

“Bring Him Home”:
Iliad 7.334–5 and the Commemoration of the War Dead in Archaic Greece

In *Iliad* 7.332–7, Nestor instructs the Achaean soldiers to gather the corpses of the fallen and cremate them separately in order to bring the remains back to their respective families. These lines are criticized already in antiquity; Aristarchus athetizes 7.334–5 due to a discrepancy with the Homeric custom of burying the low-ranked war dead *en masse* and similarly, the impracticality of individual repatriation after a collective cremation (schol. A. *ad loc.*). This paper argues that the insertion dates to the sixth century in light of an ideological strife between aristocratic and civic ideals. Firstly, it rejects early fifth century dating while discussing the scholarly history regarding these lines. The second part then situates the interpolation within a sixth-century discourse concerning the appropriate treatment towards the fallen. Through a historical analysis that considers the interpolated lines alongside epigraphic and iconographic data, the paper reconstructs the ideological conflict of the late archaic period, when competing societal forces instrumentalized the Homeric text to support their contemporary claims and worldview.

Modern scholars have largely agreed with Aristarchus. Felix Jacoby even pinpoints the interpolation to Athens around 464, considering the Athenian custom of repatriating the war dead to a collective burial at the Kerameikos (1944: 40, n. 30; cf. Kirk 1985: 10. *Contra* Wilamowitz 1916: 55). However, this raises several methodological problems since Aeschylus alludes to Nestor’s speech in his *Agamemnon* (433–6), which was first performed in 458. The couplet was, therefore, already accepted as an integral part of the Homeric epic in Aeschylus’ time (Shive 1996: 195). Other scholars solve this conundrum by designating an earlier date to the introduction of the Athenian public funeral (e.g. Gomme 1956: 94–101). Nevertheless, the so-

called *patrios nomos* came into being only at the beginning of the fifth century (Arrington 2015: 43).

Jacoby and subsequent scholars assume that the lines must mirror an Athenian custom of the classical period. However, when examined from a non-Athenocentric perspective, the insertion aligns better with the treatment of the war dead in the archaic period. In earlier times, fallen soldiers were brought back to their relatives for individual burials (Clairmont 1983: 8). The repatriation practice gradually declined around the middle of the sixth century, coinciding with the resurgence of the Homeric custom of erecting *polyandria* near the battlefield (*Ibid.*: 9, 19). The construction of mass graves reflects a shift in the commemorative culture driven by emerging civic ideology throughout ancient Greece. Concurrently, a discourse emerged regarding the rights of families over their relatives' bodies, as evidenced by iconographic and epigraphic sources. Private tombs of soldiers, for instance, became more grandiose, with epitaphs that underscore the warrior's personal virtue and *kalos thanatos* (Kucewicz 2021: 105–9). Additionally, there was a sharp increase in depictions of *Leichenkämpfe* scenes and the motif of Achilles carrying the dead Ajax over his shoulder (*Ibid.*: 88–97; cf. Lissarrague 1990: 71–96).

The cultural context surrounding Nestor's new words becomes clearer within this historical framework. The *polyandria* embody the new civic ideals by appropriating the bodies and commemorating them as a collective, while allegedly reviving a Homeric practice. Conversely, people among the *agathoi* desired to maintain the custom of repatriation and individual burials as part of their struggle for power (cf. Morris 1987: 205–10). This environment rendered the Homeric text susceptible for not only interpretive but also textual manipulations, as the social elite similarly traced their preferred practice back to an imagined heroic past. Thus, the

inserted couplet highlights the power dynamics of the late archaic period and the conflict between aristocratic and civic ideologies.

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