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Singing Heroes: The Poetics of Hero Cult in the Heroikos

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> *"With regard to giants," replied Don Quixote, "there are different opinions as to whether they ever existed or not . . . on the island of Sicily, shoulder-bones, arm-bones and leg-bones have been found, the size of which shows that they belonged to giants as tall as towers: geometry puts this truth beyond all doubt."*
>
> —Cervantes, *Don Quixote*[1]

In this essay, I explore the poetic, emotional, and ritual dimensions of hero cult as presented in Philostratus's *Heroikos*.[2] After a short digression on hero cult in the Greek period, I focus on the emphasis placed on the emotional bond between worshiper and hero, as well as the important role played by hymns and laments in the narrative. I propose to investigate these twin themes in depth by focusing on examples provided by Philostratus himself, and particularly the cult of Melikertês. Because Philostratus associates hymns and laments with initiation or mystery cults, I also consider the link between hero and mystery cult in the *Heroikos*, as well as in earlier Greek texts. The link between these two forms of ritual, I argue, is already present in the classical sources, yet while the connection between mystery and hero cult is not unique to the Roman period, the function of initiation in Philostratus's narrative is different; it

[1] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (trans. John Rutherford; New York: Penguin, 2001), 495. On ancient fossils' influence on beliefs, see Adrienne Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[2] I would like to thank Ellen Aitken and Jennifer Maclean for inviting me to the conference "Philostratus's *Heroikos*, Religion, and Cultural Identity." I also gave a version of this paper at "A Symposium on Hero Cults in the Greek East During the Empire" at the University of Chicago. My warmest thanks to Sulo Asirvatham, Judy Barringer, Claude Calame, Betsy Gebhard, Albert Henrichs, and Gregory Nagy for their help and advice.

expands in order to accommodate skepticism and include conversion. Whereas the reality of heroes is implicitly accepted as fact in archaic and classical sources, in the *Heroikos* their existence needs to be established through a series of proofs; the reader, along with the Phoenician merchant of the dialogue, undergoes an initiation of sorts. The central role of initiation into the mystery of the hero in the narrative reflects historical changes in the perception of cult heroes in the imperial period. Just as we see a gradual movement from unquestioning belief in heroes to skepticism, and from hearing about heroes to reading about them, we also see a shift from mourning to communion with the hero come back to life.

Before examining hero cult in the *Heroikos*, I would like to backtrack and turn for a moment to Greek hero cult in general. By "hero cult," I mean the combination of myths and rituals associated with the worship of heroes. Starting in the archaic period, some human beings are assigned the status of hero after their death and become objects of worship and recipients of animal sacrifice.[3] Because of the local nature of most hero cults, allusions to ritual practice (as Gregory Nagy and Albert Henrichs have argued) tend to be implicit rather than explicit in archaic and classical literature. Although allusions to hero cult per se are scarce in Greek poetry, allusions to heroes themselves, their deeds, lives, and deaths, are plentiful.[4] Myths and rituals in honor of heroes not only fulfill important religious functions, but the narrative of the hero's death and heroization must also have been a source of aesthetic pleasure that finds its way both in literary and visual representations.

Traditionally, the connection between worshiper and hero is established through ritual, and the relationship between hero and worshiper is conceived in terms of reciprocity through cult and not in terms of a close personal bond: the hero is conceptualized as a "deceased person," in Burkert's formulation, "who exerts from his grave a power for good or evil and who demands appropriate

[3] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 203–13.

[4] On the implicitness of hero cults in epic, see Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (2d ed. rev.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9–11, and Gregory Nagy, "The Sign of the Hero: A Prologue," in *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (trans. Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken; SBLWGRW 1; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), xv–xxxv; in drama, see Albert Henrichs, "The Tomb of Aias and the Prospect of Hero Cult in Sophokles," *Classical Antiquity* 12 (1993): 165–80.

honour."[5] There are, however, two important exceptions to this general rule. Two texts in extant Greek literature depict a hero simultaneously as the recipient of cult and as alive: the *Heroikos*, and some six hundred years earlier, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sophocles' play depicts Oedipus as if he were already a cult hero *before* his death, while Philostratus depicts heroes *after* their deaths as very much alive to their worshipers. I will come back to other affinities between these two texts, but for now what I wish to emphasize is their extraordinary status. Oedipus notwithstanding, hero cult in the archaic and classical period is a highly ritualized form of worshiping the dead.

Hero cult continues to thrive in the Greek world beyond the classical era, and by the Hellenistic period, this answer to death becomes so popular that private citizens routinely heroize dead members of their own families. By the time of Philostratus's *Heroikos*, we also see a renewal of interest in the earlier Greek heroes in the Roman East.[6] Dennis Hughes recently suggested that among the attractions of the traditional heroes was the link they can provide with the past, both mythical and historical. He argues, "Hero cult—with its political and historical as well as religious dimensions—played a particularly important role in the 'Greek Renaissance', the revival of civic and national pride and identity in Greece under Roman rule." He also notes that, at a time when the distance between worshipers and gods increases, worshipers grow closer to their heroes and worship them not only as a way of identifying themselves with the Greek past, but also because they hope to join the old heroes in the life to come.[7]

When we turn to the *Heroikos*, we find that the promise of hero cult lies not only in the hope of joining ancient heroes in the afterlife, but very much in the possibility of enjoying their company in the here and now. The *Heroikos* records the conversation between a vinegrower and a traveling Phoenician merchant that takes place at Elaious on the north shore of the Hellespont. At the beginning of the dialogue, the merchant makes clear that he does not believe in

[5] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 203.

[6] For the controversy about dating the *Heroikos*, see Maclean and Aitken, *Philostratus: Heroikos*, xlii–xlv.

[7] Dennis D. Hughes, "Hero Cult, Heroic Honors, Heroic Dead: Some Developments in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," in *Ancient Greek Hero Cult: Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, Organized by the Department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History. Göteborg University, 21–23 April 1995* (ed. Robin Hägg; Stockholm: Åströms, 1999), 173–74.

heroes, and the vinegrower proceeds to persuade him of their existence.

Some scholars have dismissed the third-century C.E. work as a sophistic exercise with no religious import.[8] Others take the *Heroikos* at its word and argue that the concern with hero cult is indeed serious and central to the dialogue.[9] Without denying the obvious literary aspects of Philostratus's text, I agree with the latter group of scholars that the discourse about heroes must be understood within the framework of a society in which hero cult was a common practice, and a society in which Philostratus's readers would have had no problems recognizing the ritual vocabulary associated with hero cults.

Hans Dieter Betz argues that the movement from skepticism to belief is one of the major themes of the *Heroikos*, and indeed the whole dialogue revolves around the Phoenician's change of attitude toward the worship of heroes.[10] There is a progression in the types of evidence the vinegrower uses to convince his interlocutor of the existence of heroes: he starts with his encounter with the hero Protesilaos, which represents a turning point in his own life, then goes on to the scientific proof afforded by the existence of large bones and to what he learned about other heroes directly from Protesilaos. After a section devoted to the correction of Homer's account of epic heroes, the vinegrower goes on to describe the proper performance of heroic rituals.

The vinegrower never has any doubts about the reality of heroes, and his life changes for the better when he decides to follow the hero Protesilaos's advice and moves to the country. He considers the hero to be both an adviser and a companion. The friendship the vinegrower enjoys with the risen Protesilaos, however, is not unique, and he gives other examples of heroes who have come back to life.

Even when one encounters heroes, it is not always easy to recognize them. When ghosts (εἴδωλα) first appear, the vinegrower explains to the Phoenician, the identity of each is not immediately

[8] Graham Anderson, *Philostratus: Biography and* Belles Lettres *in the Third Century A.D.* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 247–48.

[9] Teresa Mantero, *Ricerche sull'* Heroikos *di Filostrato* (Genoa: University of Genoa, Istituto di Filologia Classica e Medioevale, 1966), 1–18; Hans Dieter Betz, "Hero Worship and Christian Beliefs: Observations from the History of Religion on Philostratus's *Heroikos*," 25–47 in this volume. See also Maclean and Aitken, *Philostratus: Heroikos*, xlii–xlv.

[10] Betz, "Hero Worship and Christian Beliefs."

obvious. Heroes may appear in many different guises—they can change their appearance, their age, or their armor—and it can be a tricky task to recognize a hero from one time to the next (*Her.* 21.1–8).

To illustrate the difficulty in identifying heroes, the vinegrower tells the story of a Trojan farmer who particularly favors the hero Palamedes. The farmer is described as having deep sympathy for Palamedes' suffering and his horrific death at the hands of his comrades. The farmer often goes to the shore where Palamedes was stoned to death; he brings offerings to the hero's grave and sings dirges for him. After the farmer displays his admiration for Palamedes in these and other ways, the hero decides to visit and reward his admirer, whom he describes as his ἐραστής ("lover"). Palamedes appears to the farmer as he tends his vine:

> «σὺ γινώσκεις με» ἔφη «γεωργέ;»—«καὶ πῶς» εἶπεν, «ὃν οὔπω εἶδον;»—«τί οὖν» ἔφη, «ἀγαπᾷς ὃν μὴ γινώσκεις;» ξυνῆκεν ὁ γεωργὸς ὅτι Παλαμήδης εἴη· καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐς ἥρω ἔφερε μέγαν τε καὶ καλὸν καὶ ἀνδρεῖον, οὔπω τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγονότα· καὶ περιβαλὼν αὐτὸν μειδιῶν «φιλῶ σε, ὦ Παλάμηδες» εἶπεν, «ὅτι μοι δοκεῖς φρονιμώτατος ἀνθρώπων γεγονέναι καὶ δικαιότατος ἀθλητὴς τῶν κατὰ σοφίαν πραγμάτων.»
>
> "Do you recognize me, farmer?" He answered, "How would I recognize you whom I have never seen?" "Then *do you love him* [ἀγαπᾷς] whom you do not recognize?" said the other. The farmer realized that it was Palamedes, and he reported that the hero's image was tall, beautiful, and brave, although he was not thirty years old. The farmer embraced him and said with a smile, "*I love you* [φιλῶ σε], Palamedes, because you seem to me to be the most sensible of all and the most fair champion in deeds of skill." (*Her.* 21.5–6)

As soon as Palamedes mentions love (ἀγαπᾷς), the farmer recognizes the hero. In this passage, there is an intimate emotional bond between worshiper and hero, and loving the hero comes to the same thing as physically seeing him.

Just before this epiphany, one of the ways in which the farmer shows his devotion to Palamedes is by experiencing the sufferings (πάθος) of the hero as well as singing laments (ἐθρήνει) for him. Mourning, paradoxically, revives the hero for the worshiper. Love and lament are keys to the hero's coming back to life.

Later in the dialogue, another passage demonstrates a similar

conflation of loving and seeing, or loving and recognizing. The vinegrower tells the Phoenician what Protesilaos told him about Achilles' physical appearance. He starts with Achilles' hair, "lovelier than gold," and then goes on to his nose, brow, and eyes:

> ὁρμήσαντος δὲ συνεκπηδᾶν τῇ γνώμῃ, τοῖς τε ἐρῶσιν ἡδίω αὐτὸν φαίνεσθαι.
>
> "When he is rushing on," [he adds,] "[his eyes] spring out along with his purpose, and he seems more lovely than ever *to those who love* [τοῖς ἐρῶσιν] *him*." (*Her.* 48.2)

In the case of the farmer and Palamedes, loving precedes, and perhaps causes, the hero's epiphany. In the second instance, loving and seeing are synchronous. Clearly, then, seeing, loving, and knowing the hero are all intertwined.

The same language of love and desire is used in the dialogue both of longing for the hero and also of longing for knowledge about the hero. Desire to learn is often described in terms of πόθος and ἔρως. The Phoenician, in particular, emphasizes his thirst for knowledge:

> ἃ ποθῶ μαθεῖν, ξυνίης δή γε· αὐτὴν γὰρ τὴν ξυνουσίαν, ἥτις ἐστί σοι πρὸς τὸν Πρωτεσίλεων.
>
> You know at any rate what *I long to learn* [ποθῶ μαθεῖν], and especially about this association you have with Protesilaos. (*Her.* 7.1)

And again a little later:

> ποθοῦντι ἀποδίδως, ἀμπελουργέ, τὸν περὶ αὐτῆς λόγον· σπάνιον δὲ οἶμαι ἀκούσεσθαι.
>
> You tell the story to one *who longs* for it [ποθοῦντι], vinegrower. And I believe I will seldom hear it. (*Her.* 23.2)

Similarly, the hero Palamedes himself is described as a lover of wisdom (σοφίας ἐρῶν, *Her.* 23.24).[11]

Nagy argues that epic heroes are eroticized already in Homer's *Iliad* where yearning for the hero is conventionally described in the language of desire (πόθος). This happens when the warriors of Phthia "long" for their leader, Protesilaos, in Book 2 (*Il.* 2.703, 709) and again in Book 23, when the Achaeans "long" for Patroklos (*Il.*

[11] Other example of ἔρως for knowledge or wisdom: *Her.* 23.1; 23.36.

23.16).[12] The same verb, ποθεῖν, is used in both instances. Yet, the discourse of love is nowhere as strikingly explicit as it is, almost a thousand years later, in the *Heroikos*, with the hero Palamedes' description of his follower as an ἐραστής ("lover"), and his tacit self-definition as his worshiper's ἐρώμενος ("beloved"). It is not only the intimate emotional bond between hero and worshiper that is surprising, but the physical reality of the hero's presence and the individual nature of his relationship with worshipers.

While the emotional intensity of the bond between hero and worshiper in the *Heroikos* is unique, Philostratus also focuses on more conventional forms of worship. We saw how the Phoenician is both skeptical about heroes, yet eager to learn more about them at the beginning of his conversation with the vinegrower. Later in the dialogue, once it becomes clear that the Phoenician is no longer hostile to the idea of the reality of heroes in general, the vinegrower starts to discuss *ritual* in more details.

I would like to focus on a passage that describes the cult of Achilles and compares it with the cults of Melikertês and the children of Medea. This passage comes close to the end of the dialogue, as the vinegrower and his interlocutor start to discuss the cult of Achilles. The vinegrower tells the Phoenician about the strange mixture of rites performed by the Thessalians in honor of Achilles:

> καὶ μὴν καὶ ὕμνων ἐκ Θετταλίας ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἔτυχεν, οὓς ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ἐπὶ τὸ σῆμα φοιτῶντες ᾖδον ἐν νυκτί, τελετῆς τι ἐγκαταμιγνύντες τοῖς ἐναγίσμασιν, ὡς Λήμνιοί τε νομίζουσιν καὶ Πελοποννησίων οἱ ἀπὸ Σισύφου.
>
> From Thessaly, of course, Achilles also received *hymns*, which they sang at night when they visited his tomb every year, *mixing something of an initiatory rite* with their *heroic offerings*, just as both the Lemnians and the Peloponnesians descended from Sisyphus practice. (*Her.* 52.3)

While the Greek word τελετή can be an unmarked term for ritual in general, it also has a more specific meaning of "initiation" and in some cases "initiation into mysteries." As Arthur Darby Nock has shown, the terminology of initiation and mystery acquired a generic quality as mysteries became increasingly popular in the Hellenistic period and later.[13] Yet, because the narrative here

[12] Nagy, "The Sign of the Hero," xxvii n. 20.

[13] On τελετή as an initiation term, see Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 9. Arthur Darby Nock,

emphasizes that the ritual in honor of Achilles is a *mixture* of different rituals, and since τελετή is contrasted with ἐναγίσματα, a technical term for the type of bloody animal sacrifices preferred by the dead and heroes, I take τελετή in this passage in its specialized sense as initiatory rites.

When he learns of the rites in honor of Achilles, the Phoenician confesses that this is a subject of great interest to him. The vinegrower cautions him that a digression into these practices might be time-consuming, but encouraged by the Phoenician's enthusiasm ("the soul's cargo," as he puts it, "is sweeter to me and more profitable"; *Her.* 53.3), he agrees that digressions make for worthwhile conversation, and he elaborates the comparison by specifying that he was comparing the ritual for Achilles with two Peloponnesian rites in particular:

> τὰ μὲν γὰρ Κορινθίων ἐπὶ Μελικέρτῃ (τούτους γὰρ δὴ τοὺς ἀπὸ Σισύφου εἶπον), καὶ ὁπόσα οἱ αὐτοὶ δρῶσιν ἐπὶ τοῖς τῆς Μηδείας παισίν, οὓς ὑπὲρ τῆς Γλαύκης ἀπέκτειναν, θρήνῳ εἴκασται τελεστικῷ τε καὶ ἐνθέῳ· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ μειλίσσονται, τὸν δὲ ὑμνοῦσιν.
>
> The rites of the Corinthians for Melikertês (for these people are those whom I called the descendants of Sisyphus) and what the same people do for Medea's children, whom they killed for the sake of Glaukê, resemble a *lament* that is both *initiatory* and *inspired*, for they *propitiate* the children and *sing hymns* to Melikertês. (*Her.* 53.4)

The rituals mentioned in this passage are comparable because they all consist of a *mixture*. Let us look carefully at the terminology used by the vinegrower: he specifies that the rites for Melikertês and those for the children of Medea are similar in that they resemble a lament (θρῆνος), which is of an initiatory nature (τελεστικός), as well as divinely inspired (ἔνθεος). He does mention that "they," the Corinthians, killed the children of Medea, but he does not refer to the circumstances of the death of Melikertês. While worshipers propitiate (μειλίσσονται) the children of Medea, they perform hymns for Melikertês. Μειλίσσειν is a verb typically used to describe offerings to the dead or to heroes.[14] Both these

"Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 2:798.

[14] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 195.

cults, then, like the one in honor of Achilles, consist of a blend of initiation rituals and heroic offerings.

In all three cases—Achilles, Melikertês, children of Medea—Philostratus also describes the rites in terms of singing. The performance of mourning songs in the context of hero worship is nothing unusual, but the emphasis in these two passages is on the link between singing and initiation: the performance of hymns and laments is, in fact, what defines these rites as τελεταί, as rituals of an initiatory nature.[15]

Why are laments so important in the cults of Melikertês, the children of Medea, and Achilles? We have seen, in the case of Palamedes, how a lament can be a prelude to the hero's epiphany, and singing a θρῆνος is clearly an effective means of communication with the hero as we see in these three cases. Yet what are we to make of Philostratus's insistence on describing these cults as similar to initiation rituals? Moreover, is this link between hero cults and initiation typical of the Roman period?

While the connection between initiation and hero cult is made explicit in the *Heroikos*, can the same be said about earlier Greek sources? Angelo Brelich already suggested in his 1958 book on hero cult that there is a type of hero who is closely connected to mysteries.[16] Not surprisingly, he refers to Philostratus's description of the cults of Melikertês and the children of Medea. Yet he also points out that Euripides already had his Medea describe the ritual in honor of her children in terms of initiatory rite:

> οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεί σφας τῇδ' ἐγὼ θάψω χερί,
> φέρουσ' ἐς Ἥρας τέμενος Ἀκραίας θεοῦ,
> ὡς μή τις αὐτοὺς πολεμίων καθυβρίσῃ
> τύμβους ἀνασπῶν· γῇ δὲ τῇδε Σισύφου

[15] See Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 61–62 and nn., for laments in honor of cult heroes (lament for Leukothea in Thebes, Achilles at Elis, and the Bakchiadai at Corinth) and lamentation in the Dionysiac and Orphic tradition. For more on the cult of Achilles on Leukê, see Guy Hedreen, "The Cult of Achilles in the Euxine," *Hesperia* 60 (1991): 313–30. For the cult of Achilles in the *Heroikos*, see Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "The Cult of Achilles in Philostratus' *Heroikos*: A Study in the Relation of Canon and Ritual," in *Between Magic and Religion: Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society* (ed. Sulochana R. Asirvatham, Corinne Ondine Pache, and John Watrous; Lanham, Md.; Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 127–35. On τελετή as a term used to describe mysteries, see Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 9–11.

[16] Angelo Brelich, *Gli eroi greci: Un problema storico-religioso* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1958), 118–23. See also Nagy, "The Sign of the Hero."

σεμνὴν ἑορτὴν καὶ τέλη προσάψομεν
τὸ λοιπὸν ἀντὶ τοῦδε δυσσεβοῦς φόνου.

Indeed no, *I shall bury them* with my own hand,
Taking them to the *sanctuary* of Hera the goddess of
Akraia,
So that none of my enemies may outrage them,
Tearing up their graves. And on this land of Sisyphus
I shall enjoin a *solemn festival and initiation rituals*
For the rest of time *as a compensation* for this impious
murder. (Euripides *Medea* 1377–1383)

The sources describing the cult in honor of the children of Medea are few and not always in agreement. Parmeniskos, an Alexandrian grammarian of the second and first centuries B.C.E., reports that the cult in honor of the children was instituted by the Corinthians after some sort of a plague (λοιμός) struck the city. The Corinthians consulted the oracle, which told them to establish a cult in honor of the children in order to expiate their guilt and appease the wrath of Hera. And from that time on, seven boys and seven girls were chosen every year from the Corinthian aristocracy to serve in the temple of Hera for one year.[17] Pausanias, who is the other main source for the ritual, is silent about this yearly rite of segregation in his second-century C.E. guidebook to Greece. According to him, his contemporaries have abandoned the rituals (θυσίαι) in honor of the children of Medea. He mentions that Corinthian children used to cut their hair and wear dark clothes in honor of the dead heroes, but that the custom ended with the sack of Corinth by the Romans in 146 B.C.E. (*Description of Greece* 2.3.7). Aelian, on the other hand, writing after Pausanias, disagrees and claims that the Corinthians still perform sacrifices for the children in his own time, but he speaks in terms of heroic sacrifices (ἐναγίζουσι, *Varia historia* 5.21). Although Pausanias's and Aelian's versions are difficult to reconcile, and regardless of whether the rituals were still performed in the Roman period, we should nonetheless note that Euripides, the scholia to the *Medea*, and Pausanias all describe the ritual in terms of initiation.

When we turn to Melikertês, we find that the Isthmian myth is well documented in earlier sources, and although they disagree on details, the same basic elements are found in most versions of the story: baby Melikertês dies when his mother Ino tries to escape the murderous fury of her husband, Athamas, by jumping into the sea

[17] Scholia to Euripides *Medea* 264 = *FGrH* 417 F 3.

from the White Rock, holding her son in her arms. The Nereids welcome her, and she is deified as Leukothea, while the body of her son, Melikertês, is brought ashore at the Isthmus by a dolphin. There Sisyphus finds the body, gives him a funeral, and establishes the Isthmian Games in honor of the boy, renamed Palaimôn. Pindar is the earliest source to mention the ritual established by Sisyphus in honor of the dead child:

> Αἰολίδαν δὲ Σίσυφον κέλοντο
> ᾧ παιδὶ τηλέφαντον ὄρσαι
> γέρας φθιμένῳ Μελικέρτᾳ.
>
> They ordered Sisyphus, the son of Aiolos,
> to establish an *honor that can be seen from afar*
> for the dead child Melikertês. (Pindar *Isthmian* frg. 6.5 Maehler)

Pindar's "honor that can be seen from afar" clearly refers to the cult in honor of Melikertês. The Greek word γέρας can be understood both literally and metaphorically, as both a physical monument and the institution of a festival in honor of the dead hero.[18] The myth of Melikertês appears not only in lyric poetry, but also in tragedy as well as in Hellenistic poetry.[19] Yet, as Helmut Koester argues in a

[18] For τηλέφαντος γέρας as a panhellenic festival in honor of Melikertês, see Elizabeth R. Gebhard and Matthew W. Dickie, "Melikertes-Palaimon, Hero of the Isthmian Games," in Hägg, *Ancient Greek Hero Cult*, 161. I argue elsewhere (*Baby and Child Heroes in Ancient Greece* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004]) that the adjective τηλέφαντος refers both to time and space; the word has the connotation both of "appearing" and "speaking." In the case of Pindar's *Isthmian* fragment, the τηλέφαντον γέρας belongs to the rhetoric of cult: I suggest that it refers both to a concrete visible heroic shrine built in honor of Melikertês, as well as to the poetic narrative of the hero's death.

[19] We know that Aeschylus and Sophocles each composed an *Athamas* (actually, Sophocles is the author of two plays of the same name); there is also a *Phrixos* by Sophocles, as well as two *Phrixos* plays by Euripides; see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 179. Euripides' lost *Ino* can be reconstructed via Hyginus's *Fabula* 4. Euripides (*Medea* 1282–1291) mentions the story of Ino and Melikertês and describes Palaimôn, the son of Leukothea, as the guardian of ships (*Iphigenia in Tauris* 270–271). The scholia to Pindar's *Isthmian Odes* also gives many details about the myth and ritual in honor of Melikertês (Anders Björn Drachmann, *Scholia vetera in Pindari Carmina* [3 vols.; Teubner; Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1966–67], 3:192–95). In Hellenistic poetry, Melikertês becomes an angry baby requiring human sacrifice: see Callimachus *Causes* 4; *Diegesis* frg. 91 Pfeiffer, where Lesbians sacrifice babies on the altar of Melikertês at Tenedos; Lycophron *Alexandra* 229 mentions Melikertês as a baby slayer (βρεφοκτόνος) and the scholia add that the son of Ino is especially honored in Tenedos, where he receives sacri-

1990 article, the cult in honor of Melikertês begins to be described as a mystery cult in our literary sources only in the Roman period.[20]

Pausanias describes the temple of Melikertês-Palaimôn, which he places "to the left" within the sanctuary of Apollo at Isthmia. The ἄδυτον, an underground chamber, is where Palaimôn is supposed to be hidden—and anyone, either Corinthian or foreign, who falsely swears an oath there has no way to escape his oath (Pausanias *Description of Greece* 2.2.1). It is unclear from Pausanias's description whether the ἄδυτον was part of the temple or a different structure altogether.

Near where the temple of Palaimôn should have been according to Pausanias, excavators found the foundations of an earlier stadium, as well as the concrete foundation of a Roman building. An earlier cult place for Melikertês was probably located somewhere in this area, but all remains were obliterated during the destruction of Corinth by Mummius (146 B.C.E.). The earliest remains, however, that can be directly linked with Melikertês are from two sacrificial pits from the first century C.E. filled with animal bones, pottery, and lamps of a unique shape unknown anywhere else in Greece. The Palaimônion was rebuilt in the Roman period, and the temple as it stood in the second century C.E. has been reconstructed from representations on coins from the Isthmus and Corinth.[21]

What about the cult, then, and the lament that is both "initia-

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fices of babies (schol. *Alexandra* 229 Scheer). The emphasis on human sacrifice in the Hellenistic sources is inconsistent with what we know about heroic rituals: while it is frequent for the spirits of young victims to take revenge on their living counterparts—as is the case with the children of Medea, for example, who cause all Corinthian infants to die—there is no evidence of any hero cults requiring human victims. The function of such myths may be apotropaic. For a different interpretation, cf. Elizabeth Gebhard, who argues that the story of the death of Melikertês fits a pattern of myths dealing with child sacrifices performed in times of crisis to save a city. "Child in the Fire, Child in the Pot: The Making of a Hero" (paper presented at the Seventh International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, Göteborg University, Sweden, 16–18 April 1999), to be published in the proceedings of this conference. We find another such myth, of course, in the *Heroikos*, in the story of Achilles requesting that a young Trojan girl be left on the beach for him, only to be torn apart limb from limb (*Her.* 56.10), but here the murder of the young woman is the result of Achilles' anger against the Trojans rather than a sacrifice per se.

[20] See Helmut Koester, "Melikertes at Isthmia: A Roman Mystery Cult," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. David Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 355–66.

[21] For lamps, see Oscar Broneer, *Isthmia III: Terracotta Lamps* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1977) and Koester, "Melikertes at

tory and inspired"? Philostratus is, in fact, not our only source for this aspect of the ritual. Plutarch also mentions the cult in his life of Theseus:

> ὁ γὰρ ἐπὶ Μελικέρτῃ τεθεὶς αὐτόθι νυκτὸς ἐδρᾶτο, τελετῆς ἔχων μᾶλλον ἢ θέας καὶ πανηγυρισμοῦ τάξιν.
>
> For the contest established *in honor of Melikertês* was taking place there at night, organized like an *initiatory ritual* [τελετή] rather than like a spectacle or public festival. (Plutarch *Theseus* 25.5)

In this passage, Plutarch is distinguishing between the panhellenic athletic games, which he claims were founded by Theseus, and the ἀγών in honor of Melikertês, which he describes as already in place by the time Theseus came to the Isthmus. Plutarch uses the traditional ritual syntax ἐπί plus the dative to indicate that the ἀγών is offered to Melikertês as a compensation for his death. This ἀγών, however, is not a simple public athletic festival, but rather it is organized like an initiatory ritual (τελετή), which takes place at night.

Another important source for the cult of Melikertês-Palaimôn is Philostratus's *Imagines*. I want to focus more particularly on a few sentences referring to the ritual:

> ὁ θύων ἐν Ἰσθμῷ δῆμος—εἴη δ' ἂν ὁ ἐκ τῆς Κορίνθου—καὶ βασιλεὺς οὑτοσὶ τοῦ δήμου—Σίσυφον αὐτὸν ἡγώμεθα—τέμενος δὲ τουτὶ Ποσειδῶνος ἠρέμα τι προσηχοῦν θαλάττῃ—αἱ γὰρ τῶν πιτύων κόμαι τοῦτο ᾄδουσι—τοιάδε, ὦ παῖ, σημαίνει· ἡ Ἰνὼ τῆς γῆς ἐκπεσοῦσα τὸ μὲν ἑαυτῆς Λευκοθέα τε καὶ τοῦ τῶν Νηρηίδων κύκλου, τὸ δὲ τοῦ παιδὸς ἡ γῆ Παλαίμονι τῷ βρέφει χρήσεται. καταίρει δὲ ἤδη ἐς αὐτὴν ἐπὶ δελφῖνος εὐηνίου, καὶ ὁ δελφὶς τὰ νῶτα ὑποστρωννὺς φέρει καθεύδοντα διολισθάνων ἀψοφητὶ τῆς γαλήνης, ὡς μὴ ἐκπέσοι τοῦ ὕπνου· προσιόντι δὲ αὐτῷ ῥήγνυταί τι κατὰ τὸν Ἰσθμὸν ἄδυτον διασχούσης τῆς γῆς ἐκ Ποσειδῶνος, ὅν μοι δοκεῖ καὶ Σισύφῳ τούτῳ προειπεῖν τὸν τοῦ παιδὸς εἴσπλουν καὶ ὅτι θύειν αὐτῷ δέοι. θύει δὲ ταῦρον τουτονὶ μέλανα ἀποσπάσας οἶμαι αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος ἀγέλης. ὁ μὲν οὖν τῆς θυσίας λόγος καὶ ἡ τῶν θυσάντων ἐσθὴς καὶ τὰ ἐναγίσματα, ὦ παῖ, καὶ τὸ σφάττειν ἐς τὰ τοῦ Παλαίμονος

Isthmia," 359–60; for the temple, see Oscar Broneer, *Isthmia I: Temple of Poseidon* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studes at Athens, 1977). For a recent discussion, see Elizabeth Gebhard, "The Beginnings of Panhellenic Games at the Isthmus," in *Akten des Internationalen Symposions Olympia 1875–2000* (ed. Helmut Kyrieleis; Mainz am Rhein: Zabern, 2002), 221–37.

ἀποκείσθω ὄργια—σεμνὸς γὰρ ὁ λόγος καὶ κομιδῇ ἀπόθετος ἄτ' ἀποθειώσαντος αὐτὸν Σισύφου τοῦ σοφοῦ· σοφὸν γὰρ ἤδη που δηλοῖ αὐτὸν ἡ ἐπιστροφὴ τοῦ εἴδους—τὸ δὲ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος εἶδος, εἰ μὲν τὰς Γυρὰς πέτρας ἢ τὰ Θετταλικὰ ὄρη ῥήξειν ἔμελλε, δεινὸς ἄν που ἐγράφετο καὶ οἷον πλήττων, ξένον δὲ τὸν Μελικέρτην ποιούμενος ὡς ἐν τῇ γῇ ἔχοι, μειδιᾷ καθορμιζομένου καὶ κελεύει τὸν Ἰσθμὸν ἀναπετάσαι τὰ στέρνα καὶ γενέσθαι τῷ Μελικέρτῃ οἶκον. ὁ δὲ Ἰσθμός, ὦ παῖ, γέγραπται μὲν ἐν εἴδει δαίμονος ἐνυπτιάζων ἑαυτὸν τῇ γῇ, τέτακται δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως Αἰγαίου καὶ Ἀδρίου μέσος κεῖσθαι καθάπερ ἐπεζευγμένος τοῖς πελάγεσιν. ἔστι δὲ αὐτῷ μειράκιον μὲν ἐν δεξιᾷ, Λέχαιόν τοι, κόραι δὲ ἐν ἀριστερᾷ· θάλατται δὲ αὗται καλαὶ καὶ ἱκανῶς εὔδιοι τῇ τὸν Ἰσθμὸν ἀποφαινούσῃ γῇ παρακάθηνται.

This people sacrificing at the Isthmus, that would be the people of Corinth, and the king of the people here is, I think, Sisyphus himself; this is the sacred precinct of Poseidon, which resounds gently with the sea, for the leaves of the pine trees sing in this way, and this, my boy, is what it means: Ino, after she threw herself into the sea, became Leukothea and one of the circle of the Nereids; as for her son, the earth will benefit from the baby Palaimôn. Already he puts into port on the well-disposed dolphin, and the dolphin carrying the sleeping child spreads his back, slipping through the calm sea noiselessly, so that the child may not be waken from his sleep. And with him approaching, an ἄδυτον breaks forth out of the earth split apart by Poseidon, who, it seems to me, is announcing the child's sailing-in to Sisyphus here, and also that he should sacrifice to the child. And Sisyphus sacrifices this black bull here, having dragged him away from the herd of Poseidon. The *λόγος of the sacrifice* and the *attire* worn by those sacrificing as well as *the offerings*, my boy, and *the slaying* must be kept *for the secret rites of Palaimôn.* For *the λόγος is holy*[22] and altogether *secret*, since Sisyphus the wise himself deified it. That Sisyphus is wise is indeed shown by the thoughtfulness of his appearance. As for the face of Poseidon, if he were about to break the Gyrean rocks or the Thessalian mountains, he would certainly have been depicted as terrible and such as someone striking a blow, but since he is receiving him as a guest so that he might keep him in his land, he smiles

[22] Euripides uses same word when he describes Medea establishing a σεμνὴν καὶ τέλη ritual. For ἱερὸς λόγος in the context of mysteries, see Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 69–70.

> at the child coming into harbor, and orders the Isthmus to unfold its breast and become a home for Melikertês. The Isthmus, my boy, is painted in the form of a δαίμων sprawling himself on the land, and he has been appointed by nature to lie between the Aegean and the Adriatic as if he were yoking the two seas together. There is a young man on the right, Lechaios probably, and girls on the right, who are the two seas, beautiful and suitably calm, lying beside the land representing the Isthmus. (Philostratus *Imagines* 2.16)

Neither the "λόγος of the sacrifice," the attire worn by the people performing the sacrifice, the offerings, nor the way of killing the animal, are to be disclosed. "For the λόγος is holy [σεμνός] and altogether secret [ἀπόθετος]." Never mind that this prohibition is transgressed in this image, which shows precisely what must be kept secret.

The "λόγος of the sacrifice" (ὁ τῆς θυσίας λόγος) is in itself a mysterious phrase: is it referring to the language used during the sacrifice, the order in which it is performed, the beliefs of the participants, or the story behind it?[23] I suggest it refers to the narrative dealing with the death and coming back to life of the hero Melikertês. We see a similar preoccupation in the *Heroikos*, with the vinegrower carefully distinguishing between which part of the λόγος of Protesilaos can be told and which parts must be kept secret.

Aelius Aristides also mentions the cult of Melikertês at the end of his hymn to Poseidon. He wonders whether the story of Melikertês and Ino should be described as a story (λόγος) or a myth (μῦθος), and is distressed at the idea that the goddess Leukothea might have undergone the sufferings ascribed to the mortal Ino (*Sacred Discourses* 46.32–34). Thus, for him, Leukothea must have been a goddess from the beginning, and since there can be no evil among the gods (*Sacred Discourses* 46.36), he rejects the violent details of the narrative: Leukothea actually never threw herself into the sea, and neither was the child Melikertês snatched away—according to Aristides, he was actually entrusted to Poseidon as a source of delight and a gift (ἄθυρμα καὶ δῶρον).[24]

[23] On cult of Melikertês being secret (ἀπόρρητα), cf. Libanius *Or.* 14.65 Foerster.

[24] There is an intriguing precedent for this story, of course, in the myth of Poseidon falling in love with another beautiful young boy, Pelops (see Pache, *Baby and Child Heroes in Ancient Greece*).

When it comes to the cult of Melikertês, Aristides describes it in much the same terms as Philostratus:

> Παλαίμονα δὲ καὶ εἰπεῖν καλὸν καὶ τοὔνομα αὐτοῦ ὀνομάσαι καὶ ὅρκον ποιήσασθαι καὶ τῆς τελετῆς τῆς ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ τοῦ ὀργιασμοῦ μετασχεῖν—τοσοῦτος τις ἵμερος πρόσεστι τῷ παιδί—καὶ ἰδεῖν γε καὶ ἐν γράμματι, . . . ὅπου δὲ καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῶν τῶν νώτων τῆς θαλάττης, ὅπου δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν τῆς μητρὸς τὸ θάλος τοῦ παιδὸς καὶ τὴν ὥραν καὶ τὸ ἄνθος. ταῦτα γὰρ θεάματα θεαμάτων ἥδιστα καὶ ἰδεῖν γε καὶ ἀκοῦσαι.
>
> It is good to talk about Palaimôn and say his name and swear his oath, as well as to take part in the initiation ritual [τελετή] and the celebration of secret rites [ὀργιασμός] in his honor, and also—so great is the desire [ἵμερος] attached to the boy—to see in the picture the bloom and freshness and flower of the boy when he is on the back of the sea, and when he is in his mother's arms. For these are the sweetest of sights to see and to hear. (Aelius Aristides *Sacred Discourses* 46.40 Keil)

Aristides specifically describes the rites in honor of the hero as initiatory. Not only does he use the nouns τελετή and ὀργιασμός, which are associated with initiation rituals, but like Plutarch he also uses the traditional ritual syntax ἐπ' αὐτῷ, which in combination with the noun τελετή means "to be initiated into the mysteries of the hero." Although Aristides just dismissed the story of Ino and Melikertês throwing themselves into the sea, the picture he describes seems to show precisely this scene: the mother holding her child in the sea, and the child being carried forth by the sea. Two aspects of Aristides' description are particularly intriguing: Aristides insists on both the importance of *speaking* about Palaimôn (both talking about him and saying his name), as well as the pleasure inherent in *seeing* the boy.

The mention of swearing an oath in the name of Palaimôn recalls Pausanias's description of the ἄδυτον at Isthmia where worshipers actually swear oaths. Pausanias's claim that Palaimôn is hidden (κεκρύφθαι) begs the question: does Melikertês ever appear to his worshipers? Pausanias describes another ἄδυτον in the context of a hero cult, that of the oracle of the hero Trophônios at Lebadeia, where in order to consult the oracle, the worshiper descends into an underground χάσμα. Once they reach the inner sanctum (ἄδυτον), worshipers learn the future. According to Pausanias, there is no

single way of doing this, but some learn through seeing, others through hearing (*Description of Greece* 9.39.11).

Aristides uses a series of adjectives associated with youth to describe Palaimôn in his mother's arms: θάλος, ὥρα, ἄνθος. All belong to the metaphorical world of flowers and spring, and all draw attention to Palaimôn's youth and beauty. What about the ἵμερος evoked by Aristides? The word can express longing or yearning, but also love and desire. This is the word used by Philostratus, for example, when he describes how desire is awakened in Achilles and Helen after they hear descriptions of each other. Yet, in the case of Melikertês, Aristides is not talking about romance, but about a dead, heroized child. At first glance, it may seem that the ἵμερος described by Aristides is caused by the vision of the boy's image, but on closer examination it becomes clear that this ἵμερος is very closely related to what precedes as well; it is the participation in the rites (τελετή, ὀργιασμός) and oath, as well as the description of the picture that follows, that awakens the ἵμερος for the hero in the worshiper. Moreover, Aristides emphasizes at the end of the passage that these sights are the sweetest to *see* and to *hear* (καὶ ἰδεῖν γε καὶ ἀκοῦσαι), making it very clear that both components are essential. In some way, then, ἵμερος is closely linked with initiation into the mystery of the hero Melikertês. Something similar seems to be at work in the *Heroikos*, where we see worshipers falling in love with heroes. Indeed, in some cases, loving a hero seems to be a form of initiation.

How early, then, can we trace back a link between a hero cult and a mystery cult? I have mentioned Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* as an important exception in the way in which it conceptualizes a living being as a hero. Sophocles' last tragedy also provides an intriguing perspective on the link between initiation and hero cult. The play describes the death and heroization of Oedipus in the grove of the Eumenides at Kolônos. Although Oedipus is still alive, other characters are aware of his status as cult hero and of the powers he can exercise as such. As Claude Calame has shown, Sophocles superimposes a pattern of initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries onto the narrative of the death of Oedipus.[25] While this

[25] See Jacques Jouanna, "Espaces sacrés, rites et oracles dans *l'Oedipe à Colone* de Sophocle," *REG* 108 (1995): 38–58; Lowell Edmunds, "The Cults and the Legend of Oedipus," *HSCP* 85 (1981): 221–38; Lowell Edmunds, *Theatrical Space and Historical Place in Sophocles'* Oedipus at Colonus (Lanham, Md.:

does not necessarily mean that the ritual in honor of Oedipus was in fact a mystery cult, the very fact that Sophocles can make such an analogy is intriguing.

If a link, however tenuous, between hero cult and mystery rites can already be attested for the fifth century B.C.E., then the initiatory nature of the cults of Melikertês, of the children of Medea, as well as of Achilles described in the *Heroikos* is perhaps not an exception or a late (Roman) development, but rather represents a particular strand of hero cult that was there all along.[26]

What about the role of initiation and mysteries in the *Heroikos* in general? While the existence of heroes is a given in the classical period, in Philostratus's narrative, initiation becomes a prerequisite to perception. I return to an episode at the very beginning of the dialogue:

> καὶ οὔπω, ξένε, τῶν ἀηδόνων ἤκουσας, οἷον τῷ χωρίῳ ἐναττικίζουσιν, ἐπειδὰν δείλη τε ἥκῃ καὶ ἡμέρα ἄρχηται.
>
> "Stranger," says the vinegrower, "*you have not yet heard the nightingales that sing here in the Attic manner* both when evening comes and when day begins." (*Her.* 5.4)

Here again, let me turn to Sophocles: the allusion to nightingales recalls Antigone's description of Kolônos at the beginning of the play, where nightingales are a defining feature:

> χῶρος δ' ὅδ' ἱερός, ὡς σάφ' εἰκάσαι, βρύων
> δάφνης, ἐλαίας, ἀμπέλου· πυκνόπτεροι δ'
> εἴσω κατ' αὐτὸν εὐστομοῦσ' ἀηδόνες·
>
> But this place is *sacred*, one may clearly surmise,
> luxuriant
> with laurel, olive and vine. A throng of feathered
> *nightingales* sing their blessed song within it. (*Oedipus at Colonus* 16–18 Blundell)

And later in the play, the chorus echoes Antigone's words in their description of the sacred grove:

Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); Claude Calame, "Mort héroïque et culte à mystère dans l'*Oedipe à Colone* de Sophocle: Aspects rituels au service de la création mythique," in *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert, Castelen bei Basel, 15. bis 18. Marz 1996* (ed. Fritz Graf; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998), 326–56.

[26] For heroic cults "di carattere misterico," see Brelich, *Gli eroi greci*, 121.

εὐίππου, ξένε, τᾶσδε χώ—
ρας ἵκου τὰ κράτιστα γᾶς ἔπαυλα,
τὸν ἀργῆτα Κολωνόν, ἔνθ'
ἀ λίγεια μινύρεται ·
θαμίζουσα μάλιστ' ἀη—
δὼν χλωραῖς ὑπὸ βάσσαις,
τὸν οἰνωπὸν ἔχουσα κισ—
σὸν καὶ τὰν ἄβατον θεοῦ
φυλλάδα μυριόκαρπον ἀνήλιον
ἀνήνεμόν τε πάντων
χειμώνων·

In this country of fine horses, stranger,
You have reached the mightiest shelter upon earth,
White Kolônos.
The clear-toned nightingale,
Frequenting it most,
Pipes plaintively within green glades,
Occupying the wine-dark ivy
And the foliage of the god
Where none may step, with untold berries, out of the sun
Out of the wind of all storms. (*Oedipus at Colonus* 669–678 Blundell)

Two keywords in these two passages, Kolônos and nightingale, evoke concerns closely linked to mourning and hero cults. The noun κολωνός here refers to the sacred grove near Athens where the heroization of Oedipus takes place. Nagy argues that the word is consistently associated with hero cult and is often used as a marker of the hero's grave. Indeed it appears in the *Heroikos*, where it is used to describe the mound that extends over the grave of the hero Protesilaos (*Her.* 9.1). The same term later on describes the grave of Achilles and Patroklos (*Her.* 51.12).[27] Moreover, like the White Rock that marks the entrance to the underworld in archaic Greek poetry, it can also be perceived, metonymically, as the boundary as it were between life and death.[28]

Just as important as the word κολωνός is the presence of nightingales singing in these two passages. The presence of nightingales at Kolônos is no coincidence. Nightingales are often connected with

[27] See Nagy, "The Sign of the Hero," xxxiii n. 34.

[28] On the associations between Kolônos and the White Rock, see Gregory Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas: 'Reading' the Symbols of Greek Lyric," in *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 223–62.

mourning in the context of hero cults, and more particularly they mourn the death of the poet par excellence, Orpheus:

> ὁ δὲ Μυρσίλος ὁ τὰ Λεσβιακὰ συγγεγραφώς φησιν, τῆς Ἀντισσαίας ἐν ᾧ τόπῳ μυθολογεῖται καὶ δείκνυται δὲ ὁ τάφος ὑπὸ τῶν ἐγχωρίων τῆς τοῦ Ὀρφέως κεφαλῆς, τὰς ἀηδόνας εἶναι εὐφωνοτέρας τῶν ἄλλων.
>
> And Myrsilos, who wrote the *Lesbiaka*, says that in Antissaia, in the place where the tomb for the head of Orpheus is reported to be and shown by the inhabitants, *the nightingales are more melodious than others.* (*FGrH* 477 F 2)

Here Myrsilos describes how the inhabitants of Lesbos describe the place where the grave for the head of Orpheus is in terms of the nightingales who sing there more melodiously than others. Similarly, according to Pausanias, the Thracians say that the nightingales that nest on Orpheus's grave, which they claim is in Thrace, sing more loudly and in a sweeter manner than other nightingales (*Description of Greece* 9.30.6). The Greeks traditionally understood the song of the nightingale as a song of lament,[29] and clearly this is how the vinegrower understands it when he tells the Phoenician that he has not yet heard the nightingales singing. But what interests me even more is the Phoenician's answer, in which he makes a distinction between lamenting and singing:

> δοκῶ μοι ἀκηκοέναι ξυντίθεσθαί τε μηδὲ θρηνεῖν αὐτάς, ἀλλὰ ᾄδειν μόνον.
>
> "I think that I have heard them and I agree that they *do not lament*, but *only sing.*" (*Her.* 5.5)

Is this an indication of the Phoenician's utter failure to understand what is really at stake? Remember what the vinegrower said: "You have not *yet* heard the nightingales that sing here in the Attic manner both when evening comes and when day begins." By link-

[29] Calame, "Mort héroïque et culte à mystère," 238 n. 16, with references. For nightingales in Sophocles, see Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 373–75, with n. 34; see also Aara Suksi, "The Poet at Colonus: Nightingales in Sophocles," *Mnemosyne* 54 (2001): 646–58. For the nightingale as metaphor for poetic authority, see Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance, Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), passim, especially 7–9, 57–66, 207–13; for the nightingale in the context of mourning, see Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 57–65, 105.

ing the nightingales to Attica, the vinegrower makes clear both the literary and ritual connection to the classical past. The Phoenician merchant perhaps catches the literary allusion, but not the ritual one. He cannot hear the nightingales' lament *yet* because he is not yet initiated into the mysteries of hero cult. By the end of the dialogue, however, the Phoenician has been persuaded and is ready to understand, and perhaps experience, the bond between worshiper and hero.

Laments and hymns clearly are at the center of hero worship in the *Heroikos*, but this is also something we see at work in other sources: telling the story of the hero, singing of him, and lamenting him are constantly described as the focus of the cult of Melikertês and of Achilles, for example. Lamenting the hero is a form of community for the worshipers, and perhaps the beginning of an initiation into the mysteries.

Before I turn to my conclusion, I would like to go back once more to initiation as it is described in the *Heroikos*. As many have noticed before, the Phoenician undergoes an initiation of sorts himself in the course of the narrative:[30] at the beginning of the dialogue, he makes it clear he does not believe in heroes; by the end, he is so entranced by the vinegrower's narrative that he asks to come back the next day to hear more about yet another subject. Through hearing the vinegrower's stories, the Phoenician merchant begins to see a truth he had not suspected even existed before, and by the end of the dialogue he claims that his soul's cargo is more valuable than that of his ship, and that he would rather delay his business than miss the opportunity to hear more from the vinegrower and Protesilaos himself.

The Phoenician merchant realizes that he cannot ask about certain subjects, such as Protesilaos coming back to life, but there is one topic he is particularly interested in: he wants to hear about the place where the rivers Kôkytos, Pyriphlegethôn, and Akherousias flow, or the place—as we know it from the *Odyssey*—which is just beyond the White Rock, beyond the world of the living, beyond everyday consciousness:[31]

> τοὺς δὲ Κωκυτούς τε καὶ Πυριφλεγέθοντας καὶ τὴν Ἀχερουσιάδα
> καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ποταμῶν τε καὶ τῶν λιμνῶν ὀνόματα καὶ νὴ

[30] See Mantero, *Ricerche sull'* Heroikos, 61–64, and Betz, "Hero Worship and Christian Beliefs," 25–47.

[31] See Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, 236.

> Δία τοὺς Αἰακοὺς καὶ τὰ τούτων δικαστήριά τε καὶ δικαιωτήρια αὐτός τε ἴσως ἀπαγγελεῖς καὶ ξυγχωρεῖ διηγεῖσθαι.
>
> On the *Kôkytoi* and the *Pyriphlegethontes* and the *Akherousiada*, and such names of rivers and seas, and, by Zeus, the Aiakidai and their courts of justice and places of punishments, you yourself will perhaps report and he [Protesilaos] will agree to set forth the details. (*Her.* 58.3)

The vinegrower advises him to set sail or, if the winds should be bad, to come back the next day. The Phoenician merchant does not hesitate and reiterates that he wants to hear more:

> πείθομαί σοι, ἀμπελουργέ, καὶ οὕτως ἔσται· πλεύσαιμι δὲ μήπω, Πόσειδον, πρὶν ἢ καὶ τοῦδε ἀκροάσασθαι τοῦ λόγου.
>
> *I believe in you*, vinedresser, and so shall it be. May I not sail, by Poseidon, before I listen to this *story* as well. (*Her.* 58.6)

Kôkytos, Pyriphlegethôn, and Akherousias: Wailing, Blazing Fire, and Woe, these are the topics the Phoenician wants to learn more about, and this, it seems to me, is the perfect way to conclude an initiation into the mysteries of the hero: in the *Heroikos*, the λόγος of death and mourning literally gets the last word of the dialogue.

In conclusion, the *Heroikos* uses the same ritual vocabulary and concept of the hero used by the poets of the classical period. The roles played by mourning, love, and πόθος reflect earlier Greek practices, yet the dialogue also fundamentally differs from the earlier tradition. The need for persuasion and the "scientific," or to echo Don Quixote, the "geometric," nature of the evidence represent new developments. The vinegrower's belief in heroes, just like Don Quixote's belief in giants, is being challenged by his interlocutor and the burden of proof is on the believer. The *Heroikos* depicts worshipers who still empathize with, mourn, and love the hero, but belief in the existence of heroes is no longer a given. While earlier hero cults already exhibit aspects that we associate with mystery cult, something new is at work in the *Heroikos*, where the mystery is closely connected with doubt and the need for persuasion and conversion. And, through conversion and initiation, the hero becomes alive to the worshiper.