guy Smoot's rationale for seeing the death of Pedasos as a substitute for the death of Patroklos are 1) the fact that Sarpedon had aimed Patroklos, but instead struck Pedasos, 2) the name of Achilles’ horse Pedasos is homophonous with that of a city in the Troad, which was inhabited by an ethnic group called the Leleges: in a Hesiodic fragment, the eponym Lelex was the first king of the Loc-rians, which is Patrokllos’ own regional ethnic group since he hails from Opous. Furthermore, numerous Greek sources equate the Leleges with Patroklos’ Locrians or regard them as closely related. So a Greek audience would have known that the onomastics of Achilles’ mortal horse Pedasos was reminiscent of Patroklos’ Locrian identity.
The Haka seen in both videos was Ka Mate Ka Mate; the All Blacks, New Zealand’s national rugby team, also perform a different haka, called Kapa o Pango, when they want to ratchet up the intimidation factor.

**PASSAGE C:** This is a heartbreaking moment in the *Iliad.* King Priam wants the body of his son back from Achilles in order to give his son a proper burial. Finally pity takes hold of Achilles, and the suffering father moves him emotionally. Achilles starts to see things in a different way. He had been acting like a wild animal. Achilles makes the connection that he has a father too, and if Achilles were to die, his father would want his body for a proper burial. King Priam and Achilles both start to weep. Achilles cries at first for his father but later for Patroklos who died for him.

GUY P. SMOOT: This is the first time King Priam and Achilles start to eat and sleep again. Pain and sorrow are physiological pains.

Recall: Nestor and Antilokhos (who will give up his life for his father). Antilokhos makes a sacrifice, which is key to his becoming a hero.

**PASSAGE D:** Daimon: the mystical way to refer to a given god or a given human at the moment of his/her identification with the god. She would dip her baby in fire to turn the baby immortal. Her parents did not know of this, so when he bloomed, he was looking like a god.

**PASSAGE E:** The baby did not become immortal. The baby will die, but he will have hero cult that will last forever. “unwilling honor” [time aphthitos]. Guy Smoot: the dedication of the Nemean Games in Ancient Greece to the baby hero Opheltes renamed Arkhemoros “the beginning of Doom” parallels Patroklos' identity as the son of MENOITIOS “he who awaits his Doom.” Patroklos, whose very name “Glory of the Ancestors” embodies the cult of heroes in Ancient Greece is to the Trojan War saga what Arkhemoros is to the Theban War saga.

**GRAPHIC NOVEL:** Upper left picture: the baby being put in fire, Upper right picture: the woman is striking her thighs with down turned hands, a symbol that someone will die, Lower left picture: the baby is taken out of the fire and is dead, Lower right picture: there are athletic events to honor the child.

**PASSAGE F:** Thetis tells Achilles of the two ways in which he could “meet (his) end [telos]”. He can fight and die, but will have eternal glory [kleos], or he can go home and live longer but without unwilling [aphthiton] glory.

**RELATED TO MODERN TIMES:** In a suburb of Paris is Jim Morrison's tomb with the inscription done by his father, which says in Greek that he followed his own daimon. Above this is the expression of love written on the tomb. His father said he and his son didn’t always agree but he loved him and he respected his son’s musical genius.