

Achilles Inaugurates his Cult:

Iliad 23 as Blueprint for Hero Cult

(20 minutes: Panel 15 or 16)

It is well recognized that the description of the funeral of Patroklos in *Iliad* 23 in some sense also represents the funeral of Achilles. The rituals Achilles performs on behalf of his friend point to the future establishment of Achilles' own cult, which will eternally be linked to Patroklos. Now ritual involves a specified sequence of actions by specified individuals at a specified time. The Iliadic text presents just such a sequence: each action of Achilles offers a blueprint or a script for the rituals intended to constitute the *dromena* of Achilles' future cult. To be sure, I do not claim that the any actual historical cult of Achilles followed the scenario outlined in the *Iliad*. But the basic components -- mourning, feasting, ritual impurity, hair offerings, holocausts, and funeral games - can easily be paralleled in historically attested hero cults. And, as so often in such aetiologies, the *legomena*, the myth behind the cult, provides a version that will be considerably watered down in actual practice, in the *dromena*, e.g., no human sacrifice. Perhaps also of cultic significance is the alternation of ritual actions between the entire Greek army and the smaller contingent of the Myrmidons alone. If the cutting of hair is not only a sign of mourning but also a rite of passage between youth and adulthood, then perhaps the division of participants may be based on age groups, with the Myrmidons, like Achilles, representing ephebes.

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