Hour 15. The meaning of the hero. Key word: sēmainein ‘mean something, indicate something by way of a sēma’

Passage A. 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.

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

Passage C. 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 D. 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.

Passage E. Herodotus 9.116:
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.

Passage F. Pausanias (2nd century CE) describes an initiation into the mysteries of a hero cult (9.39.5ff): When a man has made up his mind to descend to the oracle of Trophonios, he first lodges in a certain building [oikēma] for an appointed number of days, this being sacred to the Good Daimon and to Good Fortune. While he lodges there, among other regulations for purity he abstains from hot baths, bathing only in the river Hercyna. Meat he has in plenty from the sacrifices, for he who descends sacrifices to Trophonios himself and to the children of Trophonios, to Apollo also and to Kronos, to Zeus with the epithet King [Basileus], to Hera Charioteer [Hēniokhos], and to Demeter whom they name with the epithet Europa and say was the wetnurse of Trophonios. [9.35.6] At each sacrifice a diviner [mantis] is present, who looks into the entrails of the sacrificial victim, and after an inspection prophesies to the person descending whether Trophonios will give him a kind [eumenēs] and gracious reception. The entrails of the other victims do not declare the mind of Trophonios so much as a ram, which each inquirer sacrifices over a pit [bothros] on the night he descends, calling upon Agamedes. Even though the previous sacrifices have appeared...
propitious, no account is taken of them unless the entrails of this ram indicate the same; but if they agree, then the inquirer descends in good hope. The procedure of the descent is this. [9.39.7] First, during the night he is taken to the river Hercyna by two boys of the citizens about thirteen years old, named Hermæ,² who after taking him there anoint him with oil and wash him. It is these who wash the descender, and do all the other necessary services as his attendant boys. After this he is taken by the priests, not at once to the oracle, but to fountains of water very near to each other. [9.39.8] Here he must drink water called the water of Forgetfulness [Lēthē], that he may forget all that he has been thinking of hitherto, and afterwards he drinks of another water, the water of Memory [Mnēmosunē], which causes him to remember what he sees after his descent. After looking at the image [agalma] which they say was made by Daedalus (it is not shown by the priests save to such as are going to visit Trophonios), having seen it, worshipped it and prayed, he proceeds to the oracle, dressed in a linen tunic, with ribbons girding it, and wearing the boots of the native locale.³ [9.39.9] The oracle is on the mountain, beyond the grove. Round it is a circular basement of white marble, the circumference of which is about that of the smallest threshing floor, while its height is just short of two cubits. On the basement stand spikes, which, like the cross-bars holding them together, are of bronze, while through them has been made a double door. Within the enclosure is a chasm [khasmā] in the earth, not natural, but artificially constructed after the most accurate masonry. [9.39.10] The shape of this structure is like that of a bread-oven. Its breadth across the middle one might conjecture to be about four cubits, and its depth also could not be estimated to extend to more than eight cubits. They have made no way of descent to the bottom, but when a man comes to Trophonios, they bring him a narrow, light ladder. After going down he finds a hole between the floor and the structure. Its breadth appeared to be two spans, and its height one span. [9.39.11] The descender lies with his back on the ground, holding barley-cakes [mazai] kneaded with honey, thrusts his feet into the hole and himself follows, trying hard to get his knees into the hole. After his knees the rest of his body is at once swiftly drawn in, just as the largest and most rapid river will catch a man in its eddy and carry him under. After this those who have entered the shrine learn the future, not in one and the same way in all cases, but by sight sometimes and at other times by hearing. The return upwards is by the same mouth, the feet darting out first. [9.39.12] ... [9.39.13] After his ascent from Trophonios the inquirer is again taken in hand by the priests, who set him upon a chair called the Throne of Memory [Mnēmosunē], which stands not far from the shrine, and they ask of him, when seated there, all he has seen or learned. After gaining this information they then entrust him to his relatives. These lift him, paralyzèd with terror and unconscious both of himself and of his surroundings, and carry him to the building [oikēma] where he lodged before with Good Fortune and the Good Daimôn. Afterwards, however, he will recover all his faculties, and the power to laugh will return to him. [9.39.14] What I write is not hearsay; I have myself inquired of Trophonios and seen other inquirers.

Passage G. Philostratus On Heroes 7.4-6 At any rate, among those who critically examine Homer’s poems, who will you say reads [anagignōskhein] and has insight [di-horān] into them as Protesilaos does? Indeed, my guest, before Priam and Troy there was no epic recitation [rhapsōidia], nor had anyone sung of events that had not yet taken place. There was poetry about prophetic matters and about Herakles, son of Alkmēnē, recently arranged but not yet developed fully, but Homer had not yet sung. Some say that it was when Troy was captured, others say it was a few or even eight generations later that he applied himself to poetic composition. Nevertheless, Protesilaos knows everything of Homer and sings of many Trojan events that took place after his own lifetime, and also of many Hellenic and Median events.

² "Hermae" is the plural of "Hermes."

³ Note that the groundedness of the local hero cult is reinforced by the idea of local footwear.