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Pouring Bloody Drops (Iliad 16.459): The Grief of Zeus

By DONALD LATEINER

αἰματοέσσας δὲ ψιάδας κατέχευεν ἔραξεν
παίδα φίλον τιμῶν, τὸν οἱ Πάτροκλος ἐμέλλεν
φθιείν ἐν Τροίη ἐριβώλακι τηλόθι πάτρης.

[Zeus] poured bloody drops earthwards,
honoring his own [beloved] son, whom Patroklos was soon
to destroy in fertile Troy far from his homeland.1

INTRODUCTION. Three violations of divine custom emerge when Sarpedon son of Zeus dies in the first climactic catastrophe of the Patrokleia, Iliad 16. Sorrowful Zeus considers altering Fate, aisa or moira; Zeus pours out/sheds/drips an extraordinary fluid, of signifying color, from heaven to earth; and Zeus, who does not rescue him alive, honors his son by these drops and by the divine translation of the corpse to Lykia. Criticism rightly discovers in this action Zeus’ “humanity” and connectedness to the mortals of the Trojan war. The verses, however, also allude to a fuller tale of Sarpedon in the epic tradition, and they imply Hellenic hero cult. The archaic religious practices and context that ground this striking image offer an explanation of the rarely paralleled Homeric acts of mourning and unusual vocabulary (καταχέος, ψιάς, αἰματόεσσας). Answering two important questions about vocabulary and two others about analogues in hero cult may explain the anomalies.

1. What does Homer express by “bloody,” αἰματοέσσας, since Zeus and the Olympians have no red blood, and human tears rarely contain that liquid?2 Further, why does Zeus pour bloody drops to honor his son?

2. What are these “drops,” ψιάδες, and how does Zeus “pour” them? Is the entire verse 16.459, or its ending, formulaic?

3. Do other Homeric events shape or echo this dramatic scene, unique in its vocabulary and acts?

4. Do early hero cult practices affect the composition, elaboration, and understanding of this passage?

1. Translations are generally taken from Richmond Lattimore’s 1951 Iliad, lightly modified when necessary—as in this paper’s title; and I took a phrase from Stanley Lombardo (1997).

2. Humans weep tears of blood when afflicted with the catastrophically fatal disease Ebola (Zaire); Preston (1994) 73. The striking image, therefore, is not impossibly unanthropomorphic.
One unique Iliadic parallel portending general carnage appears earlier in this day’s battle (II. 53-55, cf.1.3):

Ωρας κακόν Κρονίδης, κατὰ δὲ υψόθεν ἥκεν ἔφορας
σιματί μυθαλέας ἐξ αἰθέρας, οὐκέ’ ἔμελλε
πολλάς ἱφθίμους κεφαλάς Ἀθις προϊόνειν.

And the son of Kronos sent evil turmoil upon them, and from aloft cast down dews dripping blood from the sky, since he was minded to hurl down many strong heads to the house of Hades.

Our thesis is that these “bloody drops” twice register Zeus’ human-like affect in a way appropriate to his divine nature,3 but nowhere else does he pour bloody drops, or weep similar “tears of blood,” even when he again grieves bloody drops, or weep similar “tears of blood,” even when he again grieves Akhilleus.4 Beyond the poetic level of Homer’s poem, however, Sarpedon reflects cult in the making. Iliad 16.459-61 portrays Zeus’ emotional attachment to Lykian Sarpedon, his mortal son destined to die in battle at Troy.5 He ponders briefly whether to stand idle in accord with doom or to snatch up (Harpy-like, ἀναρπάζας, < ἀρπάζω6) his living child from the (n.b.) tearful battle and return him to his fatherland (16.433-38).

ῶ μοι ἐγώ, ὦ τέ μοι Σαρπηδόνα φίλτατον ἄνδρων
μοίρ’ ὑπὸ Πατρόκλου Μενοιτίδασο δαμήναι.
δικός δὲ μοι κραδίη μέμοιν φρειν ὄρμαινοιν,
ἢ μιν ζωὸν ἐντα μάχης ἀπὸ δακρυοέσσῃ
θεία ἀναρπάζας Λυκίς ἐν πίονι δήμῳ,
ἢ ἢδι ὑπὸ χερσὶ Μενοιτίδασο δαμάσσω.

I’m miserable because Fate has it that Sarpedon, my favorite man, must be done to death by Menoics’ son Patroklos. I am of two minds as my heart ponders: to snatch him up still living from tearful battle and put him down in the rich Lykian lands, or beat him down already under Patroklos’ hands.

3. Zeus serves as god of all liquids that fall from the sky: rain, hail, snow, mists, etc., Iliad 5.91, 10.5-7, 11.493, 12.278-80, and many passages elsewhere, e.g., Pausanias 1.32.2.
5. Pope (1715) translates: “Then touch’d with grief, the weeping heavens distill’d / A shower of blood o’er all the fatal field.” Lattimore (1951) offers: “Yet he wept tears of blood that fell to the ground for the sake of his beloved son.” Fagles (1990) prints: “But he showered tears of blood that drenched the earth.” Wilamowitz (1920) 135-38 defends the inclusion and explains the significance of Sarpedon for the Patroklea. He writes that the unnatural event humanizes Zeus and displays his helplessness.
A willingness of Olympians even to consider interfering with impersonal Destiny strongly signals severe distress in Homeric epic. Actual violation of Fate (σίων, μοῖρα: 6.487, 2.155, 20.336; cf. 17.327) happens exactly once, without agent specified, in a phrase describing Akhain valor: “And then the Akhaïans were more powerful, beyond their allotted fate” (16.780). In the present case, Here, who loathes Troy and its defenders, responds with vehement anger to the voiced hypothetical. She argues logically that, if Zeus should send Sarpedon home alive, other gods will want to save their sons also, since (and here she overstates her case, alleging that) “many sons of the immortals” are engaged at Troy (Janko [1992] on lines 444-49 counts nine). She advises him rather to accept aiša (16. 440-57, esp. 450ff.), to let Sarpedon die, but when the vital soul has left him (αὐτὰρ ἐπίν δή τόν γε λίπη ψυχή τε καὶ σίων), to have him translated to Lykia where he will receive ceremonious interment, the tomb and marker that honor the best of mortals. Thus Sarpedon will have kleos, although his life will have ended (a “painful compromise,” Stanley [1993] 174). Zeus, recognizing both the danger of setting precedent and the presence of severe spousal pressure supported by the existing rules, terminates the vain discussion about Olympian theology and allows mortal Sarpedon to die (15.67, 16.438). His divided heart, διὰθ' κραδή, does not induce the chief god to refuse obedience to Here’s behest and to violate destiny—an indication of Here’s strong logic (ὡς ἔφατ', οὖδ' ἀπίθησε πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε). He nevertheless signals his aborted desire to act otherwise and his paternal distress by a non-natural event: “he poured bloody drops down on earth.”


8. Research for this paper began with a question from my former Slavicist colleague, Professor Natasha Sankovitch, a Tolstoi scholar and Humanities teacher now practicing corporate law. Dr. Sankovitch helped gather translations for an early version of this paper. She asked about the reading and discussed the meaning of the Greek text that Richmond Lattimore translates as Zeus’ “tears of blood.” Homer states explicitly, rather like a scholiast, that Olympian beings contain no blood (5.339-42):

πρωμύνω ὑπὲρ θέαρος: ῥέ δ’ ἄμβροτον σίμα θεοῦ, ἰχώρ, ὦς τέρε τε μακάρεσοι θεοῦν ὦν γὰρ ἄρτῳ ἐδοτα, ὦ πάνωσα ἀθάντα σινου, τὸνεκ’ ἀναίμωνει εἰοι καὶ ἀθάνατοι καλέονται.

[Diomedes nicked her] above the palm, and the goddess’s immortal blood flowed—

ichor, that is, the stuff that flows in the blessed gods.

For they don’t eat bread, they don’t drink fiery wine, so they have no blood and are called “Deathless.”

Zeus and Ares (5.870) are the only male gods who weep in Homer; cf. Monsacré (1984a) 137-96, esp. 228 n.16; Arnould (1990) presciently omits 16.459. Aphrodite and Ares alone bleed or lose “immortal serum,” ἄμβροτον σίμα and ἰχώρ (5.339-42, 416, 870). Aphrodite’s peculiar wounding requires an ad hoc etiology that minimizes Olympians’ “carnal aspects” (Kirk [1985] ad 2.96). Elsewhere only mortal creatures are bloody (βρότον σίματαντα), while gods are bloodless and deathless repeatedly. Ikhor, the god’s bodily fluid, appears only twice and in the same Book 5, otherwise also of remarkable theology. Aphrodite’s ikhor is described as god-blood, her skin is darkened by the flow, with a phrase elsewhere used for blood darkening Trojan earth (5.354, cf. 15.715, 20.494; μάστιγα δὲ χρώσα καλῶν). Dione wipes the bloodlike serum clean from her daughter’s wound (5.416). The human attributes of bloodflow communicate divinity’s human-like pain and surface penetration Levy (1979) and Andersen (1981) debate whether “divine mortality” in Iliad 5 is
Zeus’ “bloody drops” and Apollo’s later, unparalleled “rapture” of Sarpedon’s corpse present “breaches of realism” that open and close the frame of the long battle presented in *Iliad* 11-16. The signs and wonders of the death of Sarpedon achieve two only indirectly related goals. The scene poetically evokes Zeus’ intense engagement with earthly mortality, and Homer introduces the Ionic religious traditions of his audience’s later age into heroic conventions of oral epic (both topics are discussed below). These five, one previous bloody shower from Zeus, dead Sarpedon’s sky-translation from Troyland, and Akhilleus’ talking, weeping, and immortal wonder-horses (16.459, 11.53-55; 16.676-83; 19.407-19; 17.426-40) constitute four notable Homeric violations of the natural order.

Most contemporary critics minimize the miraculous, magical, and weird elements in Homer’s vocabulary and verses. For example, Hainsworth claims that “the supernatural does not mean gods. Gods are part of the natural order... sorcery is completely absent from the action of the *Iliad*... [No] spells are cast or even mooted.” So Aphrodite’s amulet or love-charm for Here must be explained as “oriental influence” (Janko [1992] ad 14.214-17)

a relic of a cruder stage of epic or ad hoc inventions suited to divine combat. “Bleeding” gods, anatomically incorrect, occur nowhere else, and *ichor* has no plausible etymology (Chantraine [1999] 474-75). Rare phrases of uncertain formularity may equally well be ancient survivals or additions of the final bard. ACH. Tat. Kleit. and Leuk. (7.45) echoes the blood/tears metaphor in describing strong sentiment: δέχρινον γάρ αἷμα τραύματος ψυχῆς. “tears are the blood of a soul’s wound.”

Similarly, Aphrodite, “just as goddesses do,” rescues Paris and Aineias, her favorites, alive from the battlefield (3.380-82, 5.311-18). Poseidon saves Aineias (20.320-29), and Apollo saves Hektor (20.444).


9. References to “seemliness and epic dignity” in “the severely supernatural *Iliad*” (Edwards [1991] 283) register contemporary displeasure with the fantastic Homer and an unrealistic *Iliad* (Johnston [1992] 95 n.26). Elements of gross miracle, of the otherworldly and magical, in the Homeric epics include bizarre events such as Earth laughing or the Sky-god pouring bloody drops. Rarity, when Homer is compared to other epic traditions, does not justify suppression (cf. Griffin [1980] 30-35, 145-56, 165-67). Whether early (as Rohde [1925] 84 n.38 thinks) or late developments, the literally marvellous episodes with Sarpedon reveal Zeus’ pain. Two early Constantine Cavafy poems (1898 and 1896), “The Funeral of Sarpedon” and “The Horses of Achilles,” refigure uncanny Homeric moments. Michael Ondaatje in *The English Patient* (1992) 17 refers to the same blood-red phenomenon as meteorological reality: “The *harmattan* blows across the Sahara filled with red dust... Red sand fogs out of the Sahara were deposited... producing showers of mud... mistaken for blood. ‘Blood rains were widely reported in Portugal and Spain in 1901.’” Such phenomena might have inspired this Homeric passage, but we must control any Euhemerist inclinations in interpreting the *Iliad’s* sudden precipitation.

or dismissed as not in the “action,” or shunted aside as not sorcery because divine and not human. Hektor’s preternatural strength of two men in launching large stones becomes “one of the rare breaches of realism in the Iliad” (Hainsworth 1993 ad 12.449; cf. 5.304, 20.287). The list of these noteworthy exceptions to the rule, these non-natural phenomena in Homer, grows longer. We turn back to the four questions posed above.

1. *Blood-stained or blood-red?—Iliad* 16.459 (and the dew at 11.53-54) stand as Homeric isolates for divine, bloody outpouring.13 Αἰματόεις elsewhere characterizes wounded mortals (16.349, 17.298), corpses, or the dust that battle casualties foul (13.393 = 16.486): “covered, stained, or mingled with blood.” It also describes ravening mortal animals (16.162, 17.541-42) and their human equivalents, βρωτοί, mortal warriors seeking victims. The synecdochic word defines mortal combat by its product (9.650, 19.313).14 All other passages refer plainly to the sticky red fluid circulating peacefully in vertebrates’ vascular systems.

Blood commands powers for both pollution and cleansing in beliefs and rites.15 There are taboos against blood’s presence (such as kosher butchery, Greek asylum), demands for blood’s presence as in live animal sacrifices, limited human bloodletting (e.g., brotherhood rites), and, in some situations, bloody human sacrifice. One type of blood ritual, a blood offering that is not a prelude to eating, Greek *sphagia*, occurs in three situations: at purifications, just before battle,16 and at burials of the dead.17 We note that two of these three situations for archaic generic blood offerings apply to the “bloody drops” that Zeus poured out for Sarpedon.

The Homeric ritual blood flows into tidy bowls, or on an altar, or in a large sanctuary before a new day’s combat starts or before a pair of new adversaries begin to fight.18 Post-Homeric historical *sphagia* before battle similarly expressed and allayed human anxieties. These later sacrifices were human acts to placate, supplicate, and propitiate the gods.19 Such concerns and purposes cannot be those of the god Zeus for Sarpedon, nor does Zeus

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13. Thersites’ whipped welts (ευςωδείς only here and 23.716) suggest real blood pooling beneath the skin.
14. Cunliffe, s.v. *Statistics are drawn from the OCC editions of D.B. Monroe and T.W. Allen Iliad* (1912) and *Odyssey* (1916), the concordances of G.L. Prendergast (1875) and H. Dunbar-B. Marzullo (1880, rev. ed. 1971), Gehring’s *Index Homericus* (1891), and the lexica of R.J. Cunliffe (1924) and H. Ebeling (1880). The adjective occurs 18 times in the *Iliad*, once in the *Odyssey* (22.405), the gore on Odysseus after the suitors’ Iliadic slaughter. The acc. fem. plural form appears only here and in the parallel passage in pseudo-Hesiod (below)—the only occurrence in a wholly repeated line—absent from Schmidt *Parallel-Homer* (1885) but cf. De V. VH (2001) 82. Only at 16.459 and at 2.267 (Thersites’ blood-red wel) can one weakly translate it as “the colour of blood.”
15. Douglas (1966) offers an anthropologist’s modern *comparanda*.
16. At least in post-Homeric examples, it provides a “manageable slaughter,” a beginning of bloodshed, a “premonitory anticipation of ... unforeseeable dangers” (Burkert [1985] 59-60).
17. Akhilleus employs animal and human blood sacrifice at rituals for Patroklos’ funeral pyre. The animal “blood flows around the corpse by cupfuls” (23.34: ἁπαξ κοτυλίθρυσσον), perhaps to be poured in cups for the dead man—but no *bother* or pit here, as in the clearer blood rituals for the dead in Hades, Od. 11.23-50. Hero cult was based on cult of the dead and the chthonic gods (Rohde [1925] 116).
save his son (15.67, 16.438), but he expresses strong emotion and performs grieving rituals. Homer has Zeus merge human pre-battle propitiatory blood rituals and post-battle burial blood rituals with human grieving to express anthropomorphic parental agony. Thus the word “bloody” in this passage recalls Homeric pre-combat ritual, and then Sarpedon’s future honors as a cultic hero are anticipated (pre-echoed?) by the poured precipitation miracle.

Zeus surpasses the usual human rituals to mark a son’s special death and removal from living, as—on the human level—Akhilleus will do for Patroklos (a surrogate son), and as the ‘Trojans will do for Hektor. All three splendid honorings of the dead express the survivors’ sense of responsibility or guilt because they could not protect the talismanic warrior. The blood of ritual slaughter betokens more human slaughter; the bloody drops of Zeus connote the same sympathy and expectation of blood. The “bloody drops” honor the victim and portend more blood.

2. Raindrops or tears?—The noun ψακάζ occurs nowhere but here in Homer.21 Janko (ad loc.) cites the pseudo-Hesiodic Aspis 383-85 that exhibits the same rare words for “bloody drops” in a very similar pre-combat formula in a similarly Zeus-dominated context:

Deviser Zeus loudly thundered.
And threw down from heaven bloody drops, communicating an omen of battle for his courageous son.

The presence of combat scene and a “traditional” mourning motif (sic, Janko 1992) in this later (ca. 570?) oral epic marks a formula restricted, in extant epic, to the grief of Zeus. The pseudo-Hesiodic passage (perhaps borrowed) confirms that the bloody drops signal the end of a heroic life, and perhaps evoke echoes of pre-battle sacrifice and honor to Zeus’ close kin.

Ψάζ may be cognate to ψακάζ, a word Aiskhylos applies to rain and blood showers.22 No one in Ilion notices the bloody drops, although in many

20. “Rains of blood” are generally bad omens for the Romans, who experienced more of them. Cf. n. 10.

Ψάζ may be cognate to ψακάζ, a word Aiskhylos applies to rain and blood showers.22 No one in Ilion notices the bloody drops, although in many
other weather passages, Zeus’ portents frighten or cause joy among observant bystanders. 23 The anticipatory shower sheds a grisly, ill-omened grace—endless killing for the living, translation to heroic veneration for Zeus’ son Sarpedon. That is to say, there are negative and positive consequences portended by the divine sign. Indeed, καταχέω appears in Patroklos’ tear simile, in the anointing of immortal horses with oil, and divinities’ dripping “an enchantment of grace” on transfigured heroes (16.4 = 9.15, 23.282; Od. 2.12 = 17.63 [Telemakhos]; 6.235, 8.19 [Odysseus]), or when a mortal pours libations, including blood sacrifices, for the powerful dead at the grave, doubling as an altar. 24

Simplex χέω and compounds describe the “shedding, pouring, scattering, and flowing” of various vital fluids: rain (16.385); cold mists or snow (17.270, 12.281, 3.10); metaphorical mists of sleep or death (δράκυλος: 14.165, 16.344, 414, 580; 13.544, 5.696); dust (18.24); solemn libations (7.480, 23.220; Od. 10.518, 11.26); and human tears (1.357, 9.15, 16.3-4, 24.385), especially at funerals where they shape an essential ritual formula (Garland [1982] 77, Od. 10.518, 11.26: χορν χειδα Πάσιν νεκύεσσιν, festivals of the dead?)—all of which 16.459 echoes. 25 Χέω occurs elsewhere in funeral cult and heavenly and chthonic rituals. 26 Zeus’ “pouring drops upon” provides the crucial καταχέω compound in Book 16 (ten χέω-forms occur: 4, 123, 259, 267, 295, 344, 414, 459, 471, 580). Variants sometimes refer to sky phenomena such as rain from the Rain-God (16.385; cf. 5.91, 12.286). (κατά) δάκρυα(α) χεύονα(υ) is a very common Iliadic weeping form for humans (9x; cf. δικρυνχέω, 13x). Therefore, the formula recalls weeping at the same time as the poet activates other associations with weather portents, divine dispensations, human pre-battle sacrifice, and postmortem heroic libation.

Zeus can weep, we learn, as do Ares, immortal Artemis, the sea nymphs, and Thetis (16.493, 18.66, 1.413). The easy life of gods, θείας ζωοντές (6.138, Od. 4.805, 5.122), does not prevent conflict, or emotions like shame, anger, fury, and grief, emotional displays like shrieking (5.343: μέγα ιδχούσα; cf. 21.328), and even wounds. Bloodlike tears—perhaps “tears as large as gouts of blood”—emphasize Zeus’ loss; it is a marvellous and sympathetic medium of display singling out the corpse-to-be. Sarpedon’s henchman

77 and LSJ s.v. Pindar’s (Ol.2.66-68) rewarded heroes, like the gods, enjoy an existence without tears after death (διακρυ αλτούνται αιώνα). Tearlessness purely equates to immortality. Hesychios’ original Lexicon has been severely abridged to a glossary, so he may not gloss this verse of Homer or indeed know anything more about the word. Homer’s humanization of reddish rain recalls Aristophanes (Nub. 369-73) comic description of rain as Zeus’ urine, “pissing through a sieve.” The hexameter verse suggests “the strange situation of a god offering hero-worship to a mortal” (as a reader worried), an oddity suited to an odd passage, but see below, section 4, “Reflection of Hero Cult.”


25. Editor Roisman notes Aiskh. Ag. 239: Iphigenia “pours” her yellow mantle to the ground at Aulis.

Glaucos’ “real” blood also appears several times. T27 The distinction between unaging gods and miserable humans collapses in 16.459 to enhance Zeus’ intermittent “humanity.”28 He sobs like a human; the drops make him both like men pouring libations to the gods and like men weeping over their afflictions.29

Both males and females, gods and mortals, shed Homeric tears.30 Tears in Homer express constructive forces or strong emotion more often than weakness.31 They are θαλαπτό (lusty, blooming, moist, and large),32 for example, those of Andromakhe, Akhilleus, and the Trojans (6.496; 24.9, 794). They are θερμό (warm or hot), for example, those of Trojans, Akhilleus, his horses, and Antilokhos (7.426, 16.3, 17.438, 18.17). Blood, too, is thermon (11.266) and life-sustaining. Like Zeus’ bright dew, human tears are a vital fluid (cf. 11.53 above; or Zeus and Here’s hieros gamos fertility ritual. 14.347-51; 23.598; Od.13.245).33 As tears drain from a man, so does his life (Od. 5.151-53):

τὸν δ’ ἄρ’ ἔπ’ ἄκτης εὑρε καθήμενον οὐδὲ ποτ’ ὤσε
δακρυφών τίρονυτο, κατείβετο δὲ γλυκὺς αἰών
νόστον οἴδωμένευρ.

[Kalypso] found him then at the point, and his eyes never were wiped dry of tears, as his sweet life flowed out of him, grieving for a trip home.

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27. 16.486, 518, 529, 639, 667; see further in bloody Book 16: 159, 162, 333, 349, 796, 841.
30. van Wees (1998) surveys the “history” of Hellenic tears; pp. 11-16 review Homer’s weeping warriors and wives. Gender rules, outside of mourning rituals, have not yet made miserable Homeric tears unnaturally. Deathless gods have other human attributes: Here sweats; Aphrodite sweats; she and Ares shed bodily fluids when stabbed (5.339-343, 855-62, 870); Ares collapses (391, 886); baby Dionysos trembles at a man (6.137); Artemis twists in pain and weeps (21.495: δακρύωσας); Ares despoils corpses (5.340). Gods appear so similar to humans in size, shape, aura, and behavior that warriors fail to perceive whom they are attacking (5.183, etc.). Zeus wildly accuses Here of inclinations to eat raw human flesh, an insult of impossibility (cf. Combellack [1981]). Many of these nonverbal acts occur only once. Andersen [1981] 324 regards these moments as ad hoc enrichments of the plot, not relics of earlier theology (contra Levy [1979] 215, 217).
31. Compare Zeus’ effusion with the agony (ἐν ἡγούμενο) of Jesus (Luke 22:44). He prays pours down him like cros of blood to the ground: έγένετο δὲ ἔθρως αὐτοῦ ἤσσοι ἡράμφυοι αἰματος καταβάλων ἐπ’ τὴν γῆν. Sweat (Here, 4.27)—like tears or blood—implies physical or emotional stress or wounds. John Donne writes (Anatomy of the World [1611] vv. 430-31): “Mollifie it with thy teares, or sweat, or blood.” Winston Churchill, although uncomfortable with the Classics, famously spoke of these three on 13 May 1940, and earlier in his history of The Unknown War (1931): “Their [the Czar’s armies’] sweat, their tears, their blood bedewed the endless plain.
32. From θαλάπτο: Lowenstam (1979) examines the I-E root *dhal- in Albanian, Armenian, and Greek. Homer’s semantic field refers to that which springs freshly forth with, or from, moisture; Hamps (1984) 158 brings in elements of blood spurting, seminal ejaculation, and youthful fertility. Giacomelli (1980) discusses μένων as fluid, energetic, sudden, and subject to only partial control. Tears, sweat, and semen evince this male impulse, a sign of anxiety (13, 15).
33. Cf. Monsacré (1984b) 64. Sleep, as a character, like dew, appears only in these two scenes of Here’s seduction of Zeus and Zeus’ assumption of the dead son Sarpedon. Αἰσχον as νοχί and θαλάπτο, refers to the life force (Janko [1992] IV ad 16.450-55; cf. Od. 5.152-55 quoted below).
Zeus’ “bloody drops” are hence *vital* in four ways: they associate epic with blood and imminent death, weeping, long-term fertility, and the preservation of the dead (see below). Sarpedon’s own mortal blood is proleptically shed: Zeus pours out what his wounded son will lose and thus die for lack of (16.486, 639, 667). Zeus’ poured drops represent his personal loss and all bloodshed, a synecdoche for war’s wasted vitality. This image implies both tears and blood libations, as it elides the vast differences between them. The later, similar passage (pseudo-Hesiod, above) concludes a terrible combat between two other heroes, Herakles and Kyknos, respectively sons of Zeus and Ares. The presumably repeated formula again marks a violation of nature—Zeus’ bloody drops are poured only for filial, heroic carnage.

3. **Homer parallel**s. Precedents and parallels for elements of Sarpedon’s death and Zeus’ paternal mourning appear in Iliad 5, 12, 17, 22, and 24. Sarpedon, wounded earlier and sitting beneath “a lovely spreading oak of Zeus of the aegis” (5.693, another sign of the sky god’s protection), beseeches Hektor not to leave him to be killed by the Akhaïans. His appeal invokes the image of his own wife and son waiting for him at home (as are Hektor’s, 5.685-88):

> ... but protect me, since otherwise in your city
> my life must come to an end, since I could return no longer
> back to my own house and the land of my fathers, bringing
> joy to my own beloved wife and my son, still a baby.

Homer elects these pathetic arguments for the persuasion of Hektor, anticipating the formula soon used for Hektor’s family (6.366). Hektor silently complies with Sarpedon’s request.

Zeus honors Sarpedon’s mortality—the fact that as a human being Sarpedon is subject to death. Here responds relevantly if elliptically to Zeus’ heartfelt desire to spare Sarpedon’s life: “If he is dear to you, and your heart mourns for him, then let him be” (16.450-51). Zeus must respect his heroic mortality by letting him die, and thus will honor Sarpedon’s heroism: the will to fight, even anticipating death in battle. Sarpedon tells his henchman Glaukos shortly before his death, and not by coincidence then (12.322-28):

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34. The hero’s burial requires a cleaned-up body with a mortician to close the wounds. Only after Zeus’ henchmen properly process Sarpedon’s messy corpse will he be ready for burial and implied propitiation and worship, as befalls Erectheus, nurtured by Athene in her temple (2.547-51). Hektor’s corpse later lies similarly untended for a brief time (24.419-23, cf. 24.757; Hermes and Hekabe are the speakers): “fresh with dew... nor is there any corruption...” (2.547-51). Hektor’s corpse later lies similarly untended for a brief time (24.419-23, cf. 24.757; Hermes and Hekabe are the speakers): “fresh with dew... nor is there any corruption...” (2.547-51). Hektor’s corpse later lies similarly untended for a brief time (24.419-23, cf. 24.757; Hermes and Hekabe are the speakers): “fresh with dew... nor is there any corruption...” (2.547-51).

35. The line-end formula πέππον ἔραξε / χέον ἔραξε occurs four other times (Janko [1992] ad loc.). Elsewhere humans are the agents and only ordinary earthly objects drop. Stones, chariot reins, weapons, and sheaves of wheat hit the ground:

12.156: ἔμφρακτον τοῦ ὄμοσυμπότον νιφάδες δ' ὡς πέππον ἔραξε.
17.619: ἡμίαρη γ' εἷς ὄμοσυμποτον, κατά δ' ἡμία χέον ἔραξε.
17.633: ἡμίαρη ε' αὐτοῦ πᾶν ἔτωσαὶ πέππον ἔραξε.
18.552: δράγνιατα δ' ἄλλα μετ' ὄμοσυμπότον ἐπιτρίβωσα πέππον ἔραξε.

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... Poor wretches, 
why then did we ever give you to the lord Peleus, 
a mortal man, and you yourselves are immortal and ageless?
Only so that among unhappy men you also might be grieved?
Since among all creatures that breathe on earth and crawl on it there is not anywhere a thing more dismal than man is.

Zeus pities the immortal horses for losing a beloved mortal to death. Zeus and these other divine beings react “unnaturally” to death of a dear one. Humans are the most dismal of all earthly creatures, yet Zeus loves some mortals despite mortality.36 Zeus’ grim observation oddly leads not to his contempt, but to human glory (17.448-54; Janko [1992] 2):

At least the son of Priam, Hektor, shall not mount behind you in the carefully wrought chariot. I will not let him. Is it not enough for him that he has the armour and glories in wearing it? But now I will put vigour into your knees and your spirits so that you can bring back Automedon out of the fighting safe to the hollow ships; since I shall still give the Trojans the glory of killing, until they win to the strong-benched vessels.


Priam and Akhilleus accept pain and tears as the human lot. Zeus, also, reveals a (sometimes) sympathetic, fatherly godhood. Homer’s male tears are

37. Apparently the wet is invisible to, or unremarked by, the mortals present at Sarpedon’s death.
38. Tlepolemos, son of Zeus’ son Herakles, in challenging Sarpedon to battle, ignorantly and ironically denies Sarpedon’s lineage from Zeus (5.633-37).
active and public signs; female weeping generally occurs in more private space. Tears display male vulnerability, repeatedly contrasted with aggressive martial ability, or with taunting, or athletic ability, or sheer courage. For Zeus, Priam, and Akhilleus, as for other divinities and mortals (24.714), shedding tears, losing blood, or pouring libations express loss and pain,39 enlarging Homer’s portrait of physical, psychological, and social experience.40

Zeus does not hit his thighs in exasperation, an epic gesture that intimates and anticipates the death of a loved one. Nor does he veil himself, roll in the dust, smear himself with dung, or tear out or cut his hair, as do mortal Agamemnon, Akhilleus, and Priam.41 Sympathetic or humanlike though he may be before impending disaster, Zeus’ sempiternal dignity prevents such nonverbal affect-displays. The only other “god who mourns as a mortal mourns is Thetis,” a bereft and inconsolable goddess who is married to a mortal.42 She resembles helpless, sorrowing mortal mothers (24.104-5; cf. 22.405-7, 24.747-60) more than awesome and potent divinities.43

The depth of Zeus’ sorrow resembles and anticipates Akhilleus’, but his expression of it transcends mortal, even heroic resources. When Sarpedon dies, Zeus experiences a determined and pitiless desire for further bloodshed, a sequence that Akhilleus’ own urge for blood echoes, when his closest, nearly son-like, friend Patroklos dies.44 But the slaughter of others never restores lost life (cf. 9.406-9). Zeus, and later Akhilleus, can only kill and ensure that beloved corpses receive proper obsequies.

Akhilleus’ intense misery at Patroklos’ loss requires and expresses itself in “a funeral of a special kind.” He cuts off a reserved lock of his hair, arranges sheep-fat, honey, oil, horses, dogs, and (spectacularly) twelve Trojan boys on the great pyre (23.141-42, 164-75). Similarly, Zeus’ intense grief (16.450) requires unparalleled expression and commemoration. His anguish draws from his sky repertory: bizarre precipitation, honors for dead grief (16.450) requires unparalleled expression and commemoration. His

...
Zeus honors Sarpedon with bloody drops that go unnoticed, but his perceived response is to intensify the violence and fatality of the fight over Sarpedon's corpse (16.564-68):

Trojans and Lykians, and Myrmidons and Akhaiaans, 
they clashed together in battle over the perished body
howling terribly, with a high crash of the men in their armour,
while Zeus swept ghastly night far over the strong encounter
that over his dear son might be deadly work in the fighting.

The Homeric dead lay various claims on their survivors. Obligations include protection from the enemy’s stripping the corpse (Sarpedon, 16.498) and burial rites, in particular cremation (never inhumation, Garland [1982] 73). The gods may reproach surviving slackers (22.346ff., Od. 11.73).

Tendence of the dead hero includes burial mound and marker (16.456, 675; Garland [1982] 69, 73). The funerals of Sarpedon, Patroklos, Hektor, and Akhilleus are the most fully reported and anticipated.45

4. Reflections of hero cult. Archaeological traces of hero cult are detectable in the ground before the diffusion of Homeric epic but developed alongside the monumentalization of the Homeric epics. Material remains show that “superhuman” men received heroic “burial” honors and cult at Mykenaian sites in old Greece and Ionia by 725 BC and occasionally long before (e.g., at Lefkandi). Material cult and verbal celebration in epic both took shape as the Bronze Age yielded to the Iron. The epics and the material evidence of hero cult are equally aged and ubiquitous. Dark Age archaeology delivers daily surprises; no segment of the Homeric epics can be dated or declared uncontaminated by additions. Myth arose from bones (Vermeule [1979] 206-7) and bones accounted for myths, so it would be circular to date passages which imply hero cult from excavations or vice versa.46

Lykian Sarpedon appears in fact to have been a non-Greek superhuman before receiving in historical times a local tomb cult and becoming an eponym for various demes, hills, islands, and an oracle (Immisch [1915] 408-10, Janko [1992] 372-73 ad 16.419-683). Though on the periphery of the Hellenic world, Lykia plays an important role in the development of the grand-scale Greek monuments to demigods (Burkert [1985] 203). Homer never confirms (anachronistically) the subsequent construction of Sarpedon’s

45. Garland (1982) 74 argues against tomb cult and cult of the dead and for the tomb as focus for gatherings to stimulate remembrance of the departed (cf. Od. 4.584 γενομένους της κλάσεως τούτης).
46. Cf. inter alios Hack (1929) 73-74; Coldstream (1976) 8-9; Popham et al. (1982); Morris (1986); and Antonaccio (1995) 243. Price (1973) and Seaford (1994) discuss hero cult and Homer. The important burial at Lefkandi already challenged confident assertions; see e.g., Popham et al. (1982) 171; idem, (1987) 13; idem, (1989) 17-29. Coldstream (1976) 8-17 stated the now crumbling communis opinio, namely that Greek hero cults arose from the popular epic and show no continuity with Mykenaian religion. J. Whiteley (1988) 173-82, at 178, 181 (followed by Seaford [1994] 109-14), argues rather for a political explanation of the rise of hero cult: to impede (Attic) and to promote (Argolid) polis-formation. Antonaccio (1995), examining issues raised by Morris and Whiteley concerning the veneration of ancestors, assembles evidence only from mainland Greece. Lykian Sarpedon unfortunately falls beyond her geographical boundaries in the chapter (145-97) surveying “Cults of epic and mythical heroes.” Ad hoc construction in the epics, including matters of myth and cult, disables archaeology from decisively disproving any cult practice that Homer implies. Do not look for a thin stratum of blood-colored dust in Troy VIII or VIIA!
predicted tumulus and special grave monument in a precinct, but the Ionic audience(s) would recognize contemporary honors. Beings apart from mortals and immortals, the hovering heroes remain near men, in their happiness and need. Their grave-empowered presences, e.g., Laomedon and Theseus, supernaturally protect worshippers.47

Hellenic oral epic, as a public and travelling panhellenic art, was necessarily cognizant of the Ionic/Anatolian cults of the dead and cults of heroes. Nagy strongly asserts that Homeric poetry is “permeated with references to . . . heroes in their religious dimension as figures of cult.”48 Gods receive timê from heroic warriors and from the dêmos. This is the Homeric cult of the gods, the lesser (both hoi polloi and heroic mortals) worshipping the greater (Olympians and/or Chthonians). No Homeric god worships another god as Homer’s heroes assuredly do worship the immortals, but “no one [exists] to do the worshipping” of heroes, in Homer’s poems. Because his “dramatic date” for the Trojan war is the heroes’ own ancient age, antedating by definition “Homer’s” and the Homerids’ subsequent eras and the hero cults of these warriors, his mortals do not openly reverence great men of yore. The epic word and phrase “such as men now are,” οἷοι νῦν βροτοί εἶσο, sets the boundary, a “formula of inferiority” (e.g., 12.283, 449 = 5.304 = 20.287; cf. 1.272; Hack [1929] 72; Chantraine [1999] 198).

Lacking suitable worshippers in the poems, Homeric epic usually suppresses contemporary heroic cult practices, but oblique intimations surface at least for Herakles, Menelaos, and Sarpedon, also Helen, Erektheus, and Ino.49 Patroklos’ funeral and athla, the honors given to Akhilleus’ therapôn, may also reflect heroic cult. Timê, Homeric due honor and esteem (τιμή), both secular and sacred, occurs in contexts where mortals honor someone like a god, or treat someone like a god, as with a solemnly splendid ταφοχών burial.50 Homer variously implies hero rituals, cultic figures, and cultic honors (Nagy [1990] 131-35). Timê like that given to a god (θεὸς δ’ ὁς τίετο δῆμως) means the hero “is thereby being treated as a cult figure” (again Nagy [1990] 135, his italics).

The large tumuli of Asia Minor were regarded in the early Iron Age as hero burials (cf. Paus. 5.13.7). These still prominent mounds stimulated makers of legend and epic to “remember” the heroes and celebrate them through story, sacrifice and libation, and tomb-display. Hero cult51 may have

47. Servius ad Verg. Aen. 2.13, 241, noted by Robertson (1970) 23-26; Hdt. 1.67-68, 6.69; Soph. OC 1522-23; Plut. Kim. 8; Paus. 10.4.7. Heroes can be hostile also (Hipp. morb. sacr. 4.38).
49. See Lyons (1997) for three heroines in later cult.
50. This manner of solemn burial is granted only to Sarpedon, 16.456-57 = 674-75, but see the wording of 7.85-86 (Hektor’s expected Akhaian victim in the proposed duel; also Chantraine [1999] 1095). Hektor’s promise to commemorate an Akhaian champion usefully suggests extraordinary—heroizing—treatment.
51. Among the vast bibliography, Wilamowitz (1920) 136 notably believed the holy monument in Lykia and local spirit led to Sarpedon’s inclusion in the originally quite separate Trojan epic: die Hörer ihre Helden in diesem Kreise anzutreffen wünschten. See also Rohde (1925), esp. 115-55; Nock (1944) 141-74 (= [1972] 575-602); and Burkert (1985) 42ff., esp. n.1.
migrated from Asia Minor to mainland Greece where the practices developed in honor and explanation of their own Mykenaian tombs.52 “Heroic” structures were everywhere, even though local heroes were a “motley crew” (Rohde [1925] 126).

Here’s suggestions for consolation (16.451-57) and Zeus’ consequent actions after Sarpedon’s death suggest more than disposal of the bloodied dead. Zeus instructs another son, the fully divine Apollo, to rescue Sarpedon’s mangled body, clean off the blood in running water, and anoint him with another unusual liquid, ambrosia.53 Then he should transport the body, properly prepared for burial, to Lykia for funeral rites, a mighty tomb, and an honorific stone marker (16.666-75; cf. Here’s identical words, 6.450-57; Garland [1982] passim):

Εὐθα ἐ ταρχύσουι κασιγνητοί τε ἔται τε
τύμβῳ τε στήλῃ τε: τὸ γάρ γεράς ἐστι θανόντων.

There his brothers and countrymen will solemnly bury him with a tomb and a marker—for this is the reward that dead humans get.

Other Homeric passages also show a god exalting (τυμηον) a mortal. Laogonos—his father Onetor, priest of Zeus from Ida, is honored like a god—fights for dead Sarpedon.54 Erekhtheus (2.547-51; Rohde [1925] 98), the Athenian heroized king, receives propitiation in Athene’s temple. The Dioskouroi, sons of Zeus (Od. 11.300-4), are alive and dead in turnabout fashion on alternating days, but even on the “dead” ones, they obtain honor (τιμη) from Zeus equal to the gods’. Hero cult for Teiresias, a mortal of awesome power now below the earth, requires blood sacrifice (Price [1973] 134-35). The practices (including a promised sacrifice of a black sheep; Od. 11.32, cf. Eur. Elek. 516) in the Nekyomanteia hint at such. Godlike Ilos (θείος Ἰλος, 10.415), eponym of Ilion, has his earthly monument. This sema is probably his grand Sarpedon-like gravemarker and manmade tomb (11.371-72, 24.349). The unparalleled honor in Sarpedon’s case is the anticipatory miracle, resembling a blood offering before the death of the uniquely Zeus-born hero.55

52. Price (1973) 143-44 discusses these issues and whether Homeric epic produced actual rituals or ritual produced events of epic; whether luxurious burial practices led to hero cults or vice versa; and priority for funeral games, or ahila.
53. Kirk (1990) 10-13 remarks that the adjective “ambrosial” can describe anything immortal, as etymology suggests. The word usually denotes food, ten times in the two epics, for divine horses in the Iliad (5.777), and at Kalypsy’s cave in the Odyssey. That is, ambrosia as nutriment or ointment (19.347, 353) is nearly always consumed by immortals but only on earth (16.670, 680; 19.38). The comestible is never consumed on Olympos. Here’s use at 14.170-72, as detergent and perfume, proves the rule.
54. 16.604-5, attributed in the context of Sarpedon’s killing and heavenly assumption. So also other priests and kings: Dolopion, Agamemnon, Aineias, Thoas (5.777-78, 10.32-33, 11.58-60, 13.216-18; Nagy (1990) 133 thinks both categories of men benefit from ideas of sacrality with hints of hero cult.
Homer explains favored status on earth and in heaven most fully for Sarpedon. Sarpedon and Glaukos hold the far end of the Trojan battle line and the Trojan catalogue of allies (2.876-77 in 2.815-77). No other Trojan allies are so frequently mentioned or achieve so much (e.g., 16.521, 551). Sarpedon’s duel with the berserker Tlepolemos, a Heraklid (therefore, himself Zeus’ grandson, 5.631), intimates his “implicit and impending immortalization” (Nagy [1990] 140). Sarpedon kills the Akhaian ally in heroic combat, while Zeus (through intermediaries, as always) cares for Sarpedon. He has already been grievously wounded in this battle (an “anticipatory doublet”—Fenik’s [1968] 213-16 useful term). Tlepolemos’ almost lethal fury and spear has damaged Sarpedon’s left thigh so seriously as to fell him.56 Pelagon’s painful surgery, removing the long spear shaft by pushing it through the thigh, nearly kills “god-equal” Sarpedon.

Early death partly explains Sarpedon’s unique double resurrection. Father Zeus earlier was still (anticipating our passage) protecting him against decomposition, loigon (5.603, 662). Companions, god-like (dioi: 5.662-64, only here so described), carry “god-equal”57 Sarpedon from the field:

[The spear] skimmed Sarpedon’s bone, but his father still kept off destruction.

Then his god-like comrades carried god-equal Sarpedon from battle.

Hetairoi constitute a band of military comrades but the word also signifies chief attendants and even human followers of a divinity in disguise (Od. 24.517, cf. 503). Further, Sarpedon is repeatedly identified as Zeus’ son by both characters and the omniscient narrator (5.631, 635, 662, 672, 675, 682; eleven times; cf. Dee [2001] 392). The hero is laid down by his companions to recover under the “extraordinarily beautiful oak of Aegis-holding Zeus” (5.693). Zeus’ sacred, oracular tree58 is an Iliadic landmark, an immovable object sacred to Zeus, signifying longevity, stability, and protection. The cluster of epithets marks the unique hero (Kirk [1990] ad loc.). The sheltering tree further “Zeusifies” the son of Zeus.

In standard fashion for heroic battle-fodder, his psykhe, or life-breath, departs (λίπη ψυχῆ; cf. 16.453), and the mist of death, ἀχλῶς, envelops him.

56. The word “still” (ἐτί, 5.660-62), in “But still his father kept off evil death,” hints at Sarpedon’s imminent final difficulties.

57. Antitheos (662-64) is Sarpedon’s commonest epithet (6x) but rarely attaches to any others in the Iliad. See Dee EHH (2000) #602, also Index, p. 497.

58. Cf. 7.60, Hdt. 2.55 with Lloyd’s (1976) Book II commentary on this Herodotean passage.
(5.696). So, the human doctor’s intervention, indeed, does momentarily kill him (5.696-98). Boreas the North Wind god, however, breathes life back into Sarpedon and only him (ζωγραφεῖ, 5.698, hapax legomenon for “arouses life”). The unparalleled privilege reflects and flags Sarpedon’s irregular status. This breath from a deathless spirit miraculously fulfills an otherwise forlorn human wish.

In Lykia, Sarpedon later says, all look on him and Glaukos as gods and so honor them (12.312; cf. 6.108, 22.394, 434-35; 24.258-59). Sarpedon never appears without glorification of his timê. His famous speech to Glaukos (12.310-328) refers to premortem honors of good mutton, fine wine, and separated land (τέμενος, later “consecrated land”). That once Homeric portion for the living constituted part of postmortem hero cult in Homer’s later epoch. The early Dark-Age recipient’s implied social contract for timê, or “chiefly due,” exchanged social, economic, and political privileges and authority for associated military and political leadership, judicial, redistributive, and other obligations. The Big Man’s material benefits obscure later related spiritual concepts of the Hero.

Further, Sarpedon informs Glaukos, in his explanation of the heroic material and ideological economy, that πάντες δὲ θεοὺς ὡς εἰσορώσων, “all [mortals] look up to [or behold] us as gods” (cf. 13.478, Od. 7.71, 8.173, 15.520). This unusual and pregnant phrase (oddly ignored by Hainsworth [1993] ad loc.) may be understood as vaunting hyperbole, or, better, as a “latent expression” (Nagy [1990] 142). The phrase indicates Sarpedon’s impending immortalization. Special food and special land for heroes, the best wine, and, after that, the mortal end. Then, τὸ οἶμος, a special grave-site that “latently” indicates hero worship in the poet’s age and later (Rohde [1925] 121; Nagy [1990]). This meaningful claim to signs of high status augments the approaching pathos. The hero faces Patroklos (425), while gods watch the encounter. Here’s reasoned rhetorical question constrains Zeus to consign a mortal to mortality (441-42; cf. the same verses spoken by Athene to Zeus about Hektor: 22.179-80):

\[
\text{ἄνδρα θυητὸν ἔοντα πάλαι πεπρωμένον ἀση}
\]

[Bring] a man, already good as dead, back again to life? You wish to set him free from the dismal power of death?


60. See, e.g., Nagy (1990) 137 for cultic honors; Donlan (1989) 129-45, for the secular perks and duties.
Sarpedon disappears supernaturally from the battlefield to enter some new existence.61 Savior Apollo, who twice retrieves dead Sarpedon, is the panhellenic patron of hero cults (Rohde [1925] 131). Homer has formulated an immortality by means of the divine translation of the hero’s body. Later hero cult’s practices explain Sarpedon’s unparalleled status. Although hero cult does not belong only to Sarpedon in the Iliad, it belongs most fully to him in the present Trojan epic. Why Sarpedon? Because he is the only son of Zeus in the Trojan War; because his saga is old and beloved of Homer’s audiences in nearby Anatolian territories, where his hero cult probably continued; and because his exaltation exalts his victor Patroklos, number three on the list of Most Valuable Warriors. The hero (so echt und so ait) of the ancient local Lykian cult has been incorporated (with a narrative aetiology) into the most significant poem of the heroic age (Wilamowitz [1920] 136).

Other elements suggest the elevation of Sarpedon’s status. The root TAR of his ταρχέων sacred burial procedure may reflect the TAR of νεκταρ, the immortali­z­­­­­­izing unguent that preserves his body, and similarly, later, Patroklos’ and Hektor’s bodies (19.38-39, 23.186-87; cf. above on ambrosia). Nektar and ambrosia occur together, essentially synonymous words for nonhuman commodities, sometimes comestibles. Both imply “stronger than death” or “immortal.” Rubbing either on a body (re-)imbues it with life-force (cf. 14.170-71; hom. h. Dem. 237; Od.18.192-94) or nourishes suprahuman types such as Here’s horses and Akhilleus (5.775-77, 19.347, 353). When Zeus demands that Sarpedon and his clothes be άμβροστα, he invests him and them (16.670, 680) with immortal characteristics later applied to cult heroes (Od. 24.59, 7.260). Thus immortalizing vocabulary and formulae surround this transported, translated hero.

Hero cults, local in origin and limited in prestige, appear first on the Aegean periphery. These hero cults included libations, that is, the pouring of wine and blood sacrifices (Paus. 10.4.10), tables set with food offerings, bath preparations, weeping and lamentation festivals, and generous feasts such as Sarpedon describes to Glaukos.63 The herōn, a special grave in a special precinct, received blood sacrifices and votives. The Harpies (Death Angels, Body Snatchers) may be related to Sarpedon both linguistically and geo-
graphically (Vermeule [1979] 169-170). Divine parentage is neither sufficient nor necessary to achieve hero status, but it helps (Burkert [1985] 207). Sarpedon and Memnon, his reflex in the Epic Cycle, both mythical Eastern barbarians, both receive divine protection and deliverance from the battlefield. Sarpedon’s great service and piteous death far from home defending allies deserve honor and/or appeasement (Seaford [1994] 184).

Many heroes are “godlike” besides Sarpedon (16.638, 649; cf. ἀντίθεος, διός, θεσιδής, θεῖος), but in his case Zeus as father empowers the widely shared epithet (15.67, 16.522; cf. 5.663, 683, 692). When immortal Zeus calls his mortal son “dearest of men” to him (433: φιλτατουν ἄνδρῶν) and Glaukos calls him “Zeus’ own son and best of men” (521-22: ἄνηρ δ’ ὦριστος ὀλωκε/ Σαρπηδῶν, Δῖος νῦν), these phrases, although formulaic, demand their due weight. The hero dies still angry, κτεινόμενος μενέων (16.491), and his psyche departs a second time. He is somehow dead before benign and helpful Death arrives. He remains dios, nevertheless, even when his bloody corpse is unrecognizable. Zeus fixes his eye on the killing and the final struggle for the mortal remains (431, 638-46). The god’s attention to a corpse should focus all audiences—even the scholarly one. Only public, honorific lamentation and due burial are ever qualified by the sardonic, pathetic formula “the privilege of those who die,” δ/τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἐστι θανόντων (16.457, 675; 23.9, Od. 24.190). Thus Homer’s honor of “bloody drops” before only Sarpedon’s death may reflect subsequent, post-heroic, historical libation ceremonies and indefinite hero cult worship for both him and other “Zeus-born” but now “dead” heroes, including Akhilleus.

The unparalleled scene requires a reading open to the unusual. Death has no attractions, as Akhilleus, alive and dead, opines (II. 9.312-20, Od. 11.488-91). The dead do not return, Patroklos noted. “Even Herakles died” was Akhilleus’ pre-heroized contribution to Hellenic proverbs (23.75-79; 18.117-19). Heroic epic’s only escape is the rare and inconsistent intimation of

64. Lykian Xanthos contains several hērōa, e.g., the Nereid monument of ca. 400 and the Harpies nearby.
65. Vermeule (1979) 150, 244 n.4. Local cult possessiveness prefigures the parochialism of modern Greek saints and the Panagia (Versnel [1981] 17).
67. 16.502, 644, 681-83. Vermeule (1979) 38, 149-50 discusses relevant vases’ “death” iconography, e.g., Euphronioi and Eukharidés show Sleep and Death removing Sarpedon from the battlefield on the Metropolitan Museum krater in New York. von Bothmer (1981) 65, 76-78 discusses Sarpedon’s rare appearances on vases despite his importance for Patroklos, therefore for Akhilleus, therefore for the Homeric Iliad. Memnon is a much more popular hero on the vases; Aiskhylos wrote plays about both (Keres und Psychostasia).
68. Garland (1982) 75-76 emphasizes survivors’ concerns and pity (the psychology of the living). He justly notes the absence of evidence for Sarpedon’s tomb cult, but hero cult extends rather than competes with death ritual (Seaford [1994] 115-16, 181). Argumenta e silentio are especially weak in marginal and poorly excavated Lykia.
70. Rohde (1925) 141 n. 23 insists that the heroes are not gods, daimones, or half-gods, but even he, keeping Homer removed from hero cult, admits that some figures, e.g., Akhilleus, Teiresias, Odysseus, and Sarpedon, inter alios, were worshipped as hero or god (ibid. 133, 150 n.87). Blood offerings, such as chthonic gods received, were offered to warrior heroes (see Plut. Aret. 21 [detailed], Paus. 8.41.1); their protections were sought, and their hērōa were visited for healing and prophetic revelations.
heroic immortality, life beyond the grave—Menelaos’ exclusive Elysion, Hesiod’s “isles of the Blessed,” Herakles’ shade in Hades and apotheosis, and Erekhtheus’ worship. Ancient audiences would catch epic references to the regional hero cults of their day, even when abbreviated and allusive to avoid anachronistic reference to later, post-heroic epochs. Zeus’ “bloody drops” connect the realms (Johnston [1992] 98), suggesting the nature of “downward” interaction among the divine, heroic, and mortal worlds. Forms of “hero worship” from the sky-god Zeus, the validating paradigm of all fatherhood, paradoxically descends into the entirely human experience of bereavement.

Conclusion. Zeus has ichor, not blood, but can weep. Zeus suffers as humans do when fathers bury sons—in contravention of natural order. Sorrowing fatherhood is again extended, in a potent simile, to Akhilleus’ grief for his beloved Patroklos. Homer enlarges this bitter but not uncommon human experience to Zeus’ loss of his biological son. The bereaved parents’ tears and laments compose a Homeric motif. The theme extends from Chryses to Priam, transiting through father Zeus’ miracle-producing pain. Gods rarely show the moral awareness, or intervene in accord with the moral awareness, that humans impute to them (Winterbottom [1989] 40). This grief of Zeus, however, and, later, his sympathy for Hektor (17.200-06, 24.66-76), index his “humanity,” without bridging the chasm between death and deathless. Zeus acts contrary to nature; however he brings it about, bloodlike drops reach earth that simultaneously recall human tears, red rain, and a libation of blood. Rare Homeric divine “wonders” punctuate the Iliadic norm.

The gods are “vulnerable immortal[s]” (Vermeule [1979] 125, 118-27). “Longinos” asserts that Homer, recording the woundings of the gods, their tears, and all their many passions (de sublim. 9.7: τραύματα, δάκρυα, πάθη πάμφρυρτα), “has done his best to make the Iliad’s men gods and gods men” (ἄνθρωπους ὄσον ἐπὶ τῇ δυνάμει θεοὺς πεποιηκέναι, τοὺς θεοὺς ἄνθρωπους). Instead of experiencing unhappy death, the gods suffer everlasting sorrow (ἀτυχιαν σίωνιαν), as befalls Zeus with Sarpedon. Perhaps “Longinus” did not quote 16.459 because it both affirms and disconfirms his paradox. It affirms the observation by reporting Sarpedon’s translation skyward and Zeus’ inconsolable grief with tearful expression; but it momentarily disconfirms the idea by collapsing the terms for once. Sarpedon’s immortalization collapses any clear line between mortals and immortals, like the premortem grieving of immortal Thetis for her doomed son Akhilleus.

71. Od. 4.563-70 and 11.601-4 mentions two of Zeus’ sons-in-law; Il. 2.547-51; Hes. Opera 167-72 for more heroes.
72. 23.222-23; cf. Kroisos’ sentiments speaking to Kyros, Hdt. 1.87.4. “[T]he bereaved father is a dominant figure in the [Iliad’s] plot from Chryses to Priam” (Griffin [1980] 123).
73. Patroklos and Sarpedon have linked destinies (15.64-67), share an unusual simile (16.428-30), and dedication to the Heroic code (Stanley [1993] 172-74; Baltes 1983).
Sarpedon’s *aristeia* starts with Zeus’ bloodlike drops honoring his son and closes with his nocturnal precipitate, ghastly murk.75 The venue and purpose of bloodlike drops and a darkening heaven is similar: to give honor to the bereft god’s son (16.460, 567-68):

Zeus δ’ ἐπὶ νυκτὶ ὀλονταί πάνσει κρατερῆ ύσμυνη,

όφρα φιλο περί παιδι μάχης ὦλονδόρον πώνος εἶν.

Zeus stretched deadly murk over the strong battle so that the deadly suffering of battle would surround his son.76


Zeus does not alter *aisa* or *moira*, but he saves his preeminent son from one death, orders a lesser god to breathe life back into him (Book 5), and sees to his *timē* in life as *basileus* (Book 12) and *kleos* in death as cult hero (Book 16). He has his corpse removed from the carnage and arranges his more than human, epichoric cult. Sarpedon dies twice as he lived twice. Homer implies an immortalized future existence—at Zeus’ desire, with Here’s limited assent, by means of Apollo’s immortalizing creams and demigods Hypnos and Thanatos’ celestial removal service. Homer predicts honors from subsequent generations, even without a “consoling suggestion of a happier afterlife.”77


75. Gods can darken the air (5.506-8 [Ares], 21.6-7 [Here]) or clear it (15.668-73 [Athene]). Zeus does both when evoking and answering Aias’ fervent prayer (17.268-70 [n.b. the verb: χεύ’: 643-50; cf. 17.547-50]. Edwards (1991), Janko (1992) ad locc. on Athene’s weather acts. Scholiasts AbT view the passages in 16 and 17 as intended to show grief and to “honor the dead.” Gods show affection in their own unexpectable ways.

76. Lattimore translates the two examples of ὀλος as “ghastly” first and then “deadly”—thus losing the identity of epithets.

77. West (1988) ad *Od.* 4.563ff. Minos, known elsewhere (Hesiod *Cat.* 140 ff. and Aiskhylos fr. 99) as Sarpedon’s brother, also departed life on earth for a significant afterlife.

78. *II.* 15.12, 44; 16.431; 17.441, 644-51; 17.198-205; 19.340-48; 22.168-70; 24.332. Zeus can appear elsewhere as an indifferent or amused spectator of the human comedy (e.g., 8.51, 7.459-63) and, as often, of the divine comedy (20.23, 21.388 and 508, but cf. 5.890-91). Bruce Heiden and Sarah J. Johnston of the Classics department at the Ohio State University, Natasha Sankovich, Esq., helpful anonymous readers, and my editor and friend Hanns Roisman improved this paper. With due thanks, I formulaically note that they are blameless for any errors or circular arguments that readers discover.