Hour 11

Key word for this dialogue: olbios ‘blessed’ (for the initiated) and ‘prosperous, happy’ (for the uninitiated). The cult hero is olbios ‘blessed’ after he or she dies. The worshipper of a hero becomes olbios ‘blessed’ by making contact with the hero. Most relevant is a word we have considered at length already, sēma. In Passage A, note the sēma of Achilles, which looks out over the Hellespont:

A) Odyssey xxiv 35-97: "Happy [olbios] son of Peleus," answered the ghost [psukhē] of Agamemnon, "for having died at Troy far from Argos, while the bravest of the Trojans and the Achaeans fell round you fighting for your body. There you lay in the whirling clouds of dust, all huge and hugely, heedless now of your chariot-riding. ... Then, when we had borne you to the ships out of the fray, we laid you on your bed and cleansed your fair skin with warm water and with ointments. The Danaans tore their hair and wept bitterly round about you. Your mother, when she heard, came with her immortal nymphs from out of the sea, and the sound of a great wailing went forth over the waters so that the Achaeans quaked for fear. ... The daughters of the old man of the sea stood round you weeping bitterly, and clothed you in immortal raiment. The nine muses also came and lifted up their sweet voices in lament—calling and answering one another; there was not an Argive but wept for pity of the dirge they chanted. Days and nights seven and ten we mourned you, mortals and immortals, but on the eighteenth day we gave you to the flames, and many a fat sheep with many an ox did we slay in sacrifice around you. You were burnt in raiment of the gods, with rich resins and with honey, while heroes—horse and foot—clashed their armor round the pile as you were burning, with the tramp as of a great multitude. But when the flames of heaven had done their work, we gathered your white bones at daybreak and laid them in ointments and in pure wine. Your mother brought us a golden vase to hold them—gift of Dionysos, and work of Hephaistos himself; in this we mingled also those of Antilokhos, who had been closer to you than any other of your comrades now that Patroklos was no more. [80] Over these the host of the Argives built a noble tomb [tumbos] on a point jutting out over the open Hellespont, that it might be seen from far out upon the sea by those now living and by them that shall be born hereafter. Your mother begged prizes from the gods, and offered them to be contended for in a contest [agon] of the noblest of the Achaeans. You must have been present at the funeral of many a hero, when the young men gird themselves and make ready to contend for prizes on the death of some great chieftain, but you never saw such prizes as silver-footed Thetis offered in your honor; for the gods loved you well. Thus even in death your kleos, Achilles, has not been lost, and your name lives evermore among all mankind. But as for me, what solace had I when the days of my fighting were done? For Zeus willed my destruction on my return [nostos], by the hands of Aegisthus and those of my wicked wife."

B) Odyssey xi 90-137: Then came also the ghost [psukhē] of Theban Teiresias, with his golden scepter in his hand. He knew me and said, 'Odysseus, noble son of Laertes, why, poor man, have you left the light of day and come down to visit the dead in this sad place? Stand back from the trench and withdraw your sword that I may drink of the blood and answer your questions truly.' [97] So I drew back, and sheathed my sword, whereon when he had drank of the blood he began with his prophecy [= words of a mantis]. [100] 'You want to know,' said he, 'about your return home [nostos], but the gods will make this hard for you. I do not think that you will escape the eye of Poseidon, who still nurses his bitter grudge against you for having blinded his son. Still, after much suffering you may get home if you can restrain yourself and your
companions when your ship reaches the Thrinacian island, where you will find the sheep and cattle belonging to the sun, who sees and gives ear to everything. If you leave these flocks unharmed and think of nothing but of getting home [nostos], you may yet after much hardship reach Ithaca; but if you harm them, then I forewarn you of the destruction both of your ship and of your men. Even though you may yourself escape, you will return in bad plight after losing all your men, in another man's ship, and you will find trouble in your house, which will be overrun by high-handed people, who are devouring your substance under the pretext of paying court and making presents to your wife. [118] When you get home you will take your revenge on these suitors; and after you have killed them by force [biē] or fraud in your own house, you must take a well-made oar and carry it on and on, till you come to a country where the people have never heard of the sea and do not even mix salt with their food, nor do they know anything about ships, and oars that are as the wings of a ship. I will give you this certain token [sēma] which cannot escape your notice. A wayfarer will meet you and will say it must be a winnowing shovel that you have got upon your shoulder; on this you must fix the oar in the ground and sacrifice a ram, a bull, and a boar to Poseidion. Then go home and offer hecatombs to the gods in the sky one after the other. As for yourself, death shall come to you from the sea, and your life shall ebb away very gently when you are full of years and peace of mind, and your people shall be prosperous [olbioi]. All that I have said will come true.'

Notes:
1) Odyssey i 3 Odysseus saw the cities of many and came to know their/his noos
2) Odyssey i 5 Odysseus seeking to win as a prize his psukhē, plus [his nostos and] the nostos of his companions
3) noos of Teiresias at Odyssey xi 493-495 / nostos is first word of Teiresias at Odyssey xi 100
4) Compare Odyssey xi 121-137 with the different version in Odyssey xxiii 267-268: there it is made explicit that Odysseus is to travel through the cities of humankind. The "journey of a soul" through many different cultures, with different values, is key to noos.
5) Compare Odyssey i 3: Odysseus, by virtue of traveling throughout the cities of humankind, comes to "know" noos. The question remains: whose noos?
6) Odyssey xi 126 'I will give you this certain token [sēma], and you cannot have lēthē about it'.
7) Compare the clip from Kurosawa's Dreams, "A gravestone marker for a journey of the soul."
8) 'winnowing-shovel' at Odyssey xi 128; it is a mistake to translate as 'winnowing-fan'; a winnowing shovel looks just like an oar, but a winnowing-fan does not.

C) Two variant tales, collected by folklorists in early-20th-century Greece and analyzed by William F. Hansen, about St. Elias [known as the Prophet Elijah in the Hebrew bible]:

Variant 1[a]: Saint Elias was a seaman who lived a dissolute life, but he repented of what he had done and thereby detested the sea. {Variant 1[b]: because he had suffered much at sea and had often nearly drowned, he became disgusted with voyaging.} He resolved to go to a place where people know neither what the sea was nor what ships were. Putting his oar on his shoulder he set out on land, asking everyone he met what he was carrying. So long as they answered that it was an oar, he proceeded to higher and higher ground. Finally, at the top of a mountain he asked his question, and the people answered, 'a stick'. Understanding then that they had never seen an oar, he remained there with them.

Variant 2: The Prophet Elias was a fisherman who, because of terrible weather and terrific storms, became afraid of the sea. So he put an oar on his shoulder and took to the hills. When he met a
man, he asked him what it was he was carrying; the man answered that it was an oar, and Elias went on. The same happened when he met a second man. But at the top of a mountain, he asked a third man, who replied, 'why, that's a stick'. Saint Elias resolved to stay there. He planted his oar in the ground, and that is why his chapels are all built on hilltops.

Variant 3: In some versions, the natives' decisive answer is not 'a stick' but 'a baker's peel' [phtyri tou phournou = "winnowing-shovel of the oven"].

Notes:
1) Feast Day of the Prophet Elias: July 20. This date coincides, roughly, with harvesting season. It is around this time when wheat is gathered and winnowed.
2) There is a hero cult of Odysseus in Arcadia, where he is worshipped together with Athena as goddess of pilots and Poseidon as god of the sea (Pausanias 8.44.4); note that Arcadia is mountainous and landlocked.
3) Planting of winnowing-shovel on top of a mound of winnowed grain (Theocritus 7.155ff): a symbolic gesture, meaning "the harvest is accomplished = finished."
4) Tomb of Elpenor: Odyssey xi 75-78, xii 13-15. This sēma 'tomb' is also a 'sign, signal, symbol' meaning "the sailor is dead."

D) Odyssey xix 106-114: "Lady," answered Odysseus, "who on the face of the whole earth can dare to chide with you? Your fame [kleos] reaches the firmament of heaven itself; you are like some blameless king, who upholds righteousness [= good dikē], as the monarch over a great and valiant nation: the earth yields its wheat and barley, the trees are loaded with fruit, the ewes bring forth lambs, and the sea abounds with fish by reason of his virtues, and his people do good deeds under him.

This word dikē means 'justice' (long-range) and 'judgment' (short-range). The sign of dikē is a thriving or blooming field / garden / orchard / grove / vineyard / etc.