Title: “Blessed are the Heroes”

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.

Passage A) Odyssey xxiv 35-97: "Happy [olbios] son of Peleus," answered the ghost [psukhe] 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 your bleached bones with those of Patroklos who had gone before you, and separate we enclosed 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 [psukhe] 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 Poseidon. 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.'

Passage C) Herodotus 1.30.2-5: “Athenian xenos, we have heard much about your wisdom [sophia] and your wanderings, that you have gone all over the world philosophizing, so now I desire to ask you who is the most olbios man you have seen.” Croesus asked this question expecting the answer to be himself, but Solon, instead of flattering him, told it as it was and said, “O King, it is Tellos the Athenian.” Croesus marveled at what he had said and replied sharply, “In what way do you judge [krinein] Tellos to be the most olbios?” Solon said, “Tellos was from a prosperous polis and his children were good and noble [agathoi]. He saw them all have children of their own, and all of these survived. His life was well off by our standards, and his death was most distinguished: when the Athenians were fighting their neighbors in Eleusis, he came to help, routed the enemy, and died most beautifully. The Athenians buried him at public expense on the spot where he fell and gave him much timē.”

B) Herodotus 1.31.1-5: When Solon had provoked him by saying that the affairs of Tellos were so olbios, Croesus asked who he thought was next, fully expecting to win second prize. Solon answered, “Kleobis and Biton.” They were Argive in genos, they had enough to live on, and on top of this they had great bodily strength. Both were prize-winning athletes [athlophoroi], and this story is told about them: There was a festival of Hēra in Argos, and their mother absolutely had to be conveyed to the sacred precinct by a team of oxen. But their oxen had not come back from the fields in time [hōra], so the youths took the yoke upon their own shoulders under constraint of time [hōra]. They drew the wagon, with their mother riding atop it, traveling 45 stadia until they arrived at the sacred precinct. When they had done this and had been seen by the entire gathering, their lives came to the best fulfillment [ariston telos], and in their case the god made clear that for human beings it is better to be dead than to live. The Argive men stood around the youths and congratulated them on their strength; the Argive women congratulated their mother for having such children. She was overjoyed at the feat and at the praise, so she stood before the image and prayed that the goddess might grant the best thing for humanity to her children Kleobis and Biton, who had given great timē to the goddess. After this prayer they sacrificed and feasted. The youths then lay down in the sacred precinct and went to sleep, and they
never got up again; they remained in the pose that they had assumed in reaching their telos. The Argives made and dedicated at Delphi statues of them, since they were aristoi.”

[E] Homeric Hymn to Demeter 265-268:

260   ... immortal and ageless for all days
would I have made your philos little boy, and I would have given him an honor [timē] that is imperishable [a-phthi-tos].
But now there is no way for him to avoid death and doom.
Still, he will have an honor [timē] that is imperishable [a-phthi-tos], for all time, because he had once sat
on my knees and slept in my arms.
265   At the right timely season [hōra], every year,
the sons of the Eleusinians will have a war, a terrible battle
among each other. They will do so for all days to come.
I am Demeter, the holder of honors [timai]. I am the greatest boon and joy for immortals and mortals alike.

Passage F) Odyssey xix 107-114: “My 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.

Passage G) Odyssey xxiv: As he went down into the great orchard, ... he found his father alone, hoeing a vine. ... He went up to his father, who was bending down and digging about a plant. [244] “I see, sir,” said Odysseus, “that you are an excellent gardener - what pains you take with it, to be sure. There is not a single plant, not a fig tree, vine, olive, pear, nor flower bed, but bears the trace of your attention.”

H) Herodotus 9.120. The people of the Chersonesus say that a portent happened to one of the guards while he was roasting salted fish [tarikhoi]: the salted fish on the fire began to jump and writhe just like newly-caught fish. A crowd gathered in amazement, but when Artayktes saw the portent he called to the man roasting the salted fish and said, “Athenian xenos, have no fear of this portent; it has not been sent to you. Instead Protesilaos of Elaious indicates [sēmainein] to me that even when dead and dried [tarikhos] he holds power from the gods to punish one who treats him without dikē.

I) Heraclitus 22 B 93 DK:
The Lord [= Apollo] whose oracle is in Delphi neither says nor conceals: he indicates [sēmainein].

J) Herodotus 1.47:
I know [oida] the number of the sands and the measure of the sea. I understand the mute and I hear the one who does not speak. The smell has come to my senses of a hard-shelled tortoise, boiling with meat of lamb, where bronze is spread below, bronze set above.

Passage K) Herodotus 1.5: Concerning these things, I am not going to say that they were so or otherwise, but I will indicate [sēmainein] the one who I myself know [oida] first began unjust deeds against the Hellenes. I will go on further in my account, treating equally of great and small cities of humankind, for many of those that were great in the past have become small, and those that were great in my day were formerly small. Knowing that human good fortune [eudaimonia] never remains in the same state, I will mention both equally.
Xerxes’ governor Artayktes, a Persian and a clever and impious man, was *turannos* of this province. He had deceived the king in his march on Athens by robbing from Elaious the property of Protesilaos son of Iphiklos. The grave of Protesilaos is at Elaious in the Chersonese, with a sacred precinct around it. There were many goods there: gold and silver bowls, bronze, apparel, and other dedicated offerings, all of which Artayktes carried off by the king’s gift. He deceived Xerxes by saying, “Master, there is here the house [oikos] of a Hellene who waged war against your land, but he met with dikē and was killed. Give me his oikos so that all may know not to wage war against your land.” He thought he would easily persuade Xerxes to give him a man’s oikos by saying this, since Xerxes had no suspicion of what he really thought. When he said that Protesilaos waged war against the king’s land, he had in mind that the Persians consider all Asia to belong to them and to their successive kings. So the king made him the gift, and he carried the goods from Elaious to Sestos, planting and farming the sacred precinct. Whenever he came to Elaious, he would even have sex with women in the sanctuary.