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# THE “BEAUTIFUL DEATH” FROM HOMER TO DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

NICOLE LORAUX

*Translated by David M. Pritchard*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From Homer’s *Iliad* to the Athenian funeral oration and beyond, the “beautiful death” was the name that the Greeks used to describe a combatant’s death.<sup>1</sup> From the world of Achilles to democratic Athens, in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the warrior’s death was a model that concentrated the representations and the values that served as [masculine] norms.<sup>2</sup> This should not be a surprise: the *Iliad* depicts a society at war and, in the

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1 Translator’s note: This article was published as “Mourir devant Troie, tomber pour Athènes: de la gloire du héros à l’idée de la cité” (Loraux 1982). It was delivered as a paper at the conference, “Funerary Ideology in the Ancient World,” which took place in Ischia, Italy, in 1977. Cambridge University Press and the Éditions de Maison des Sciences de l’Homme co-published the conference proceedings. My translation appears here courtesy of these presses. In translating Loraux’s footnotes, I include English-language publications in lieu of the French translations that Loraux cited or in lieu of French-language works that have been translated into English. The paper’s stated purpose was to summarise the major findings of the three conference papers about the “beautiful death”: those of A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982, J.-P. Vernant 1991.50–74, and Loraux herself, which she published in *The Invention of Athens* (Loraux 1986.98–118). In discussing the major findings of this last book, Loraux went well beyond this purpose. I remain indebted to P. Cryle and, especially, M. Mardon for their valuable help with this translation.

2 Therefore I keep the *Iliad* distinct from the *Odyssey*; on the latter, see, e.g., Finley 1979. With the Achaean camp and the classical city, of course, it is a question of the two absolute endpoints of a long history that the three conference papers did not cover. Consequently, in what follows there are gaps, especially on the hero, which is treated by Bérard 1982. On the development of the *cult* of heroes in the cities, which was an essential stage in the process of abstraction, see below.

Achaean camp at least, a society of men without children and legitimate wives. Certainly the Athenian polis reversed the traditional combatant-citizen relationship by claiming that one must be, *first*, a citizen before being a soldier.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this polis distinguished itself from others by the splendour of the public funeral for its citizens who had died in war and, especially, by repatriating their mortal remains (Thuc. 2.34). In a society that believed in autochthony, this repatriation was, undoubtedly, significant. Since the beautiful death crystallised the *aretē* (“courage”) of Achilles and Athenians alike, it was, from the outset, linked to speech. Indeed, heroic death *and* the civic beautiful death were the subject matter of elaborate speech-making. Such a celebratory discourse gave the warrior’s death an eternal existence in memory. This discourse gave his death its reality, but, conversely, also took for itself all that was valued in his exploit and claimed to be its truthful expression. In short, the beautiful death was a paradigm.

## 2. THE LANGUAGE OF THE FUNERAL: THE LIVING’S TREATMENT OF THE DEAD

In order to bury their dead, two communities came together: the army of the Achaeans and the Athenian city. The former used two markedly different procedures, depending on whether it was burying the ordinary dead or the elite of the heroes. For the non-elite anonymous dead who had not fallen in the front rank, the army of the Achaeans acted quickly: they washed the dead bodies, removing blood and dust, and built a funeral pyre. Once the cremation was finished, they departed, without, apparently, saying a word (e.g., *Il.* 7.424–32); for it is certain that the Achaeans, just like the Trojans, abstained from any lamentation before piling the bodies on the pyre (Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982.79).<sup>4</sup> To the living’s silence corresponds the silence surrounding the dead, who, as an indistinct cohort, will go and rejoin, in Hades, the *nōnumnoi* (“the nameless”), that is, the masses who are deprived of glory.<sup>5</sup>

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3 This relationship went back to the so-called hoplite reform; see, e.g., Detienne 1968 and Vidal-Naquet 1986.85–106.

4 Since wailing was essentially feminine, it is significant that women in this particular setting were absent. The text also emphasises the ban on lamentation *on the Trojan side* (e.g., *Il.* 7.427). Therefore it is was an important departure, when, among the Trojans, the dead heroes were brought home and met with female wailing.

5 In Hesiod’s myth of the races, only the elite among the heroes arrive in the Isles of the Blessed, while the rest reach Hades, like the men of bronze, as *nōnumnoi* dead men (Hes. *Op.* 152–55, 166–73).

In order to bury the heroes, by contrast, whether it be Sarpedon, Hector, or, especially, Patrocles, a ritual was required to which significant time had to be allocated. This funeral accommodated lamentations, a display of the body (*prothesis*), a banquet, and/or games.<sup>6</sup> Next it fell to the poet to celebrate the *klea andrōn*, namely, the glorious deeds of the heroes. In brief, one did not bury Thersites, if he were to die, as one would Achilles or as one did bury his "other," Patrocles. There was, clearly, one lot for ordinary men and another lot for the heroes.

Democratic practice, in contrast to the epic funeral, granted everyone the same honour; for, at Athens, the funeral was collective, as were the tomb and the eulogy. But each citizen still had an individual right to his share of glory and to the eternal memory of his name that was inscribed on the funeral monument. A name, it is true, that was both "abstract" and political: without a patronymic and a demotic, the citizen's name was stripped naked, as it were, and detached from all relationships, such as those in a family or any other group. His name was placed on a list, next to the names of the year's other dead, who were enumerated within the civic framework of the ten Cleisthenic tribes. In this way, democratic egalitarianism was able to integrate the aristocratic value of glory. Some anonymity, certainly, governed this funeral, but it was moderate; for if the remains of the dead, which were collected by tribes, were not individualised, each family, at least, had the right to bring offerings to its deceased loved one during the *prothesis*. An unwritten law encouraged the orator not to praise any individual's glory in his *epitaphios logos* ("funeral oration"). But the public monument still implemented a fair division between collective glory, which was given by the verse epitaph, and personal renown, which came from the name's inscription (Loraux 1986.15–42).

Might burying a dead individual or the collective dead be a way for a community to give full expression to the values that provide the society of the living its structure? If we leave to one side the truly anonymous dead of Book 7 of the *Iliad*, this question can be answered by returning to two funerals: those of Patrocles and Athenian citizen-soldiers. Yet before doing so, it is right that we anticipate a criticism. It could be objected that between, on the one hand, the "literary" funeral, whose described ritual is all there is (even if it is realistic: Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982.81), and, on the other hand, the funerary practice attested by archaeological evidence, the

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6 I am using the term hero strictly in the Homeric sense and not in the cultural sense; on the latter, see, e.g., Bérard 1982 and Hartog 1982.

distance is much too great. Importantly, however, our principal document on the Athenian collective funeral *is still a text*, namely Thucydides 2.34—a text that plays an essential role in the overall economy of this historian’s account of the Peloponnesian War. Consequently, in both cases, the funeral has already become the subject matter of speech, which is something that we will need to take into account.

Let us go, first, to the funeral of Patrocles. It furnishes, at first sight, the classic schema of a hero’s funeral in the *Iliad*. To begin, the dead man’s body is cared for in multiple ways, after which it is displayed in all its beauty and, next, burnt on a funeral pyre. In this cremation, J.-P. Vernant sees a process that was the opposite of the one characterising sacrificial practice (Vernant 1991.69–70). In the funerary rite, certainly, the corruptible flesh, which was totally consumed, departed in smoke, while the “white bones” survived, which were all that remained of the dead man’s body. In the sacrificial rite, by contrast, the white bones went up as smoke towards the gods, while the flesh remained, destined to be consumed by the community of men. Yet Patrocles’s funeral only appears to conform to this cremation schema, since this ritual completely mixes up funeral and sacrifice (Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982.83–85). The sacrifices in it are made aberrant by the status of the victims (men, dogs, and horses). In what is an excessive funeral, Patrocles, who is burnt by a double fire, both sacrificial and funerary, is the object of a funeral ritual as well as the recipient of sacrificial practice. In a word, he is a divine corpse.

What is essential here is that this is what Achilles will soon be, because, by honouring Patrocles with whom he had a “living connection,” Achilles accepts his destiny, a destiny inscribed by death.<sup>7</sup> Patrocles’s funeral is, in reality, celebrated by Achilles alone, although it takes place in the middle of the Achaean army and includes his own people, the Myrmidons. This funeral tacitly expresses *the complex status of Achilles as a hero*: his *hubris* (“insolence”), which constantly leads from all to nothing, and his standing as a living man whose death is written in his (short) life. Being neither completely dead nor, for that matter, alive, and a mortal, who is, nevertheless, treated like a god, Patrocles reveals Achilles’ status as a

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7 “Living connection” is borrowed from what Vernant said in the discussion that followed this conference presentation. As for Patrocles as the “double” of Achilles, E. Cassin evoked the analogous couple in the Mesopotamian tradition of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and the hubristic funeral that the former held for the latter, whose life is, from then on, no more than a long march towards death.

living man. Until Achilles dies one day, Patrocles will not truly be one of the dead. His absolutely temporary tomb contains what looks like the white bones and the double layer of fat for a sacrifice that has not yet taken (nor will ever take) place. Until he, in his turn, departs for Hades, Achilles alive is the immortal face of Patrocles, just as Patrocles was his mortal part. In the end, only death will reunite the two halves of this *sumbolon* ("token"). Patrocles' funeral therefore brings up to date Achilles' status, his difficult integration into the societies of the living and the dead, and the tension within him that constantly opposes life to death and god to man. In short, Achilles and Patrocles are the inside and the outside. There is no better way to say that the hero is double.

After the heroic funeral, let us turn to the civic funeral's democratic egalitarianism. Again we need to note how this egalitarianism consisted of giving to all what aristocracy reserved for some. Aristocratic features of this funeral included the *prothesis*, which was longer than for the ordinary dead, the use of chariots for the cortège (*ekphora*), the placing of the bones in caskets of cypress, which, as a rot-proof timber, was the bearer of memory and the symbol of immortality, and, especially, the eulogy. This prose oration may have used the language of political debate. But the *doxa athanatos* ("immortal renown") of the civic orators looks suspiciously like the *kleos aphthiton* ("imperishable glory") of the poet. Therefore, the civic funeral certainly did give everyone what the past's aristocrats had given only to some. To everyone the oration and the verse epigram also gave, officially, the title *agathoi andres* ("courageous men"). We might ask: did death erase differences? It is better to say that it was the city that erased differences in death, as if democracy's interchangeable egalitarianism was (only) fulfilled on such an occasion. In death, Athenian combatants, who were hoplites, archers, rowers, and peltasts all mixed up, looked like *homoioi* ("peers"). In light of words such as *homoioi* and *agathoi*, was this the equality of democratic Athens or an aristocracy? What the public funeral spoke of was *democracy as it wanted to be*, that is, as it wanted to be thought of. Consequently, we can say that the Athenian funeral did indeed give expression to the "reality" of the society of the living—as long as we designate as real what this society wanted people to say about it or what it said about itself.

This society kept saying the same thing, despite all the transformations that it underwent. In the fourth century, the funeral oration with its strict orthodoxy resisted the intrusion of private values that were again growing in the city (Loroux 1986.109–10). But the historian cannot forget

that even on the edges of the *dēmosion sēma* (“public cemetery”), private tombstones began again to proliferate. Some of them even went so far as to celebrate individually citizens who had been interred in a collective monument. In this way, family devotion duplicated official values, just as, in the Ceramicus, the “street of tombs” duplicated the *dēmosion sēma*. The most remarkable case is that of Dexileos, who was, probably, interred in the collective monument of 394. He was definitely twice celebrated individually: first, with the *hippeis* (“horsemen”) who had distinguished themselves at the same time as him and, second, by the monument that his family erected for him.<sup>8</sup> This tomb’s epitaph formed a biography, while its relief cut him off from the other combatants (Loraux 1986.31).<sup>9</sup> In the face of all this, however, the civic funeral and the funeral oration never tired of saying that the collective had primacy over the individual and the public over the private. It is time that we really examine this speech.

### 3. HEROIC AND CITIZEN DEATHS: FROM THE BEAUTIFUL DEAD TO THE BEAUTIFUL DEATH

In Homer’s world as much as in the Athenian city, an important place was made for speech on the beautiful death, because ceremonial practices in both honoured the dead by speaking to the living. While speaking of the “language” of rites, we are not overlooking that the combatant’s death is literally surrounded on all sides by speech. This speech, whether it be the poet’s or the orator’s, formed the beautiful death by celebrating it. Yet inside this speech, there was another speech that the combatants were supposed to have rehearsed for themselves before risking their lives. We find this internal deliberative speech in, for example, Sarpedon’s address to Glaucus, this “other” who is just like him, in Book 12 of the *Iliad* (Vernant 1991.55–57), and in the monologue of the Athenian combatant in Lysias’s

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8 These monuments’ inscriptions are, respectively, Rhodes and Osborne 2003.nos. 7A and 7B.

9 The casualty list of 394 (*IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 5221) is too lacunose to affirm with certainty that it included Dexileos’s name. During the discussion that followed, C. Bérard objected that this young Athenian had probably been buried not in, not the collective monument, but the one for the *hippeis*, among whom he was counted. Yet I would be inclined to see the latter as a simple honorific monument, probably a cenotaph, which duplicated the collective monument where *all* the year’s dead were buried. As for the private *mnēma* (“funeral monument”), I agree with him in seeing there something like a claim on the part of the family for the “personal part” of the combatant.

*epitaphios logos* (Loraux 1986.155–71). This internal speech is like the poem’s matrix and the funeral oration’s truth. The bard and the orator take it upon themselves to be its faithful interpreters.

Certainly this internal speech had a “deliberative” form, because it came before a choice, even if it was only possible to choose immortal glory and so the beautiful death. The reasons for this choice, in Homer, were “metaphysical,” because men can escape neither death nor old age, which was like a living death, and because it was better to immortalise the hero’s beautiful youth (Vernant 1991.59–60). The reasons in the funeral oration were “political,” because the city wanted it so, but we could say that this politics was another form of metaphysics. Because the warrior’s death, as a supreme exploit, irresistibly called for the poet’s song or the orator’s prose, it turns out that *the beautiful death was already in itself speech*. It was a rhetorical *topos* (“commonplace”) that was the privileged place for the implanting of an ideology. From the heroic death to the civic death there was, like a long chain’s outermost links, a real continuity, even if gaps and ruptures or, most accurately, a series of gaps and ruptures had their place.

Speech about the beautiful death was built on a certain number of common claims. In one go, this death realised the *aretē* of a combatant. It established the youthfulness of Homeric warriors, who were immortalised in the flower of their life, and sanctioned the Athenian soldier’s access to the status of an *anēr* (“man,” that is, a virile adult), who was inextricably both a citizen and a soldier. There are two ways to understand “they died, after having shown themselves to be courageous men” (*andres genomenoi agathoi*), which was the funeral speech’s key phrase depending on whether we put the emphasis on *agathoi* or privilege *andres*. In the first reading, which is the most common, it appears that an Athenian only became courageous in death. If more weight is given to *andres*, the more unusual reading, the funeral oration appears to be saying that an Athenian becomes a man, that is to say, a citizen, only in death.<sup>10</sup>

The glorious death also widened a gulf between the hero, or the *agathoi*, and the rest of humanity. In the *Iliad*, where people only died in war, a line divided the anonymous death of ordinary people from the

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10 The funeral oration appears to make no distinction between *andra gignesthai* (“to become a man”), which designated political majority (registration in the deme register), and the dead man’s registration on the official casualty list (*andra genesthai agathon*, “having become a courageous man”).



beautiful death of Sarpedon or Patrocles. In the funeral oration, the spectacular death of the *anēr agathos* (“courageous man”) separated him forever from passive humanity, who, trapped on earth, waited to suffer their fate (Loraux 1986.104). Yet in both cases, the elite’s chosen death is opposed to ordinary men’s unchosen one. Therefore the glorious death unfurled in the domain of the absolute: all the world’s treasure could not counterbalance the demands of honour that drove Achilles, while no prestige [off the battlefield] would be sufficient to launch Sarpedon into battle’s melee. The military exploits of the Athenians likewise responded not to any utilitarian consideration but only to the quest for *aretē*.

All occurred as if the heroic beautiful death continued to inform the civic version of the combatant’s death—as if, as it were, the city’s discourses were feeding off epic representations. Yet this does not mean that there was no rupture between the civic beautiful death and the heroic one. Indeed, we can detect multiple gaps from one to the other. We can observe them more easily by taking as our reference point the civic beautiful death, which looks like the end of a long history. While epic gave itself as subject matter the *klea andrōn*, that is, glory that had already been realised in actions, the Athenian speech resolutely erased the action behind the decision to die (Loraux 1986.101–204). In the funeral oration, everything comes down to this choice, which leads to death. Between the decision to die and the report of the beautiful death (*andres genomenoi agathoi*), there is no room for action or for an account of exploits. Consequently, life is erased behind death for the reason that all that counts is the instant of the decision that is both the beginning and the end of the (true) life. Another reason for this erasure is that the eulogy’s collective character requires that all the dead share the same praise, without consideration being given to the quality of their past lives.

For epic’s heroes, such as Achilles in Book 9 of the *Iliad*, there was, by contrast, no other value than life. It was precisely for this reason that it was worth putting one’s own life at stake: one found death but became exemplary, while the beautiful death took on all the weight of the lost life. It was left to the poet to sing of the hero’s life that had been perfected forever by his death. The hero went to his death because life was everything for him. The funeral oration, by contrast, encouraged the citizen to risk a life that was nothing in order to serve the city that was everything: for there was no other life than the city’s, which was also his [personal] history. To the citizens there remained only death. Whereas epic, which, once again, was more “realistic,” mentioned casualties who got better, the

Athenian speech celebrated the citizens only in death. In brief, everything in the Athenian funeral conspired to erase life. This is the meaning of the transfer that made eternal youthfulness, characterising the *person* of the dead warrior in epic, a feature of the glory or praise of citizens. To the Athenian dead, the funeral oration promised *agērōs epainos*, that is, praise that did not grow old. But who, if not the city, possessed this praise? We might wonder whether, according to the funeral speech’s criteria, a citizen was even a person.

A person is a *sōma* (“body”) and a *psukhē* (“soul”). In epic, *sōma* is the term for the dead person, while what gives formal unity to his body, after his death, is his face. It is this face that an enemy tries hard to destroy and that a dead man’s relatives immortalise in the funeral ritual. The body, which has been embellished and consumed, is broken down, but the *psukhē*, which is liberated in this way, reaches Hades’ shores (Vernant 1991.68–69). Finally, seated atop the white bones, which are the absent body’s sole remains, the *mnēma* (“funeral monument”) speaks to the living about the dead man. In the kingdom of the shades, there is the *psukhē*, and in the world of humans, the memory of the dead man, which is immortalised by the *mnēma* and the poet’s song.<sup>11</sup> In epic, all is played out between these three terms: *sōma*, *psukhē*, and *mnēma*.

The funeral oration, which is based on cut-and-dry oppositions, knows only two terms: there is, on the one hand, *mnēmē* (“memory”), which is always immortal, and, on the other, “life,” of which citizens can only have usufruct. This life is always undervalued and described indiscriminately as *sōma*, *psukhē*, or *bios*, almost to the point of unfamiliarity. From this there is an enormous consequence: the dead, it appears, have no more body than they do life. Here the essential point is evident: the change *from the beautiful dead man to the beautiful death*.

In epic, the body was a spectacle. By immobilising it, the heroic death dramatised the body’s beauty. This beauty of the young fallen warrior was his glory’s visible sign. The ritual aimed to emphasise it by focusing on it. Such is the meaning of the *prothesis*, in which a corpse that has been meticulously embellished is displayed, because, at this point in the funeral, the dead man’s person is entirely linked to his *sōma* (Vernant 1991.59–60). The Athenian funeral, by contrast, was built around the

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11 Here I am drawing on Vernant’s course at the Collège de France (1976–77) on the funeral code in ancient Greece.

systematic occultation of the body. In the speech, first of all, there appeared no beautiful dead man but only always the beautiful death. In it all aesthetic value had disappeared and the “beautiful” was moral. Therefore a double transfer had taken place: from *the dead man* to *death*, that is, from an exemplary individual towards a formal model of civic behaviour, and then from the beautiful as the body’s quality to the beautiful as the action’s quality (Loraux 1986.98–118).<sup>12</sup> As the action, moreover, was absorbed into *logos* (“speech”), in the end, the beautiful was used to describe the quality of the civic speech. For Priam, “all that appears (*phanēēi*) on the young dead warrior is beautiful” (*Il.* 22.73). The civic speech responded to epic’s “appears” with the always repeated epiphany of Athens’ *aretē*.

Yet it was not just the funeral ceremony that failed to make room for showing the dead’s bodies. In the *Iliad*, the assembly of the gods decided to force Achilles to return Hector’s corpse (24.35–137), because it had to be delivered before the eyes of, first, his spouse, then, his mother, son, and father, and, finally, his people. In Athens, by contrast, the dead no longer looked like a *sōma*, and what the city agreed to display for family devotion were bones.<sup>13</sup> In this way, *the dead were already abstract* and already deprived of all that gave them their physical appearance and all that permitted them to be identified.<sup>14</sup> In actual fact, the order of the funeral ritual had been reversed for Athens’ citizens: first, the funeral pyre, on the battlefield,<sup>15</sup> and, then, for the families, a *prothesis* without spectacle or individualisation.

In view of this, we cannot underestimate the significance of the cremation of the bodies. Was burning the dead instead of burying them only a prophylactic measure? Was it simply about conserving their remains until the funeral ceremony at the combat season’s end? Certainly there are a

12 In classical Athens, the notion of the “beautiful dead man” no longer had a reality. Therefore in Euripides’ *Suppliant Women*, the dead’s mothers must be spared the sight of “disfigured bodies, which are a hideous spectacle, the blood and the wounds of the corpses” (944–45).

13 Thuc. 2.34.2: *ta osta protithentai* (“they display the bones”).

14 In Homer’s *Iliad*, the impossibility of identifying the dead characterised the mass of the ordinary dead (e.g., 7.424). Euripides’ *Suppliant Women*, which is a tragic reflection on the public funeral, presents the stages in the same order: first, the funeral pyre in the presence of the political and military leaders and then the display of the bones, which the mothers can attend (941–49, 1123–64).

15 It is significant that there was in attendance at this cremation the army, which was the inheritor of the *laoi* (“peoples”) that were, in epic poetry, the last invitees to the funeral spectacle.

great number of historians who are convinced that the real is rational and so answer in the affirmative. But to him or her who acknowledges that ancient Greece is also a matter of anthropology,<sup>16</sup> such rationality appears really suspect. To tell the truth, the recourse to cremation strongly resembles a choice that was dictated by ideological imperatives. We can note that this prophylactic measure would have had no *raison d'être* if the Athenians did not repatriate the remains of their citizens. In doing so, they distinguished themselves from other Greek cities who normally buried their dead on the battlefield. Now the meaning of this Athenian practice is clearer still when it is related to the dominant myth of autochthony. For the Athenians, their civic earth was both "a mother and a fatherland."<sup>17</sup> Was entrusting their war dead's bones to it therefore not a way to guarantee the city's reproduction? This choice of repatriation, at least, made it necessary for the Athenians to concern themselves with prophylactic measures.

Yet there was more to cremation than this. As a funerary practice, it was a matter of symbolism and could, itself, be subject to choice. After the battle of Marathon, combatants were buried on the battlefield. What was absolutely symbolic, in this case, was the dividing up of, on the one hand, the citizens, for whom the Athenians resorted to cremation, and, on the other, the Plataeans and the slaves, who were simply buried some distance away. In interpreting this division, we can take into account that cremation, as a more costly practice, was reserved for those whom the city wanted to honour highly (Kurtz and Boardman 1971.246). Undoubtedly, we need also to take into account that the Athenian citizens, who, by their deaths, had put beyond doubt their status as *andres*, were, as was natural, on the side of the cooked, while the Plataeans and the slaves, like the children in Eretria's princely tombs (Bérard 1970), were on the side of the raw. Earlier we noted how the funeral oration habitually presented those who had fallen in battle as having, at last, definitively left behind their childhood.

When it comes to funerary practice, were there, it can be asked, behaviours that escaped symbolism? Because I do not believe that there were, I have had to dwell at some length on the Athenian refusal to make

16 To those who, in the discussion that followed, insisted on the importance of "health reasons," the talk by D. Lombard on the ancient south-east Asian funeral (1982) provided a definitive answer: in this funeral practice, which consisted of keeping a corpse rolled up in cloth inside the house for years (sometimes up to three), where is there a prophylactic measure?

17 Plato said this explicitly in his *Menexenus* (237c).

room for display in their funeral ceremony. From the beautiful dead man to the beautiful death, a major change had occurred: the effacing of the person of the dead man or, more precisely, the dead themselves before [the ideal of] the city. To put it differently, this was the creation of the *city ideal* beyond all the representations of the polis as a community. In short, this creating of an ideal was a process of abstraction.

#### 4. THE DEAD AND THE ABSTRACTION OF THE CITY: ACHILLES AND ATHENS

Such a process is not carried out in a day. Indeed, clearly, this process was not carried out in all places nor at the same speed. Different speeds, delays, and gaps are, of course, peculiar to ideological phenomena. While limiting this examination to the two extremes of the beautiful death's history, we must not forget that between the Homeric world and Athenian democracy essential stages had intervened, such as the archaic period's aristocratic cities or Sparta.<sup>18</sup> In the classical period, the Greeks saw Sparta as embodying very rigorously the civic obligation of the beautiful death. It is worth studying this, if only briefly, in order to take note of the remarkable discrepancy there between discourse and practice. This city, from its sixth-century beginning, was protected from the temptation of development by its immoveable social structures and, in the next century, looked like an archaic polis that had been miraculously preserved.<sup>19</sup>

Sparta demonstrates that the process of abstraction was not an irresistible phenomenon across the Greek world. In many respects, Sparta's choices are even reminiscent of those of epic. In Sparta, room was made for the *life* of the courageous warrior. Let us recall the quasi-institutional opposition, in the city of the *homoioi*, between he who had fought gloriously and so merited, in his lifetime, honours, admiration, and sexual attention, and the *tresas* ("trembler"), who was pushed out of the city and even its age classes, since he was required to give up his seat to a younger (and more courageous) Spartan (e.g., Tyrtaeus 7.29–30, 9.35–42 Prato).<sup>20</sup> Along the same lines, probably, the Spartans, like the Homeric

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18 On the aristocratic funerary practices in archaic cities, see, e.g., Bérard 1982.

19 On the unequal development of different Greek cities in the classical period, see, e.g., Austin and Vidal-Naquet 1977.17, 78. On Spartan social structures, see, e.g., Finley 1968.

20 On the *tresantes* ("tremblers") and the Spartan representations of the beautiful death, see, e.g., Loraux 1995.63–74.

*laoi* (“peoples”), judged it essential to possess not just the remains but also the *bodies* of their kings. If a king died away from Sparta, his body, which was embalmed in honey or wax, had to be brought back, with special care taken to preserve his face.

Sparta’s male–female opposition included women in the city more than in Athens. Attic women had to be content with the (small) place that was allotted them in the civic funeral. Beyond this ceremony, as Pericles politely reminded them (Thuc. 2.45.2), they were counselled not to be spoken of. For Pericles, feminine *aretē* was simply a contradiction in terms.<sup>21</sup> Spartan women, who enjoyed the right to attend a royal funeral, could also win renown in the sphere of reproduction, even if this sphere, it is true, was tightly confined.<sup>22</sup> Only Spartan men who had fallen in battle and Spartan women who had died in childbirth had the right to the inscription of their names on their tombs. While this equivalence might conform to the Greek orthodoxy about the division between the sexes, it is no less remarkable for being institutionalised. From the Spartan viewpoint, we can see more clearly the abstraction process that was implemented in Athens. Yet this does not mean that other essential stages did not exist along the way to this Athenian beautiful death.<sup>23</sup>

This process of abstraction, besides not being implemented in every place, was implemented or, at least, was orchestrated on an exceptional scale in a very exact place: Athens. This, too, happened at a very exact time. The funeral oration’s moment, let us say, fell between Cleisthenes and Ephialtes.<sup>24</sup> More generally, it fell between Cleisthenes and the start of the Peloponnesian War. This period witnessed the disappearance of the dead’s figurative representation on Athenian private tombs, although such representation did continue on public monuments. In funerary representations there existed, therefore, a gap separating archaic sculpture, such as the

21 In the discussion that followed, D. Lanza drew my attention to the strange *epitaphios logos* that Electra delivered over Aegisthus’s body (Eur. *El.* 906–56). This is a “bad” funeral oration because it is a question of blame, not praise; the *kratos* of the situation is emphasised; and, most importantly, it is a *woman* who delivers it. Only tragedy could subvert the tradition of the funeral oration by giving speech to, of all people, a woman.

22 On the equivalence of marriage and war as the respective natural accomplishments of men and women, see, e.g., Vernant 1988.34–36.

23 E.g., the triumphing of speech in the world of the cities, and the claim, constantly repeated in Pindar, of the total supremacy of celebratory speech over action.

24 While I am inclined to date the funeral oration’s introduction to around 460, I believe, along with Jacoby 1944, that it stood at the end of a long maturation process that was carried out between Cleisthenes and Ephialtes (Loraux 1986.56–76).

*kouros* stela, from the late classical period's innumerable figurative reliefs. Certainly this phenomenon merits an in-depth study. To understand this gap, we, undoubtedly, would need to explore the civic ban that weighed against the individual's representation in death and—in a more general way—against sight to the benefit of speech. Subsequently, we would need to bring together this ban and the study of the public funeral.

Clearly the Athenian city never stopped exorcising sight: it substituted white bones for bodies. It diverted the eye from the collective monument, on which a relief sculpture celebrated symbolic combatants,<sup>25</sup> towards the rostrum of the *dēmosion sēma*, where the official orator's speech transformed the public into an audience.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the speech that the classical city heard about the beautiful death was formed by a rejection of archaic representation or, indeed, of all representation.<sup>27</sup> Here, perhaps, we see less the rejection of archaic *discourse* than of *representation*.

Let us return to this speech one last time. Everything occurs in the funeral oration as if Athens were taking the place that Achilles occupies in epic.<sup>28</sup> Achilles, the most valorous of the Greeks, parallels Athens, the city of *aretē*, to which the Greeks, by mutual agreement, supposedly award the *aristeion* ("the first prize for valour"). No one in the Achaean camp contests Achilles' eminent merit. No Greek city, if we are to believe the orators, denies for a second that Athens merits universal admiration and placement in the first rank. Like Achilles, the city can only be the greatest. This is why the victory at Marathon, which was an initiatory exploit of the hero-Athens, gained paradigmatic value. While Plataeans actually fought besides the Athenians, the orators "forget" them, because Athens gives no thought to allies (Loraux 1986.155–71). Finally, just as Achilles-bard sings of the *klea andrōn*, so, too, within civic discourse, the city gives speech to the orator and glory to its dead citizens.

This heroic position of the city in the funeral speech was not without consequences. It basically gave the combatants an interchangeable face,

25 A. C. W. Clairmont objected that on a public monument, the relief sculpture praised generally the physical beauty of the combatants. My response to this objection is that it was a question of a "beauty" that was thoroughly symbolic and that the eye is not the only thing that can perceive; see, e.g., Loraux 1975.

26 This transfer from sight to hearing can clearly be seen in the preamble of Lysias's *epitaphios logos*.

27 In rejecting all representation, the funeral oration can be characterised as deploying an imaginary with an image.

28 For what follows about Achilles, see, especially, Vernant 1991.51–54, 58–59.

which, in reality, meant that they did not have a face at all. Therefore, the funeral oration proclaimed the dominance of the polis over *andres*, of the city over men. To speak plainly, this should discourage the historian of the Greek city from overemphasising the importance of the well-known adage: "men are the city." Against the idea that Greece of the *poleis* knew only the community's concrete lived experience, the study of the funeral oration's beautiful death urges us to emphasise the dominant position that the abstraction of the polis held in civic discourse (Loraux 1986.263–327). This abstract polis was the indivisible unity around which speech was organised.

In order to complete the comparison of Achilles in epic and the city in the *epitaphios logos*, we should also note that the city, if it takes Achilles' place, does so in a moralising fashion. The funeral oration is a (civic and hoplitic) lesson in morality, which epic poetry, clearly, was not. Therefore this speech represents the end of the *hubris* that formed the Homeric hero in all his ambiguity (e.g., Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982.82, 85–86; Vernant 1991.51–52). In the *epitaphios logos*, excess lies elsewhere, among enemies, while all justice has taken refuge in Athens. With this major difference is associated the very strong opposition between, as I called it earlier, epic's realism and the Athenian speech's metaphysical absolutism.

We can also associate it with the funeral oration's systematic occultation of the *kratos* ("power") that was a big part of epic's definition of the warrior. When it came to the *kratos* that the people exercised within the city, the *epitaphioi logoi* suggested that democracy was not the *kratos* of the people, but the fatherland of *aretē* (Loraux 1986.172–220). Funeral speeches, likewise, suppressed the imperial city's *kratos*, transforming it into a recognition of the merit of Athens in a contest for excellence (Loraux 1986.81–96). Power *per se* simply did not have a place in the funeral oration.

Therefore, what was said in the public cemetery on the occasion of the death of Athenians merits the label "ideology of the city."<sup>29</sup> To this, perhaps, we should add "ideology of democracy," since manifest egalitarianism existed only in death and by a claimed adherence to *aretē*. Yet it is very significant that the funeral oration contained the only methodical discourse that the Athenian city officially maintained on democracy. Democracy spoke for itself in the public cemetery. It described itself as the one true value, and even as the model of the polis. Yet in order for this

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29 In the sense that it is the "city" that gave this speech such coherence and enabled it to resist the discordant material that the "real" could have introduced. For a different approach, see Lanza and Vegetti 1977.



description to succeed, the democratic city still had to depart from political practice, for in the *ekklēsia*, the citizens had fewer scruples about calling *kratos* by its name, and also from the town, because the Ceramicus, as the “most beautiful *suburb*” (Thuc. 2.34.5), was still beyond the walls. The city also deliberately departed from time, as Pericles all but stated in Thucydides (“we *will be admired* by men today and in the future,” 2.41.4). The pause that death brought allowed such a breaking away.

## 5. CONCLUSION: IDEOLOGY AND “FUNERARY IDEOLOGY”

But was this *funerary* ideology? Rather I would say: ideology in death. Unless we are prepared to read the ideology in funerary ideology vaguely as a “system of representations,” we really must try to understand the process that allowed an ideological discourse’s dissemination in a death celebration. A ritualised death had become an effective factor in social cohesion. Thus it is important that civic ideology was formed against the beautiful death’s background. The hero, Achilles, set up a unique ceremonial for honouring Patrocles in a manner that had never (and would never) be seen. But this hero was unique among the heroes. At least he should be or even had to be in order to fit in—in his paradoxical manner—in Homeric society. Against time and against its own history, which had not consisted of [heroic] agonistic wars nor of unsullied prestige, the Athenian city set up a ceremonial that distinguished it from other cities and in which it proclaimed that it was the only polis. This is a discourse that historians have had (and continue to have) difficulty in leaving behind. We are accustomed to pay little attention to the phraseology of our modern speeches for the dead. It is, therefore, pleasing to me that the most effective of the Athenian models of Athens was articulated in a cemetery.

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