

ΟΜΗΡΟΝ ΕΞ ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΥ ΣΑΦΗΝΙΖΕΙΝ: *ILLAD* 7.332–338  
AND *AGAMEMNON* 433–455

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BRINGING HOME THE BONES has been an Homeric problem only since Aristarchus. It seems not to have been a problem for Aeschylus, who successfully produced on stage before all the Athenians the very crux that nearly all scholars since Aristarchus find so reprehensible and indefensible in Homer. Is this a question of poets and pedants or have pre-Aristotelian poets pre-Aristotelian logic?<sup>1</sup> The remarkable lines are *Iliad* 7.332–338:

αὐτοὶ δ' ἀγρόμενοι κυκλήσομεν ἐνθάδε νεκροὺς  
βουσὶ καὶ ἡμιόνουσιν· ἀτὰρ κατακόμεν αὐτοὺς  
τυτθὸν ἀποπρὸ νεῶν, ὥς κ' ὅστέα παισὶν ἕκαστος  
οἴκαδ' ἄγῃ, ὅτ' ἂν αὖτε νεώμεθα πατρίδα γαίαν.  
τύμβον δ' ἀμφὶ πυρὴν ἕνα χεύομεν ἐξαγαγόντες  
ἄκριτον ἐκ πεδίου· ποτὶ δ' αὐτὸν δείμομεν ὦκα  
πύργους ὑψηλοῦς, εἰλαρ νηῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν.

Let us ourselves gather and put the corpses here round about (the camp)  
with the oxen and mules: and let us cremate them  
a bit off from the ships, so that (fathers') bones to children severally  
we may take home, whenever we again return to the father(s) land;  
and one (continuous) mound along the pyre let us heap, extending it continuously  
away from the plain; and against it let us quickly build  
high ramparts, a bulwark both for the ships and for ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Commentary on these lines wonderfully illustrates scholarship. Aristarchus athetized 334–335 because it was customary to cremate the dead *en masse* and

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented in Wallace McLeod's Homer seminar at the University of Toronto in 1978; see McLeod 1987: 364. To him my thanks.

<sup>2</sup> F. Combellack (privately): "What annoys me about the passage is the clumsy language. It clearly says, though it cannot mean, 'so that each man may carry his bones home for his children.'" But is this not a notorious characteristic of English idiom? French and German are as "clumsy" as Greek: Brûlons-les et rapportons aux enfants les os; Verbrennen wir sie, um den Kindern die Knochen zurückzubringen; let us bring the bodies here and burn them and take the bones home each to his own. English often insists on being explicit about possessive pronouns—at the risk of clumsiness. My translation is unusual in three respects. First, κυκλήσομεν is taken to mean "let us dispose (the corpses) in a circle (round the camp)." This eliminates the usual complaint that the usual translation "let us wheel (in a wagon)" otherwise first occurs in tragedy. Second, ἀμφὶ πυρὴν "along the pyre" is well supported in the immediate context: τεῖχος ἐτειχίσσαντο νεῶν ὕπερ, ἀμφὶ δὲ τάφρον ἤλασαν (7.449–50): the ditch is dug "along the wall," not "around, about, on both sides of the wall." Compare also 1.409, 7.329. Third, ἐκ πεδίου "away from, beyond the plain," as ἐκ νεῶν (8.213). "beyond the ships," ἐξ ἁλός (*Od.* 11.134), "away from the sea."

collect their confounded remains for burial in a *polyandria*: it was therefore impossible for each to take his own bones separately home, presumably in a *monandria*.<sup>3</sup>

F. Jacoby advanced scholarship by precisely dating and locating the interpolation in fifth-century Athens, repatriation of ashes having originated then and there:

It is certain that the lines are interpolated (Schol. A . . .) and the question concerning them is rather important for the history of the text of the *Iliad*. If the addition was made in Greece proper (which I should not maintain with the assurance of Wilamowitz ["sicherlich kein athenischer"]) it can only have been made in Athens. For Athens alone did transfer her dead from abroad after 464 B.C. . . . If the interpolation was made in Athens, it is at least fifty years later than the Theseus line *Il.* A 235 which I should put in the last decades of the sixth century.<sup>4</sup>

The historian predictably holds history to be productive of poetry. He will doubtless demand historical precedents for much else, and for Iphigenia singing a paean at her father's banquets (Aesch. *Agam.* 243–247).

The Cambridge *Iliad* commentary reiterates the scholars' position: "One phenomenon and one only [in Homer] can be securely dated after 700, and that is Nestor's proposal at *Il.* 7.334 f. (in an inorganic couplet athetized by Aristarchus) that the Achaean dead should be burned 'so that each man may bring home the bones for the children, whenever we return to our native land'—a custom apparently initiated by the Athenians in 464 B.C."<sup>5</sup> Kirk's comment *ad*

<sup>3</sup> Schol. A: ἀθετοῦνται, ὅτι οὐ διὰ τοῦτο ἐκαίοντο, ὅπως τὰ ὅσα κομίσωνται, ἀλλὰ συνηθεία· καὶ γὰρ οἱ ἐπὶ τῆς ἰδίας τελευτῶντες ἐκαίοντο. καθόλου οὖν οἶδεν πυρὶ καιομένους τοὺς πάλαι καὶ ἐνταῦθα τιθεμένους, ὅπου καὶ ἐτελεύτησαν. ἐναντιοῦνται δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς "τύμβον . . . πεδίου," ἀδισχώριστον, ἀδιάστατον, τουτέστι πολυάνδριον· πῶς οὖν ὥς κ' ὅστέα παισὶν ἕκαστος (334); Erbse 1971: 279. Schol. T: καὶ πῶς ἐν 'Οδυσσεΐα φησὶν· "ἀμφ' αὐτοῖς <ι δ'> ἔπειτα μέγαν <καὶ ἀμύμονα τύμβον / χεύσαμεν>" (ω 80–1); Erbse 1971: 280.

Twentieth century scholars idolize the scholar and obelize the poet. Leaf 1900: 321, "334–5 were athetized by Ar. on the sufficient ground that the making of a common tomb was inconsistent with taking home their bones: a practice which we do not elsewhere find in the Homeric age . . . ludicrously feeble in expression."

The scholar's scholar concurs: Wilamowitz 1916: 55, "mit der Sitte der homerischen Gedichte in den grellsten Widerspruch . . . Erst im Mutterlande kann der Zusatz entstanden sein, einer der spätesten in der *Ilias* und sicherlich kein athenischer."

<sup>4</sup> Jacoby 1944: 44, n. 30. Scholarly prose can hardly be more incisive than Page (1959: 323): "Professor Felix Jacoby in a widely quoted article distinguished by a depth and breadth of learning beyond the scope of most of us, established the following propositions: that the practice of bringing the bodies (or ashes) of the fallen warrior back to his native land was peculiar to Athens; and that it was not instituted there until 464 B.C. It was uniform Hellenic custom to bury the fallen in a *polyandria* on the battlefield. The practice to which Nestor alludes is not merely unknown to the Greek Epic: it is unknown to Greek history—except at Athens in this late period. It is, says Jacoby, "a specialty of Athens," a "custom . . . known only for Athens."

<sup>5</sup> Kirk 1985: 10. For the same comment twenty-five years earlier see Kirk 1960: 195, reprinted in Kirk 1964: 180. The couplet can hardly be considered inorganic, for ἀτὰρ κατακείμεν αὐτοῦς needs some qualification such as is supplied by the unobjectionable τυτθὸν ἀποπρὸ νεῶν.

*loc.* begs scholarly consensus for our time: “this couplet [334–335] must surely be accepted as interpolated, probably indeed Athenian.”<sup>6</sup>

Two scholars demur. A. Gomme tries to rebut Jacoby’s date for the custom of ‘bringing home the bones.’ Gomme concludes: “On the whole (I think) we must believe Thucydides that the custom was an old one, a good deal older than the Persian wars.” This does not, however, lead him to doubt that Homer’s lines are “certainly interpolated.”<sup>7</sup>

M. Willcock alone defends Homer’s ‘bringing home the bones’ (1978: 256): “That the lines are illogical cannot be denied. The argument that they were composed under the influence of an Athenian custom instituted in the fifth century, however, is not convincing. To require an historical precedent is to deny any exercise of the poet’s imagination.” This comment deserves restatement and reinforcement—except for the charge “illogical” which can (I think) be denied.

Scholars fail to appreciate Nestor’s logical logistics. They visualize the cremation of all the corpses on one spot and then on that spot the incorporation of the single pyre into a wall built round the camp. This would be impractical, if not impracticable, within the constraints of the situation. Nestor rather envisions a series of cremations on the perimeter of the camp, each a little off from their own ships so that each can recover bones for children back home and each extend their own pyre-tumulus to join one continuous tumulus-wall. Neither the Trojans nor even the gods expected this ingeniously imperceptible transformation. Agamemnon swears by Zeus a truce with Troy to cremate the corpses, but he withholds Nestor’s wisdom from unwitting Widaïos, the Trojan herald (*Il.* 7.408–411). Poseidon complains of being uninformed of Nestor’s clever plan: νόον καὶ μῆτιν (*Il.* 7.447). But what excuse have we for not following Athena’s advice to Telemachus (*Odyssey* 3.17–18):

ἀλλ’ ἄγε νῦν ἰθὺς κίε Νέστορος ἱποδάμοιο  
εἶδομεν ἦν τινα μῆτιν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι κέκευθε.

<sup>6</sup>Kirk 1990: 279. West (1969: 259) “334–5 is an interpolation; it may indeed be a fourth century interpolation.” Kurtz and Boardman (1971: 187) “this may be an interpolated ‘archaeological Atticism.’” Morris (1987: 46) fails to deal with the problem and only alludes to it in parenthesis. In Morris 1986: 91, he considers it a “fourth-century interpolation” with West.

<sup>7</sup>Gomme 1956: 94–101. Robertson (1983: 86) too considers the custom genuine, even if not as old as Homer. The passage is defended generally (without mention of ‘bringing home the bones’) by van der Valk (1964: 423): “In ordinary circumstances we expect the dead to be buried in the plain where they have fallen (cf. Arist. in A H334). The poet alters this representation and has them buried in the neighbourhood of the ships. The reason for it is given in H334f. The notice is an *inventio ad hoc*, for by it the poet can arrange matters in such a way that the tomb becomes a point of support for the wall. By this ingenious device, the erection of the wall, as it were, results imperceptibly from the construction of the tomb and loses its humiliating character, at least this point is masked as much as possible. So I cannot think but that the lines are genuine.” Note that ‘bringing home the bones’ is not specifically defended.

Typically traditional poetry would give Nestor typical counsel in typical diction in a typical scene. *Iliad* 7.332–338 gives Nestor counsel that seems typical only of Nestor. Foreshadowing and correspondance, however, are typical Homeric techniques. If Nestor's bones in Book 7 foreshadow and correspond to Patroclus' and Hector's bones in Books 23 and 24, then they are probably all equally Homer's bones.

*Iliad* 24.782–804 goes as follows. The corpse of Hector is wheeled back to Troy on a mule wagon; then the Trojans yoke oxen and mules to wagons and gather before the city; nine days they gather wood, and on the tenth they put Hector on the pyre and throw in fire; on the eleventh after the pyre is quenched, the white bones are gathered by kith and kin (these κασίγνητοι θ' ἑταροί τε correspond to and clarify the indefinite ἕκαστος [7.334] who will take fathers' bones to children); the Trojans wrap up the bones and enclose them in a box or coffin (λάβραξ), which they deposit in a hollow pit (κάπετον), constructed of substantial thick-set stones; then over the tomb they heap up a tumulus. Typical scenes commonly complement each other. Nestor's bones and Hector's differ in the length of the truce and the final disposition of the bones: the rest may be alike.

*Iliad* 23.243–257 goes as follows. Patroclus' ghost had requested of Achilles that the same urn (σορός) contain the bones of them both; after the cremation Achilles instructs that Patroclus' bones be put in a golden urn (φιάλη) and that a suitable tumulus (τύμβος, σῆμα) be made for Patroclus and be enlarged for Achilles' own burial. Patroclus' bones are not put in the tomb but rather in Achilles' hut. Nestor's bones presumably likewise.

The *Iliad* does not specify whether Achilles' and Patroclus' bones are to remain entombed in Troy or taken home to Phthia to father and son. *Odyssey* 24.71–84, however, has Agamemnon report from the Underworld that Achilles' and Patroclus' white bones now lie in a golden am(phi)phora, a gift of Dionysus and the work of Hephaestus; a mound great and big was heaped up round about the bones; and the tumulus is now and for generations to come telephanic on a projecting cape of broad Hellespont. Earlier, in *Odyssey* 3.107–110, Nestor reports from Pylos that Achilles and Patroclus lie in Troy—or at least were killed there, if κεῖται is merely a synonym for κατέκταθεν in the previous line, as in Antilochus' κεῖται Πάτροκλος (*Il.* 18.20): Patroclus is dead, has been killed, rather than just not standing. Likewise Athena glosses κεῖται: ἀπόλοιτο (*Od.* 1.46–47); and Vergil is Homeric: *saevus ubi Aeacidae telo iacet Hector, ubi ingens Sarpedon* (*Aeneid* 1.99), for Hector was killed by Achilles' spear and Sarpedon was killed in Troy but lies in Lycia. Bones may well lie within a tumulus, but also without, for Menelaos in far-away Egypt having heard news of Agamemnon's death back home piled up a cenotaph in Egypt for the sake of his κλέος (*Od.* 4.584), and Athena advises Telemachus to do so for Odysseus (*Od.* 1.289–292).

Although Vergil's Andromache consecrates ashes in Buthrotum *Hectoreum ad tumulum . . . inanem* (*Aeneid* 3.303), Hector's Trojan tumulus probably served

logistically as a look-out post or another equally unceremonious and unsuperstitious service. Consider Polites the Trojan scout who sat on the high tumulus of old Aisyetes (*Il.* 2.792–793); and Hector calls a council on the tomb of godly Ilos (*Il.* 10.214); and Paris props himself on the tomb-stone of the same tumulus and shoots Diomedes (*Il.* 11.371–372). It is not, therefore, unhomeric that Nestor's one continuous tumulus should become a practical fortification. The deposited remains might even contribute to reinforcing the wall, either morally or materially.

After the attempted assassination Agamemnon imagines Menelaos rotting in Troy, Helen still in Troy, and himself disgraced (*Il.* 4.173–178):

καὶ δὲ κεν εὐχωλὴν Πριάμῳ καὶ Τρωσὶ λῑποῖμεν  
 'Αργεῖην 'Ελένην· σέο δ' ὅστέα πύσει ἄρουρα  
 κειμένου ἐν Τροίῃ ἀτελευτήτῳ ἐπὶ ἔργῳ.  
 καὶ κέ τις ᾄδ' ἔρει Τρώων ὑπερηνορέοντων  
 τύμβῳ ἐπιθρόσκων Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο·  
 αἴθ' οὕτως ἐπὶ πᾶσι χόλον τελέσει' Ἀγαμέμνων. . . .

We would leave behind our boast to Priam and the Trojans:  
 Argive Helen; and you will lie in Troy, your deed undone,  
 and the ground will rot your bones;  
 And thus will say one of the insolent Trojans  
 insulting the tomb of glorious Menelaos:  
 "Thus may Agamemnon end his anger everytime . . . ."

There is certainly rhetoric here and presumably also burial custom. Note that 'bringing home the bones' heightens the pathos and complaint of Agamemnon. Since so much was made of preserving corpses from enemy mutilation, one might well wish to defend the ashes of glorious men from inglorious abuse. Homer himself sent Sarpedon off to Lycia rather than let him be defiled by Patroclus (*Il.* 16.419–683)—which presumably gives Pindar the right to bear Achilles to Elysium (*Ol.* 2.79). Homer's own portrayals of Agamemnon's fears of desecration and Sarpedon's consecrated homecoming easily suggest Nestor's idea of 'bringing home the bones.' Recovering ashes is hardly surprising for a society so keen on recovering bodies. Heraclitus and Socrates scorn the custom and confirm it.

So much for scholars. μετὰ καὶ τόδε τοῖσι γενέσθω (*Od.* 5.224). What about the poets' practice of 'bringing home the bones'? Κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον it might occasion no astonishment that poetic Achaeans should bury fallen warriors by heaping up a barrow on the battlefield, and that they should still reserve and preserve some commemorative vestige and relic of their kith or kin—ashen spear, empty shield, lock of hair, urn of ashes, κλέα ἀνδρῶν—to be lamented at home and enshrined at home, for either consecrated use by their scions or disuse and consignment to shelf, chest, or earth, as a funebrial monument. In poetry, the Trojan dead might have been carted off and buried by the city or not carted off and rather buried where they lay on the plain; the Hellene dead, on the other

hand, could hardly be convoyed home periodically or embalmed for a belated homecoming.<sup>8</sup> Let them send home an urn of ashes.

Even if religion did prescribe proper procedure and there was a Greek way of death, still the poets' Muses ὕσαν ψευδέα πολλὰ λέγειν, i.e., they can write fiction. Hellenes were poets before historians; a poet, at least, might be imaginative in poetry. And the enthralled audience by imitation may make history poetic.<sup>9</sup>

Aeschylus, regardless of right or reason, dramatically reportrayed Nestor's troubled counsel of burial at home and abroad (*Ag.* 433–455),

οὓς μὲν γάρ <τις> ἔπεμψεν  
οἶδεν, ἀντὶ δὲ φωτῶν  
τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἑκά-  
στου δόμους ἀφικνεῖται.

...

οἱ δ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τείχος  
θήκας Ἰλιάδος γᾶς  
εὐμορφοὶ κατέχουσιν, ἔχ-  
θρὰ δ' ἔχοντας ἔκρυπεν.<sup>10</sup>

For those they sent away  
they know, but instead of men  
to each one's home  
there came back urns and ashes.

...

But the men where they fell about the wall  
in all their beauty occupy  
their tombs in Ilium's earth;  
and the enemy land covers its occupiers.<sup>11</sup>

Here is repatriation of ashes together with burial at Troy. Surely here interpolation is out of the question. So scholars disbelieve that Aeschylus alludes to Homer's lines. Repatriation of ashes originated in Athens in 464 B.C.

<sup>8</sup>The exception is exceptional: Zeus' son Lycian Sarpedon was spirited off to Lycia by euphronian angels Sleep and Death.

<sup>9</sup>Homer often misfits his Archaic Age. Scholars mostly have found his soul in a Dark and Mycenaean Age. He may rather have been innovative and a misfit (like his hero Achilles). Even if scientific scholarship could expound the multifarious codes of religious regimen from Indo-European to Archaic Greece, it is illiberal to assume that a poet could not liberally disdain, could not liberally disregard it, could not regard his own, could not but conservatively transmit a cultural heritage. Many mistakenly think discontinuity less fundamental than continuity, revolt than reversion. Thus West (1966: 31) insists, "Greece is a part of Asia; Greek literature is a Near Eastern Literature." Burkert (1984: 118) ends with the pronouncement "Hellas ist nicht Hesperien." Z. Stewart (privately) suggests, "Hellas ist nicht nur Hesperien." Hesperia hails from Hellas, like the American Hesperia from the East.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. *Cho.* 682–685.

<sup>11</sup>Lloyd-Jones 1970: 41.

Aeschylus produced his play in 458. He wantonly retrojects to Troy a custom that his audience knows to be an innovation. Thus Jacoby maintains (1944: 44), “Nobody will seriously doubt that the singularity [Aeschylus’ passage] is due to a typical and deliberate anachronism after the Athenian custom which had been introduced but a few years earlier.” We are expected to believe that an anonymous Athenian proposed the unprecedented practice, that Aeschylus quickly gave it mythical sanction, and quickly a *quidnunc* interpolator interpolated Homer. Perhaps Aeschylus did all three. If Onomacritus, however, was caught and castigated (Herodotus 7.6), someone might at least have noticed Aeschylus.

But should we not rather think that Aeschylus took a shive from Homer’s great banquet?<sup>12</sup> τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἐκάστου δόμους ἀφικνεῖται at *Ag.* 435 derives from ὅστέα παισὶν ἕκαστος οἴκαδ’ ἄγῃ at *Il.* 7.334; θήκας at *Ag.* 453 is τύμβον at *Il.* 7.336.<sup>13</sup> E. Fraenkel (1950: 2.223) suggested that the εὐμορφοί who have θήκας are transfigured heroes and different from the φωτῶν τεύχη καὶ σποδός. He translates οἱ δ’ at *Ag.* 452 as “others.”<sup>14</sup> The Greek could be read this way only to save Aeschylus from Homer’s misconceived inconsistency. Lloyd-Jones rightly renders it “but the men.”

If Homer is flagrantly inconsistent in burying the very bones that are to be sent home, then so is Aeschylus. Alternatively, neither Aeschylus nor Homer is inconsistent: burial at Troy need not contravene ashes coming home, at least in poetical reality. And the enthralled audience may make history poetic.

*Facilius est Herculi clavem Homero versum subripere.*

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<sup>12</sup> ἐπὶ νοῦν βαλλόμενος τὸ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ λαμπροῦ Αἰσχύλου, ὃς τὰς αὐτοῦ τραγωδίας τεμάχη εἶναι ἔλεγεν τῶν Ὀμήρου μεγάλων δεῖνων (Ath. 8.347e, ed. Kaibel [Leipzig 1887]).

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones (privately) cites various examples of θήκη denoting case or casket, “Inside the big τύμβος each lot of bones will have had its own place (its θήκη?).”

<sup>14</sup> Fraenkel 1950: 1.119.

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