

Ἔρκος Ἀθηναίων: The Ajax Myth, the Trojan War, and the Construction of Civic
Ideology in Fifth-Century Athens

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Abstract

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This project explores how fifth-century Athens attempted to appropriate the myth of Telamonian Ajax as a way to express its civic ideology and sociohistorical identity in the decades following the Second Persian Invasion. I argue that Athens used the Ajax myth in order to promote its political interests as Hellenic liberator to the larger Greek world. Because the Persian Wars were often treated as parallel with the Trojan War, Athens could propagandize its role in the Battle of Salamis by articulating the Ajax myth as an exemplum. The scope of the Ajax myth also provided Athens with a means to address its political anxieties, as it shifted during the fifth century from Greece's dark-horse champion at the Battle of Salamis, to Delian League hegemon, and finally to imperial power. I first orient readers with the myth of Ajax in general, and the history of Athenian disputes with other poleis over his home island of Salamis. I then look at the Athenian artistic representation of "Ajax and Achilles playing a board game" and suggest reasons for its popularity. I turn next to Ajax in Homer, highlighting characteristics that Athens might find expedient for its projection of civic identity after the Persian Wars. This chapter also considers Ajax's relationship with other figures, notably Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus, in order to provide a foundation for my project *in toto*.

I look next at literature in the decade after the Persian Wars, the era of “celebration culture” after Greek victory. I explore the new Simonides’ Plataea elegy and epigrams from the Athenian Agora to demonstrate that Greeks employed the Trojan War to parallel the Persian War. I then examine Aeschylus’ *Persians* and argue that he uses the Iliadic Ajax in order to epicize Athens’ role in the battle of Salamis. Finally, I address Sophocles’ *Ajax* as a vehicle to examine the shift in Athens’ identity from Greek defender in the Persian Invasions to imperial aggressor in the Peloponnesian War. I argue that the *Ajax* alludes to Aeschylus’ *Persians* as a way to integrate Athens’ identity as defender of Greece in the battle of Salamis with its imperialist identity at the time of *Ajax*’s production. Lastly, I argue that *Ajax* recalls his single combat and gift exchange with Hector from the *Iliad* (*Aj.*654-665 alluding to *Il.*7.161-312), as a way for Athens to problematize shifting civic values and to incorporate that problematization into its civic identity.

Dedication

To my grandfather, who taught me to never give up, to my wife who carried me through this process, and to my two distracting little sons, Charlie and Henry, who were no help at all.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	7
Introduction.....	8
Chapter 1: The Homeric Ajax.....	23
Chapter 2: The Persian War as Trojan War: An Athenian Ajax in Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i>	73
Chapter 3: Sophocles' Athenian <i>Ajax</i>	121
Appendix 1: Simonides fr. 11W ² Plataea poem.....	170
Appendix 2: Eion Epigram III.....	173
Bibliography.....	174

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Introduction: Athens and the Ajax Myth

In the 470s BCE, after Athens led the Greek coalition that routed Xerxes' fleet around Salamis, it began to associate its achievement with Ajax's Panhellenic fame as the bulwark of the Achaeans in the *Iliad*. It is little wonder. Homeric tradition depicts Ajax as the quintessential Greek hero of defensive warfare. Entering battle, he wields the massive Mycenaean body-shield, the implement of a bygone era, carrying it "like a tower," in defense of his Greek comrades. The shield indicates Ajax's heroic personality, intractable to change, and is an extension of his warrior prowess—it is the tangible representation of Ajax's essence. When Achilles abstains from battle, the Greek army looks to Ajax, Achilles' understudy and the second best warrior. Ajax provides military cohesion, and leads the defense against Hector's assaults, securing the Achaean wall, and warding fire away from the Greek ships. Like Ajax defending the Greek army atop the ships at Troy, Athens looked to its ships at Salamis for the protection of Greece, and soon styled itself, the defender of Greek liberty—the "bulwark of Hellas" (*Pi.* fr.76).

However, where the *Iliad* distinguishes Ajax for his unrelenting defensive prowess, the larger tradition marks him for his humiliation—losing the judgment of the arms, his madness, the attack on the Greek livestock, and for his subsequent suicide.¹ The contrast between the Iliadic Ajax and his depiction in the *Epic Cycle* reveals the stark disparity separating the gloried Achaean defender and the frenzied and humiliated warrior. This Ajax, Athens would also look to in mid-century, when Sophocles depicted his myth in the troubled years leading up to the Peloponnesian War. Previously unattested, Ajax's attempt to murder Greek comrades is more

¹ These events are related in the *Aethiopis* and the *Little Iliad* of the Epic cycle, of which only fragments and Proclus' summary survives.

than likely a Sophoclean innovation, and one of particular relevance for the years marked by Athens' increasing tendency to punish disinterested allied *poleis*.

This project examines how Classical Athens interpreted the myth of Ajax through the poetic texts of Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles, in order to address its evolving civic identity. I argue that Athens constructs and criticizes its civic ideology by articulating Ajax as a model for the Athenian state, one that facilitated self-interpretation as its civic identity shifted from dark-horse champion of Greece, when it led the Greek defense at the battle of Salamis (480BCE), to hegemon of the Delian League and finally to Athenian Empire. In this way, Athens employed Ajax as an analogue for its national character—that is, Athens continually tailored Ajax from the Homeric tradition to fit an “Athens as Ajax” identity.

Examining culture through the prism of its mythological heroes has often preoccupied scholars. Seminal works such as W.B. Stanford's *Ulysses Theme* analyzes how ancient Greeks and later cultures adapted Odysseus' diverse characterizations to articulate social and political narratives. Stanford understands the Homeric Odysseus as a complex character which serves to buttress the many later diverse interpretations of his figure. In a similar vein, I understand Ajax as an “adaptable” hero, who serves the cultural needs of Athens for its own ideological articulation. Many scholars have written about the political implications of Ajax's myth, often concentrating on Sophocles' play, such as Bernard Knox's “The *Ajax* of Sophocles,” R.P. Winnington-Ingram's “Sophocles: An Interpretation”, or Peter Rose's “Historicizing Sophocles' *Ajax*” which offers a detailed Marxist interpretation, centered on conflict between the *demos* and aristocratic elites in fifth-century Athens. Among these, David Bradshaw's essay, “Ajax and the Myth of the Polis”, stands out for its insight into the myth of Ajax and its applicability for the Athenian city-state. But Bradshaw's study, while illuminating, does not comprehensively discuss

the Ajax myth for the time-period I intend to treat. Bradshaw does not fully incorporate the texts of Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles, nor does he examine how Athens utilized the epic past in service to its burgeoning sense of historical awareness and as a vehicle for its socio-historical identity.

Moreover, scholars have only recently investigated the extent to which the epic past has shaped fifth-century Athenian history, identity, and ideology.² Certainly, Homer and the tradition of the Trojan War were integral to the development of a Panhellenic consciousness and allowed city-states to promote individual interests and identities originating in the Panhellenic praise of local heroes.³ Moreover, following the most recent conflict involving allied Greeks fighting an eastern enemy, the tradition of the Trojan War supplied a convenient framework for an interpretation of the Persian Wars.⁴ Furthermore, as leader of the Greek defense at the Battle of Salamis, Athens capitalized on the battle's location near the island home of Ajax and promoted this association in the articulation of their national character.

This study focuses on non-historiographical texts in an effort to glean an organic understanding of how Athens developed a sense of historical identity at a time when historical fact, mythology, and political issues were not yet disentangled from poetic expression. Looking first at his character in the *Iliad*, I work to foreground the epic Ajax that Athens cultivates to represent its role as the defender of Hellas in the Persian invasions. I next examine how Simonides employs Achilles in lyric as an analogue for the battle of Plataea, and then suggest

² For recent treatments see J. Grethlein 2010, 2012; D. Boedeker 1988, 1998 and 2002; Marincola 1997, 2006. Especially relevant is Grethlein's discussion (2012: 14-36) of the epic 'plupast' in Homer and how Greek historians presented the historical past along similar lines.

³ City-states often emphasized their association with epic heroes, notably in their capacity as figures of cult. Cf. the contest between Sparta and Tegea over the bones of Orestes (Hdt. 1.67).

⁴ See Georges 1994: 60-62; Mitchell, 2007: 77-112, 169-202.

that Aeschylus cues us to Ajax's role in the battle of Salamis in the *Persians*. Finally, I discuss Sophocles' *Ajax*, where imperial Athens witnesses the traumatic aftermath of the judgment of the arms, and is confronted with the self-destructive final day of the "Athenian Ajax." This "Athenian Ajax," I argue, negotiated and resolved civic dissonance by integrating Athens' older identity as "Hellenic liberator" with its newfound role as imperial power.

In the sixth century, Athens had utilized the Ajax myth for political self-interest, and its attempts to assimilate Ajax were inextricably linked to its efforts to control Salamis island. With Salamis only one nautical mile (2km) from Piraeus Harbor and 16 km from Athens proper, it lay in proximity to three other major maritime powers: Megara, Aegina, and Corinth. In the inevitable conflict that resulted, Athens worked hard to possess Salamis, linking its ownership with Athenian identity from an early stage. In Solon's time, for instance, in Athens' first attested attempt to appropriate Ajax (E. Kearns 1989: 82n.10), Athens litigated Megara over the island, with Solon reportedly saying that "he would rather not be an Athenian than to bear the shame of letting go of Salamis" (*Sol.*2.3). According to Plutarch, Homeric authority helped Athens against Megara, since Solon "inserted a verse into the Catalogue of the Ships and read it during the suit: 'Ajax led two hundred ships from Salamis and stood them where the phalanxes of the Athenians stood' (Plut. *Solon* 10).⁵ Due to the Panhellenic *Iliad's* lack of full fixity,⁶ Athens could employ its local Iliadic variant, and in opposition, Megara deployed its own to justify claims to Salamis.⁷

⁵ Strabo reports this as well, and notes that either Peisistratus or Solon was responsible for the insertion. He compares the Athenian lines with other passages from the *Iliad* noting the disparate location of Ajax's station compared with Menestheus (9.1.10.). Edith Hall (2006:221) sees this as Athenian propaganda.

⁶ See Wickersham 1991: 17n.2.

⁷ For a full treatment of this conflict and its ramifications for the development of epic choric and Panhellenic myths, see John Wickersham's chapter in *Myth and the Polis*: "Myth and Identity in the Archaic Polis" (16-31). Strabo 9.1.10 also tackles discussion of the quarrel over Salamis, that the Megarians claimed Athens had inserted a self-interested couplet into the Homeric text.

The Salamis dispute spilled over into the wider Hellenic world, and at Megara's behest, arbitration was outsourced to Sparta (Plut. *Sol.*10), with a Spartan delegation hearing arguments over Athens and Megara's ancestral rights and rival claims of Ajax's mythological genealogy. Failing to convince the Spartans with Iliadic variants, parties had "to resort to para-Homeric traditions" (Wickersham 1991: 18). In the end, Sparta ruled in favor of Athens, basing its decision on Athenian local cult, since Athens argued that the sons of Ajax, Eurysakes and Philaios, had moved to Attica and become Athenian citizens (*Sol.*10).⁸ Upon receiving citizenship, Eurysakes and Philaios willed Salamis to Athens, and thus the Spartan emissaries adjudicated in favor of Athens based on its legitimate inheritance. Thus, from the start, Athens' appropriation of the Ajax myth was primarily rooted in its geopolitical will to expand and dominate in the Saronic Gulf.

Athens continued to employ Ajax for political aggrandizement into the late sixth century. In 508, as part of Athens' democratic revolution, Cleisthenes reformed the Athenian tribes, and created demes based on Athenian tribal heroes as a way to galvanize small Attic communities, and promote a sense of communal identity and responsibility (Osbourne 2006: 294-304). Each deme was named for an Athenian eponymous hero,⁹ except for the deme of Ajax (Aiantis). This political maneuver indicates Athens' attempts to appropriate the Ajax myth through legislation.¹⁰ Osbourne writes that "by instituting new tribal names, (Cleisthenes) was able to make all the various actions which Athenians performed in tribes, whether military, festival, or political,

⁸ Pausanias and Plutarch relate how Eurysakes moved to Melite and Philaios to Brauron, becoming Athenian citizens and passing possession of Salamis over to Athens (Plut. *Sol.*10, Paus.1.35.1).

⁹ The demes' tribal names were: Aigeus, Akamas, Erechtheus, Pandion, and Cecrops –legendary Attic kings, Leos, Hippothoon, Oeneus, Antiochus, and Ajax.

¹⁰ Herodotus notes that Cleisthenes included Ajax in the tribes "because he was a neighbor and an ally" (Hdt.5.66).

redolent of an Athenian past,” and that this process “lay the groundwork for Athenian autochthony” (2006:300). Including Ajax in Athenian democratic governance is tantamount to an inversion of the Solonic/Peisistratid Iliadic interpolation, with the Athenian polis inserting Ajax into its mythico-historic legacy and attempting to fuse his myth to Athenian origins.

Besides Megara, Aegina also vied with Athens over Ajax’s legacy. The island of Aegina, roughly 15 miles off the coast of Attica, was Athens’ chief naval rival in the sixth and early fifth centuries.¹¹ During the late sixth century, Athens began to amplify its city’s rather minimal role in the Trojan War tradition, attempting to match its growing political power with epic backing.¹² When Athens rebuilt the temple of Athena Polias on the Acropolis, it included in the agora below a shrine to Aiakos, the grandfather of Achilles and Ajax.¹³ To the Aeginetans, however, Aiakos was an ancestral hero and the island’s legendary cult ruler,¹⁴ and the establishment of a

¹¹ Herodotus gives the general story, naming it an “ancient enmity,” and writing that Aegina started a war against Athens sometime in the early to mid 6th century (Hdt.5.79-81). In response to this, Athens sent emissaries to the oracle of Delphi which told them to dedicate a sanctuary to Aiakos, the most important cultic figure on Aegina, which they placed in the agora. The oracle is highly suspect, however, and it is likely that Athens invented it after the fact for propagandistic purposes attempting to appropriate the central cultic figure of their rival.

¹² In the late sixth century, Athens turned its attention to the sea, building up a trading empire and simultaneously drawing the ire of Aegina. Athenian focus on trade is evidenced by the spread of Athens’ “owl” currency throughout the Mediterranean. Herodotus reports that the city-states were engaged in a “unannounced war” (πόλεμος ἀκήρυκτος) (Hdt.5.81-9).

¹³ R.S. Stroud (1998:96) argues convincingly that this Athenian Aiakeion was built in imitation of the Aiakeion on Aegina, noting that Aeginetan limestone was used in the construction of the Athenian shrine. Fearn (Fearn 2007:92) suggests additionally that “it may be significant that one of Athens’ most important families, the Philiadai could trace their own history back to Aiakos: Miltiades and Kimon trace their lineage back to Aiakos, Telamon, and Ajax. See D. Fearn’s *Bacchylides: Politics, Performance, Poetic Tradition*. Oxford.

¹⁴ According to Pindar, Aiakos was the son of Zeus and the nymph Aegina, and famous for his just rule over the island (*Nem.* 8,6-12). He also joined Apollo and Poseidon in building the walls of Troy (*Ol.*8.31-52), and his two sons, Telamon and Peleus, reportedly killed their half-brother Phokos, and were forced to flee Aegina. Peleus went to Thessaly and Telamon to Salamis (*Nem.*5.12-16). Telamon performed exploits with the Theban hero Heracles and Iolaos, including taking Troy for the first time from Laomedon (*Nem.* 3.37-8, 4.25-7; *Isth.* 5.35-8, 6.27-35). His son was Ajax (*Isth.*6.36-56).

shrine to Aiakos was Athens' brazen attempt to appropriate their cultic figure.¹⁵ Soon after, Aegina took advantage of a fire that destroyed the sanctuary of the temple of Aphaia and refashioned the Aphaian pediment sculptures to include the Aiakidai (with Ajax prominent) at Troy (Watson 2011: 79-113). According to Watson, the refashioned Aphaian sculptures are can be read as a declaration that "Aeginetan heroes –not Athenians –played the key role in the conflict with Troy" (*ibid.*:109). Many scholars view this as a clear rejoinder to Athens' attempts to claim Ajax and the Aiakidai, in a milieu in which Athens was increasingly attempting to epicize its past.

While Aegina attempted to rebuke Athens' claims to Ajax and the Aiakidai in architecture, Pindar's poetry provides the strongest textual evidence for Aegina's Aiakid link to Ajax. His Aeginetan odes describe Ajax's birth, heroic deeds and unfair treatment in the contest for Achilles' armor, rooting Ajax's glory firmly in Aeginetan soil. Moreover, as some scholars suggest, there is evidence for Pindar's support of Aeginetan Aiakid ancestry contra Athens' efforts to claim them,¹⁶ since he mentions Aiakos or the Aiakids in every surviving Aeginetan

Curiously Aegina's Aiakid mythic claim seems to have come about late in the mythic tradition – Homer only briefly mentions Aiakid genealogy sans Ajax (*Il.*21.189), and he notably locates Aiakos and his family in Thessaly. Homeric tradition mentions Aegina only once in a minor reference as a land under the sway of Diomedes. This passage notably follows only a few lines after Solon's supposed interpolation. Only in the 6th century does the tradition confirm Aeginetan claims to Aiakid ancestry with Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* fr. 205 asserting Aegina's anthropogenic claim on Aiakos.

¹⁵ Watson (Watson 2011:107) notes that "the consecration of an Aiakeion in Athens represented an Athenian attempt to claim the Aiakidai –to persuade those heroes to 'change sides,' to abandon the Aeginetans, and to support the Athenians instead."

¹⁶ Barbara Kowalzig (Kowalzig 2001: 89) writes, "but the Aeginetans' claim, too, to the hero's Aiakid ancestry is stubbornly preserved in Pindar's early to mid-fifth-century odes, despite Athens' earlier Cleisthenic appropriation –proof that Athens' pretense of unique ownership of the hero, at least in terms of rhetoric, cannot have been all that successful."

ode, and considers it to be a τέθμιον, a “duty,” to mention them (*Isth.*6.19-21).¹⁷ Specifically, scholars link Herakles’ prayer for Telamon and Eriboia’s son Ajax in *Isthmian* 6, which enjoins Telamon to name his son after the eagle, with the refashioned Aphaian statuary, which also depicts Herakles, Telamon, and Ajax.¹⁸ Consequently, as a prominent member of the Aiakidai, Pindar focuses on Ajax.¹⁹ However, more than Ajax’s birth, Pindar’s odes emphasize the injustice of an aristocratic warrior undone by rhetorical artifice in the judgment for Achilles’ arms.²⁰ In fact, Pindar is credited with introducing the idea that Ajax was cheated in the contest, something previously unattested, and notably lacking from the Homeric tradition.²¹

¹⁷ G. Nagy argues that when Pindar mentions Aiakos and the Aiakids he connects them to aristocratic Aeginetan families. Nagy further suggests that the word *patra* is used to mean “patriliny” when it is applied to Aeginetan lineages in the odes, and that in each case where *patra* is thus used, there is a pointed mention of the Aiakidai ‘descendants of Aiakos’, or of the hero Aiakos himself elsewhere in the same composition. Accordingly there is a strong aristocratic Aeginetan faction whose ties to the Aiakids and Ajax may have been threatened by Athenian attempts to appropriate one of their ancestors.

¹⁸ Henrik Indergaard (2011: 294-322) argues that *Isthmian* 6 praises the Psalychiadai, a single Aeginetan clan, by “incorporating the Aeginetan myth of the Aiakidai” with the myth of Herakles. He writes that the “aetiological function of the mythological narrative” links the pedimental statuary and is integrated “into an ode which celebrates one Aeginetan clan.” In *Isthmian* 6, after Herakles makes his first prayer, ταῦτ’ ἄρα οἱ φαμένω πέμψεν θεὸς /ἀρχὸν οἰωνῶν μέγαν αἰετόν: ἀδεῖα δ’ ἔνδον νιν ἔκνιξεν χάρις, /εἶπέν τε φωνήσαις ἄτε μάντις ἀνήρ: /ἔσσεταί τοι παῖς, ὃν αἰτεῖς, ὃ Τελαμών: /καὶ νιν ὄρνιχος φανέντος κέκλε’ ἐπόνυμον εὐρυβίαν Αἴαντα, λαῶν /ἐν πόνοις ἔκπαγλον Ἴνυαλίου.’ The god sent to him the king of birds, a great eagle. He felt thrilled inside with sweet joy, and he spoke like a prophet: “Telamon, you will have the son that you ask for” (*Isth.*6.49-54).

¹⁹ In Pindar’s Aeginetan odes, Ajax is mentioned at *Nem.* 4.44-8; 7.24-30; 8.23; *Isth.* 5.46-50; 6.26; 52-54. Pindar also mentions Ajax in accordance with Salamis as his ‘ancestral isle’ at *Nem.*4.47-8, ἀτὰρ Αἴας Σαλαμῖν’ ἔχει πατρώαν, and *Isth.*5.48-50 and then in the Heracleian prophecy of Ajax’ birth at *Isth.*6.35-56.

²⁰ “Pindar, ‘the most articulate voice of that aristocratic order for which Thucydides (son of Melesias) stood’ is far louder and more heartfelt than convention demanded in his praise of Aegina” De St. Croix 2004, p.379-380.

²¹ Regarding Ajax’s pre-Pindaric tradition, only two facts are clear: Ajax was the best of the Greeks after Achilles, and Odysseus somehow won the contest. While intimations of future deception may be gleaned from Ajax and Odysseus’ wrestling match in book 23 of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Epic Cycle* only relate that Athena, or captive Trojans, or Trojan women walking on the city walls decided the contest. Pindar omits references to all three, and claims that

Besides countering Athenian appropriation of Ajax’s Aeginetan ancestry, Pindar may also be projecting Athens as the shameless Odysseus against Aegina’s aristocratic Ajax in his retelling of the judgment of the arms,²² a rebuke to Athens’ attempt to claim Ajax as its own hero. As the aristocratic warrior of βίη, “force,” Ajax is cheated by Odysseus, the unscrupulous figure of μῆτις, “cunning,” in a political subtext that promotes Aeginetan claims to the Aiakidai over Athenian efforts. For example, in *Nemean* 7, Pindar conflates Odysseus’ deceptive words with Homeric poetry,

ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον’ ἔλπομαι

λόγον Ὀδυσσέος ἢ πάθαν διὰ τὸν ἀδυεπῆ γενέσθ’
 Ὅμηρον:
 ἐπεὶ ψεύδεσιν οἱ ποτανᾶ τε μαχανᾶ 22
 σεμνὸν ἔπεστί τι: σοφία δὲ κλέπτει παράγοισα μύθοις: τυφλὸν δ’ ἔχει
 ἦτορ ὄμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος. εἰ γὰρ ἦν
 ἔ τὰν ἀλάθειαν ιδέμεν, οὐ κεν ὄπλων χολωθεῖς 25
 ὁ καρτερὸς Αἴας ἔπαξε διὰ φρενῶν
 λευρὸν ξίφος: ὃν κράτιστον Ἀχιλλέος ἄτερ μάχα...

I think that Odysseus’ account is greater than his experience
 Because Homer is sweetly worded, for there is something reverent in his
 lies and winged artifice, and his cleverness misleads and deceives with his
 stories.

The majority crowd of men has a blind heart;
 if it were able to see the truth,

Mighty Ajax, enraged over the arms, would not have planted his level
 sword through his chest –he, mightiest in battle apart from Achilles...

the vote was rigged, that the “blind and envious hearts” of men tilted the contest for Odysseus, and that if men could discern truth, Ajax would not have killed himself.

²² *Nem.* 7, *Nem.* 8, and *Isth.* 4 challenge the prevailing Homeric narrative of the *Hoplion Krisis*, the contest for Achilles’ armor from Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. Describing Odysseus’ experience as his *πάθαν*, Pindar points specifically to the *Odyssey*’s poet, particularly books 9-12, where Homer’s voice is Odysseus’ voice as he recounts his “sufferings” to the Phaeacian court, and chiefly to Odysseus’ encounter with Ajax’s shade at *Odyssey* 11.543-51: “Alone did the soul of Ajax, son of Telamon / stand-off apart, angered about the victory / that I had won over him when judgment was made by the ships / about the armor of Achilles. His queenly mother had set it. / The sons of the Trojans judged it, and Pallas Athene. / Would that I had not won in a contest of that kind! / For the sake of those arms the earth closed over the great head of Ajax, / who by his form and his deeds had surpassed the other Danaans, After Peleus’ blameless son.” See F. Nisetich: 1989: 9-23.

Swayed by superficial artifice, the throng serves as contrast to Pindar’s Ajax, whose martial deeds validate his station as an aristocratic hero.²³ Pindar’s Odysseus is the crowd’s poet, the poet of the *demos* who seduces with pleasant words compared to the poet of *arête*, Pindar, concerned with truth and partial to the sensibilities of an inherently superior class, Ajax. By configuring Odysseus as the slippery figure of rhetoric,²⁴ whose verbal skill outshines the noble Ajax, Pindar’s Odysseus projects stereotypical elements of Athenian democratic governance and of the sophists of the mid to late 5th century, whose expertise was to “make the weaker argument the stronger.”²⁵

In *Nemean 8*, Pindar again offers his revision of the *hoplon krisis*, but this time cues us to its outcome through a stark intimation of Athenian democratic practice,

ἢ τιν’ ἀγλωσσον μὲν, ἦτορ δ’ ἄλκιμον, λάθα κατέχει
 ἐν λυγρῷ νείκει: μέγιστον δ’ αἰόλω ψεύδει γέρας ἀντέταται.
κρυφίαισι γὰρ ἐν ψάφοις Ὀδυσσῆ Δαναοὶ θεράπευσαν:
 χρυσέων δ’ Αἴας στερηθεὶς ὄπλων φόνω πάλαισεν.

Truly, oblivion pins down a man in grievous strife who is ineloquent,

²³ Pindar blames Homer for Odysseus’ inflated reputation, and blurs Homer’s verse with Odysseus’ rhetorical skill. In fact, Homer and Odysseus are so closely tied that assigning ownership to the dative οἱ at line 22 becomes difficult. The ambiguity seems intentional, as scholars have noted, and further serves to conflate Homer and Odysseus into a single voice.

²⁴ The Thersites account may offer an exemplum of Odysseus arguing the opposite side of the case.

²⁵ For the sophistic trope, Aristotle writes, καὶ τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν τοῦτ’ ἔστιν. καὶ ἐντεῦθεν δικαίως ἐδυσχέρανον οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸ Πρωταγόρου ἐπάγγελμα: ψεῦδός τε γὰρ ἔστιν, καὶ οὐκ ἀληθές ἀλλὰ φαινόμενον εἰκός, καὶ ἐν οὐδεμιᾷ τέχνῃ ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐν ῥητορικῇ καὶ ἐριστικῇ. “And this is what “making the worse appear the better argument” means. Wherefore men were justly disgusted with the promise of Protagoras; for it is a lie, not a real but an apparent probability, not found in any art except Rhetoric and Sophistic” (*Rhetoric* 1402a23, translated by J. H. Freese). Strepsiades in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* declares of his son, ὅπως δ’ ἐκείνω τὸ λόγῳ μαθήσεται,/ τὸν κρείττον’ ὅστις ἐστὶ καὶ τὸν ἥττονα, /ὅς τᾶδικα λέγων ἀνατρέπει τὸν κρείττονα: /ἐὰν δὲ μή, τὸν γοῦν ἄδικον πάσῃ τέχνῃ. But see that he learns those two causes; the better, whatever it may be; and the worse, which, by maintaining what is unjust, overturns the better. If not both, at any rate the unjust one by all means. (*Clouds* 880-889).

yet stout in heart;
but the greatest honor is offered to the shifty lie.
For in secret ballots, the Danaans favored Odysseus: and Ajax, robbed of
the golden armor, who wrestled with death.

The “secret ballots,” at line 26 evoke a democratic and Athenian element, which shifts the frame of the contest from the Homeric world into the political sphere of the 5th century. That ψᾶφοι are somehow negatively κρύφιοι “secret” to Pindar seems counterintuitive to societies who see it as a safeguard against political reprisal. Moreover, the Athenian democracy began to implement secret voting around the time that Pindar produced *Nemean* 8 (459/8 BCE),²⁶ for exactly that reason.²⁷ Furthermore, vase paintings from 490-480BCE depicting the judgment of Achilles’ armor show an open voting procedure where Greeks place pebbles publicly on either side of a table.²⁸ On one scene, the Brygos painter has set Athena between Odysseus and Ajax behind a low table on which Greeks place their ψᾶφοι on either side.²⁹ Perhaps by claiming that the votes are secretive (κρυφίαισι γὰρ ἐν ψάφοις) through a political subtext, Pindar can disparage Athenian democratic practice, to win the approval of Aegina’s aristocrats. Accordingly, Pindar responds to Athens’ attempts to appropriate Ajax by painting Athens as Ajax’s greatest foe, Odysseus.

²⁶ Alan Boegehold argues that “the principle of secret voting was known at Athens in 458 BCE,” but writes that “nothing demonstrates its use any earlier.” See “Toward a study of Athenian Voting Procedure.” *Hesperia* 1963. Athenians of the fifth century introduced the mysterious κημός “muzzle,” a funnel-shaped affixture set atop voting urns presumably to keep ballots secret. Cf. *Ar.Eq.* 1150, V.99.

²⁷ Ideas of the secret ballot’s protective service are articulated by later authors, see Lysias 13.33, Thuc.4. Xen. *Symp.* 5.8, and Dem. 19.239, and Aristotle’s *Athenaion Politeia*.

²⁸ The vote for Achilles’ arms was a popular motif in Attic vase painting at this time. See Spivey 1994: 41-7 for a list. The Wine Cup with the Suicide of Ajax, ca. 490 BCE., attributed to the Brygos Painter (The J. Paul Getty Museum, 86.AE.286).

²⁹ Red-figured Kylix in the British Museum 1843,1103.11.

Athens also looked to the epic past to buttress its new political position through artistic depictions on vase paintings of the late sixth century. One of the most popular and quite possibly the earliest Athenian vase painting motifs was “Ajax and Achilles playing dice,”³⁰ the most famous being the Attic black-figure amphora by Exekias (Vatican 344). Scenes of this type typically depict Ajax and Achilles engaged in some form of board game, as each warrior sits facing the other—either on the right or on the left—with Athena or a tree sometimes behind or in front of the gaming table. While not likely depicting an actual episode from a text,³¹ the contraposition of Ajax and Achilles on these vases correlates to their opposing binary schema in the layout of the Achaean army on the Trojan beach in the *Iliad* (*Il.*8.220-6).³² Heide Mommsen argues that no narrative underpins these motifs, and views the consistent depictions of Ajax in near symmetry with Achilles as an Athenocentric innovation to bolster Athenian prestige by presenting the hero from Salamis, an Attic holding, in proximity to Achilles (Mommsen 1980: 152, 446-7). Similarly, Barbara Kowalzig suggests that Ajax and Achilles playing “pessoi” may indicate the level to which Athens attempted to integrate Ajax into its polis (2006).³³ In other

³⁰ According to E. Anne Mackay (2010:334), there are over 160 vase paintings of this type, with a majority being black-figure, and nine are specifically inscribed as “Ajax and Achilles.” Guy Hedreen (2001:92) writes that “In this scene type, the consistency of the players’ characterization as soldiers and the unanimity of the inscriptions suggest that, even in the absence of inscriptions, artists and viewers would have identified the players as Achilles and Ajax.”

³¹ Scholars have offered numerous interpretations. J.D. Beazley (1986:60) argued that they depict a story from a lost epic entitled the *Palamedeia*, named for Palamedes, the mythical inventor of the dice game. As Ajax and Achilles play, they fail to notice the Trojans attacking and Athena must intervene in order to rouse them to battle.

³² Susan Woodford (Woodford 1982:177) briefly touches on this idea in her discussion of the Oxford *olpe*’s illustration of the scene: “The symmetrical placement of the two heroes on either side of the gaming board is, in fact, a concretization within a small format of the placement of their camps.”

³³ Kowalzig also notes that the pessi game represents the structure of the cosmic order. Cf. Plato’s *Laws* 903c5-e.

words, by emphasizing Ajax's close relation to Achilles on vases, Athens could project its image as Ajax through export and trade to the wider Greek and Mediterranean world.³⁴

The Battle of Salamis and Ajax

Before the second Persian invasion, Athens' attempts to appropriate Ajax were primarily tied to its efforts to maintain control over Salamis island. However, in the aftermath of the Athenian led victory at the battle of Salamis, Athenian connection to the Ajax myth would become more than a justification for holding onto local territory. Athens began to employ its link to Ajax as the Panhellenic defender of Greek liberty in order to promote its hegemony over the post Persian War world. On the battle of Salamis, Barbara Kowalzig writes, "the cornerstone of Athenian Panhellenic commitment was fought in Ajax's home –and under his protection," and accordingly Athens could associate its defensive action at Salamis with Ajax's defensive action from the *Iliad*, an amenable association considering Athens' historical attempts to claim the hero.

In general, the decades following Xerxes' expulsion from Greece witnessed city-states beginning to analogize the Persian War with the Trojan War. The epic undertones of contemporary Greeks confronting an ancient eastern power naturally lent itself to comparison, and as a result city-states saw the fight against Persia as a continuation of the struggle with Troy (see Chapter 2). When Herodotus prefaces the battle of Salamis, he employs a topos common to

³⁴ Ajax and Achilles are also closely tied in the larger iconographic record. Appearing quite early, and attesting to the antiquity of their association, are the many depictions of Ajax rescuing Achilles from battle. On the handle of the Francois vase, for example, ca. 570BCE (Florence 4209), a helmeted figure carries a deceased warrior on his back, with the names "Ajax" and "Achilles" inscribed to the right and left, respectively. For others see Susan Woodford and Margot Loudon, "Two Trojan Themes: The Iconography of Ajax Carrying the Body of Achilles and of Aeneas Carrying Anchises in Black Figure Vase Painting." *AJA*, Vol.84, No.1. 1980:25-40.

the Iliadic Ajax. He reports that a ship was dispatched to retrieve Aiakos and the Aikiadai from Aegina, and Telamon and Ajax from Salamis, in order to help the Greeks in battle:

ἔδοξε δέ σφι εὔξασθαι τοῖσι θεοῖσι καὶ ἐπικαλέσασθαι τοὺς Αἰακίδας συμμάχους. ὡς δέ σφι ἔδοξε, καὶ ἐποίηυν ταῦτα: εὐξάμενοι γὰρ πᾶσι τοῖσι θεοῖσι, αὐτόθεν μὲν ἐκ Σαλαμῖνος Αἴαντά τε καὶ Τελαμῶνα ἐπεκαλέοντο, ἐπὶ δὲ Αἰακὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Αἰακίδας νέα ἀπέστελλον ἐς Αἴγινα. (*Hdt.*8.64.2)

and it was resolved to pray to the gods and summon the sons of Aiakos as allies. When it was resolved, they did this: praying to all the gods, they called Ajax and Telamon to come from Salamis, and sent a ship to Aegina for Aiakos and his sons.

In the *Iliad*, Ajax is the “summoned” warrior, and in pitched battle, comrades look to Ajax, the ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, “Bulwark of the Achaeans,” calling on him for aid when they become imperiled (*Il.*7.181-185, 11.459-471). On the brink of Salamis, the Greek coalition was indeed imperiled, seriously outnumbered, and facing a coordinated Persian land and naval armada, and ceremoniously “summoned” the sons of Aiakos, specifically Ajax and Telamon from Salamis. A.M. Bowie argues that these heroes “must be physically present at the battle, because heroes only had local influence,”³⁵ and it is clear that the Greeks conceived that Ajax assisted in battle, since afterward they dedicated a Phoenecian trireme to Ajax (*Hdt.* 8.121). However, the Herodotean episode reveals that Aeginetan and Athenian claims on Ajax were not settled. While the allies “called Ajax and Telamon to come straight from Salamis, and sent a ship to Aegina for Aeacus and his sons,” (8.64) we note that one ship was dispatched to two locations to retrieve perhaps cult statues, or as Nagy has posited, individuals representing the Aiakidai. David Fearn, pointing out that the Aiakidai are separated in this instance (2017:74-80), states that this action “provides a potential asymmetrical problem between Athenian power (since Athens owns

³⁵ Bowie 2007: 151. He also comments that “Ajax’s help was later commemorated at the Aianteia festival, celebrated on Salamis.”

Salamis) and Aeginetan claims.” More important is what follows victory. Each side claims that it started the battle, with Athens asserting that the Athenian Ameinias began the fight, while Aegina claims that the appearance of the ship with the Aiakidai (Ajax included) commenced the confrontation (*Hdt.* 83-4).

Discussing the argument, Elizabeth Irwin suggests that Athens acts “rather Odysseus-like, [in] an attempt to wrest from the Aiakidai (among whom Ajax, of course, figures) the credit that the Aeginetans attribute to the heroes” (Irwin 2011:). Moreover, she notes that in Diodorus’ account of the battle (11.27.2) the Spartans weigh in on the decision calling it a κρίσεως περὶ τῶν ἀριστείων “a judgment over the *aristeia*,” a clear evocation of the *hoplon krisis*. Irwin even asserts that the main Greek players at Salamis can be represented by their mythic counterparts: Sparta as Agamemnon, Athens as Odysseus, and Aegina as Ajax.

While Athens’ attempts to claim Ajax as an exemplum for its civic identity faced challenges on the Panhellenic stage, Ajax provided Athens with a model for its historic past and for contemporary criticism. In the following work, I attempt to show how Athens employed the Ajax myth in its poetry as a way to define itself from the end of the Persian Wars to the preliminary years before the Peloponnesian War. My aim in this study is to examine and present the multifarious use of a Homeric hero for Athens’ evolving civic identity. In many ways, the Ajax myth complements the history of fifth-century Athens. The trajectory of Ajax’s mythic life, much like Athens’ Golden Age, begins in glory and ends in self destruction. Where Ajax staunchly defended Greek comrades in the *Iliad*, his diminished honor led to a brutal attack on his former friends, so too the Athenians fought in defense of their Greek allies at Salamis, and in a short time, turned on them, subjugating the fellow Greeks they once protected in brutal reprisals.

Chapter 1: The Homeric Ajax

The Homeric Ajax is foremost a warrior of critical defense. In Achilles' absence, Ajax alone stands against Hector and the Trojans as they make their deepest incursion into the Achaean camp and force the Greek army back against its ships. In this moment, Ajax fights as the eleventh-hour soldier, warding off destruction as he leaps from deck to deck of the Greeks' ships (*Il.*15.674-680). In skill of battle and in beauty only Achilles surpasses him (*Il.*2.768-9, 17.279-80).³⁶ In stature, Ajax is a colossal figure, standing head and shoulders above other warriors (*Il.*3.228). He wields an equally gigantic body shield, an ancient implement that serves as the physical expression of his implacable disposition.³⁷ He is μέγας, πελώριος (*Il.*23.708, 7.208-211), and in his most celebrated epithet, ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν “bulwark of the Achaeans” (*Il.*3.228, 6.5, 7.211), the *Iliad* manages to capture his massive size as well as his military function. Often likened to the war god, Ajax even strides like Ares (*Il.*7.208), carrying his shield into battle ἠϋτε πύργον, “like a tower”, suggesting the paradoxical image of an advancing fortress (*Il.*7.219). Ajax is the Greek workhorse, the reliably summoned defender who rescues fellow soldiers (*Il.*7.181-185, 11.459-471) and fortifies weakened defenses (*Il.*12.331-81). While often cast as the warrior of βίη, in contrast to Odysseus as the figure of μῆτις,³⁸ Ajax is in fact a figure of

³⁶ Achilles surpasses Ajax only in “form of beauty” *in conjunction* with the “works of his hands” (*Il.*17.279-80). Nireus demonstrates only physical beauty removed from the strength of arms (*Il.*2.673-75). G.S. Kirk notes that line 2.674 is identical to 17.280, where the poet clarifies the nature of Ajax's beauty after Achilles; “sheer good looks, in a heroic society would not make up for a man being ‘weak...and with few troops’” (Kirk 1985:227).

³⁷ See A.M. Snodgrass for the shield's ancient heritage (*Arms and the Armour of the Greeks* 1967:19-20).

³⁸ D. Bradshaw suggests that Ajax and Odysseus' wrestling match in Book 23, and the later Pindaric tradition (*Nemean* 8), reinforce this dichotomy. He also argues that Shakespearean tradition has contributed to Ajax's reputation as a simpleton; in *Troilus and Cressida*, Ajax is referred to as a “beef-witted lord” (1991:102-11, n.27).

equitable disposition and a strategist who apprehends the tide of battle and then implements a plan of action. In the Embassy to Achilles, Ajax demonstrates a keen sensitivity to Achilles' mood, and is able to articulate his case and to move Achilles where Phoenix and Odysseus could not (*Il.*9. 622-55). Moreover, Ajax demonstrates a commander's voice on the battlefield as we hear him in the midst of the throng, marshaling and directing units in combat (*Il.*17.356-65). He is the fighter who sweats (*Il.*16.109-111), who consistently exhorts and reproaches comrades, and serves as a rallying point for his companions (*Il.*6.5, 15.685-88, 732-41, 17.356-60).

Looking to his performance in the *Iliad*, it is easy to imagine why fifth-century Athens might find in Ajax a Panhellenic symbol for its leadership in the struggle against Persia. As a formidable non-Greek enemy, the Persian Empire became equated with the Trojans.³⁹ What is more, as one of two leading city-states who refused to medize, Athens could link its resistance to Persia with Ajax's opposition to Hector. It could then envision its defense of Greece aboard triremes as the contest of Ajax beating back Hector from the Achaean ships. Like Ajax, Athens too had to abandon its city, its "camp" so to speak, and renew its defense on the decks of its ships.⁴⁰ On board their triremes, Athenians would watch as Persian forces razed their city, thus creating the urgent sense that Athens is now a kind of floating city-state adrift in the Straits of Salamis.⁴¹ In this, Athens' darkest hour, the desperate Athenians might remember their *Iliad*, and commiserate with Ajax as he makes a last ditch effort to ward off annihilation on the decks of

³⁹ For the idea, see Georges 1994: 61-5, and Boedeker 2001:125-6.

⁴⁰ While Ajax's defense ultimately ends when Hector sets fire to the ships, this final action signals the completion of Zeus' plan. It is Hector's furthest incursion against the Achaeans, and serves as a catalyst bringing Achilles back to the war.

⁴¹ Athens is a polis without a city according to Adeimantus in his rebuke to Themistocles before the Battle of Salamis (*Hdt.*8.61.1); women and children were evacuated to Salamis and to Troezen; The overall implication is that its trireme navy and the island of Salamis are the Athenian State.

Greek ships. Perhaps it was this idea that inspired the Athenians, shortly before the Battle of Salamis, to offer prayers and to dispatch a trireme to bring Ajax and Telamon from the island as allies in the upcoming engagement (Hdt.8.64). In this dire moment, Athens desperately needed an Ajax on the deck of its ships. Having dedicated a trireme to him after their victory, the Athenians understood that Ajax was physically present in battle, and intervened on their behalf (Hdt.8.121.1).⁴² Additionally, the *Iliad* records that Ajax came to Troy from Salamis with twelve ships, “placed next to where the Athenian battalions were drawn up” (*Il.*2.557-8, 7.198-99).⁴³ This passage, the first textual evidence linking Athens and the Homeric Ajax, offers another level of complexity by adding a naval element to the mix. By advancing this association with Ajax, Athens could help propel themselves into a more formidable position, one that might rival the hoplite powerhouse of Sparta. Since he was a Panhellenic hero with reputation as the greatest warrior after Achilles, Athens could capitalize on Ajax’s built-in approximation to Achilles, and promote its new trireme armada as a force of comparable strength to Sparta’s army, one on a par with the “Doric Spear” of the Peloponnesian army.⁴⁴ Achilles and Ajax can be seen as the spear and shield of the Greeks at Troy, that is, they represent the offensive and defensive wings, respectively.⁴⁵ Athenian self-promotion as the Ajax extreme of the Achilles-Ajax pair would thus

⁴² What exactly was brought back on the trireme? While it is unclear, it was most likely statues, symbolizing the physical presence of Ajax and the Aeacidae in battle. According to A.M. Bowie (2007:151), Ajax and the Aeacidae “must be physically present at the battle because heroes only had local influence”, i.e. because Salamis was nearby, Ajax could assist in the battle.

⁴³ The question of Athenian interpolation in this passage has raged since antiquity; Aristarchus athetized the passage based on later contradictions in the poem: Ajax’s camp is set between Idomeneus and Odysseus, and not close to the Athenians cf.3.225; 229. See Kirk 1985:207-9.

⁴⁴ Aeschylus uses the phrase in the *Persians*, when he contrasts Athenian victory at Salamis to the Spartan victory in the Battle of Plataea, and describes the majority of the Peloponnesian army as the “Doric Spear” (*Pers.*815-20).

⁴⁵ Already a popular vase motif at Athens, the figures of Achilles and Ajax competing in a “game of dice” serve to exemplify their binary and antagonistic relationship in the Archaic period.

lend Homeric authority to its recent defensive action in the Persian Wars and correlate Ajax as the bulwark of the Achaeans with Athens as the “Savior of Hellas”.⁴⁶

In this chapter, I offer an interpretation of the Homeric Ajax, highlighting specific qualities that Athens might have found useful for developing its civic identity in the wake of the Persian Wars (480-79 BCE). Thus, I shall largely focus on Ajax in his defensive capacity in contrast to Achilles’ offensive ability, and analyze how the *Iliad* works as a whole to formulate a picture of Ajax as the consummate defensive fighter. Additionally, I investigate the Homeric Ajax as a figure in a structural relation to other warriors, specifically Achilles, Odysseus, and Hector, in order to distinguish ways in which Athens could have promoted its civic and martial identity in connection with other powers in the Mediterranean at the time.

Three Men and an Army: Achilles, Odysseus, and Ajax

The *Iliad* first mentions Ajax early in Book 1. Acting as an advocate for his afflicted comrades, Achilles seeks to end Apollo’s plague and urges Agamemnon to return his war-prize, Chryseis, to her father, the priest Chryses. To this, Agamemnon responds scornfully:

Either the great-hearted Achaeans shall give me a new prize
Chosen according to my desire to atone for the girl lost,
Or else if they will not give me one I myself shall take her,
Your own prize, or that of Ajax, or that of Odysseus,
Going myself in person; and he whom I visit will be bitter. (*Il.*1.135-9)⁴⁷

Exekias’ sixth century BCE black-figure amphora of “Achilles and Ajax playing dice” is the most well-known example of this type (Vatican 344).

⁴⁶ “As it is, to say that the Athenians were the saviors of Hellas is to hit the truth. It was the Athenians who held the balance; whichever side they joined was sure to prevail, choosing that Greece should preserve her freedom, the Athenians roused to battle the other Greek states which had not yet gone over to the Persians and, after the gods, were responsible for driving the king off” (Hdt.7.139.5-6).

⁴⁷ All translations of the *Iliad* come from Richmond Lattimore’s edition 1951, rev. 2011, unless otherwise noted. I have altered transliterations of some Greek names to correspond with conventional usage.

As commander of the largest contingent, Agamemnon feels entitled to the war-prize (γέρας) of the other Greek warlords. He initially prefaces his demand with an overture to the army, but he reveals his true motive: to answer the perceived insult of Achilles' public challenge. He then erupts into an outrageous threat against three of the most powerful Achaean warriors: Achilles, Ajax and Odysseus.⁴⁸ By vocally coveting their war-prizes, Agamemnon not only alerts the audience to their high warrior status, but signals for the first time the idea of Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus as an interconnected triad. When Agamemnon names these three in lieu of a failed overture to the will of the "great-hearted Achaeans", he suggests that three individual warriors represent the army as a whole.

Lois Hinckley (1986: 212) has similarly discussed Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus in triadic formation and sees this organization throughout the *Iliad* as a "rafter-like triangular grouping." She understands their triangular relationship as a means to contrast Odysseus' and Ajax's conflicting attributes while also emphasizing their significance as models of βίη, "force", and μῆτις, "stratagem". Furthermore, because of Achilles' arete, we may understand him as the natural apex of the triangle. All three heroes, Achilles, Odysseus, and Ajax are critical to Greek success at Troy. Achilles must kill Hector, Odysseus devises the Trojan horse, and Ajax must defend the Achaean ships while Achilles rages.⁴⁹ Accordingly, as two lead ambassadors in the Embassy to Achilles, Ajax and Odysseus serve as representatives for the imperiled Greek army, who approach Achilles and seek to bring him back to the war (*Il.*9.165-70). While Phoenix is the third member, he serves as a kind of surrogate for a younger Achilles attempting to convince an

⁴⁸ Agamemnon names the three warriors again at line *Il.*1.145 to lead the squadron to fetch Briseis from Achilles' tent.

⁴⁹ While all three are integral to Greek success, note that only Ajax is integral for the survival of the Greek army; he is the last 'bastion' of the Achaeans with Achilles' absence and Odysseus' incapacitation.

older Achilles to return to battle. Thus in the Embassy scene, Ajax and Odysseus seek to bring Achilles, the apex of their triangle back into the war.

The *Iliad* displays this structural importance on the Trojan Beach, where the three have drawn their ships up in triadic formation. The poet uses the geographical position of the Achaean encampment to express not only the dispositions of three of the most powerful Greek warriors, but also their importance as representatives of the structure of the Greek army. We see this panoramically as Achilles, Odysseus, and Ajax are stationed in three equidistant positions along the beach,

And he (Agamemnon) went walking beside the tents
and the ships of the Achaeans, holding the great purple cloak
in his mighty hand, and beside the wide-bellied black ship of
Odysseus, which was in the middle, in order to shout out to both sides,
both to the tents of Telamonian Ajax and to Achilles, for they had dragged
their well-built ships to the farthest ends, trusting in their prowess
and in the strength of their hands. (*Il.*8.220-6)

And again at the start of Book 11:

She (Strife) took her place on the huge-hollowed black ship of Odysseus
which lay in the middle, so that she could cry out to both flanks,
either as far as the shelters of Telamonian Ajax
or to those of Achilles; since these had hauled their balanced ships up
at the ends, certain of their manhood and their hand's strength. (*Il.*11.5-9)

While Achilles and Ajax have beached their ships on the farthest ends, the positions of honor, in a dimensional illustration of their extreme character, Odysseus has set up in the middle position, which signals his resourceful personality (*Il.*8.220-228; 11.5-12).⁵⁰ Moreover, in each instance when their positions are explicitly detailed, there is a figure (Agamemnon at *Il.*8. 220-228 and Strife at *Il.*11.5-12) who attempts to rouse the entire Achaean army to war, shouting to both

⁵⁰ Hinckley (1986: 212) notes that “Ajax vs. Odysseus (are) the base angles of an equilateral triangle whose apex is a third party,” seeing this “metaphysical grouping at work in the embassy scene, the wrestling match in 23.”

Achilles' and Ajax's positions and thereby addressing all the Achaeans. Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus physically contain the army as a whole, conveying its integrity along triple reference points. As markers for the army's structural integrity, the three may be understood as load-bearing walls, that is they are figures whose presence on the field provides critical structural support for Greek success at Troy. Further, given Ajax's position, the triad allows for the realization of his epithet as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, as one by one the three load-bearing walls fall away, first with Achilles' withdrawal in Book 1, and then with Odysseus' elimination in Book 11. Thus Ajax remains the last wall and defender of the Greeks as he attempts to hold off the entire Trojan army.

Ajax and Achilles

The entire *Iliad* is consumed with Achilles and his anger. As the poem's essential figure, every motif, plot, and myth depends in some way on his presence and emotional state.⁵¹ In fact, it is in Achilles' proportion to other figures that the *Iliad* can give a clearer understanding of his unparalleled heroic nature.⁵² All other warriors, in some way, contain elements of what Achilles embodies as the pinnacle of heroic existence. To put it another way, "all the heroic virtues that are given singly to others", Achilles exemplifies in a composite figure. However, when one takes a closer look at Telamonian Ajax, it becomes apparent that he is more like Achilles than any other Greek warrior.

Ajax and Achilles are closer in character than any of the other Greek warriors. While Achilles is clearly the more outstanding figure, their similar characterizations serve to illuminate and complement each other throughout the text. They are solitary figures, more so than any other

⁵¹ As indicated by the etymology of his name, "grief of the people", Achilles brings grief to Trojans in battle, and to Greeks when he withdraws (Nagy 1979: 69-83).

⁵² See S. Schein 1984: 90-91.

Greek warrior. As Cedric Whitman notes, they do not combine well with others in a way that Odysseus, a figure of more flexible disposition, can accomplish.⁵³ Achilles and Ajax's isolation is a direct result of their exceptional heroic characters, and although their remarkable nature sets them apart, it also relegates them to their own class.⁵⁴ In this sense, their exceptionalism shifts their characters into closer alignment, allowing Ajax to serve as the closest Greek counterpart to Achilles in the *Iliad*.⁵⁵ Moreover, at a fundamental level, their respective martial domains, offense and defense, shield and spear (although denoting oppositional qualities, aggression and resistance) reinforce the concept of a single fighting unit, of a kind that is critical for any successful military endeavor.

Without question, Achilles is ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν, "Best of the Achaeans."⁵⁶ It is in fact, a quarrel over this title that leads to Achilles' immediate departure from battle and sets the *Iliad* on its course. Certainly, other heroes are often called ἄριστος, typically by another warrior, a Trojan, or the heroes themselves: Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Patroclus, for example, all

⁵³ Such as when Odysseus works together with Diomedes in the *Doloneia*. (*Il.*10.240-253).

⁵⁴ As noted before, while the layout of the Achaean camp on the Trojan beach attests to this extremism, it also indicates their isolation; their positions are as far from the center of the Greek camp as possible (*Il.*8.11).

⁵⁵ There are other figures, no doubt, who share similarities with Achilles, but their likeness evokes a sense of vicariousness in their roles. That is, these characters are viewed as prefigured iterations, surrogates of an Achilles that will be realized in the poem's latter half. Diomedes and Patroclus both fulfill this role. For example, when Diomedes displays his fiery *aristeia* in book 5, Paris wounds him in the foot with an arrow, and as such we may understand Achilles' final onslaught before the walls of Troy and death at Paris' fatal arrow. Likewise when Patroclus, in book 16, dons Achilles' armor and challenges Hector, he presents a vision of Achilles that will exist in the future (he is Achilles' θεράπων, cf. Nagy 1979: 292-3). And even in Patroclus' death, in the great battle over his corpse, Patroclus still symbolizes Achilles.

⁵⁶ See Nagy, 1979: 26-41 for a definitive account of the issue.

receive this title.⁵⁷ However, the narrator never directly names them ἄριστος.⁵⁸ More importantly, the *Iliad* never conditions their rank in subordination to Achilles; when the *Iliad* names other heroes ἄριστος, the poet has no need to qualify their status by stating that Achilles is still better—this is understood.⁵⁹ Ajax is the only hero who the *Iliad* qualifies by exclusively naming Achilles as his only superior.⁶⁰

As a consequence, Ajax's heroic status is linked to that of Achilles, priming us to be sensitive to Achilles' absence whenever Ajax appears in the poem. When Ajax's ἄριστος title is qualified in this way, the poem both underlines Achilles' and Ajax's comparable qualities by emphasizing a closeness in the degree of difference between them and sharpens its focus on

⁵⁷ As claimant to the “second best of the Achaeans” title, Ajax's status has also received challenges from scholars. Van der Valk, “Ajax and Diomedes in the *Iliad*,” *Mn. Series IV*, 5 (1952) 269-86, asserts that Diomedes, not Ajax, is second to Achilles, due to his *aristeia* in book 5, ability to wound gods, assistance from gods, and the fact that Diomedes imperils Troy more than Achilles has, up until that point. For rebuttal of van der Valk, see Trapp 1961: 274-5.

⁵⁸ At *Il.*5.103 the Trojan archer Pandarus refers to Diomedes as ‘best of the Achaeans’, after he wounds him with an arrow; and at 5.414 Dione refers to Diomedes' wife, who will lament the best of the Achaeans, when Diomedes will meet with a stronger adversary. Achilles at 1.91 remarks that Agamemnon claims to be the best of the Achaeans; at 2.98 Nestor also relates that Agamemnon claims this title; and at 11.288 after Agamemnon is wounded, Hector refers to Agamemnon as “best” in an exhortation to his fellow Trojans. The special case of Patroclus as best of the Achaeans can be attributed to his surrogate relationship to Achilles. See Nagy 1979: 26-35; Whitman 1958:136-7; 200-2.

⁵⁹ “Homer has subjected his material to strict categories of primary and secondary, subordinating all characters to Achilles, and all incidents of the Trojan War to the Wrath” (Whitman 1958: 182). “Achilles is never out of mind in the *Iliad* when it comes to asking who is the best of the Achaeans” (Nagy 1979: 27).

⁶⁰ There is Nireus who the poet claims is the ‘comeliest’ of all the Greeks who came to Troy “after faultless Achilles” (*Il.*2.671-75). In beauty Nireus is second best, possessing only physical beauty, a kind that is less than admirable for a warrior. As the *Iliad* clarifies, Nireus is “of poor strength and of few people with him”. Note that Achilles is here referred to as “faultless,” meaning that he surpasses all in every quality, and does not simply excel in one sphere, like Nireus. It is as an *aristos* of a composite quality, particularly deeds of war, that Ajax comes closest to Achilles.

Achilles' excellence by contrasting him with Ajax. To put it another way, the *Iliad* uses Ajax's secondary rank to define Achilles' primacy.

The *Iliad* states that Ajax is the greatest warrior after Achilles on two separate occasions:

ἀνδρῶν αὖ μέγ' ἄριστος ἔην Τελαμώνιος Αἴας
ὄφρ' Ἀχιλεὺς μήνιεν· ὃ γὰρ πολὺ φέρτατος ἦεν.

Among the men far the best was Telamonian Ajax
while Achilles stayed angry, since he was far best of all of them.
(*Il.*2.768-9)⁶¹

and again:

Αἴας, ὃς περὶ μὲν εἶδος, περὶ δ' ἔργα τέτυκτο
τῶν ἄλλων Δαναῶν μετ' ἀμύμονα Πηλεΐωνα.

Ajax, who for his beauty and the work of his hands surpassed
all other Danaans, after the blameless son of Peleus. (*Il.*17.279-80)

The first passage is a directly inspired answer to the question τίς τὰρ τῶν ὄχ' ἄριστος ἔην σύ μοι ἔννεπε Μοῦσα (*Il.*2.761-2), "Tell me then, Muse, who of them all was best and bravest?"⁶² While the poet's immediate response, "Ajax", lends authority to his ἄριστος status, this invocation itself appears roughly 300 lines after a previous appeal in which the poet seeks inspiration for the "Catalogue of the Ships" (*Il.*2.484-93). While the first invocation ushers in an itemization of the armies, towns, and leaders of Greece on a massive scale, in contrast, the first passage lists only Ajax (and the horses of Eumelos) as best before proclaiming Achilles and his horses'

⁶¹ Lines 2.768-9 and 17.279-80 are the only explicit articulations of Ajax's secondary status. The idea is also found at *Odyssey* at 11.550-1 and 24.17-18. Cf. also Idomeneus' statements at *Il.*13.321-25.

⁶² O'Higgins notes that this is the first of two instances where the *Iliad* invokes the muse shortly before addressing Ajax; the second is *Il.*16.111, right before Hector brings fire to the Greek ships. The implication is that Ajax is prominent around invocations to the muse, indicating his importance to the narrative.

supremacy.⁶³ The terse answer to the poet's second appeal reads as a stark coda to the massive inventory of the Greek army and underscores Ajax's exceptional status in a world without Achilles.

Additionally, as Nagy has pointed out, the first passage forms part of a ring composition. When the poet asks a compound question, "who was best of heroes *and their horses*," the Muse states that Eumelus' horses are best, then names Ajax as best of the warriors, and subsequently relates that Achilles' horses were indeed better than Eumelus' (*Il.*2.770). Nagy (1979: 27) reads Ajax here as "demoted from the best to the second best of the Achaeans, by what seems to be premeditated afterthought."

The second passage occurs as Ajax fights in the melee over Patroclus' corpse. The narrator issues this claim, and the context reinforces its impact since one can read the battle for Patroclus' corpse as the struggle over the corpse of Achilles. In fact, Ajax's effort in the recovery of Patroclus' body alludes to his recovery of Achilles' corpse in the post-Iliadic tradition—an allusion that signals the most critical contest for Ajax's ἄριστος title, the contest for Achilles' armor. Additionally, the second passage is identical to *Od.*11.550-1, where Odysseus, encountering Ajax's shade, laments the outcome of the Judgment of the Arms, and refers to Ajax as: Αἴανθ', ὃς πέρι μὲν εἶδος, πέρι δ' ἔργα τέτυκτο/τῶν ἄλλων Δαναῶν μετ' ἀμύμονα Πηλεΐωνα, "Ajax, who for his beauty and the work of his hands surpassed all other Danaans, after the blameless son of Peleus". While the second passage cues its audience to Ajax's action in the recovery of Achilles' corpse, the intertextual connection to the *Odyssey* highlights the contest for

⁶³ "By itself the new invocation suggests that a considerable list is to follow; in fact is hardly a list at all, just one person, one set of horses, and an expanded description of the Myrmidons' enforced leisure" (Kirk 1985: 240).

Achilles' armor. This would encourage the audience to recall simultaneously Odysseus' statement to Ajax and Ajax's performance in the recovery of Patroclus' corpse.

O'Higgins (1989: 52n3) notes that the first and second passage differ in their articulation of Ajax's secondary status to Achilles. She remarks that in the first passage, "best while Achilles rages" "makes Ajax best within a group of men excluding Achilles," and that in the second passage, "best after Achilles", "admits common ground between Ajax and Achilles." While at first glance the difference seems trivial, the second passage's claim qualifies and enhances the first, implying that it is not just a matter of Achilles' absence that makes Ajax best, but that his excellence is more closely related to that of Achilles than any other warrior's. Furthermore, both passages can serve as bookends that mark Achilles' initial absence and return to war. In the first passage, shortly after Achilles' withdrawal, the *Iliad* seems to restart, recounting Greek forces en masse, and then recalibrates their warrior ranking: Ajax is now best since Achilles is out. But after Patroclus' death, and the retrieval of his corpse, Achilles' return is imminent, and the *Iliad* revisits its earlier claim, bringing Ajax's time as ἄριστος to its completion, as indicated by the second passage.

In addition to sequential rankings, Achilles and Ajax complement one another as avatars of offensive and defensive modes of warfare. As the greatest warrior of the Achaeans, Achilles is the foremost soldier of attack. Indeed, nineteen books of the *Iliad* cultivate anticipation of his homicidal assault, when, likened to fire, Achilles rages unabated in an all-out offensive against Troy (*Il.* 20.75-22.360). Achilles, in effect, is a single devastating invasion unto himself. Even Zeus expresses reservations about the force of Achilles' attack:

εἰ γὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς οἶος ἐπὶ Τρώεσσι μαχεῖται
οὐδὲ μίνυθ' ἔξουσι ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα.
καὶ δέ τί μιν καὶ πρόσθεν ὑποτρομέεσκον ὀρῶντες:
νῦν δ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ θυμὸν ἐταίρου χῶεται αἰνῶς

δεῖδω μὴ καὶ τεῖχος ὑπέρμορον ἐξαλαπάξῃ.

For if we leave Achilles alone to fight with the Trojans
they will not even for a little hold off swift-footed Peleion.
For even before now they would tremble whenever they saw him,
and now, when his heart is grieved and angered for his companion's
death, I fear against destiny he may storm their fortress. (*Il.* 20.26-30)

Conversely, Ajax is the unrivalled Achaean defensive fighter, who alone without Achilles defends the ships against Hector's fire (*Il.* 15.674-16.121). From Books 7 through 16, as Hector makes steady advances against Achaean positions, at last pressing them back against their beached ships, only Ajax leads the defense and yields only when he must.

In a moment of strategic discussion, Idomeneus provides for Meriones a succinct account of both Ajax's defensive identity and Achilles' offensive capability :

ἀνδρὶ δέ κ' οὐκ εἴξειε μέγας Τελαμώνιος Αἴας,
ὄς θνητός τ' εἶη καὶ ἔδοι Δημήτερος ἀκτὴν
χαλκῷ τε ῥηκτός μεγάλοισι τε χερμαδίοισιν.
οὐδ' ἂν Ἀχιλλῆϊ ῥηξήνορι χωρήσειεν
ἔν γ' αὐτοσταδίῃ· ποσὶ δ' οὐ πῶς ἔστιν ἐρίζειν.

Nor would huge Telamonian Ajax give way to any man,
one who was mortal and ate bread, the yield of Demeter,
one who could be broken by the bronze and great stones flung at him.
He would not make way for Achilles who breaks men in battle,
in close combat. But for speed of feet none can strive with Achilles.
(*Il.* 13.321-325)

Idomeneus stresses Ajax's defensive ability in terms not unlike Zeus's apprehensive statements about Achilles' offensive power. Like Achilles' forward assault, Ajax's defensive prowess is nearly unassailable. Thus, the paired passages suggest that Achilles, an unstoppable force, will come to an impasse with Ajax, an immovable object.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This paradox is also known from a Chinese 3rd century philosophical handbook by Han Feizi (*Nanyi*, "Collection of Difficulties, No. 1") as the "Shield and Spear Paradox", nicely evoking Ajax's σάκος ἑπταβόειον, "shield of seven ox-hide, and Achilles' Πηλιάδα μελίην, "Pelian ash spear."

More importantly, Idomeneus' description of Ajax's defensive power correlates with references to Achilles as a ῥηξήνωρ, "breaker of men". The word ῥηξήνωρ, an agent descriptor used only for Achilles (*cf. Il.7.228, 16.575.*), following ῥηκτός, "breakable," serves to distinguish and to emphasize their complementary military spheres.⁶⁵ While both words derive from the verb, ῥήγνυμι, Achilles is ῥηξήνωρ, an active agent in contrast to ῥηκτός a passive verbal adjective. Idomeneus thus expresses Ajax's military skill in passive, stationary terms, while Achilles' is active and forward moving.

Additionally, Idomeneus discloses why Achilles surpasses Ajax in martial skill: Achilles is faster than Ajax (*Il.13.325*). Again the *Iliad* uses Ajax to define Achilles' ἄριστος rank, this time with reference to Achilles' most frequent and famous epithet. He is most celebrated as πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς, "swift-footed Achilles" (*Il.1.215, passim*), ποδαρκής "swift-foot" (*Il.1.21, passim*), and he fights ποσὶ κραιπνοῖσι πεποιθώς, "in the confidence of his quick feet" (*Il. 22.138*)—all formulations that indicate rapid mobility. Foley argues that Achilles' most famous epithet contrasts with his idleness beside the ships, as he broods in his tent and causes incongruity between his inertia and the frequent use of these epithets referring to his speed (1991: 41). According to Foley, the epithet's effect, while inactive for the majority of the *Iliad*, ultimately foregrounds the forthcoming narrative when Achilles will activate his earlier descriptors, as he outruns Hector and kills him. In the *Iliad*, then, Achilles' recurrent speed epithets all look to the moment when he confronts Hector and only become actualized when he faces him in battle. This is also true for Ajax and his most famous epithet.

⁶⁵ Ajax even names Achilles ῥηξήνωρα when he confronts Hector for the first time in single combat, boasting about the martial prowess of Greeks other than Achilles, and intimating his own skill in battle (*Il.7.228*).

Ajax is most famously the ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, “bulwark of the Achaeans.” The *Iliad* employs this unique epithet for Ajax three times, always in apposition with his name (*Il.* 3.229, 6.5, and 7.211). In a military sense, ἔρκος is a defensive barrier, a rampart, or more often “bulwark” (as it is so often translated).⁶⁶ The epithet identifies Ajax’s military role as *the* Greek defensive fighter.⁶⁷ It is also associated with his equally famous shield, the σάκος ἑπταβόειον, “seven layered ox-hide shield”, which he carries ἠῦτε πύργον “like a tower.” The shield imparts to Ajax an image of massive size and entrenched immobility, in contrast to Achilles’ swiftness.

Helen first names Ajax ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν in the *Teichoskopeia* in Book 3. Her brief description of Ajax is particularly odd following two extended accounts of Agamemnon and Odysseus. That the greatest warrior after Achilles would receive such short shrift seems anticlimactic, and has given many scholars pause.⁶⁸ Yet it is the second time that an identification of Ajax is briefly added to a list of Greek warriors, as we saw after the Catalogue of the Ships, when the poet curtly names Ajax “best” after Achilles. Interestingly, Priam asks Helen who Ajax is in a manner similar to the appeal to the Muse at *Il.* 2.761-2:

Who then is this other Achaean of power and stature
towering above the Argives by head and broad shoulders?
Helen with the light robes and shining among women answered him:
That one is gigantic Ajax, wall of the Achaeans. (*Il.* 3.225-8)

⁶⁶ The ἔρκος epithet is more than a metaphor. As a simple noun, ἔρκος is used more frequently as a literal bulwark (*Il.* 5.90, 18.564), for the mustering of soldiers (*Il.* 4.299), for the ἔρκος ἀκόντων (*Il.* 4.137, 5.316), “barricade against spears” or even for the ἔρκος ὀδόντων, “barrier of the teeth” (*Il.* 14.83), which checks improper speech and sometimes prevents the soul from escaping. This occurs with Odysseus and Agamemnon (*Il.* 4.350, 14.83), and poignantly, when Achilles employs ἔρκος ὀδόντων to mean the final barrier beyond which the soul cannot return (*Il.* 9.409). As the ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, Ajax serves the army in both capacities; he physically defends the Greeks from Hector’s assault, while also exhorting them not to act in a manner that is shameful. In this way, ἔρκος can be seen to function as another aspect of Ajax’s heightened sense of αἰδώς (see below).

⁶⁷ “Ἐρκος was a fence or defensive enclosure, even walled courtyard, before it acquired a metaphorical sense of “shield.”

⁶⁸ Kirk notes the “remarkable” manner in which Helen so quickly identifies Ajax and then moves on. But he does not think that interpolation should be suspected here (Kirk 1985: 297-98).

When Helen proclaims Ajax's identity, she does so with a strong declarative force as she did with Agamemnon and Odysseus before. Much of Helen's narrative power derives from a heightened awareness of her role in epic poetry, which is matched only by that of Achilles.⁶⁹ Because of this awareness, her pronouncements exhibit a narrator's authority. Moreover, like Book 2's restart and appeal to the muse, Helen's words serve to recalibrate Achaean heroic status now that Achilles has withdrawn from battle. When Helen calls Ajax the ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, the poet revisits Nestor's reply to Agamemnon in Book 1, revising his previous statement that Achilles is a ἔρκος Ἀχαιοῖσιν (*Il.* 1.283-4) and replacing him with the new ἔρκος in Achilles' absence. Thus, Helen as narrator presents Ajax for the first time as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, lending authority to his function in the *Iliad*, and identifying Ajax as the quintessential Greek defensive fighter in a world bereft of its previous ἔρκος, Achilles.

Additionally, Achilles and Ajax are alike in that their military identities correspond with their associated armor. Their armor is not simply functional, but serves as an extension of their character as avatars of defense and offense.⁷⁰ Whereas Ajax carries the gigantic Mycenaean body-shield, Achilles wields the Pelian ash spear. Whereas Ajax is identified by his shield,⁷¹ the ashen spear is Achilles' exclusive purview. Moreover, Ajax is the only person who carries the

⁶⁹ The *Teichoskopeia* sequence begins with Iris visiting Helen in disguise, happening upon her as she is "weaving a great web...working into it the numerous struggles of Trojans ...and Achaeans...struggles they endured for her sake" (*Il.* 3.121-28), see also Kirk 1985: 279-81. In this way, Helen reaches beyond the narrative, and is aligned with a narrator within the text. Similarly, when the embassy arrives at Achilles' camp in Book 9, they find him singing glorious deeds on the lyre.

⁷⁰ By "armor", "armament", etc., I include the full panoply: spear, sword, and shield as well. Commenting on warriors and their weapons, Jasper Griffin states, "So closely are the weapons (of Homeric warriors) identified with the hero himself that it is the same thing to say ... 'they feared his massive spear' as to say 'they feared god-like Hector.'" (1980: 36).

⁷¹ When the Trojan Kebriones recognizes Ajax's shield in battle, he says: "The Telamonian Ajax drives them. I know him surely for he carries the broad shield on his shoulders" (*Il.* 11.526-27).

σάκος ἑπταβόειον, the “sevenfold ox-hide shield”. The *Iliad* records that Tychios, an unknown craftsman from Hyle, and “best of all workers in leather” constructed the shield (*Il.*7.220-3). That the shield’s provenance is ascribed solely to human manufacture, unlike Agamemnon’s scepter and Achilles’ spear, may accord with Ajax’s lack of divine assistance and his faith in the work of mortal hands (*Il.*15.509-10). Furthermore, in another shared aspect that speaks to their frequent pairing, while Ajax strictly carries the σάκος ἑπταβόειον, the only other warrior to consistently wield a simple σάκος is Achilles.⁷²

Like Ajax’s many epithets, ἔρκος, πελώριος, and μέγας—all indications of his massive barricade-like figure—the shield too receives its own adjectives and suggests the merging of warrior and weapon. For example, as Whallon points out, when Ajax enters into single combat with Hector, the *Iliad* records, Αἴας δ’ ἐγγύθεν ἦλθε φέρων σάκος ἡὔτε πύργον, στή δὲ παρέξ, (“Ajax came near, bearing his shield just as a tower, and he stood forth beside them”) (*Il.*7.219). He notes that while “tower” must be understood to describe the shield’s size the adverb ἡὔτε nearly confuses the shield and its wielder, and lends some of its force to the participle φέρων.⁷³ The effect blends Ajax, who carries the shield, with the image of a man who can carry a tower.

⁷² As opposed to the ἀσπίς or σάκος used interchangeably by other warriors, Ajax and Achilles alone wield the σάκος (*Il.*7.220, 7.245, 7.266) (Whallon 1966:14). The *Iliad* describes the σάκος as “like a tower” indicating the shield’s antiquity if it alludes to the Mycenaean body shield depicted on daggers found in Mycenaean Shaft Grave IV (c. 1500 BCE). Willcock notes: “The evidence suggests that the body shield went out of use some two hundred years before the Trojan War... that somehow the memory of it survived in this phrase ‘carrying his shield like a tower.’” It implies that Ajax comes from an earlier period, and was not associated with the Trojan War. See Willcock 254-55.

⁷³ Whallon (1966: 7) argues that the adverb “modifies the noun” like an epithet, and that “since ἡὔτε πύργον is so straightly limited to the σάκος of Ajax, and has nothing to do with other artifacts or with shields of other men, he may himself be regarded as a πύργος among his comrades.”

In this way, the *Iliad* advances the paradoxical notion of Ajax as a moving fortification and further essentializes his identity as *the* Achaean defensive fighter.

The association of warrior and armor is often illustrated in traditional arming scenes. In Book 3, for instance, when Paris arms for his duel with Menelaus, the poet zooms in with detail-shots, showing armor as it is fitted to shoulders, legs, ankles, and chest, and coalesces in the complete blending of bronze and warrior (*Il.*3.326-39).⁷⁴ As an archer, Paris lacks a corselet and must borrow one from his brother Lycaon (*Il.*3.333). However, to lack a piece of armor so fundamental to hand-to-hand combat indicates how mismatched he is against Menelaus. Likewise, in Patroclus' arming scene, when he fails to take up Achilles' spear, the omission foreshadows Patroclus' failure against Hector (*Il.*16.139-42). The omission of a piece of armor in an arming scene suggests not just the incompleteness of equipment, but the inefficacy of the warrior. Interestingly, when Ajax arms for single combat with Hector, there is little in the way of detail, with the *Iliad* simply stating that "Ajax armed himself in shining bronze. Then when he had girt his body in all its armor, he strode on his way" (*Il.*7.206-8). But although the *Iliad* fails to give Ajax a full arming scene, it focuses greater attention on his shield:

Αἴας δ' ἐγγύθεν ἦλθε φέρων σάκος ἠϋτε πύργον
χάλκεον ἑπταβόειον, ὃ οἱ Τυχίος κάμε τεύχων
σκυτοτόμων ὄχ' ἄριστος Ὕλη ἐνὶ οἰκίᾳ ναίων,
ὃς οἱ ἐποίησεν σάκος αἰόλον ἑπταβόειον
ταύρων ζατρεφέων, ἐπὶ δ' ὄγδοον ἤλασε χαλκόν.
τὸ πρόσθε στέρνοιο φέρων Τελαμώνιος Αἴας
στῆ ῥα μάλ' Ἔκτορος ἐγγύς, ἀπειλήσας δὲ προσηύδα

Now Ajax came near him, carrying like a wall his shield
of bronze and sevenfold ox-hide which Tychios wrought him with much
toil; Tychios, at home in Hyle, far the best of all workers of leather
who had made him the great gleaming shield of sevenfold ox-hide

⁷⁴ The *Iliad* offers four typical arming scenes: Paris at 3.226-8, Agamemnon at 11.17-45, Patroclus at 16.131-44, and Achilles at 19.369-91. See Kirk 1985: 313-16. The intricacy of an arming scene correlates with the display of martial excellence to follow (Griffin 1980: 36).

from strong bulls, and hammered an eighth fold of bronze upon it.
Telamonian Ajax, carrying this to cover his chest came near. (*Il.* 7.219-25)

The traditional arming scene has shifted from the explication of armor meticulously applied to specific body parts, to the detail and provenance of Ajax's most famous implement. The cumulative effect unites armament and warrior and ascribes Ajax's identity to his shield, making Ajax a byword for defensive warfare.

Ajax's σάκος also shares diction with the construction of Achilles' divinely wrought shield. To this point, Loudon argues that the same formula as in Tychios' construction of Ajax's shield is also present in Hephaestus' creation of Achilles' shield: κάμε τεύχων (*Il.* 7.220, 19.368). He posits that while Ajax's shield "concretizes" his defensive power, Achilles' shield connotes invulnerability, looking ahead to his confrontation with Hector. On top of that, Loudon sees parallels where the *Iliad* identifies both shields' makers: Tychios for Ajax and Hephaestus for Achilles (2006: 39-40). Moreover, this accords with the sense of primary and secondary positions that we see play out so often in the Achilles and Ajax relationship. Whereas Ajax wields a shield made by the greatest leather worker, Achilles has a shield crafted by the god of craftsmen himself.

Like Achilles, Ajax shares familial connections with his armor.⁷⁵ While he is styled "Telamonian Ajax" there is still considerable doubt concerning the meaning of Telamon as a patronym. Wilamowitz thought that Telamon derived from τελαμώνιος, indicating τελαμών, or "shield strap".⁷⁶ However, this suggestion has been repeatedly challenged. It seems likely that Ajax was thought of not as "son of shield strap", but as a τελαμών, a "load-bearing, colossal

⁷⁵ Tradition holds that Ajax names his son after his weapon: Eurysakes, the "Well-shielded"; *Soph. Aj.* 339-41.

⁷⁶ Wilamowitz, *Homerische Untersuchungen* (Berlin 1884) 246.

column or pillar”.⁷⁷ In this way, the *Iliad* emphasizes Ajax’s role as critical defender and essential support by likening him to a weight-bearing structural feature. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the idea of shield strap is wholly absent from Ajax’s patronymic. For instance, when fighting Hector, Ajax’s δῶω τελαμῶνε preserve his life, and deflect Hector’s spear (*Il.* 14.404). And when Hippothoon attempts to drag away Patroclus’ corpse with a τελαμῶνι around the ankles, υἱὸς Τελαμῶνος, “the son of Telamon” prevents him from dragging the body away (*Il.* 17.288-294).⁷⁸ Both sets of connotations may be present, regardless of strict etymology, as massive architectural support emphasizing Ajax’s identity as critical edifice, and as a simple shield strap.

Just as the σάκος distinguishes Ajax as the quintessential defensive Achaean warrior, so too, the Pelian ash spear marks Achilles as the foremost offensive Greek fighter. Like Ajax’s σάκος ἐπταβόειον, Achilles’ Pelian ash spear is uniquely his weapon to wield as we learn in Achilles’ arming scene:

ἐκ δ’ ἄρα σύριγγος πατρώϊον ἐσπάσατ’ ἔγχος
 βριθὸν μέγα στιβαρόν: τὸ μὲν οὐ δύνατ’ ἄλλος Ἀχαιῶν
 πάλλιν, ἀλλὰ μιν οἷος ἐπίστατο πῆλαι Ἀχιλλεύς:
 Πηλιάδα μελίην, τὴν πατρὶ φίλῳ πόρε Χείρων
 Πηλίου ἐκ κορυφῆς φόνον ἔμμεναι ἠρώεσσιν:

Next he pulled out from its standing place the spear of his father, huge, heavy, thick, which no one else of all the Achaeans could handle, but Achilles alone knew how to wield it, the Pelian ash spear, which Cheiron had brought to his father from high on Pelion, to be death for fighters in battle. (*Il.* 19.387-91)

⁷⁷ For a view that entertains both interpretations see Whallon 1966: 27-28.

⁷⁸ “ Ajax, his chest facing Hector, offers a tempting target, but Hector’s spear hits the spot where the straps for his sword and shield cross over”...“Telamonian Ajax, punningly saved by his τελαμῶνε, hits Hector, who is backing away from him, on the chest with one of the stones used to prop up the ships” (Janko 1992: 213 n.402-8).

Achilles is the “swift-footed runner” who surpasses all others in speed and also brandishes his “Pelian ash spear,” which no other warrior can wield (*Il.*16.143).⁷⁹ This combination of unmatched speed and exclusive ability to wield a spear which no other warrior can accounts for Achilles’ military supremacy, and defines him as the incomparable warrior of assault, demonstrated when he outruns and kills Hector in Book 22.

So far, I hope to have shown that the *Iliad* describes Ajax, Achilles, and their weapons as complementary. Achilles with his spear is the warrior of offense, Ajax with his shield, the defensive fighter. Yet they also stand in a reciprocal relationship. When lamenting to Iris about his lost armor, Achilles says: ἄλλου δ’ οὐ τευ οἶδα τεῦ ἄν κλυτὰ τεύχεα δῶω / εἰ μὴ Αἴαντός γε σάκος Τελαμωνιάδαο (*Il.*18.191-3), “But I do not know of another whose glorious armor I may wear, except the shield of Telamonian Ajax”. When Achilles declares his armor’s exclusivity, he suggests that Ajax’s armor may suffice, an added qualification that reads like the echoed inversion of Ajax’s ἄριστος rank after Achilles; that is, Achilles seems to say that “when my armor is unavailable, Ajax’s armor is second best.” And given what we know about warriors and their armor, this may be tantamount to Achilles himself admitting that Ajax is the second greatest warrior.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Unlike Ajax’s σάκος, Achilles’ ashen spear is imbued with supernatural qualities. Fashioned by Cheiron for Peleus, the spear signals paternal legitimacy for its owner, and as such carries its own “biography.” Similar to Ajax’s shield, Achilles’ Pelian Ash spear defines his warrior identity in connection to his father. The concept is from folk-tale –the idea that an object can only be used by the rightful inheritor. On this, Janko notes that “there is a play on “son of Peleus”, as the *Iliad* links Achilles’ right to wield the spear to a play on his father’s name as well as echoing the verb πῆλαι, “to wield”, or “brandish” (1992: 335n. 141-4). Furthermore, at *Il.*16.143-4, noting its anaphoric construction, Mueller argues that the spear’s name “evokes aurally” its patrilineal descent, by playing on Peleus’ name (2016: 134). In other words, when we hear Achilles’ spear spoken aloud, it identifies Achilles.

⁸⁰ This, the second instance in the *Iliad* where Achilles verbalizes Ajax’s nearness to his own character (*Il.*9.644-5), only Ajax’s armor could fit him. It adds pathos to Ajax’s final humiliation when Odysseus wins Achilles’ armor.

While for the most part, I have focused on Ajax and Achilles in a military capacity, they are also expressly alike in their adherence to the “heroic code.”⁸¹ As Glaucus explains succinctly to Diomedes, this is “to be always among the bravest, and hold my head above others, not shaming the generation of my fathers” (*Il.*6.208-9). The code is based on one’s fighting ability and personal honor, and is predicated on the warrior’s fear of losing status in the eyes of his community. As a guide for conduct, it is governed largely by a warrior’s sense of αἰδῶς, a “responsibility to others, and a sense of their importance to oneself” (Whitman 1958: 171). The person who feels αἰδῶς, as Redfield states, “internalizes the anticipated judgments of others to himself. As such αἰδῶς is the affective or emotional foundation of virtue” (1975: 115-119). Reactions to violations of the heroic standard are often severe, as the fallout from Agamemnon and Achilles’ quarrel attests. Achilles’ concern for the Greek army, when he “called the people to assembly; a thing put into his mind by the goddess of the white arms, Hera” (*Il.*1.54-55), will set in motion events leading to the self-centered nursing of his wounded personal honor,⁸² which his prayer to Thetis that Agamemnon come to grief through the greater suffering of the army (*Il.*1.407-12), activates.⁸³

⁸¹ On the “heroic code” see Finley who states: “Warrior’ and ‘hero’ are synonyms, and the main theme of a warrior culture is constructed on two notes –prowess and honor. The one is the hero’s essential attribute, the other his essential aim. Every value, every judgment, every action, all skills and talents have the function of either defining honor or realizing it” (1978: 115-116). See also Redfield’s comment (1975:105) on Achilles’ refusal to accept recompense in the Embassy to Achilles. “Achilles’ story, in fact, is not a departure from the heroic pattern but an enactment of that pattern...Achilles’ refusal of the warrior’s role is an affirmation of the warrior ethic.”

⁸² At lines 1.53-56, Hera puts it in Achilles’ heart to call an assembly “since she pitied the Danaans when she saw them dying”. I read this as ‘double determination’ similar to Athena’s appearance and admonition when Achilles is minded to kill Agamemnon in book 1. While the poet presents the idea as Hera’s, “by the rules of ‘double determination’, divine initiative in such cases should be divine prompting for human impulse” (Silk 2004: 40).

⁸³ On this passage Kirk notes Achilles’ indifferent attitude to what his desire to harm Agamemnon will entail, “Achilles knows that they (comrades) must suffer heavy casualties

In the Embassy to Achilles, we see the first diplomatic effort to assuage Achilles' wounded honor and to convince him to return to battle. While it offers another instance of the heroic triad of Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus, it also contrasts Achilles' response to Odysseus with Achilles' response to Ajax, affording Achilles the opportunity to define Ajax and Odysseus with his own words. After Odysseus and Phoenix fail to persuade Achilles, Ajax's understanding of heroic protocol provides the only voice to sway Achilles in any capacity. Moreover, as the *Iliad's* centerpiece, Achilles speaks with authoritative power, answering each petitioner separately and defining their character in each of his responses.

Achilles is an authoritative speaker like Helen. Similarly, he functions beyond the narrative and displays an awareness of his role in heroic tradition (cf. *Il.*9.185-91).⁸⁴ Whereas in Book 3 Helen identifies Odysseus as πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς, “resourceful Odysseus” (*Il.*3.200), in this instance Achilles identifies Odysseus' crafty personality in action, calling him out for “hiding one thing in his heart, and speaking forth another” (*Il.*9.307-13). In effect, Achilles characterizes Odysseus as a practitioner of subterfuge (*Il.* 3.202, 4.339).⁸⁵

When both Odysseus and Phoenix have exhausted their efforts, Ajax indicates that they are about to depart and adeptly turns to Odysseus, saying:

διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ

before his honor is restored, and accepts the possible sacrifice of friends and allies without evident distress” (1985: 96 n.410).

⁸⁴ Hainsworth issues a poignant note claiming “Achilles the hero sings of the heroic deeds that he is no longer allowing himself to perform” (1993:88 n.189). R. Blondell notes that both Achilles and Helen “share a preoccupation with their reputation among future generations” and that Helen's weaving of “the ‘marvelous deeds’ of the *Iliad* is indispensable to the glorification of Achilles, whose status as ‘best of the Achaeans’ is revealed and confirmed through the role in the war she began” (2013: 54). While Helen and Achilles demonstrate an awareness of their existence in song, Helen appears to be more cognizant of her role in the *Iliad* since she weaves a tapestry about the Trojan War. Achilles' song is unidentified.

⁸⁵ Hainsworth argues that Achilles has immediately provided permanent characterization: “Achilles is open, Odysseus is indirect” (1993:102).

ἴομεν: οὐ γάρ μοι δοκέει μύθοιο τελευτή
τῆδέ γ' ὁδῶ κρανέεσθαι: ἀπαγγεῖλαι δὲ τάχιστα
χρῆ μῦθον Δαναοῖσι καὶ οὐκ ἀγαθόν περ ἔοντα
οἷ που νῦν ἔσται ποτιδέγμενοι. αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς
ἄγριον ἐν στήθεσσι θέτο μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν
σχέτλιος, οὐδὲ μετατρέπεται φιλότητος ἐταίρων
τῆς ἧ μιν παρὰ νηυσὶν ἐτίομεν ἔξοχον ἄλλων
νηλής: (*Il.*9.624-32)

Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus:
let us go. I think that nothing will be accomplished
by argument on this errand; it is best to go back quickly
and tell this story, though it is not good, to the Danaans
who sit there waiting for us to come back, seeing that Achilles
has made savage the proud-hearted spirit within his body.
He is hard, and does not remember that friends' affection
Wherein we honored him by the ships, far beyond all others.
Pitiless. (*Il.*9.622-32)

True to his character as the final line of defense, Ajax addresses Achilles last.⁸⁶ Where Odysseus and Phoenix made appeals based on financial recompense and familial ties, Ajax curtly reminds Achilles of his obligation to friends, his comrades in arms. There is a simplicity in Ajax's speech, one that indicates the outlook of a soldier who has fought long beside his comrades, and cannot understand that that bond could be forfeited because of a single quarrel. He even calls Achilles *σχέτλιος* "cruel," "perverse," a word considered to be among "the strongest terms of condemnation in the Homeric vocabulary."⁸⁷ Ajax severely rebukes Achilles on the basis of their shared warrior status. His appeal to soldierly camaraderie pits Achilles' sense of personal violation against his sense of reciprocal duty to friends. Ajax reaches Achilles –indeed, it is the only time in the *Iliad* when Achilles and Ajax directly address one another. Yet Ajax cannot

⁸⁶ "Ajax as a warrior is the last hope of the defence and virtually never leads an attack, here too he intervenes when all seems lost" (Griffin 1995:142 n.624).

⁸⁷ Scodel notes that Ajax's anger at Achilles is shown by the epithet *σχέτλιος* and in Ajax's use of the third person. She also sees Ajax's anger as "both *nemesis*, that Achilles is not responding to the need of the social group, and personal, Ajax's response to Achilles' failure to respond to the ambassadors as friends" (2008: 52-53).

fully persuade Achilles, because he does not fully understand the complexity of Achilles' motivation.⁸⁸ Especially in terms of loyalty to friends, Achilles expressly agrees with Ajax's sentiment (*Il.*9.644-53), but persists in his anger.⁸⁹ Since Achilles cannot get over Agamemnon's outrageous violation of their heroic ethic, he perpetuates another violation in his anger.

Nonetheless, Achilles underlines their congruent dispositions, stating that Ajax's reasoning is *κατὰ θυμὸν*, "after my own mind". This is a vivid contrast to his reply to Odysseus at *Il.*9.307-313, and one that also provides "permanent characterization" for Ajax (Hainsworth 1993:102 n.308-14). Whereas Achilles characterizes Odysseus as an unscrupulous rhetorician, he assures Ajax that he is forthright like himself.⁹⁰ But more significantly, he makes an important concession to Ajax, prompted by a recognition of their shared heroic sensibilities. Achilles will not leave Troy altogether, but will consider fighting when Hector torches their ships (*Il.*16.112-23).⁹¹

Ajax and Hector

I turn now to Ajax's association with Hector, the foremost Trojan warrior, whose development from city defender to enemy invader mirrors Ajax's development as the leading

⁸⁸ Scodel (2008: 92) puts it this way, "Achilles wants to be repaid the outrage that grieves his heart; that is his feelings, which are not within the system of compensation. The only way to make him feel better is for Agamemnon to suffer, but he cannot admit (to Ajax, Odysseus, and Phoenix) that he is exacting *ποινή*, 'compensation' on his friends."

⁸⁹ Hainsworth notes that "Ajax said in effect 'I never thought you would treat your friends like this in your own house', and Achilles has no reply to that devastating comment" 1993: 143 n.643-55.

⁹⁰ Griffin compares Odysseus and Achilles' characterization in Plato's *Hippias Minor* 364e-7, where their disparate personalities contrast with the consonance of spirit between Achilles and Ajax (1995:110 n.308-13). Hinckley, in an unpublished dissertation, notes "Although Odysseus speaks first and at length, he also accomplishes least, provoking Achilles' most negative response and most decided withdrawal from the war" (1972: 110).

⁹¹ Hinckley notes that where Odysseus speaks on behalf of Agamemnon, and addresses Achilles in terms of the "claims that society can make on the individual and the rewards that it can give," Ajax speaks to Achilles' sense of honor, and links that to his return to battle (1972:110-13).

Achaean defender in Achilles' absence. Hector and Ajax are principal adversaries, facing off against one another sixteen times, more than any other Greek and Trojan pair in the *Iliad*. They are also doubling figures, and are metrically alike; while Ajax is μέγας Τελαμώνιος Αἴας, formulaically similar to Hector's μέγας κορυθαίολος Ἴκτωρ, both share the adjective φαίδιμος (Hector 29x, Ajax 6x) (Kirk 1985: 297 n.226-7). They also share similar attributes, especially in their devotion to a code of moral behavior and acute awareness of αἰδώς.⁹² While Hector and Ajax are both warriors of αἰδώς, the outcomes of their commitment to it are starkly different. Hector's sense of αἰδώς will prove destructive to his people, resulting in his death and Troy's destruction. Ajax's devotion to αἰδώς, on the other hand, remains beneficial and solidifies the Greek defense.⁹³

The poet reveals the importance of αἰδώς to Ajax and Hector in different ways. When Andromache petitions Hector to refrain from battle, for instance, she essentially wishes him to disregard αἰδώς, and to consider the safety of his immediate family; Ajax, on the other hand, employs αἰδώς to spur Achilles to return to battle. In the embassy scene he shrewdly turns to Odysseus and remarks:

Let us go. I think that nothing will be accomplished
by argument on this errand; it is best to go back quickly
and tell this story, though it is not good, to the Danaans
who sit there waiting for us to come back, seeing that Achilles
has made savage the proud-hearted spirit within his body. (*Il.* 9.625-29)

⁹² "More than any other figure on the Greek side, Ajax is the man of αἰδώς" (Whitman 1958: 171). Redfield (1975: 119) however refers to Hector as the "hero of αἰδώς" 119.

⁹³ Only in extra-Iliadic material do we see its malignancy.

Ajax appeals to Achilles' sense of αἰδώς by projecting in front of Achilles what others will say about him. Ajax entertains the imagined response of their warrior society, by enacting for Achilles what this response would seem like.⁹⁴

As *the* foremost fighters of αἰδώς on both sides, there is parity when Ajax and Hector face one another on the field. This parity reinforces Ajax's character as the "bulwark of the Achaeans", when it pits him against Hector, the defender of Troy, who, in Achilles' absence has become the chief aggressor against the Achaeans. Thus, Hector and Ajax are both "walls", and represent the preservation of their society. Moreover, Hector's private moment with wife and child in Book 6 marks the first time the *Iliad* defines Hector's critical protective identity, οἷος γὰρ ἔρῦετο Ἴλιον Ἐκτώρ, "since Hector alone saved Ilium" (*Il.*6.403). Book 6's tableau anticipates Ajax's appearance in book 7 when Ajax is chosen by lot as the Greek champion, and serves to define Ajax as the chief Achaean defender (*Il.*7.175-200). Further, after Hector's death the *Iliad* links Hector with Troy's outer defense, but with the added clarification for Hector, οἷος γὰρ σφιν ἔρυσσεν πύλας καὶ τείχεα μακρὰ, "since it was you alone who defended the gates and the long walls" (*Il.*22.507). Schadewalt also noted Book 6 as key to the development of Hector as defender of Troy, and draws a direct line to his duel with Ajax: "Hector's stay at Troy shows him as the defender of the city to which he belongs, just as the following duel with Ajax shows him as a great fighter" (1959: 207-29). When Hector falls, Troy will fall. Accordingly, Hector like Ajax, embodies the chief defense of their armies.

⁹⁴ It is to Ajax's credit that he adroitly shifts from talking about Achilles in the third person to addressing him in his final point in an accusatory second person when he commands Achilles αἰδεσσαι, to "feel αἰδώς" (*Il.* 9.640).

As the “walls” of their society, Hector and Ajax are the human expression of physical battlements and exist as citizens whose presence protects their people.⁹⁵ Both Hector and Ajax receive designations and epithets that equate them with the city’s fortifications. Thus, Troy’s walls seem to converge with Hector’s body and likewise the walls of the Achaean camp are conflated with Ajax. Additionally, Scully argues that “even more than Ajax, Hector typifies the transference of defense from the physical rampart to an individual” (1990: 59). Even Hector’s name “the one who holds,” indicates this function and seems to be a shortened form of *Ekhepolis*, “he who holds the city” (Nagy 1979: 146-147 and Scully 1990: 59). Moreover, when Hector can no longer stand his ground against Achilles, he runs around Troy three times, “whirling about the city of Priam” (*Il.* 22.165). Hector’s swift circuit equates warrior and wall, and vividly illustrates Hector’s identity one last time before his death. Similarly, when Achilles drags Hector’s corpse around the walls, this implies that the walls have failed and Troy has fallen (*Il.* 22.410-11).

In so far as Hector represents the walls of Troy, Ajax corresponds to the wall of the Achaean camp. The *Iliad* emphasizes this parallelism by following Ajax’s single combat with

⁹⁵ The idea that soldiers, not the physical battlements, are the actual defenders of a polis is not uncommon in archaic thought. Famous for its lack of walls, Sparta entrusted its defense to its warrior elite—a point of pride in Plutarch’s *Apophthegmata Laconica*, when he records that a Spartan, “being asked once how far the bounds of Sparta extended, said, with a flourish of his spear, ‘as far as this can reach’” (28). When someone else wished to know why Sparta was without walls, he pointed to the citizens in full armor and said, “These are the Spartans’ walls” (29).

In many instances a polis that trusted solely in its walls was thought somehow to emasculate its citizens. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 778e-79a. Spartans, always suspicious of Athens and its long walls, refused to build them altogether, entrusting the city’s safety to the martial valor of their hoplites. For Athens, the notion of walls, had specific naval implications, as Themistocles made sure that the oracle was interpreted to indicate manned triremes, in contrast to those men who trusted in the literal wooden barricade on the acropolis (*Hdt.* 7.143). Herodotus presents the city’s defense as a conflict between marines and a wooden wall. Nevertheless, precedent for the idea that men defend a city, and not its walls, is found throughout the *Iliad*.

Hector with the hurried construction of the palisade (*Il.*7.336-8). The Achaean wall provides a makeshift defense, and serves to comment on the uneasy stalemate between Greeks and Trojans now that Achilles has withdrawn from battle.⁹⁶ In composition, the wall is an odd mixture of defensive battlement and funerary edifice: a literal compound of corpses and earthwork. In this macabre display, one may readily understand the idea of warrior as wall and the concept of mortal as mortar. Moreover, the temporary quality of the wall's rushed construction reflects the provisional nature of Ajax's time as the "bulwark of the Achaeans" in Achilles' absence. On this point, O'Higgins remarks that "the human ἔρκος is replaced by a literal defensive rampart" (1989: 46). Yet the wall does not replace Ajax, but reinforces his defensive identity since its construction follows directly after Ajax's single combat with Hector. Accordingly, the Achaean wall facilitates a more vivid interpretation of Ajax's ἔρκος epithet, one that is heard for the last time in his single combat with Hector (*Il.*7.211). In this way, Ajax' character demonstrates what the Achaean wall generalizes on a larger scale.

Construction of the Achaean wall marks the official beginning of Hector's Trojan offensive and initiates a temporary reversal of the established Greek and Trojan situation.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Bassett speculates that the encounter between Hector and Ajax in Book 7 may be the first time that the Trojans are made aware of Achilles' absence. He also states "The *monomachia* introduces Hector as a dangerous enemy champion...Hector appears dangerous to justify the building of the wall and to make probable his success in fighting on to the second and third day" (1927: 153-56).

⁹⁷ The wall reinforces the idea that the Achaean camp, as opposed to the Trojan citadel is now a polis under siege (Rabel 1997: 100). Conversely, Scully does not see the Achaean camp and its walls as a viable city and argues that "no one ever considers the camp sacred, it perverts the higher necessity of the polis to defend women and children. The protected camp is an aggregate of parts which never transcends its multiplicity into a unifying singleness" (1990: 26). Contra Scully, Rabel and Morrison examine in great detail the idea of the Achaean camp as a city under siege (Rabel 1997:100-113, Morrison 1994). Morrison musters extensive examples demonstrating how the Achaean camp can be viewed as a serviceable polis, and shows how the *Iliad* can "depict the trauma of undergoing a siege by showing his audience that experience, but he does so from the Greek point of view. Rather than exult in the glory of sacking a city, Homer

The fortified camp shows, as Rabel remarks, “a new sense of interdependence, a rudimentary form of civic ideology arising from their need for Achilles and for one another” (1997:108). Lacking Achilles, Achaean society must now learn to exist in a world bereft of its premier warrior, and accordingly, the *Iliad* turns its attention to its second greatest fighter, Ajax. This temporarily allows Hector to be glorified as a “Trojan Achilles” and Ajax to become the “Achaean Hector”. Additionally, the besieged Achaean camp must defend itself against the will of Zeus, who actively supports Troy in order to glorify Achilles. The result is in miniature a reverse Trojan War, allowing Hector to overrun the Achaean “city”. Moreover, while the Achaean wall is a physical manifestation of Ajax’s character, it also stands to fortify Hector’s development as formidable antagonist. Basset argues that the poet introduces the Achaean wall “to provide stages in the victorious progression of Hector,” that “without Hector there need have been no wall” (1927: 155). If the wall adds ferocity to Hector, at the same time its construction will parallel the development of Ajax as champion of the Achaeans now that Achilles sits on the sideline.

Furthermore, while unaware of Zeus’ support for Hector, Ajax leads the Greek defense until he recognizes the extent of Zeus’ plan when Hector lops off the top of his spear (*Il.* 16.114-121). Although one may sense futility in Ajax’s effort, his great defense of the Greek ships underlines his determination to fight despite divine opposition. O’Higgins poignantly comments on the paradox of Ajax’s action: “to Ajax belongs the failure by which we measure the success of Achilles’ prayer, the unique value of Achilles’ contribution to the war” (1989: 46). As a product of human endeavor alone, the Achaean wall reflects Ajax’s tendency to work without

offers an alternative perspective in the *Iliad*, as the besiegers of Troy have become the besieged in their own city” (1994: 227).

divine approval. Although the wall will eventually be overrun, Ajax still demonstrates an unrelenting defense in the face of incremental Trojan incursion until both wall and Ajax are finally overcome by Trojan attack.⁹⁸ In Book 12 especially, Ajax must defend the Achaean wall from Hector's attacks:

ἀμφοτέρω δ' Αἴαντε κελευτιόωντ' ἐπὶ πύργων
πάντοσε φοιτήτην μένος ὀτρύνοντες Ἀχαιῶν.
ἄλλον μειλιχίους, ἄλλον στερεοῖς ἐπέεσσι
νεῖκεον, ὄν τινα πάγχυ μάχης μεθιέντα ἴδιοιεν:
'ὦ φίλοι Ἀργείων ὅς τ' ἔξοχος ὅς τε μεσήεις
ὅς τε χειριότερος, ἐπεὶ οὐ πῶ πάντες ὁμοῖοι
ἄνερές ἐν πολέμῳ, νῦν ἔπλετο ἔργον ἅπασι:

The two Aiantes,⁹⁹ walking up and down the length of the ramparts, urged the men on, stirring up the war-craft of the Achaeans, and stung them along, using kind words to one, to another hard ones, whenever they saw a man hang back from the fighting: "Dear friends, you who are pre-eminent among the Argives, you who are of middle estate, you who are of low account, since all of us are not alike in battle, this is work for all now. (*Il.* 12.266-71)

As Ajax and Teucer walk "up and down the length of the ramparts" in diction they align their bodies with the wall itself. Moreover, Ajax speaks not as a fore-fighter, but as commander, directing and exhorting his troops.¹⁰⁰ He emphasizes need for collective effort to rebuff Trojan attack and equalizes the soldiers' status in the critical need for every fighter. However, while

⁹⁸ When Apollo easily breaches the Achaean wall, summed up in the playfully destructive simile of a child obliterating his own sand towers (*Il.* 15.355-66), he fulfills his own promise in Book 7 to "smooth the Trojans' entire path," and further underlines his role as Hector's patron.

⁹⁹ According to Nagy, "Aiantes," the dual form of Ajax's name is an "elliptical plural" that uses the name of a dominant figure to "elliptically include" another. "Aiantes" can refer to Telamonian Ajax with Ajax son of Oileus, and at other times Telamonian Ajax with his half-brother Teucer (Nagy 1997: 175-183).

¹⁰⁰ At *Il.* 12.273, Hainsworth notes the use of the word ὀμοκλητῆρος "shouter," "threatener," and highlights the uncertainty about who the "shouter." Hainsworth claims that "Ajax, or the poet, slips into the language of a commander urging his men to advance" (1993: 347 n.273-4).

Ajax maintains troop cohesion, he will intervene as the situation dictates. When Menestheus witnesses Glaucus and Sarpedon advance against his section of the wall,

πάπτηνεν δ' ἀνὰ πύργον Ἀχαιῶν εἴ τιν' ἴδοιτο
ἡγεμόνων, ὅς τις οἱ ἀρῆν ἐτάροισιν ἀμύναι:
ἔς δ' ἐνόησ' Αἴαντε δῶ πολέμου ἀκορήτω
ἔσταότας, ...
αἶψα δ' ἐπ' Αἴαντα προΐει κήρυκα Θεώτην:
'ἔρχεο δῖε Θεῶτα, θέων Αἴαντα κάλεσσον,'
ὥς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε μέγας Τελαμώνιος Αἴας.
εὔτε Μενεσθῆος μεγαθύμου πύργον ἴκοντο
τείχεος ἐντὸς ἰόντες, ἐπειγομένοισι δ' ἴκοντο,

He scanned the rampart of the Achaeans in the hope of seeing some great chief who could beat back the bane from his company, and saw the two Aiantes, insatiate of battle, standing on the wall...At once he sent Thootes off as a runner to Ajax: "Go on the run, brilliant Thootes, and call Ajax here..." ...and huge Telamonian Ajax did not disobey him, They (Ajax and Teucer) kept inside the wall as they went, till they came to the bastion of high-hearted Menestheus, and found men who were hard pressed there.

(*Il.* 12.333-36, 343, 364-69, 373-77)

When a section of the wall is imperiled, Menestheus looks to Ajax, the human bulwark, to intercept the threat. The general idea underlines Ajax's metaphorical link with the literal fortification, allowing his presence to substitute a threatened part of the wall. Furthermore, Ajax is the "summoned defender," whom comrades call upon in time of critical need.¹⁰¹ Fenik sees the call for aid and rescue as "fully typical elements" occurring as a leitmotif and especially common in connection with Ajax. Moreover, the call for aid/rescue theme occurs often with Menelaus, whose "characteristic action." Bradshaw (1991:101) notes, "is to recognize the plight of a fallen comrade and to call for the rescue of a warrior." When Trojans surround a wounded Odysseus, for instance, Menelaus summons Ajax and they rescue him (*Il.* 11.459-501). Later, when

¹⁰¹ Bradshaw notes that "one of Ajax's characteristic actions is to effect rescue by shielding the fallen and warding off Trojan attacks" (1991: 101).

Menelaus is under duress, he thinks of Ajax, and says, “Yet if somewhere I could only get some word of Ajax of the great war cry, we two might somehow go, and keep our spirit of battle even in the face of divinity” (*Il.*17.101-4). Ajax acts as a mobile wall, a summoned bulwark, who repositions himself between imperiled ally and enemy combatant.

Until Book 7, however, Ajax has not yet lived up to his “bulwark of the Achaeans” epithet. Just as Achilles’ “swift footed” epithet remains unrealized until he confronts Hector and outruns him in Book 22, so too is Ajax’s ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν epithet not activated until he faces Hector in Book 7 and the Achaean wall is built. Helen’s identification of Ajax as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν at *Il.*3.229 hangs inactive in the text until it is picked up again at *Il.*7.211, when the poet names Ajax as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν as he advances against Hector in single combat. Furthermore, while the duel is the main subject of narrative of Book 7, it complements the makeshift Achaean wall constructed around their ships in a sequential narrative that links Ajax’s duel with Hector to the construction of the Achaean fortification. To put it another way, the *Iliad* describes the construction of an Achaean bulwark, shortly after the “bulwark of the Achaeans” makes his military debut.

In their first substantive encounter, Book 7 establishes Hector and Ajax as the greatest champions of both armies. While Ajax and Hector take center stage, nonetheless it is a rivalry overshadowed by Achilles. As Kirk notes (1985: 265-66), it is a fight “dominated by the sense of Achilles’ absence.” Shortly after Hector’s challenge, Agamemnon states, “Even Achilles, in the fighting where men win glory, trembles to meet this man” (*Il.*7.113-14). The idea that Achilles would fear Hector is found nowhere else in the *Iliad*, and Kirk even dismisses it as a bit of ego padding from an older brother (*ibid*). Nevertheless, it bestows on the eventual Achaean challenger (Ajax) a semblance of fearlessness to go where even Achilles would fear to tread.

Furthermore, in Ajax's opening taunt there is a direct link to Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon as well as Book 2's claim of Ajax's ἄριστος status. Informing Hector about Achilles' absence,

Ajax declares:

Ἔκτορ νῦν μὲν δὴ σάφα εἴσεται οἰόθεν οἶος
οἶοι καὶ Δαναοῖσιν ἀριστῆες μετέασι
καὶ μετ' Ἀχιλλῆα **ῥηξήνορα**¹⁰² θυμολέοντα.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν νήεσσι κορωνίσι ποντοπόροισι
κεῖτ' ἀπομηνίσας Ἀγαμέμνονι ποιμένι λαῶν.

‘Hector, single man against single man you will learn now
for sure what the bravest are like among the Danaans
even after Achilles the lion-hearted who breaks men in battle
**But he remains at the hollow sea-faring ships
steeping his wrath for Atreid Agamemnon, shepherd of the people.**’ (*Il.7.229*)

This passage echoes lines from Book 2:

ἀνδρῶν αὖ μέγ' ἄριστος ἔην Τελαμώνιος Αἴας
ὄφρ' Ἀχιλεὺς μήνιεν· ὁ γὰρ πολὺ φέρτατος ἦεν,
ἵπποι θ' οἱ φορέεσκον ἀμύμονα Πηλεΐωνα.
**ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν νήεσσι κορωνίσι ποντοπόροισι
κεῖτ' ἀπομηνίσας Ἀγαμέμνονι ποιμένι λαῶν
Ἄτρεΐδη...**

Among the men far the best was Telamonian Ajax
while Achilles stayed angry, since he was far best of all of them,
he and the horses that bare the peerless son of Peleus.
**But he remains at the hollow sea-faring ships
Steeping his wrath for Atreid Agamemnon, shepherd of the people.**
(*Il.2.771-72*)

By repeating these lines verbatim, the *Iliad* asserts for a second time that Ajax is now ἄριστος and alerts its audience to the initial heroic calibration at *Il.2.768-772*. At the same time it cues a sequence in which Ajax will demonstrate why he is ἄριστος as well as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν.

¹⁰² Note too that Ajax refers to Achilles as ῥηξήνορα, “breaker of men” in a contest with Hector, *cf. Il.13.324, 16.575*.

Accordingly, like Achilles with his “swift-footed” epithet, Ajax too activates his epithet only when he encounters Hector.

While Hector has shortly before been presented as the foremost warrior of the Trojans, here the poet reveals an Ajax layered with epithets that depict his slow, menacing, and expanding presence as he advances into single combat:

τοῖος ἄρ' Αἴας ὄρτο πελώριος ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν
μειδιῶν βλοσυροῖσι προσώπασι· νέρθε δὲ ποσσὶν
ἦϊε μακρὰ βιβιάς, κραδάων δολιχόσκιον ἔγχος.
τὸν δὲ καὶ Ἀργεῖοι μὲν ἐγήθεον εἰσορόωντες.

Such was Ajax as he strode, gigantic, the wall of the Achaeans,
Smiling under his threatening brows, with his feet beneath him
Taking huge strides forward, and shaking the far-shadowing spear.
And the Argives looking upon him were made glad. (*Il.* 7.211-14)

As Ajax approaches, he seems to fill the horizon with his expanding mass. The colossal warrior is only made more ferocious by the fact that he is “smiling” as he advances.¹⁰³ The last time a form of *μειδάω* occurs before this passage is when Hector smiles at Astyanax, *ὁ μὲν μείδησεν ἰδὼν ἐς παῖδα σιωπῆ* (*Il.* 6.404), which is “Hector’s only smile in the *Iliad*,” an act that lessens the severity of the sadness of the moment (Graziosi and Haubold 2010: 193 n.404). Ajax’s smile of military superiority in a belligerent episode echoes Hector’s final smile of affection in a familial scene and draws a stark contrast between the two warriors, underlining their roles as chief adversaries.

In many ways, Ajax and Hector’s single combat is peculiar.¹⁰⁴ While Book 3’s duel was meant to end the war, Book 7’s duel has no stated purpose (Apollo has instigated this duel with

¹⁰³ D. Levine (1982: 102) notes that “Ajax is like a walking gorgoneion, with his face set in a gruesome smile in anticipation of victory.”

no objective), and ends in a draw with a strangely initiated gift exchange.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as Bassett notes, Ajax and Hector’s duel is “longer and more elaborate than almost any other Homeric combat” (1927: 155). He continues, “It is the only duel in the *Iliad* in which all four methods of attack are used: the spear hurl, spear lunge, large stone throw, and charging with the sword.” Hector and Ajax’s fight runs the gamut of a warrior’s martial expression, conveying the inability of either side to gain an advantage while Achilles is absent.¹⁰⁶

Ajax and Hector’s deference to warrior etiquette also stands out as a mark of their shared sensibilities. When the herald Idaios interrupts their fight and urges both warriors to stop, Ajax replies,

‘Ἴδαϊ Ἔκτορα ταῦτα κελεύετε μυθήσασθαι:
αὐτὸς γὰρ χάρμη προκαλέσσατο πάντας ἀρίστους.
ἀρχέτω: αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μάλα πείσομαι ἢ περ ἄν οὗτος.

Bid Hector answer this, Idaios, since it was he who
in his pride called forth all our bravest to fight him.
Let him speak first; and I for my part shall do as he urges. (*Il.*7.284-86)

Hector answers,

‘Αἴαν ἐπεὶ τοι δῶκε θεὸς μέγεθός τε βίην τε
καὶ πινυτήν, περὶ δ’ ἔγχει Ἀχαιῶν φέρτατός ἐσσι,
νῦν μὲν παυσώμεσθα μάχης καὶ δηϊοτήτος
σήμερον: ὕστερον αὖτε μαχησόμεθ’ εἰς ὃ κε δαίμων
ἄμμε διακρίνη, δῶη δ’ ἐτέροισί γε νίκην.

Ajax, seeing that God has given you strength, stature and wisdom
also, and with the spear you surpass the other Achaeans,
let us now give over this fighting and hostility
for today; we shall fight again, until the divinity
chooses between us, and gives victory to one or the other. (*Il.*7.292)

¹⁰⁵ For an extended list of possible reasons see Kirk 1985: 243-44, n. 74-5.

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted here that when the herald Idaios comes to stop the duel, he states that both Hector and Ajax are “loved by Zeus.” Moreover Zeus plan to help the Trojans does not officially start until book 8’s offensive. Thus, without Zeus’ help, the result is a stalemate.

Hector and Ajax officially end their conflict and temporarily cease hostilities with a gift exchange. Ajax gives a crimson war belt to Hector, and Hector, a sword and sheath to Ajax.¹⁰⁷ Their exchange echoes Glaucus and Diomedes' encounter from Book 6. However, in that instance the truce was predicated on a formal understanding of shared ancestral *xenia*; Hector and Ajax accomplish their gift exchange in the knowledge that their hostility will resume, as it does when they encounter one another in Book 14.

The events of Book 14 occur while the king of the gods as well as the greatest Achaean warrior lie idle. Hera has taken an opportunity to seduce her husband and so grant favor to the Greeks. In this interval, Ajax and Hector briefly resume their single combat. The *Iliad* records, "Hector made a cast with his spear at Ajax" (*Il.*14.402), but the blow struck his sword and shield straps; Ajax then picked up a rock,

χερμαδίῳ, τά ῥα πολλὰ θοάων ἔχματα νηῶν
 πὰρ ποσὶ μαρναμένων ἐκυλίνδετο, τῶν ἐν αἰείρας
 στῆθος βεβλήκει ὑπὲρ ἄντυγος ἀγχόθι δειρῆς,
 στρόμβον δ' ὡς ἔσσευε βαλῶν, περι δ' ἔδραμε πάντη.
 ὡς δ' ὄθ' ὑπὸ πληγῆς πατρὸς Διὸς ἐξερίπη δρυῶς
 πρόρριζος...
 ὡς ἔπεσ' Ἔκτορος ὄκα χαμαὶ μένος ἐν κονίησι:
 χειρὸς δ' ἐκβαλεν ἔγχος, ἐπ' αὐτῷ δ' ἀσπίς ἐάφθη
 καὶ κόρυς, ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ βράχε τεύχεα ποικίλα χαλκῶ.

and hit him in the chest next the throat over his shield rim,
 and spun him around like a top with the stroke, so that he staggered
 in a circle; as a great oak goes down root-torn under
 Zeus father's stroke...

so Hector in all his strength dropped suddenly in the dust, let
 the spear fall from his hand, and his shield was beaten upon him,
 and the helm, and his armor, elaborate with bronze clashed over him.

(*Il.*14.410-15,418-20)

¹⁰⁷ Sophocles will pick up this theme and tether Ajax's subsequent life to this one fateful moment. See chapter 3.

In Zeus' absence, Hector falls like "a great oak" (the tree of Zeus) which is hit as if by "Zeus father's stroke." Ajax strikes Hector near the throat, a wound proximate to Achilles' fatal spear thrust at *Il.22.327*. Hector, naturally, cannot fall to Ajax here, but his sudden collapse and the thunderous crash as he hits the ground suggests the finality of death as opposed to temporary incapacitation.¹⁰⁸ Hector's fall seems to contravene narrative expectation, that Achilles will kill Hector and not Ajax. However, the poet shifts the emphasis to the larger battle between Greek and Trojan forces in a skirmish in which the Greeks, thanks to Zeus' divine libido, will gain the upper hand (Janko 1992: 213). Although Ajax roundly defeats Hector, success belongs to the Achaean army and not simply to Ajax.¹⁰⁹ Still, Hector survives and their enmity remains unresolved.

Book 7's duel initiates a series of encounters between Hector and Ajax that will reach its zenith in Book 16's confrontation on Protesilaus' ship, when Hector, slicing away the iron head of Ajax's spear, marks the final thrust of Trojan incursion and ultimately leads to Achilles' return. In this moment, when his spear head clangs on the ship's deck, Ajax understands that Zeus has promoted Hector in Achilles' absence. As Griffin (1980: 44) notes, "Ajax 'sees' the event as symbolic, and the poet agrees: Zeus is in fact urging on the Trojans and paralyzing the Achaean efforts against them." This brings us to Ajax's ambiguous relationship with the gods. While in the post-Iliadic tradition Athena is blatantly antagonistic towards him, the *Iliad* is muted as to whether any god or goddess assists or actively hinders Ajax, but is clear that Zeus loves Ajax and Hector (*Il.7.280*).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Sarpedon's death, when he falls "as an oak, or a poplar, or a tall pine" (*Il.16.482*) and Patroclus, whose helmet "rang as it rolled" when it fell (*Il.16.794*), and who "hit the earth with a thud" (*Il.16.822*).

¹⁰⁹ Winter 1956: 124, *Die Kampfszenen in den Gesaengen MNO der Ilias* (Diss. Frankfurt 1956).

When Hector and Ajax face one another in combat, Zeus plays a prominent role in their encounters. Duffy (2008:76) argues that between Books 8 and 17, Zeus acts on Ajax a total of five times, hampering Ajax three times and assisting him twice. While Ajax's constant frustrations with Hector could be attributed to Zeus' antagonism, Duffy suggests Zeus' favor for Hector is not out of malice towards Ajax; indeed when Zeus' herald tells both warriors to stop fighting, it is because Zeus loves them both. Zeus' preference for Hector is another instance in which, according to Duffy (2008:79, 85), Achilles' interests, his appeal to Thetis and her appeal to Zeus, take precedence over Ajax's. Nevertheless, Zeus' constant involvement in encounters between Hector and Ajax, an association that often brings them into deadlock, further reinforces their characterizations as principal antagonists.

Distinguishing between general divine assistance for the Greek army and "direct" assistance, or moments on the field when gods intervene, Duffy argues that no god or goddess directly assists Ajax (2008: 84). He notes that Poseidon and Zeus never offer direct aid to the Achaeans and that the only god to do this is Athena.¹¹⁰ He writes (2008: 85), "the question is not why the gods do not help Ajax, but why Athena does not help him." Duffy suggests that extra-Iliadic material concerning Athena's dislike for Ajax allows us to understand her indifference toward him in the *Iliad*.¹¹¹ While Apollo assists Hector in the duel with Ajax, Athena does not; during the fight over Patroclus' corpse, Athena chooses to help Menelaus over Ajax, an act that actually prolongs the struggle to recover Patroclus' body (*Il.*17.551). Duffy sums up Athena's

¹¹⁰ As when Athena assists Diomedes in Book 5 (*Il.*5.1-9).

¹¹¹ Duffy suggests that since Ajax's poor performance in the funeral games for Patroclus alludes to the Judgment of the Arms, the *Iliad* was aware of Athena's involvement in that post-Iliadic tale (2005: 85).

feeling toward Ajax, regarding her decision to help Menelaus as a result of not wanting to help Ajax (2008: 89).

Hector and Ajax's single combat is the first performance of Ajax as the foremost Greek defender. It also shows Hector as a serious threat to the Achaeans and consequently reinforces Greek reliance on Ajax' military skill. By reinforcing Ajax's defensive capability in single combat with Hector, it foregrounds Hector and the Trojans as a formidable threat, effected "by making Hector the champion of the enemy" (Bassett 1927: 154). Furthermore, Hector becomes more menacing by facing the most formidable Achaean fighter and provides a credible reason to the construction of the Achaean wall as well as for the string of Trojan victories in Books 8 through 15. The *Iliad* thus crafts Ajax as the "bulwark of the Achaeans" in tandem with Hector's rise as the "defender of Troy."

I turn now to Ajax's conduct in battle. Besides his single combat with Hector, Ajax exhibits a preoccupation with cohesive, strategic group combat. When Ajax fights, he consistently reminds the army of their duty and serves to uplift the troops and also as a physical defender who eases the burden for his comrades. At the beginning of Book 6, in the Catalogue of Killings we are told, Αἴας δὲ πρῶτος Τελαμώνιος ἕρκος Ἀχαιῶν / Τρώων ῥῆξε φάλαγγα, φῶος δ' ἐτάροισιν ἔθηκεν, "first, Telamonian Ajax, bulwark of the Achaeans, broke the battle line of the Achaeans, and brought light to his own companions (*Il.*6.5-6).¹¹² After breaking the Trojan phalanx,¹¹³ Ajax serves as a φῶος δ' ἐτάροισιν, "light for his comrades". As Stoevesandt

¹¹² This section (*Il.*6.1-71), provides a list of Greek "kills" as well as a general overview of action on the battlefield. The catalogue also provides for the first time the idea that Troy's fall is imminent, the only time this happens while Achilles is angry. See Graziosi and Haubold 2010: 76.

¹¹³ Greeks of the fifth century would have understood this as a hoplite phalanx, although current scholarship draws clear distinctions between Homeric and hoplite styles of fighting. See H. Bowden 1993, Van Wees 1997: 668-93, Graziosi and Haubold 2010: 79.

remarks, “light’ generally serves as a metaphor for ‘rescue/rescuer’ in moments of extreme distress” (2016: 16 n.6). In fact, the idea of “light” seems to be pronounced particularly when Ajax is on the field. At *Il.* 15.741, Ajax exhorts his comrades by saying, τὸ ἐν χερσὶ φῶς, οὐ μιλίχρη πολέμοιο, “Salvation’s light is in our hands’ work, not the mercy of battle.” Moreover, Ajax’s light emanates from the work of his hands –it is a light devoid of divine contribution. This contrasts with Achilles, whose light for the army is linked with his connection to the gods.¹¹⁴

Additionally, as the “summoned defender”, Ajax fights in coordination with others whenever an ally becomes endangered. When Trojans isolate and menace a wounded Odysseus (*Il.* 11.401-420), for instance, Menelaus hears his shouts for help, “and immediately calls to Ajax, who was nearby him (*Il.* 11.464). Menelaus immediately considers Ajax: he is the first person to come to mind. Ajax, without a word assents, “and he (Ajax) followed, a mortal like a god” (*Il.* 11.472-3). When he arrives, Ajax bursts onto the scene and scatters Trojans, as he hovers over Odysseus until Menelaus can carry him off the field.¹¹⁵ While Menelaus escorts Odysseus to safety, Ajax approaches an *aristeia* of his own in a cascade of similes as the poet describes the rescue, the scattering of enemies, and his staggered retreat at *Il.* 11.492-7 (Hainsworth 1993: 277). However, a typical *aristeia* displays a warrior’s battle prowess through a sustained forward assault, and is reserved for conspicuous offensive maneuvers (cf. Diomedes in Book 5 and Agamemnon in book 8). For this reason, Ajax never seems to carry out a proper *aristeia*, since his martial sphere is overwhelmingly defensive. In this sequence, although Ajax kills three

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Il.* 18.196-218, where Athena sets a gleam that “went up toward heaven above” when Achilles shows himself to the Trojans after Patroclus’ death.

¹¹⁵ Bradshaw (1991: 102) suggests that this passage hints at “the adversarial relationship of Ajax and Odysseus,” since in the simile Odysseus is likened to a wounded stag, the Trojans to jackals attempting to eat it, and Ajax to a lion who scatters the jackals, but eats the stag. He also notes incongruity between the simile’s narrative, that is the Lion eating the stag, and the execution of the rescue, Ajax saving Odysseus.

Trojans and successfully recovers Odysseus, his entire performance is part of a defensive retreat. Nevertheless, in lieu of an actual *aristeia* Ajax still receives four extended similes in close succession: 1) as a lion coming upon a wounded stag (*Il.*11.473-88), 2) as a swollen river (*Il.*11.492-7), 3) as a lion again (*Il.*11.547-56), and 4) as a donkey, unfazed as he is pelted with missiles by children (*Il.*11.556-64). In aggregate, these similes express the actions of rescue (when the lion finds the wounded stag), of scattering the enemy (the repulse of Trojan warriors by the river), and calculated, defensive retreat (as the lion and donkey slowly recede from an enemy, yet only when they wish).¹¹⁶ All four similes characterize Ajax's style of fighting. He is the defensive fighter who rescues, endures, and formulates calculated retreats.

Besides his dedication to his comrades, Ajax acts as a beacon of leadership and directs troops like a battlefield commander. At *Il.*13.125 ff., the *Iliad* states that Poseidon, in the guise of Calchas,

ῶρσεν Ἀχαιοῦς.
 ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' Αἴαντας δοιοῦς ἴσταντο φάλαγγες
 καρτεραί, ἃς οὔτ' ἄν κεν Ἄρης ὀνόσαιτο μετελθῶν
 οὔτε κ' Ἀθηναίη λαοσσόος: οἱ γὰρ ἄριστοι
 κρινθέντες Τρῳάς τε καὶ Ἴκτορα δῖον ἔμιμνον.

stirred up the Achaeans,
 and their battalions formed in strength about the two Aiantes,
 battalions the war god could not find fault with, coming among them,
 nor Athena, lady of storming armies, since there the bravest
 formed apart and stood against the Trojans and brilliant Hector.
 (*Il.*13.125-29)

Hector comments (*Il.*13.152-3), “The Achaeans will not hold me back for a long time for all they are building themselves into a bastion (πυργηδόν) against me.” The adverb πυργηδόν, “tower-

¹¹⁶ Hainsworth (1993: 284, n.558-62) notes that “the point of the simile is that Ajax shrugs off the Trojan attacks and retreats only when he is ready to do so.”

wise,” indicates the formation of massed troops in battle line. It is used again at *Il.* 16.212, when Patroclus arranges the Myrmidons like stones in a compact wall.

Furthermore, Ajax or the Aiantes appear often as commanders in instances of mass troop maneuver. While at *Il.* 13.125 the army is “formed in strength about the Aiantes,” at *Il.* 17.352-65 in the melee over Patroclus’ corpse the *Iliad* states:

Αἴας γὰρ μάλα πάντας ἐπῳχετο πολλὰ κελεύων:
οὔτε τιν’ ἐξοπίσω νεκροῦ χάζεσθαι ἀνώγει
οὔτε τινα προμάχεσθαι Ἀχαιῶν ἔξοχον ἄλλων,
ἀλλὰ μάλ’ ἀμφ’ αὐτῷ βεβάμεν, σχεδόθεν δὲ μάχεσθαι.
ὣς Αἴας ἐπέτελλε πελώριος.

For Ajax ranged their whole extent with his numerous orders,
and would not let any man give back from the body, nor let one
go out and fight by himself far in front of the other Achaeans,
but made them stand hard and fast about him and fight at close quarters.
Such were the orders of gigantic Ajax. (*Il.* 17.355-60)

Bradshaw (1991:108) notes how Ajax can expertly direct the army because of his μητις, and his “discernment” and “superintendence of discipline in the ranks.”¹¹⁷ Van Wees (1997: 685) contends that the *Iliad* depicts Ajax’s formation of a completely united mass of troops as the “best way to stage a defense,” and a peculiarly exceptional display of strategic defensive fighting. Moreover, he argues (1997: 685-6), that this is the only instance where troops are forbidden to break rank, the only battle where the enemy cannot assault the positioned battle line, and the only time when a “massing of troops is followed by an extended scene of intense mass combat without any reference to individual heroics.” Van Wees specifically calls attention to Ajax’s role in devising these tactics and notes their extraordinary appearance [in the *Iliad*]. He also argues (1997: 685-6), that the mass of soldiers in combat is disparaged in the *Iliad*, and that

¹¹⁷ He focuses more on building a case for Ajax’s understated mental acuity in the face of constant comparisons to Odysseus’ reputation for stratagem.

the poem emphasizes their inefficacy on the field in comparison to “aristocratic leaders who are the decisive force on the battlefield.” However, I would emphasize in addition, Ajax’s capacity to command as an individual hero in a collective endeavor, one that transmits his effort and achievement to the entire group. In effect, Ajax shares military achievement with his comrades.

By far the most spectacular performance of Ajax occurs in battle in his defense of the Greek ships. In this, the most crucial event of his tenure as ἄριστος, Ajax embodies his ἔρκος epithet to its fullest and becomes the last line of defense for the Achaeans. Ajax defends the ships seemingly alone against the entire Trojan army. He fights in place of many, and leaping from deck to deck in acrobatic fashion, he exhibits an image that once more conflates his person with the physical line of defense. Since the wall has been compromised, this line is now the Achaean ships themselves. Previously the Achaean camp displaced Troy as a polis under siege, and the invading ships are now the invaded (Morrison 1994: 226-7). Where before the wall marked the border of the Achaean “polis”, now the ships patrolled by Ajax serve as its final boundary. Accordingly, the Greeks’ moment of nearest extinction occurs while Ajax features his finest display of defensive action, when the ships that remind us that the Greeks are invaders on Trojan soil become imperiled and threaten to rob the Greek army of its homecoming.

Although a few of the ships are ultimately overrun, Ajax displays remarkable presence of mind, an acute strategic foresight, and an ability to instill αἰδώς in his companions—all in the face of Hector’s furious assault. Understanding their dire situation, Ajax calls for Greek solidarity, and exhorts his companions to feel αἰδώς in front of one another:

‘αἰδώς Ἀργεῖοι: νῦν ἄρκιον ἢ ἀπολέσθαι
ἢ ἐ σωθῆναι καὶ ἀπόσασθαι κακὰ νηῶν.
ἢ ἔλπεσθ’ ἢν νῆας ἔλη κορυθαίολος Ἴεκτωρ
ἐμβαδὸν ἴξεσθαι ἢν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἕκαστος;

Shame, you Argives; here is the time of decision, whether

we die, or live on still and beat back ruin from our vessels.
Do you expect, if our ships fall to helm-shining Hector,
you will walk each of you back dry shod to the land of your fathers?
(*Il.* 15.502-5)

And again,

ὦ φίλοι ἀνέρες ἔστε, καὶ αἰδῶ θέσθ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ,
ἀλλήλους τ' αἰδεῖσθε κατὰ κρατερὰς ὑσμίνας.
αἰδομένων δ' ἀνδρῶν πλέονες σοοὶ ἢ πέφανται:
φευγόντων δ' οὔτ' ἄρ κλέος ὄρνυται οὔτε τις ἀλκή.

Dear friends, be men; let shame be in your hearts, and discipline,
and have consideration for each other in the strong encounters,
since more come through alive when men consider each other,
and there is no glory when they give way, nor war-craft either.
(*Il.* 15.561-64)

When at last the Trojans rush directly toward the Achaean ships, Ajax fights while still urging the Greeks to fight and jumping from deck to deck, “he went in huge strides up and down the decks of the vessels” and “wielded in his hands a great pike for sea fighting,”

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἀνήρ ἵπποισι κελητίζειν ἐὺ εἰδώς,
ὅς τ' ἐπεὶ ἐκ πολέων πίσυρας συναίρεται ἵππους,
σεύας ἐκ πεδίοιο μέγα προτὶ ἄστυ δίηται
λαοφόρον καθ' ὁδόν: πολέες τέ ἐθήσαντο
ἀνέρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες: ὃ δ' ἔμπεδον ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ
θρῶσκων ἄλλοτ' ἐπ' ἄλλον ἀμείβεται, οἳ δὲ πέτονται:
ὡς Αἴας ἐπὶ πολλὰ θοάων ἴκρια νηῶν
φοῖτα μακρὰ βιβάζ, φωνὴ δὲ οἱ αἰθέρ' ἴκανεν,
αἰεὶ δὲ σμερδνὸν βοόων Δαναοῖσι κέλευε
νηυσί τε καὶ κλισίησιν ἀμυνέμεν.

And as a man who is an expert rider of horses
who when he has chosen and coupled four horses out of many
makes his way over the plain galloping toward a great city
along the traveled road, and many turn to admire him,
men or women, while he steadily and never slipping
jumps and shifts his stance from one to another as they gallop;
so Ajax ranged crossing from deck to deck of the fast ships
taking huge strides, and his voice went always up to the bright sky
as he kept up a terrible bellow and urged on the Danaans
to defend their ships and their shelters. (*Il.* 15.679-680)

The simile of horse and rider is an exceptional image, particularly since the *Iliad* never depicts Ajax on horseback; he is foremost a man of the infantry. Yet the analogy with an acrobatic horse-master as commanding general, able to marshal and organize disparate forces into a cohesive defensive front, underlines Ajax's critical role as the final defense of the Greeks. Bradshaw (1991: 107) remarks that "controlling yoked horses...is a standard trope for self-mastery, for personal harmony or dynamic equipoise," and further sees this simile as a means to express Ajax's tactical prowess, in contrast to the hackneyed image of Ajax as an inarticulate man of brawn. At the ships, he assumes many military roles as he jumps strategically to where defense is most urgent, demonstrating furious battle tenacity, and all the while exhorting his comrades to not relent.

The image is also one distinctly connected to naval warfare. While Ajax skillfully jumps from one "swift ship" to another, he wields a $\xi\upsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\nu\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\alpha\ \nu\acute{\alpha}\upsilon\mu\alpha\chi\omicron\nu$, "great naval battle-pike" (*Il.* 15.727-41). As he falls back into the "seven-foot mid-ship, and gave up the high deck of the balanced ship," Ajax continues to sweep attacking Trojans away with this weapon. Ajax's retreat into the ship's interior shows the situation as critical –Achaean existence depends on the defense of the ships, their ships are their salvation, as Ajax poignantly reminds them in exhortation. This $\phi\acute{\omicron}\omega\varsigma$, "light of salvation" (*Il.* 15.741), echoes its earlier use at *Il.* 6.5, where Ajax first broke the Trojan ranks and "brought $\phi\acute{\omicron}\omega\varsigma$ to his companions." At this point, Ajax comes to understand a hard truth: Zeus favors Hector. His defense, although dazzlingly courageous, is in vain. This is perhaps Ajax's most pitiable irony, that his essential warrior identity as the defensive fighter par excellence depends on Zeus' plan to allow Hector to advance against the Greek army—and all this in order to glorify Achilles, his friend, and "best of the Achaeans."

After Achilles

Ajax's story continues in the *Odyssey*, in the *Nekyia* at 11.541-67, when Odysseus encounters his shade in the Underworld. It is the earliest attestation of Ajax's loss of Achilles' armor to Odysseus, and of his suicide. How did the second greatest Achaean warrior come to such a bad end? Only in later tradition do we hear of Ajax's madness and violent assault on his Greek companions. Before Sophocles' play, any reference to madness seems to be connected with his suicide, which is firmly attested not only in Homeric tradition, but in the artistic record.¹¹⁸ But there are hints in the *Iliad* of the post-Iliadic Ajax.

Much of the *Iliad's* tragic quality lies in our knowledge of what will occur beyond the poem. Achilles' impending death, Ajax's suicide, and the sack of Troy—these are all external to the narrative of the *Iliad*. Yet because the poet can draw upon the audience's awareness of traditional Trojan War motifs, the *Iliad* can engage with its audience by alluding to events beyond its immediate scope.¹¹⁹ There are two major episodes in the *Iliad* that allude to the Judgment of the Arms: the fight over Patroclus' body and Ajax's loss in Patroclus' funeral games.

¹¹⁸ The earliest depiction of Ajax's suicide is a Protocorinthian aryballos, ca. 700BCE (Berlin: PM VI 3319). Exekias also depicts Ajax's suicide on an amphora ca. 558 BCE (Boulogne 558). Identification is made easier since Ajax is the only figure from myth to have flung himself on his sword.

¹¹⁹ According to neoanalyst readings, the *Iliad* used the narrative of an *Aethiopsis* at an earlier oral stage as its source, and some of the motifs found in the Homeric poems would have originated in these earlier stages. Burgess advocates for "post-neoanalysis," and attempts to identify an overarching mythological oral tradition as the source for Homeric motif transference. According to post-neoanalysis the narratives of cyclic epics would have been familiar to the Homeric poems, but there would be no intertextuality with specific epics. However, while there may not be allusion to other epics, the audience would be sufficiently versed in the Trojan War tradition to discern motif transference. See Davies 1989, Burgess 2001, Renkagos 2015.

With Patroclus' death in Book 16, a great struggle ensues over his corpse and lasts until the end of Book 17, when Menelaus and Meriones manage to recover his body while the two Aiantes perform a rearguard defensive action. In the wider Homeric tradition, as scholars have noted, Ajax's performance in the recovery of Patroclus' corpse stands out for its similarity to his role in the recovery of Achilles' body.¹²⁰ Patroclus' *aristeia*, his death, the recovery of his corpse, and the subsequent funeral games held in his honor are doublets for the death cycle of Achilles. Ajax plays a prominent role in both episodes since he secures the retrieval of Patroclus' corpse and carries Achilles' body from the field.¹²¹

In setting up the funeral games, Achilles alludes to *Il.*2.768-70, when Ajax is first named the best of the Achaeans after Achilles. Achilles' allusion foregrounds the forthcoming competition between the leading warriors as a contest for the new "best of the Achaeans" title. It cues the audience to its significance of a series of competitions in which Ajax, the "best while Achilles is angry," fairs quite poorly. Achilles' pronouncement in Book 22, together with Ajax's poor showing in the athletic contests, creates an end marker, indicating the end of Ajax's tenure as "best of the Achaeans," and thus alluding to his humiliation in the Judgment of the Arms.

¹²⁰ The lost Epic Cycle, specifically the *Aethiopis* and the *Little Iliad*, detailed Achilles' death, the struggle over his corpse, and his funeral games. They were preserved in epitome in Proclus' *Chrestomathy*, and although dates for the *Epic Cycle* are later than current estimates for the Homeric poems, tradition behind these lost epics reaches back into the same archaic mythological milieu that generated the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

¹²¹ Willcock conceives of the episode as a way to contrast the heroic achievement of two secondary heroes, Menelaus and Meriones, to Ajax and Odysseus, two mightier warriors who recover Achilles' corpse (Willcock in Bremer 1987: 193). The scholiast Aristonicus also commented on the resemblance of these episodes. At *Il.*17.719, when Ajax exhorts Menelaus and Meriones to carry Patroclus' corpse from battle, he remarks that "more recent writers have derived Achilles being carried by Ajax with Odysseus defending him. But if Homer had been describing the death of Achilles, he would not have the body carried by Ajax, as the later writers do."

Ajax's wrestling competition with Odysseus serves an allusion to the much more serious *agon* for Achilles' armor in the post-Iliadic tradition. In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus encounters Ajax's shade, he addresses him with the familiar Iliadic designation, "best after the blameless son of Peleus." This intertextual allusion connects the Ajax who lost the arms of Achilles in the *Odyssey* and the Epic cycle with the greatest warrior in the *Iliad* after Achilles.¹²² It colors the character of the Iliadic Ajax in light of the Odyssean, and vice versa. As Bradshaw notes, "antagonism resulting from the contest illuminates passages of the *Iliad* in which the two heroes (Ajax and Odysseus) are somehow related."

Additionally, the wrestling match provides another instance of the interconnectedness between Ajax, Achilles, and Odysseus. The language used in their bout is architectural:

ζωσαμένω δ' ἄρα τώ γε βάτην ἐς μέσσον ἀγῶνα,
ἀγκὰς δ' ἀλλήλων λαβέτην χερσὶ στιβαρῆσιν
ὥς ὅτ' ἀμείβοντες, τοὺς τε κλυτὸς ἦραρε τέκτων
δῶματος ὑψηλοῦ βίας ἀνέμων ἀλεείνων.

The two men, girt up, strode out into the midst of the circle,
and grappled each other in the hook of their heavy arms,
as when rafters lock, when a renowned architect has fitted them
in the roof of a high house to keep out the force of the wind's spite.
(*Il.*23.710-13)

The image of a house's structure, evoked by these two warriors locked in contention as Achilles judges suggests a triangulated and balanced strife, which might serve as a metaphor for the integrity and soundness of the Greek war effort. The *Iliad's* parting shot of Ajax faring poorly in a contest with Odysseus points to the greatest humiliation of his career. However, Ajax's poor showing is not due to diminished arete, but to Odysseus' subterfuge—he trips Ajax.

¹²² "A clear illustration of the intertextual referencing that binds *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together", Bradshaw in Pozzi and Wickersham 1991: 101.

In this chapter, I have offered an interpretation of the Homeric Ajax, which I shall suggest, provided fifth-century Athenians with a template for exploring their own identity in the Persian Wars and in the build-up to the Peloponnesian War. This Ajax would not only display attributes that might appeal to Athens' new political reality after the Persian invasions but also usher in the larger framework of the Trojan War, that is, the idea of an epic clash between Hellenes and Barbarians, and the connotations of divine retribution for mortal transgression. Later writers like Aeschylus, Sophocles will assume these associations with the figure of Ajax and appropriate them for an Athenian audience grappling with its identity in the turbulent fifth century.

Chapter 2: The Persian War as Trojan War: An Athenian Ajax in Aeschylus' *Persians*

I divide this chapter into two sections; in the first, I lay the groundwork for my reading of Athens and Ajax in Aeschylus' *Persians*, examining the earliest textual evidence revealing how Greeks paralleled the Persian Wars with the Trojan War, and how recent scholarship has addressed this. Looking first at Simonides' Plataea Poem (ca. 479-78 BCE), I analyze how it presents the Trojan War as paradigm for the Persian War and how it features Achilles as a symbol for Spartan military action at the battle of Plataea. This correlates Greece's epic encounter against Troy with its more recent clash against Persia, juxtaposing the heroic distant past and recent history, and imputes the epic gravitas of Homeric poetry to the struggle between Greece and Persia. This paradigm also provided means for Greeks to formulate a historical narrative, and in turn, to facilitate a new identity based on the ready parallel of the shared cultural Trojan War tradition.

In the second section, I suggest that Aeschylus' *Persians* (472 BCE) responds to Simonides' *Plataea Poem* by presenting Telamonian Ajax as an epic model for the battle of Salamis. I argue that Ajax pervades Aeschylus' play through references, Homeric allusions, echoes, and diction that connect Athenian victory at Salamis with Ajax in his role as "bulwark of the Achaeans" in the *Iliad*. While typically considered a Panhellenic text, I will argue that *Persians* reveals a greater Athenocentric perspective than was previously thought. I suggest that Aeschylus saturates *Persians*' treatment of the battle of Salamis with allusions that connect Ajax with Athens in its role as orchestrator of Greek victory, in order to brand itself the "defender of Hellas" and "bulwark of the Hellenes" in the celebration culture of the 470s.

Introduction

Shortly after the battles of Salamis and Plataea, Greek poleis began to parallel the Persian War with the Trojan War in a way that would foster new political identities in the fifth century.

Following what must have been considerable reflection upon the overwhelming foreign threat they had repelled, city-states began to celebrate their victory as the result of Hellenic collaboration in the face of a common foreign enemy, leading to what many saw as a resurgent atmosphere of Panhellenism. In what Oliver Taplin (Taplin 2006: 24) terms “celebration culture,” Greeks of the 470s began to compare their recent coalitional effort with the martial deeds of their epic past and celebrated their achievement through literature and monumental architecture.

However, as scholars have pointed out, this notion of Greek unity has been highly overstated and the Persian Wars, rather than a catalyst for a new stage of Hellenic unity, are rightly viewed as a wrinkle in the interminable internecine conflicts of individual poleis (Osborne 2006). Hellenic collaboration, according to Osborne (2006: 343) “is largely a myth,” and the unity of Greeks facing Persia was a “slight and temporary concession” to the continuous conflicts of Greek poleis. Moreover, the Persian Wars’ aura of Panhellenism was also short-lived (if it ever fully materialized). As Taplin (2006: 4) remarks: “It was no doubt quite true that appeals to shared Hellenism were aspirations which were in reality in tension with deep-seated and time-honored agonistic rivalries.” Constant competition was the established rule of life for Greek city-states, a fact which their anomalous collaboration in facing a common foreign threat

would prove too insubstantial to change; in other words, Greek unity was the exception, not the rule.¹²³

Nevertheless, the façade of Greek unity persisted. In particular, the leading city-states, Athens and Sparta, exploited it to serve their own political ambitions. But while the coalition remained intact until 478, differences between Athens and Sparta materialized as old competitive attitudes resurfaced in the power vacuum after Persian retreat. The clash with Persia had allied the established hoplite army of militaristic Sparta with the naval power of democratic Athens in an uneasy coalition. Athens' newly acquired trireme armada unsettled Sparta's aristocratic hoplite-class (as well as the aristocratic faction at Athens) and suspicions deepened as years accumulated since the alliance of convenience which had enabled Greek victory against Persia.

In the polarized landscape of the 470s, Athens and Sparta wielded the mirage of a united Greece in order to persuade other poleis to follow their lead. One major push in the proliferation of this propaganda was the use of the Persian War as a renewed (and inverted) Trojan War in which Sparta and Athens attempted to demonstrate a close connection to the Panhellenic ethos of the Homeric tradition. Sparta and Athens used the Trojan War paradigm as a model for Greek leadership through the appropriation of Homeric heroes who were associated with their ancestral forebears of the epic past. While Menelaus and the Dioscouri might have seemed obvious choices for Sparta, the New Simonides fragments, specifically the Plataea Poem, reveal that Achilles was also a model for Sparta. By employing Achilles, Sparta could introduce epic vengeance into its victory at Plataea, by comparing the Homeric tradition's greatest warrior with Greece's most formidable hoplite army. I shall argue that Ajax similarly provided Athens with a

¹²³ Osborne writes that "Persian defeat saved Greece from an imposed end to interpolis conflict. The liberty which they preserved allowed the Greeks to continue to interfere with each other's liberty" (2006:243).

comparable exemplum for the battle of Salamis, one which Aeschylus features in the *Persians*. Achilles and Ajax thus offer Athens and Sparta an umbrella of Homeric Panhellenism under which they could refresh the distant epic past in order to arrange Persian War battles on the same heroic continuum with the Trojan War and display Salamis and Plataea as their own flagship victories to the Greek world.¹²⁴

The decade following Salamis and Plataea ushered in the time of “celebration culture,” when Greeks sought to memorialize victory over Persia (Taplin 2005:3). These years also saw tragedy begin to assert itself as a vehicle for Panhellenism, one that would come to rival the *Iliad* for its celebration of the epic past. In this atmosphere, Taplin argues, Aeschylus produced *Persians* as a “special edition tragedy,” in order to compete with other celebratory literature like Simonides’ Plataea poem. In fact, Schachter (1998: 25-30) sees verbal echoes of the Plataea poem in *Persians* and interprets Aeschylus’ play as a response to Simonides’ work. Moreover, *Persians* establishes Athens for the first time as “defender of the Hellenes,” as a result of its celebratory offering of the battle of Salamis as a Panhellenist venture in which Aeschylus celebrates Athens’ leadership at Salamis within a Homeric landscape.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ As early as 470 BCE Pindar categorizes the battles of Plataea and Salamis as markedly Spartan and Athenian, respectively, crediting Athens with Salamis and Sparta with Plataea (*Pyth.* 1.75-77). He also credits Athens with the establishment of “the glorious foundation of freedom” in an encomium on the battle of Artemisium (*Fr.* 65). Schachter (1998: 25-30) suggests that Pausanias commissioned the Plataea Elegy in order to market Spartan prowess to the Ionian Greeks to gather and support for continued military action against Persia in the aftermath of the Persian Wars.

¹²⁵ The battle of Plataea was, in historical fact, a coalitional effort, as was Salamis, and both *Persians* and the *Plataea Elegy* refer to other city-states which contributed to Hellenic victory. Nonetheless, both poets managed to incorporate pro-Spartan or pro-Athenian biases into their works by celebrating each battle as a victorious coalitional battle *orchestrated* by either polis. By including allied city-states in these works, Sparta and Athens could advance an image of collaborative Panhellenism in which they themselves conspicuously led coalitional forces.

The Persian Wars radically altered how Greek poleis understood themselves in the fifth century. Scholars have come to identify Persian defeat as the incipient moment in the development of Greek political freedom –that is, Greeks began to articulate for themselves the concept of political liberty in light of their unlikely victory.¹²⁶ Moreover, evidence from the early post-war period indicates that Greeks, especially Athenians, came to view Persian defeat as an evasion of the “yoke of servitude” (*Pers.* 50), incorporating Homeric diction into literature and monuments in order to articulate what political freedom meant.¹²⁷ In fact, shortly after the war’s end, an inscription on a monument (*Sim.*XXa FGE/C) dedicated to the Athenians who fought at Salamis and Plataea, erected in the agora, praises Athenians who “both on foot and on swift-sailing ships kept all Greece from seeing the day of slavery.”¹²⁸ While the phrase “day of slavery” δούλιον ἦμαρ appears throughout Homer, it particularly resonates with the expression at *Il.*6.463 ἀμύνειν δούλιον ἦμαρ, which figures in Andromache’s lament about what will happen to Troy and to her if Hector dies. Simonides in the Plataea poem (25) uses the same phrase to praise the Greeks who fought at Plataea, playing on her words, as now Greeks have saved

¹²⁶ According to Raaflaub, Greeks began to conceive of the Persian Wars as “Freedom Wars” shortly after the war. He argues that until the Persian invasions, Greeks (Sicilians included) had not developed the political concept of liberty in response to warfare or political alliances; Raaflaub submits that Athens in particular was chiefly responsible for this shift with the recognition of the gulf between their “isonomic” polis and the tyrannical government of Achaemenid Persia (2005:102-117).

¹²⁷ This would become a *topos* for Athenian identity as Athens soon espoused an ideological stance asserting that Greeks were free and that barbarians were naturally given to slavery (Raaflaub 2004: 60).

¹²⁸ Engraved on a monument in the Athenian agora, the monument was originally thought to concern Salamis and Plataea, but with new fragments, scholars like Barron think Salamis is the more likely focus (Barron 1990).

ἀνδρῶν τῶνδ’ ἀρετῆ[ς ἔσται κλέ]ος ἄφθι[τον] αἰε...
 [... ..]ρ[]νέμωσι θεοί
 ἔσχον γὰρ πεζοί τα [καί] ὠκυπόρων ἐπὶ νηῶν
 Ἑλλά[δα μ]ὴ πᾶσαν δούλιον ἦμαρ ἰδεῖν.

themselves, “warding off the day of slavery from Sparta and Hellas” οἱ Σπάρτ[η]ι τε καὶ Ἑλλάδι δούλιον ἦμ[α]ρ / ἔσχον] ἀμυνόμ[ενοι]. Early after victory, then, Greeks came to understand the magnitude of the Persian threat they evaded, and were in need of proportionally greater themes to explain how they prevailed against Persia (Raaflaub 2004: 86). Accordingly, the Trojan War motif provided a ready and proportional analogue to what the Greeks felt they had experienced in their confrontation with Persia.

Moreover, scholars argue that the Greek experience in the Persian Wars was a contributing factor in the formulation of a historical mode of thinking.¹²⁹ While historiography as we define it would not appear until much later, there existed commemorative media, epinician odes, elegy, and tragedy, in which Greek authors articulated a cultural memory of the past.¹³⁰ Greek mythic tradition played a large role in offering a narrative for this articulation and provided a means for Greeks of the fifth century to secure continuity with tradition when they assimilated the events of the recent past to the Trojan War tradition.¹³¹ Accordingly, Greeks sought a narrative for their new political reality after having expelled the militarily superior Persian Empire from their land, and the Trojan War tradition provided a relevant analogue. Athens used this tradition to describe its experience in the Persian invasions by incorporating it into an ideological framework. Employing the Trojan War to articulate the Persian War experience, Athens conscripted individual heroes for specific battles, as the Eion Epigrams demonstrate for Menestheus (which I explore later), and which Aeschylus’ *Persians* reveals for

¹²⁹ See Bowie 2001: 44-56; Thomas 1989; Hornblower 2004 and especially Marincola 1997: 20-21.

¹³⁰ For the notion of cultural memory, see Assmann (1992).

¹³¹ Cf. Gehrke’s “Intentional History,” which claims that it is the narrative element itself that enlivens historical writing and makes it understandable to a culture. “It is based on the elementary connection between narration and experience. Only in the literary form of narration does historiography perform its specific function and thus makes it tangible” (Gehrke 2014:124).

Ajax at the battle of Salamis. Yet despite this use of Ajax as a Homeric exemplum that would contribute to its development of political liberty, Ajax would also be used to justify Athens' increasing imperial arc in the fifth century.

After the battles of 480 and 479, and because of its achievement at Salamis and as a rising political star, Athens was better able to shift its local propaganda, much involving territorial conflicts in which Ajax was used, to the stage. Athenian sources soon began to propagandize the idea of political freedom by presenting the action at Salamis as an epic feat, understood by way of the island's most famous denizen, Ajax, and allowing Athens to craft itself as the fifth-century "bulwark of the Achaeans." Moreover, both Athens and Sparta presented Salamis and Plataea as especially crucial moments in which each polis preserved Greek freedom, each vying for preeminence in the recent past as they attempted to recruit newly liberated poleis in the eastern Aegean. Like Athens with Ajax, Simonides crafts the Plataea poem by invoking Achilles as an exemplum for Spartan valor at the battle of Plataea. Accordingly, he seems to have wed the actions of the recent historical past to ready and culturally resonant narratives in fifth-century Greece: the Homeric poems. While the Homeric underpinnings of Herodotus' and Thucydides' accounts have been addressed (Marincola 2001: 9-11), and Pindar's odes noted for its proto-historical impulse (Nagy 1987: 175-84), the Plataea poem reveals the earliest example in which Greeks used the Trojan War tradition to interpret and provide a narrative structure to events from the recent past.

When in the course of the 470s the Greek coalition began to unravel and political rivalries resurfaced, poleis began to covet their roles in the Persian Invasions and vied with one another over whose achievements excelled the other (Hdt. 8.93.1, 9.71). In this atmosphere,

ironically, the decade of “celebratory literature” witnessed the disintegration of the Hellenic alliance, and disagreements arose among the allies concerning how Greeks would continue the war against Persia and prevent another Persian invasion. The coalition was formally dissolved in 478, when Sparta ceded leadership of the Hellenic alliance to Athens, who soon after formed the Delian League to continue the fight against Persia. While the original intent of the Delian League was to liberate Greeks from Persia (Thuc. 1.96.1), it soon used its propaganda of liberation for the opposite effect, in order to oppress and extort Delian League member states. Accordingly, what we see in *Persians* as an attempt to laud Athens at Salamis by alluding to the image of “Ajax at the ships,” may in retrospect signpost a warning of hubris, and seem like an expression of apprehension when we turn to the Sophoclean Ajax in the later mid fifth century.

The New Simonides

In order to foreground my discussion on Ajax and the Trojan War as a paradigm for Aeschylus’ *Persians*, in the following section I discuss Simonides’ *Plataea* poem and examine how scholarship has treated its inclusion of Achilles and the Trojan War paradigm as an analogue for Sparta and the battle of Plataea. One of the discoveries resulting from the New Simonides’ *Plataea* poem was how soon after the Persian invasions Greeks began to parallel their experience with the Homeric contest against Troy.¹³² The *Plataea* poem (*POxy* 3965, fr.10W2-18W2), published in 1992, is the earliest textual attestation of a Persian War narrative connected to the

¹³² The *Plataea* poem is not uncontroversial. Scholars debate generally whether “historical elegy” or “narrative elegy” ought to have its own genre, and its fragmentary nature makes it difficult to arrive at definite narrative forms (D. Sider 2006, Kowerski 2005: 63-73). Kowerski is skeptical that there is enough evidence for a discernable narrative. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that there is a discernable narrative, that it involves treatment of the Battle of Plataea, and that Simonides used Achilles and the Trojan War as an analogue (Grethlein 2010: 52).

Trojan War.¹³³ Despite its highly fragmentary state, scholars agree that Simonides probably meant to equate the Greeks who fought at Plataea with the Greeks who fought at Troy (Parsons 2001: 55-64). Most scholars agree that it celebrates Achilles' death and funeral, and that it references Priam, Paris' crime, and the divine retribution which Troy suffered for his crimes. The poem weds these epic themes to the recent mustering before the battle of Plataea, all prefaced by an invocation to the muse as a *ἐπίκουρος* "helper," (line 21). The fragments conclude with a reference to the Spartan commander Pausanias, who leads a Panhellenic army assisted by Menelaus and the Dioscouroi.¹³⁴ While such accounts of heroic epiphanies during Greek battles are not uncommon, Simonides integrates the Trojan War's *raison d' être* into his account of the battle of Plataea by recalling Paris' transgression (10-11) while also reminding his audience of Troy's divine destruction (12). As such, the *Plataea* poem is remarkable for its rarity as an early example of elegy utilizing the Trojan War as a paradigm for a contemporary historical event.¹³⁵

¹³³ I have included West's heavily restored translation in "Appendix A." "Accordingly, the reference to Achilles in the elegy of Simonides is to be understood within the tradition of memory, which is the earliest evidence of such an analogy (Trojan War as Persian War) (Michael Jung 2006: 229). "Before 1992 no one would have connected Achilles specifically with the battle of Plataea or with the Plataiomachoi" (Shaw 2001: 165). Albert Schachter assembles three points of general scholarly agreement: 1) It was commissioned soon after the battle of Plataea as part of a festival to honor war-dead, 2) it celebrates Greek victory and demonstrates strong pan-Hellenism since it commemorates more than one polis, although it grants Sparta top billing; 3) it celebrates Achilles, paralleling the Persian War with the Trojan War. Schachter reads Achilles as the most important feature of the poem (1998: 25-6).

¹³⁴ Other fragments in the New Simonides corpora have bolstered evidence for (and raised more questions about) two other poems on individual battles: a likely elegy concerning the sea battle at Artemisium (480 BCE) and an elegy in praise of the Athenian victory at Salamis (480 BCE) (Rutherford 2001: 35-38, Kowerski 2005: 63-107). Sider and Boedekker argue that the poem was performed shortly after the battle, perhaps within the following two years. Boedekker further suggests that the poem may indicate how contemporary war dead were heroized in the decades following the war (Boedekker 2001: 153). Rutherford argues that it was performed at Plataea itself during the Eleutheria festival (Rutherford 2001: 40).

¹³⁵ D. Boedekker (1995) "Genre of Plataea"; Further evidence for "historical elegy" can be found in Mimnermus' *Smyrneis* and in the *Eunomia* and *Politeia* of Tyrtaeus.

However, Simonides not only parallels the Trojan War with the Persian invasions, but also presents Paris' criminal act as an affront which Menelaus still makes him answer for when he marches with Pausanias and contemporary Greeks in order to vanquish a new eastern aggressor. The juxtaposition of Paris' epic violation with the recent mustering of Hellenic forces at the battle of Plataea elevates the poem and the battle of Plataea to an epic register. Accordingly, Simonides unites the epic past with recent history in a way that would allow fifth-century Greeks to see their war against Persia as an iteration of vengeance stretching back to Homeric tradition.

The Plataea poem displays the Homeric tradition thematically and in a Panhellenic context. By incorporating several named Greek allied city-states, the poem achieves a politically diplomatic tenor. For instance, in lines 13-14, τοὶ δὲ πόλι]ν πέρσαντες ἀοίδιμον [οἴκαδ' ἔκ]οντο φέρτατοι ἠρ]ώων ἀγέμαχοι Δαναοί[, "the valiant Danaans, [best of warr]riors, sacked the much-sung-of-city, and came [home,]" the use of the name Danaans, a Homeric term used to denote all Greeks who fought at Troy, frames the subsequent narrative of contemporary military action at Plataea with the paradigm of the shared Hellenic mythology of the Trojan War. Despite its Spartan emphasis in which Spartan geography is mentioned at line 29, "From Eurotas and from [Sparta's] town they [marched,]" οἳ μὲν ἄρ' Εὐ]ρώταν καὶ Σπάρτης ἄστρ]υ λιπόντ[ες. Spartan commanders and epic figures are recalled, as the poem also mentions Corinth, Megara, and Eleusis (lines 36-9). This not only allows the Greek audience to see a thematic parallel between the Danaans in the allied Greek effort at Troy and Greeks who fought Persians, but suggests that their contemporary locales represent Homeric contingents in a recent Hellenic war against a new Troy.

Grethlein (2010: 55) argues that Simonides' Trojan backdrop for Plataea offers "an exemplary use of the past, which directly juxtaposes two different events...[so that] the present

seems to re-enact the past.” Grethlein suggests that by doing this the poem can minimize the threatening idea that the Greek past is a product of chance, and that this offers stability through the fusion of the narrative of traditional epic and the memory of contemporary events (2013: 7-15).¹³⁶ This forges a sense of cultural regularity and consistency in which the poem can reframe the accomplishments of contemporary Greeks by presenting Plataea as an iteration, of sorts, of the Trojan War. Simonides allows Plataea’s contemporary history to attain monumental significance through juxtaposition with the gravitas of the Homeric tradition.¹³⁷

While the Trojan War paradigm helps facilitate the poem’s Panhellenism, its focus on leading personalities underscores its Spartan leanings and directs our attention to the movers of the plots of both the *Iliad* and the battle of Plataea. The “valiant Danaans” (line 134) who are instrumental in piloting “the chariot of divine justice” against “[P]aris’ wickedness” (lines 11-12) can be read as contemporary Greeks subordinated, through a collective anonymity, to military leaders and this reveals, I suggest, the political reality of post-war Greece. While certainly many Greek poleis fought at Plataea, it was Sparta whose hoplite infantry held the wing of honor and led the Greek coalition against Persia (Hdt.9.28.2).¹³⁸ Moreover, as Schachter maintains, when Simonides uses “Danaans” to describe Greeks who fought at Troy, we may understand this to

¹³⁶ Grethlein (2010: 7) explains that this contingency serves as “the frame for both actions and chance, and results in a tension between expectation and experience in our consciousness. On the basis of previous experiences, expectations about the future are formed and guide our actions.” For Simonides, Grethlein (13) states that “the presentation of polis history [is] a continuum and the use of mythical foils are attempts to counterbalance contingency of chance.”

¹³⁷ The Plataea elegy itself is a way for the Spartans and others who fought at Plataea to achieve *athanaton kleos* that Homeric epic provided for Greeks at Troy” (Boedeker 2001: 152).

¹³⁸ Moreover, Sparta and Athens were building up their own power blocs, with Athens’ recently acquired trireme armada unsettling many leaders in Sparta. Constant Greek bickering over places of honor in the phalanx (left or right wing), which Herodotus notes in the Battle of Plataea, belies the idea that Panhellenism born of a common enemy would quell Greek inter-polis rivalries. That Herodotus reports the Spartan *strategos*, Eurybiades had to be given command of the Greek fleet in the Battle of Salamis due to Sparta’s established prestige, provides another example.

mean only those from the Peloponnese, that is their Spartan ancestors, since the mythical Danaus, from whom the Danaans receive their name, is one of the founding figures of Argos in the Peloponnese. Further, Schachter sees the Plataea poem's Trojan War paradigm as a way to minimize Athenian involvement at Plataea, since Athens plays a minimal role in Homeric epic, and as a way to downplay Athenian action at the battle of Sestos, which occurred one year after Plataea (Schachter 1998: 29). To be sure, the Plataea poem praises Sparta for its role in the battle, when it led the Hellenic coalition and held the position of honor on the right wing of the phalanx. Historical reality notwithstanding however, political faction and interpolis rivalry were deeply imbedded in the Hellenic ethos, and in the Plataea elegy we ought not to let the smoke of Hellenic unity in the Persian Wars obscure the ways in which Greek poleis frequently fought with one another.

For Simonides to name the epic muse ἐπίκουρος "assistant" is odd. Stehle (2001:110) argues that at the time of its writing, ἐπίκουρος meant "foreign auxiliary," and that as such "the Muse is not the guarantor of truth" because of "her supplementary status." Simonides deviates from epic convention when he initiates his poem in this manner. When the Homeric poet sings, the muse "sings" through the bard, and the poet becomes a vessel directed by the divinity. The Homeric muse is an external referent, the guarantor outside of the poem vouching for the narrative's veracity. While the Trojan War's narrative stretches back to the deep past of Greek oral poetry, and for this Simonides relies on her, as a probable witness to the battle, he positions himself as an authoritative witness and the muse's helper. Accordingly, Simonides begins a new partnership wherein the bard and muse work together, a moment where the epic past and recent past meet to celebrate contemporary achievements.

Aloni (2001: 86-105) argues that Simonides himself can act as an external guarantor of his narrative because he witnessed the battle of Plataea.¹³⁹ He notes that the Muse's assistance is only partially needed for this reason. Accordingly, Simonides could validate his own work, but for references to the Trojan War, he relies on the Muse. Moreover, Stehle suggests that Simonides' performative role must be taken into account since Plataea veterans would make up a significant number of his audience.¹⁴⁰ She argues that invoking the Muse as a guarantor of their experience would discomfit combat veterans who witnessed Plataea's violent reality (Stehle 2001: 106-119). By partnering with the Muse then, Simonides united the battle experience of the *Plataeomachoi* with the epic register of the Trojan War, elevating their recent efforts to the heroic standard of Achilles, while at the same time conveying the assurance of someone who witnessed the battle.

In a poem glorifying Sparta so soon after the battle of Plataea, Achilles' presence is surprising. He is not substantially connected to Sparta: his cult has associations rather with the Hellespont region and with Phthia, suggesting as an explanation tenuous connections with his mother Thetis, and noting that perhaps the poem was performed at an Isthmian festival in her honor (Shaw 1991). However, as a Panhellenic paradigm the Trojan war allowed Simonides to parallel Greek figures of the recent past with figures from the Homeric tradition; while Sparta could not exclusively claim Achilles based on local cult, Simonides could appropriate his status as the greatest warrior of the Panhellenic Trojan War tradition to foreground Sparta's reputation as the most formidable military power in Greece at that time. We know that soon after Plataea,

¹³⁹ "In the 470s the speaker's appeal to the Muse to be *epikouros* must have been arresting." (Stehle 2001: 110)

¹⁴⁰ Herodotus and Thucydides' accounts must surely have been informed by the war stories of veterans who participated in the battles they narrate; Thucydides was himself an exiled general as a result of his own actions in the battle of Amphipolis (Thuc. 4.108).

Greeks began to see coalitional Persian War battles as either Athenian or Spartan victories. Certainly Herodotus presents Thermopylae as the supreme moment for the Spartan militaristic ethos, while admitting (with calculated reservation) that the Athenians at Salamis were indeed the “saviors of Hellas” (Hdt. 7.139.5-6). Aeschylus’ *Persians* (472 BCE) celebrates Athenian leadership at the battle of Salamis, despite coloring that achievement with a hue of Panhellenism, and Pindar’s *Pythian* 1 (470 BCE) addresses both Salamis and Plataea, neatly dividing Salamis as an Athenian victory, and honoring Sparta with Plataea (75-8).

However, the *Plataea* poem is not merely thematically Homeric, but also contains much Homeric diction. The *athanaton kleos* of Homer’s Achilles is transferred to the young Greek dead on the field of Plataea.¹⁴¹ The word ἀοίδιμος “well-sung,” (line 14) and ὠκύμορος “quick-fated” (18) are clear Homeric borrowings, used here in reference to the Trojan War,¹⁴² and to describe the lives of Greeks who died to take it. This diction unites the locale of an epic Greek victory with the recent Greek victory at Plataea. Simonides links the epic past and the valorous present, Troy and Plataea, through the words ἀοίδιμος, and ὠκύμορος, now appropriate for Greeks who died at Plataea, whose bravery Simonides’ poem ensures to be “well-sung” for future generations. Moreover, the simile at line 2 probably describing Achilles, in which he falls as a pine-tree in the glades, heavily echoes Homeric similes of dying warriors (Cf. *Il.* 13.389-91, 16.482-4). As Barchiesi (2001: 258) notes, “the tree-felling imagery must be rooted in Thetis’

¹⁴¹ “Surely the poet addresses Achilles, who if not a god is a great hero, because he is aiming to do for Pausanias and the other heroes of the battle of Plataea what Homer did for Achilles and the heroes of the Trojan War” (Lloyd-Jones 1994: 1).

¹⁴² While the Homeric poet used ἀοίδιμος only once, the narrative context of its single appearance at *Il.* 6.357-8 is poignant. When Helen relates to Hector that the Greeks have proclaimed an ill-fate on herself and Paris, she states that they will both be ἀοίδιμοι for future generations. Because ἀοίδιμος is a hapax in Homer, it may emphasize its appearance in Simonides, since his audience were likely attuned to its single appearance and context in the *Iliad*.

anticipated lament” at *Il.* 18.56-7, when Thetis recalled Achilles as a child, “like a young shoot...a tree on a mountain slope.”¹⁴³ He sees this as specific to Achilles. Aloni compares line 6, the recollection of Achilles’ burial rites, with *Od.* 24.36-97, when Agamemnon in the underworld states that Achilles and Patroclus share the same urn (Aloni 2001: 86). He also argues that the Homeric recollection of Achilles’ burial would resonate with the “commemoration of the warriors who had died at Plataea” (2001: 87). Altogether, these allusions evoke an epic sense of bereavement, appropriate for young warriors whose recent deaths at Plataea would surely have spurred similar sentiments of grief. Several scholars read Achilles as a paradigm for the Plataean war-dead, and understand his inclusion and the references to his death to symbolize all Greeks who perished in battle against Xerxes (West 1993:6, Stehle 2001).

Pavese argues that Achilles appears as an analogue to Leonidas at the battle of Thermopylae, whose last stand is mirrored in Achilles’ final moments before the Scaean gate (1995: 24). Although not without controversy, this interpretation promotes the idea that Plataea was Spartan vengeance for the death of its king, while revealing a tendency to analogize the greatest warrior of the *Iliad* with the greatest infantry warriors of contemporary Greece, whose actions at Plataea are to be interpreted as vengeance.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, Achilles’ Panhellenic importance is commemorated by intimations of his death and funeral, and murder by Paris at the

¹⁴³ Barchiesi (2001: 258) argues further that “the tradition has it that Achilles was not struck at the throat or the breast –as is usually the case with Homeric warriors who fall to the ground “like a tree”–but at the heel or ankle. Achilles’ fall is modelled on that of a tall pine not only because of its height, but also because his body was felled by a blow to the base, just like a tall trunk assailed almost at its root by the woodcutters.”

¹⁴⁴ Shaw suggests that Achilles’ appearance in the poem is a combination of cultic identity and epic identity and posits that the occasion of its performance, perhaps the Isthmian Games, had special connections to Achilles. Shaw sees Achilles as a parallel for Pausanias (2001: 164-181). Leonidas’ recent death, according to Pavese (1995: 22), is relevant in addition to the conspicuous appearance of Pausanias.

Scaean Gates; at Plataea, these epic transgressions are transferred onto invading Persians, whose destruction at Plataea was provoked by the death of a Spartan king at Thermopylae.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, the invocation of Achilles offers distinct “military inspiration” (Stehle 2001: 112). Simonides invokes Achilles like a commander does who invokes a divinity or cult figure for assistance before battle, underscoring the poet’s role as *strategos*. By doing so and by naming the Muse an ἐπίκουρος, Stehle (2001: 112) thinks Simonides can “foster battle spirit” and create a persona of bard and military leader, not unlike Achilles’ warrior and singer identity in the *Iliad* (*Il.*9.189). Moreover, she (Stehle 2001: 113) points out that Simonides names his work, “this grateful song-array of mine” (23-4), describing it as κόσμος “good-order,” a term which in military contexts means “the preservation of good order during an advance” (Hdt. 8.86). Simonides describes the advance of the Greek army at Plataea like the forward movement of his song.¹⁴⁶

While battle invocations often address local deities in proximity to battle, Achilles’ appearance seems to complicate this idea. Hailing from Phthia in north-central Greece according to tradition, Achilles has no substantial association with Boeotia, whether mythic or cultic. But if we consider Achilles strictly in his military capacity, as the premier Greek warrior of assault—the “best of the Achaeans”—he acquires an emblematic role for the Spartan military ethos. In

¹⁴⁵ Aloni argues that Simonides focuses chiefly on Achilles’ death and the fall of Troy, noting that the text “dwells upon these two events” (2001: 94). To my mind, by focusing on these two events, the poem presents Achilles’ death and Troy’s destruction in a consequential relationship, which in turn might allude to Persian defeat at Plataea as the consequence of an earlier offense—the death of Leonidas? Scholars have argued that Herodotus based his narrative of the struggle over Leonidas’ corpse on the struggle over Patroclus’ in the *Iliad*. Accordingly, scholars also note that Patroclus’ death and funeral in the *Iliad* are substantial allusions to Achilles’ death and funeral in the wider Homeric tradition.

¹⁴⁶ Aeschylus also uses the term κόσμος at *Persians* 399-400, when the messenger describes the advance of the Greek squadron at Salamis as “well-disciplined and in order” εὐτάκτως...κόσμω.

Achilles' *aristeia* ending in Hector's death, the *Iliad* narrates the most devastating one-man assault against an enemy position. Wielding his pelian-ash spear, Achilles routs the Trojan battle line. Until Plataea, the full might of the Spartan infantry had not faced the Persian army; by recalling Achilles from the *Iliad*, Simonides can juxtapose the traditional Greek warrior par excellence with Spartan hoplites at Plataea.

Achilles provided an acceptable model for Greek cooperation within the new zeitgeist of celebration culture after the Persian wars. Shaw has argued that while Agamemnon led Greeks to victory at Troy, it was Thucydides who describes the first Hellenes as the "followers of Achilles" (Thuc.1.3.2-3). She argues (2001:165) that while Homer hardly uses the term "Hellenes," preferring Danaans, Argives, and Achaeans, "it becomes understandable that, in an account of Panhellenic victory, the Hellenes should honor and invoke him." Moreover, as a figure whose cultic identity is associated with Troy, and who was sometimes identified as the leader of all Greeks, Achilles' Panhellenic status as Hellenic leader serves to buttress Spartan prestige at Plataea by reframing Sparta's role as a new Achilles leading a new Panhellenic army.

I suggest that Achilles operates in the *Plataea elegy* in a manner similar to Ajax in Aeschylus' *Persians*. As an epic paradigm who emblemizes Spartan valor at Plataea, Achilles supplies the Homeric model of martial excellence to represent Spartan military dominance in the decade after the Persian Wars. By juxtaposing Achilles and the Trojan War tradition with Sparta's role at Plataea, Simonides formalizes Sparta's ideal moment at Plataea in which coalitional Greeks banded together under its aegis and defeated the Persian army in battle. Aeschylus presents the battle of Salamis as Athens' great moment of Greek defense and depicts the Iliadic Ajax as its Homeric model. However, before turning to Aeschylus, let us take a look at the Eion epigrams.

Athens and the Trojan War as Model for the Persian Wars

After the Plataea Elegy, the Eion epigrams contain the earliest literary evidence for the Trojan War used as a paradigm for the Persian war. They were commissioned by Cimon and inscribed on three herms in the Athenian agora shortly after his successful campaign to flush out Persian troops entrenched in the Thracian coastal town of Eion (476-5 BCE). On the third herm is an epigram commemorating Cimon's achievement with an explicit reference to Athenian action in the Trojan War.¹⁴⁷ The epigrams stand as an early example of the way fifth-century Greeks attempted to present battles of the Persian War as a renewed Trojan War.¹⁴⁸ The poem highlights Menestheus and the Athenian contingent of the *Iliad* as analogues for Athens at the siege of Eion, directly connecting the Athenians who fought at the siege of Eion with their epic ancestors who fought at the siege of Troy, led by the Athenian warrior Menestheus. According to Jacoby (1945:203), the Eion poet "chooses the one Panhellenic title of Athens to glory which is also the one fact comparable with the historic event he is out to praise --a siege and occupation of a strongly defended town of the barbarians."

A minor character in the *Iliad*, Menestheus leads the relatively obscure Athenian contingent with fifty ships to Troy (*Il.* 2.557). Counted among his exploits is an ability to muster troops in the heat of battle (*Il.* 7.161), and he once summons Telamonian Ajax for assistance when he faces assault from Sarpedon and Glaucos (*Il.* 17.240). Rosenbloom (2006:14), commenting on Menestheus in the Eion epigram, notes: "Since Homer depicted the Athenian Menestheus as a leader, all Athenians are leaders both in war and in manliness; what is true of a

¹⁴⁷ The Eion epigrams can be found in Aeschines. *In Ctes.* 183, Simonides. *XL FGE*, Plutarch. *Cimon* 7.4-5.

¹⁴⁸ "The Eion poem, inscribed on three herms in the agora, with its analogy between the Athenians who besieged the Persians in Thrace and those who fought at Troy, shows that these comparisons were in the air after Plataea." (Boedeker 2001:126)

single Athenian in the past is true of all Athenians in the present.” The Eion epigram focuses on Menestheus, not only because the siege of Eion was an Athenian endeavor, but also because the poem serves a distinctly Athenian audience, and so celebrates the Homeric heritage of Athens alone.

Outside Athenian circles, Menestheus was a minor hero, especially in proportion to Athens’ recent achievement in the Persian Wars. For the Hellenic world, his greatest claim to fame was that Ajax moored his ships and the Salaminian contingent beside him and his Athenians in the Catalogue of the Ships (*Il.*2.556-9). Sixth-century Athenians already promoted this passage to justify their claims to the island of Salamis, competing fiercely with Megara, and ultimately securing Salamis for themselves.¹⁴⁹ Menestheus’ nearness to Ajax would come to complement Athens’ geographic nearness to Salamis, an island that facilitated Ajax’s assimilation as an Athenian hero. After its orchestration of the battle of Salamis, Athens would come to understand the island’s ramifications for propaganda.

The Eion epigrams, while early examples of the juxtaposition of Trojan and Persian Wars, may seem to limit Athenian propagandistic efforts to a parochial base. Menestheus’ reputation outside of Attica could not carry the dignitas that an Achilles, Odysseus, or an Ajax could muster on the Hellenic world stage. By commemorating Menestheus and Athenian glory on the Eion herms, fifth-century Athens offered itself an epic paradigm, justifying continued aggression against Persia. This anti-Persian paradigm would develop as Athens assumed more

¹⁴⁹ Taylor (1997:42-3) comments that a thorough account of the “war” between Megara and Athens over Salamis in the 6th century cannot be recovered. “Solon’s poetry supports the idea that in the early 6th BCE Athens desired to acquire Salamis; Plutarch who gives the fullest account of the “war,” says that both Athens and Megara submitted to Sparta for arbitration (*Sol.*10). Both Athens and Megara recited interpolated passages of the Catalogue of the Ships to prove that Ajax was associated with either the Megarians or the Athenians.”

imperial power. In the decade following Salamis and Plataea, with war against Persia continuing in the North Aegean, broader and more prestigious models of Homeric Panhellenism would be required as Sparta and Athens jockeyed for hegemonic position.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, Athens' new role as Greek naval superpower problematized its relationship to its mythic past. As Shapiro (2012:169) points out: "The biggest problem for the Athenians of the fifth century was that their national hero *par excellence*, Theseus, had not been at Troy." Theseus belonged to the generation of heroes before the Trojan War, and Athens had to look elsewhere in order to enhance the heroics of their minor Homeric home town hero (Menestheus) in the aftermath of the Persian Wars. By turning to Menestheus, Athens was drawing attention to a glaring disparity: its powerful navy and military achievements for Greece in the Persian Wars were vastly greater than those of her Iliadic ancestor's minor glory. Athens' Homeric backwater status offered little in the way of real equity with their contemporary status as the "saviors of Hellas" after Salamis.

Menestheus' nearness to Ajax in the *Iliad* proved beneficial for Athenian propagandistic efforts in the late sixth century. Solon looked to this Iliadic passage to solidify power over Salamis, and when Cleisthenes reordered the Athenian constitution based on ten tribal heroes, he

¹⁵⁰ Immediately after mainland Greek victory, the Greeks of Ionia revolted from Persian rule and sought help from the Hellenic League. Sparta wanted the Ionians to resettle on the Greek mainland, but the Athenians wanted them to persist. When the Athenian faction won out, the Greek coalition cut Xerxes' cabled bridge and lay siege to the Persian controlled city of Sestos on the Hellespont. With this action, the Spartan general Leotychidas quit his command leaving the Athenians in de facto command to pursue the ends of the war. This was the germination of the Athenian Empire. In fact, historians understand Cimon's siege of Eion (begun in 477) as the first military action accomplished by the newly minted "Delian League," the federation of Greek poleis who banded together under an Athenian banner to continue the war against Persia, and bring the fight to them, so to speak.

included Ajax and Hippothoon as the only non-Attic eponymous members.¹⁵¹ The happy accident that Athens' great moment of Hellenic defense occurred in the straits of Salamis served to support Athens' assimilation of Ajax and bolstered its lordship over the island. In many ways Athens' victory around Ajax's isle could be construed as heroic approval of their new found hegemony. Moreover, Athens' relationship with Ajax mirrors Menestheus and Ajax's interactions in the *Iliad*: Athens neighbors Salamis and it looks to the island in its direst moment of need.

Although Menestheus was Athens' ancestral warrior at Troy, Athens' annexation of Salamis and its assimilation of Ajax would become a powerful tool in forthcoming imperial propaganda. When Athens' appropriation of Ajax and Salamis occurred in the sixth century, it initiated Ajax's mythic immigration beginning under Solon and Cleisthenes by first promoting him as an adopted Athenian hero; following the battle of Salamis, this appropriation would reach its zenith in the mid fifth century.¹⁵² After Athens used the Homeric Ajax to credential their claims to Salamis and to reform the Attic deme, Athens molded Ajax in the celebration culture of the 470s as a Panhellenic demonstration of its achievement at Salamis that promoted Greek solidarity under the aegis of Athenian naval superiority.

Emerging from the settling dust of Greek victory, Sparta and Athens began to assert themselves and vie for hegemony over the Hellenic world. Sparta, the hegemonic polis when it

¹⁵¹ Cleisthenes' tribal reforms involved the assignment of ten new tribes to ten heroes. Only Ajax and Hippothoon are not Attic; Ajax is from Salamis, Hippothoon from Eleusis. See Kearns 1989:80-102.

¹⁵² Salamis is distinct from the rest of Attica and Athens treated it differently; Strabo reports that at one time even Megara was counted part of Attica, but Salamis was organized separately (9.1.11). According to Pausanias, Philaios, the son of Eurysakes, grandson of Ajax, gave the island of Salamis to the Athenians in return for Athenian citizenship (1.35.2). In mythological tradition Salamis is originally separate from Athens until Philaios' gift (Taylor 1997: 4). Athens appeared to only want political control of the island.

entered the Persian Wars, made an uneasy alliance with Athens and its newly acquired naval armada. Following Salamis and Plataea each side began to promote its own effort and to present these coalitional victories as battles which either city-state had orchestrated alone. The Trojan war paradigm helped to solidify this bifurcation. But while Sparta could rely on Homeric tradition and its epic Peloponnesian forebears as exempla in the Persian Wars, Athens had little to work with, as its remarkable attempts to secure Salamis through the heavy reliance on a reading of the Catalogue of Ships show. True, Menestheus played a minor role in the *Iliad*, but he had not the status of a Menelaus or Agamemnon. Further, Athens paralleled its fight against Xerxes' fleet in the straits of Salamis as a great moment of Hellenic defense, likening it to Ajax's defense of the Greek ships in the *Iliad*. In promoting its new Panhellenic defender identity, Athens would find a ready model in the decade following Greek victory, one which tragedians like Aeschylus, who likely fought at Salamis, made a significant contribution.

An Athenian Ajax in Aeschylus' *Persians*

In the following section, I attempt to construct a new interpretation of Aeschylus' *Persians*. I read *Persians* as a Panhellenic text with an Athenian preference, arguing that the Homeric Ajax plays a significant role. Recently, Taplin (2006: 24) has recently argued that *Persians* is as an example of "a special edition tragedy in the celebration culture of the 470s." Taplin sees *Persians* in the mainstream of Panhellenic victory literature after the Persian Wars, sharing much of the Panhellenic ethos of the *Iliad*. He argues that tragedy was already vying with epic for the narration of events of the epic past, and was not restricted to an Athenian audience. Aeschylus was attempting to market tragedy to a larger, non-Athenian audience, and would have had to appeal to the Panhellenic scope of the Homeric poems, downplaying overt Athenian praise in his treatment of the coalitional effort of the battle of Salamis.

Taplin sees Athenian nationalism minimized in the play, but I shall argue that the cumulative weight of references to Athenian prestige still point to an undeniable “Athenian Moment,” particularly *because* the play can be read within this Homeric framework. I interpret the play’s Homeric landscape as a means to glorify Athens through continuous references to Ajax, whose island serves as a touchstone of recent history and the epic past—acting as a Persian War site recalling Ajax’s defense in the Trojan War. By linking the epic past to the recent past, Aeschylus elevates Athens’ prestige in the Persian Wars to epic status by appropriating the idea of a Panhellenic military coalition from the *Iliad*, drawing connections between Ajax’s home island, his defense of Greek ships at Troy, and Athens’ defense of Greece at Salamis. In other words, *Persians* alludes to the Panhellenic moment of Ajax’s defense of the ships in order to illustrate the “Athenian Moment” at Salamis. *Persians* evokes Telamonian Ajax, through diction, reference, and Homeric allusion. This is mostly understated, but sufficient to create a parallel between Ajax’s defensive acts from the *Iliad* with Athens’ contemporary achievement at the battle of Salamis.

Some scholars read a strict Panhellenism in the *Persians*, arguing that Aeschylus employs vague ethnic descriptions such as Ionian, Doric, and Dorian to stress Greek unity in facing the Persian Empire (Kowerski: 2005, Boedeker 2001, Hall 1996: 123), they often overlook the reality of inter-polis relations in the archaic period leading up to the Persian Wars. One of the most discussed passages used to support *Persians*’ Panhellenism is in the speech of Darius’ ghost, who is concerned about the oracles that are now fulfilled, foresees disaster for his son’s land forces in Boeotia,

κεῖπερ τάδ’ ἐστὶ, πλῆθος ἔκκριτον στρατοῦ
λείπει κενᾶισιν ἐλπίσιν πεπεισμένος.
μίμνουσι δ’ ἔνθα πεδίον Ἀσωπὸς ῥοαῖς
ἄρδει, φίλον πιάσμα Βοιωτῶν χθονί:

οὐ σφιν κακῶν ὕψιστ' ἐπαμμένει παθεῖν,
ὑβρεως ἄποινα κἀθέων φρονημάτων:

If that is indeed so, Xerxes, seduced by vain hopes,
has left behind a large, select portion of his army. They remain
where the Asopus waters the plain with its stream, bringing
welcome enrichment to the soil of the Boeotians. There the destiny
awaits them of suffering a crowning catastrophe, in
requital for their outrageous actions and their godless arrogance. (803-8)¹⁵³

Darius intimates Persia's forthcoming defeat at the battle of Plataea. While the battle of Plataea will occur outside of the narrative time of the *Persians*, Aeschylus sets up Plataea as a consequence of Salamis, that is, without the Athenian naval action against Xerxes' fleet, the Spartan infantry would not have been successful. Moreover, Darius characterizes Plataea as a chiefly Spartan accomplishment, attributing Persian defeat to the "Dorian spear:"

τόσος γὰρ ἔσται πέλανος αἵματοσφαγῆς
πρὸς γῆ Πλαταιῶν Δωρίδος λόγχης ὕπο:

so great will be the clotted libation of slain men's blood
on the soil of the Plataeans, shed by the Dorian spear. (816-17)

In Aeschylus' audiences, veterans of the battle would have been sitting in the theater of Dionysus, which still bore the visible scars of Persian fire on the Acropolis, an act born of Persian vengeance for Athenian participation in the Ionian revolt and the battle of Marathon. Although foreign domination may have been warded off from all Greece, the effects of the Persian invasion were not borne by all poleis equally. Indeed, as Taplin (2005:4) has pointed out, "appeals to shared Hellenism were aspirations which were in reality in tension with deep-seated and time-honored rivalries." Rivalry ran deep in the Hellenic world, and Persia's antipathy for Athens, although evidenced from Athenian sources, is a notion that cannot be swept tidily under the rug of pan-Hellenism.

¹⁵³ All translations of *Persians* are from Sommerstein 2009 unless otherwise noted.

In the aftermath of the Persian Wars, Simonides and Aeschylus played major roles in the proliferation of celebration culture.¹⁵⁴ Schachter sees “echoes” of the Plataea elegy in Aeschylus’ *Persians*, and interprets it as a comparable vehicle of political promotion for Athens. While *Persians*, unlike the Plataea elegy, does not mention any Athenian *strategos* by name, its heavy emphasis on Xerxes’ cables and bridges across the Hellespont emphasize Xanthippus’ campaigns in the northern Aegean against Persia, in which he removed and brought the cables back to Athens (*Persians* 65-72, 719-26, 745-51, et al.) (Hdt.9.121). Moreover, we may note that it was Pericles, son of the Athenian *strategos* Xanthippus, who produced *Persians*.¹⁵⁵

Produced just eight years after the battle of Salamis in 472 BCE, *Persians* imagines the Persian royal court’s response to Xerxes’ defeat. Perhaps taking a cue from his contemporary Phrynichus, whose *Capture of Miletus* reportedly sent the audience into open wailing for which he incurred a stiff fine (Hdt. 6.21.10), Aeschylus distanced his play from the martial reality of the naval battle, and buffered his veteran audience with the play’s Persepolis setting. In 472 scars of the burning of Athens’ acropolis would still have existed, lending *Persians* a deeper dimension, since the audience in the Theater of Dionysus would presumably watch the play with their backs to the Acropolis and to reminders of what the Persian War cost them. By setting the the tragedy at Persepolis, where the audience witnesses Atossa, Xerxes, and Darius’ ghost respond to the news of Persian defeat, Aeschylus creates a safe distance for the audience. Aeschylus

¹⁵⁴ There is a tradition that they were great rivals; *Vit. Aeschylus* p.332 ff. Page (Aesch. OCT).

¹⁵⁵ *Persians* is not only the oldest extant tragedy but the only extant example of historical tragedy. There are two lost plays of Phrynichus, the *Capture of Miletus* (ca.494 BCE) which treated an episode from the Ionian Revolt, and *Phoenissae* (ca. 476BCE), another drama that dealt with the battle of Salamis. Moreover, *Persians* paraphrases Phrynichus’ *Phoenissae*’s opening lines, and offers a clear awareness of the historically dramatic milieu of the decade following the battles of 480-79 BCE (Garner 1990: 22). Themistocles reportedly produced the *Phoenissae*. Like *Persians*, it was set at the Persian court and dealt with their loss at Salamis. Garvie speculates that it might have treated the battle of Mycale (479 BCE) as well (2009:xi).

accomplishes what other tragedies effect by setting their narratives in the distant mythological past, by centralizing a foreign enemy's reaction to a recent Greek military victory in a foreign land whose people were on the losing side.

The main action—the Persian court's reaction to the battle of Salamis—occurs at a considerable narrative distance from Aeschylus' Greek audience. Whereas most plays are set in the distant mythological past, and privilege legendary stories, *Persians* occurs in a distant foreign land, allowing Aeschylus to present Salamis in mythic terms. Moreover, *Persians* features the battle of Salamis as an epic tale told on foreign shores. Tending toward epic style, messenger speeches typically contain Homeric echoes, and the messenger who relates the devastating speech to the Persian court has been compared to a Homeric bard (Grethlein 2010). In this way, Aeschylus' audience can witness their recent martial deeds epicized in the foreign court whose armies they vanquished. Aeschylus achieves two aims: he can moderate Athenian triumphalism, facilitating a more palatable story for a Panhellenic audience, while at the same time signaling Athenian preeminence through Ajax.

While explicit Homeric references in *Persians* are few, they are nonetheless potent (Garner 1990:22), and are buttressed by the overall Homeric structure of the *Persians*.¹⁵⁶ As an episode of extended royal grief, reminiscent of Priam's court reacting to Hector's death in *Iliad* 22, *Persians* details Xerxes' court's response to a disaster perpetrated by a coalition of Greeks. Barrett (2002: 40-55) notes that the messenger who relates the disaster operates with an authority akin to the Homeric bard, and Grethlein parallels the Iliadic Catalogue of the Ships of Book 2

¹⁵⁶ Grethlein 2013, along with Barrett 1995, and Rosenbloom 1993, understand *Persians* to have an Iliadic structure. Barrett sees the messenger as a type of epic muse, and Grethlein stresses the similarity of the catalogue at 21-58 to the *Iliad's* catalogue in Book 2. Both examples for Grethlein 2013: 77 “evoke the *Iliad* as background for *Persians*.”

with the extended inventory of Persian chieftains, forces, and their allies (21-58), in the early stages of the play (2010: 77). D. Rosenbloom also reads this as an epicizing effect, that suggests a “New Trojan War which reflects upon the Greeks primarily through the Persians, who are depicted in Homeric terms” (Rosenbloom 2006: 40-1). Accordingly, the Catalogue motif provides a thematic and structural impetus to interpret *Persians* as an inversion of the conquest of Troy, an interpretation to which Grethlein also adheres, seeing the Trojan War as a foil to the Persian.

Despite the fact that *Persians* offers few direct Iliadic references, the chorus provides one of the most recognizable:

στυγναί γ' Ἀθᾶναι δάοις·
 μεμνησθαί τοι πάρα
 ὥς πολλάς Περσίδων μάταν
 ἔκτισαν εὐνιδας ἠδ' ἀνάδρους.

She is indeed hateful to her foes:
 we can remember well
 how many Persian women they caused
 to be bereaved and widowed, all for nothing. (286-9)

A. Garner (1990: 23) points to the word εὐνις, and translates it “bereft of children,” noting that it occurs only twice earlier in Greek literature: *Odyssey* 9.524 and *Iliad* 22.44. The rarity of the word and its context in *Persians* indicates that the *Iliad* passage is the most likely allusion.¹⁵⁷ In his grief after Achilles has killed Hector, Priam embarks on a long lament describing how he is bereft of sons and envisioning what will happen without Troy’s defender:

ὄς μ' υἱῶν πολλῶν τε καὶ ἐσθλῶν εὐνιν ἔθηκε
 κτείνων καὶ περνὰς νήσων ἐπι τηλεδαπάων.

¹⁵⁷ The *Odyssey* passage relates the exchange between Odysseus and Polyphemus after Odysseus has revealed himself as he departs from Polyphemus’ island. Odysseus employs εὐνις in reference to violence against the Cyclops, “bereaving him of life and soul” and to send him to the House of Hades.

seeing he hath made me bereft of sons many and valiant,
slaying them and selling them into isles that lie afar. (*Il.*22.44-5)

Both passages feature old men lamenting the loss of young men at the hands of Greek warriors (the old men of Susa make up *Persians*' chorus). As Garner notes, the passage is "the most frequently echoed (scene) in the *Iliad*," and would have been familiar to the Athenian public (1990:23). Therefore, εἶνις in *Persians* could trigger an allusion to Priam's lament from the *Iliad*, providing a distant epic referent for a contemporary moment in Athenian history. Where εἶνις alludes to Priam's lament in *Persians*, it also foregrounds the Iliadic allusion by naming the party responsible, as does Homer, for Persia's bereavement: Athens. Accordingly, the Persian court's response to defeat at Salamis presents for Athens an updated revision of the fall of Troy – one in which Athens itself plays the role of victor. Garner also posits that Aeschylus employs εἶνις elliptically (1990:23), and that when the chorus uses this word, "one must understand the complement "sons," which Priam supplies in his lament (*ibid*). In sum, the allusion equates an Asian despot's lament from the epic past with an imagined royal grief from a contemporary eastern fifth-century despot—both serving to glorify the Athenian achievement at the battle of Salamis by paralleling it with the epic past.

Aeschylus first mentions Salamis explicitly at 273 where the messenger relates to the chorus,

πλήθουσι νεκρῶν δυσπότημος ἐφθαρμένων
Σαλαμῖνος ἀκταὶ πᾶς τε πρόσχωρος τόπος.

The shores of Salamis, and all the region near them, are
full of corpses wretchedly slain. (272-3)

The "shores of Salamis" theme recurs often throughout *Persians* (Salamis is mentioned at least six more times: 284, 421, 449, 570, 953, 964-5). For an Athenian audience in the 470s, Salamis was a point of considerable socio-political complexity, notably with Athens' recent acquisition

of Salamis in a struggle with Megara, and its appropriation of the island’s mythic tradition when Cleisthenes formed ten new tribes, with one named for Ajax. After 480, being the locale of a pivotal coalitional victory against the Persian Empire, Salamis was commemorated as a site of Panhellenic victory. Salamis and its environs provides the “off-stage place” for *Persians*’ action, serving as the traditional locale of tragic violence which is typically related by a messenger on stage (Garvie 2009: 153). *Persians* does not specify that the disaster actually occurred in the straits of Salamis, where the naval battle occurred, but on the “shores of Salamis,” a consistent periphrasis that connects the events of the naval battle to the island nearby. This enables Aeschylus to conflate the island and its cult-hero Ajax as a divinity operating offstage, attributing to them responsibility for the violence that the messenger relates to the Persian royal court.

Aeschylus names Salamis island “the isle of Ajax” three times (307, 368, 596).¹⁵⁸ He first names Ajax and his island at lines 306-7, when the messenger addressing Atossa relates the fate of a Bactrian general’s corpse,

Τενάγων τ’ ἄριστος Βακτρῶν ἰθαιγενῆς
θαλασσόπληκτον νῆσον Αἴαντος σποδεῖ.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ The epitaph of the Corinthians (IG I² 927) who died at Salamis also mentions Ajax’s isle in connection with their action at the battle of Salamis:

ὃ ξένε, εὐυδρὸν ποτ’ ἐναίομεν ἄστῃ Κορίνθου,
νῦν δ’ ἄμ’ Αἴαντος νᾶσος ἔχει Σαλαμῖς.
ἐνθάδε Φοινίσσας νῆας καὶ Πέρσας ἐλόντες καὶ Μήδους,
ἱερὰν Ἑλλάδα ῥυσάμεθα:

Stranger, we once lived in the well-watered city of Corinth,
but now Salamis, Ajax’s island holds us.

Here we took Phoenecian ships and Persian and Mede,
and saved holy Hellas.

Plutarch records the epitaph in his *De Malignitate Herodoti* and condemns the report that the Corinthians fled after battle was joined at Salamis (Hdt.8.94) as an Athenian concoction after relations had soured between Athens and Corinth in the mid fifth century.

¹⁵⁹ Garvie notes that while “all codd. have πολεῖ, ‘ranges over,’ with the accusative νῆσον, the verb should mean ‘ranges over the island, not comes and goes over the shores.’” The correct

Tenagon, noble and best of the Bactrians
pounds Ajax's island beaten by the sea. (306-7)

The couplet positions man against island, with Salamis pointedly belonging to Ajax and demonstrating a defensive ability to withstand Tenagon's assaulting corpse. The compound adjective θαλασσόπληκτον, "sea-beaten" indicates Salamis' characteristic resistance.

Groenebloom and Mazon suggest line 307 intimates that Ajax in some way assisted the Greeks in their victory, and Garvie reminds us that Herodotus reports that Athens sent a ship to fetch Ajax and the Aecidae before the battle, eventually erecting a dedicatory trireme in his honor (8.64.2 and 8.121.1). Moreover, Salamis and its environs are connected with Ajax's hero-cult and would demarcate the locale of Ajax's cultic power. In this way, Aeschylus features the island of Salamis as the combination of geographical terrain and divine agency as a defense for Athens.

I further suggest that while Aeschylus names Salamis "Ajax's island," diction concerning the fate of Tenagon could also indicate Ajax's defensive identity associated with him in the *Iliad*. The chief warrior of defense in Achilles' absence, Ajax is the ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, "bulwark of the Achaeans" (*Il.*3.228, 6.5, 7.211). Idomeneus describes Ajax's ability to resist assault in a way similar to that in which Aeschylus describes Salamis island and the way in which Tenagron's corpse will uselessly pound its shores:

ἀνδρὶ δέ κ' οὐκ εἴξειε μέγας Τελαμώνιος Αἴας,
ὃς θνητός τ' εἶη καὶ, χαλκῷ τε ῥηκτός μεγαλοῖσιν τε χερμαδίοισιν.

Nor would huge Telamonian Ajax give way to any man,
one who could be broken by the bronze and great stones flung at him.
(*Il.*13.321-323)

meaning is "pounds the island with his body" which the verb σποδεῖ supplies (Garvie 2009: 164). In the translation I follow Garvie's emendation.

Adversaries are “broken” on Ajax like the ocean around Salamis that is θαλασσόπληκτον. The messenger gestures to the manner in which Tenagon’s corpse “pounds” harmlessly upon Ajax’s island, an action commensurate with the sea’s useless pounding against the island.

While Tenagon may very well be an Aeschylean invention, the epithet following his name evokes a distinct Homeric borrowing.¹⁶⁰ As ἄριστος Βακτρῶν “best of the Bactrians” Aeschylus places Tenagon, the superlative warrior of the Bactrians in a Homeric context, echoing the Homeric epithet for Achilles in the *Iliad*, ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν “best of the Achaeans,” as we saw earlier in chapter 1. Ajax too receives this title, but always qualified with “after the blameless son of Peleus.” However, Ajax becomes ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν when Achilles withdraws from battle. Moreover, in Achilles’ absence, the Greeks become besieged in their ships, and Ajax alone leads the defense. Aeschylus’ inclusion of Tenagon as the ἄριστος Βακτρῶν may indicate a play on the inversion topos, wherein Greeks are besieged by an invading Asian army, and in which one of Xerxes’ most formidable warriors cannot overcome the Athenian led defense at Salamis. In this way, when *Persians* refers to Salamis as Ajax’s island, it equates the island with the warrior, and recalls his spectacular defense of the Greek fleet, all in a couplet expressing Salamis’ capacity for unassailable defense.¹⁶¹

Persians evokes Ajax’s epithet again, yet couched in distinctly pro-Athenian sentiment.

This occurs in dialogue between Queen Atossa and the messenger. When the queen inquires how

¹⁶⁰ Garvie notes that his name does not “sound Persian” and surmises that Aeschylus’ knowledge of Bactria would be very slight (2009: 163).

¹⁶¹ It also suggests Ajax’s battle prowess when Achilles has withdrawn from battle, and Ajax alone defends Greek ships from Hector’s assault. Accordingly, we remember that the Aeschylean battle of Salamis presents the inversion of the Trojan War motif in a great sea-battle between besieged Greeks and a besieging foreign eastern enemy; yet, more precisely we may observe the inversion that occurs in the *Iliad* when the Trojans attack the Achaean wall, with Ajax as the lone defender (J. Morrison 1994: 212-17).

Hellenes could have possessed the confidence to wage a naval battle against the might and number of the Persian navy, the messenger replies at lines 337-49:

Ἄγγελος: πλήθους μὲν ἂν σάφ' ἴσθ' ἕκατι βάρβαρον
ναυσὶν κρατῆσαι. καὶ γὰρ Ἑλλησιν μὲν ἦν
ὁ πᾶς ἀριθμὸς ἐς τριακάδας δέκα
ναῶν, δεκάς δ' ἦν τῶνδε χωρὶς ἔκκριτος:
Ξέρξης δέ, καὶ γὰρ οἶδα, χιλιάς μὲν ἦν
ῶν ἦγε πλῆθος, αἱ δ' ὑπέροχοι τάχει
ἑκατὸν δις ἦσαν ἐπτά θ': ὧδ' ἔχει λόγος.
μή σοι δοκοῦμεν τῆδε λειφθῆναι μάχη;
ἀλλ' ὧδε δαίμων τις κατέφθειρε στρατόν,
τάλαντα βρίσας οὐκ ἰσορρόπῳ τύχῃ.
θεοὶ πόλιν σῶζουσι Παλλάδος θεᾶς.

Ἄτοσσα: ἔτ' ἄρ' Ἀθηνῶν ἔστ' ἀπόρθητος πόλις;

Ἄγγελος: ἀνδρῶν γὰρ ὄντων ἔρκος ἐστὶν ἀσφαλές.

Messenger: I assure you that, so far as number are concerned, the fleet of the Easterners would have prevailed. The Greeks had a grand total of about three hundred ships, and ten of these formed a special select squadron; whereas Xerxes –I know this for sure –had a thousand under his command, and those of outstanding speed numbered two hundred and seven. Such is the reckoning; I hardly imagine you'll consider we were inferior in that respect in the battle! It was some divinity that destroyed our fleet like this, weighting the scales so that fortune did not fall out even: the gods have saved the city of the goddess Pallas.

Atossa: Then the city of Athens is still unsacked?

Messenger: While she has her men, the bulwark is secure.

The messenger relates the events of Salamis by moving from the general to the specific, beginning with a calculation of the entire Greek fleet, and ending with Athens, whose salvation the gods intended. Atossa asks if the *polis* of Athens has been sacked, and the messenger responds that the city is a ἔρκος “bulwark,” he does not say that the city’s physical structure is destroyed (it was burned, actually), but that Athens still stands because its people live. While indeed “the gods preserve the city of Pallas,” the messenger means that the gods have saved the

city through its men who man the fleet, so long as they are living (ὄντων). Aeschylus employs ἔρκος to describe the Athenian polis and equates its immoveability with the citizens who defend it, charging the word with epic meaning. Its most iconic poetic use is as Ajax’s famous epithet, ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, “bulwark of the Achaeans” (*Il.*3.229, et al.), an epithet that Ajax activates when he alone defends the Greek ships from Hector’s onslaught. The allusion combines a description of Athenian defensive valor at Salamis with Ajax’s epithet in the *Iliad*. As a critical naval encounter for Greek survival, the battle of Salamis offers an optimum moment for Aeschylus to harmonize Athenian defense with the Iliadic connotations of ἔρκος.

Furthermore, the use of ἔρκος at line 349 looks back to an ironic use in lines 85-90. There the chorus of Persian elders describes Xerxes’ unstoppable host on land and sea and first claims that he leads a “war-like host of archers against a people renowned for the spear” (ἐπάγει δουρικλύτοις ἀν-/δράσι τοξόδαμνον Ἄρη, 85-6). In what may be a veiled reference to the “Dorian spear” (817), and perhaps alluding to the battle of Thermopylae when Xerxes’ archers defeated Leonidas and his Spartans, the chorus suggests a future glory where Xerxes’ army will overcome Sparta’s celebrated infantry prowess, “a people renowned for the spear.” However, when the chorus turns to naval warfare, it boasts:

δόκιμος δ’ οὔτις ὑποστάς
 μεγάλῳ ρεύματι φωτῶν
 ἐχυροῖς ἔρκεσιν εἴργειν
 ἄμαχον κῶμα θαλάσσης:
 ἀπρόσοιστος γὰρ ὁ Περσῶν
 στρατὸς ἀλκίφρων τε λαός.

No one can be counted on to withstand
 this great flood of men
 and be a sturdy bulwark to ward off
 the irresistible waves of the sea:
 none dare come near the army
 of the Persians and their valiant host. (87-92)

The chorus indicates that no power can withstand Xerxes' immense armada, while suggesting that no navy is comparable in celebrity to Sparta's infantry. Yet in the report of the battle of Salamis, roughly 300 lines later, the messenger directly addresses and refutes this point, and specifically names Athens as the ἔρκος "bulwark," that will resist the irresistible Persian navy. By claiming that no armada exists to counter Xerxes, and conceding the established fame and reputation of Sparta's warrior class, the chorus pinpoints Salamis as the "Athenian moment" where Athens secures its reputation (comparable to Sparta) as a formidable naval power by repelling Persia's unstoppable navy.

Moreover, where the chorus of Persian elders boasts that no person with ἔρκεσιν "bulwarks," can resist the Persian fleet, the messenger directly answers this claim, refuting it with the same word, ἔρκος, and giving further definition to what this bulwark is: the Athenian people. Taking into account the epic shading of ἔρκος, Ajax's Homeric epithet, utilized here in intra-textual relation to describe Athens fighting for survival around the "island of Ajax" νῆσον Αἴαντος (368), a periphrasis that occurs only 19 lines after Athenian people have been defined as a ἔρκος (349), an epic association begins to appear between Athens, the battle of Salamis, and the greatest Greek defender at Troy: Ajax.

We should note that at this moment, that as a matter of historical fact, non-combatant Athenians had been ferried to Troezen or Salamis, and that a small group of resisters in Athens had barricaded themselves on the acropolis—to no avail (Hdt. 7.141).¹⁶² Moreover, ἔρκος "bulwark" may reference Themistocles' interpretation of the wooden wall prophecy. The

¹⁶² Herodotus mentions 3 places of refuge for evacuees in the Persian invasions: Aegina, Troezen, and Salamis, (although he mentions only some Athenians went to Salamis and to Aegina, and most went to Troezen, Hdt. 8.41); some Athenian children and women were on Salamis (Hdt. 8.60) See Taylor 1997: 124-5.

Delphic oracle, who initially advised Athens to flee from the Persians, on second counsel stated that a wooden wall would become a stronghold for Athens (Hdt.7.141.3). While a small faction fortified the wooden palisade on the Acropolis in light of the oracle, Themistocles interpreted the wooden wall to mean Athenian ships. Although Herodotus uses the word τεῖχος “city-wall,” ἔρκος would allow Aeschylus to capture the essence of the Themistocles’ prophecy while associating a distinctly Homeric word with Athens and its fleet, ἔρκος, Ajax’s epithet.

Lines 353-432 of the messenger’s speech, the “centerpiece of his report and the play”(Garvie 2009: 182), contains the second mention of Salamis in reference to Ajax. The messenger tells Atossa that an “avenging or evil spirit” ἀλάστωρ ἢ κακὸς δαίμων, appeared in order to deceive Xerxes about Greek naval movements. We may assume that Aeschylus refers to Themistocles and his plan to deceive Xerxes. Moreover, the messenger characterizes the battle as a conflict between Greeks aided by divinity against Xerxes’ ignorance of these matters (361-2, 372-3). After the trap is set, Xerxes orders his ships into position:¹⁶³

τάξαι νεῶν στῖφος μὲν ἐν στοίχοις τρισὶν
 ἔκπλους φυλάσσειν καὶ πόρους ἀλκρρόθους,
 ἄλλας δὲ κύκλῳ νῆσον Αἴαντος πέριξ

They were to arrange the mass of their ships in three lines
 and guard the exits and the surging straits, while stationing
 others so as to surround the island of Ajax completely. (366-8)

Aeschylus depicts Xerxes’ battle plan as a great encircling of “the island of Ajax.” Garvie notes briefly that νῆσον Αἴαντος “is perhaps more than a poetic circumlocution” (2009:187), and leaves it there. However, the detailed description of Persian ships encircling Ajax’s island, home of the greatest defensive fighter in the Homeric tradition, presents a critical image of Greek

¹⁶³ Aeschylus describes the Persian fleet in terms familiar to Athenian trireme crews who would have participated in the battle and who would also be part of his audience.

divinity and terrain pitted against foreign aggression. Moreover, Ajax and Xerxes are the only named figures in this section of the messenger's speech; the others are all indefinite and anonymous "Greeks" or "Hellenes," suggesting an equivalence between Xerxes and the cult hero of Salamis.

Furthermore, diction concerning night and day suggests cosmological justification for Greek victory. As night falls, Persian forces prepare for battle, and they deploy patrols throughout the night: ἐπεὶ δὲ φέγγος ἡλίου κατέφθιτο καὶ νύξ ἐπήει "when the light of the sun disappeared and night came on" (377-8), and καὶ πάννουχοι δὴ διάπλοον καθίστασαν ναῶν ἄνακτες πάντα ναυτικὸν λεῶν "all through the night, the masters of the ships kept the whole naval host sailing to and fro"(382-3). However, when the sun first appears, the messenger reports,

ἐπεὶ γε μέντοι λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα
πᾶσαν κατέσχε γαῖαν εὐφεγγῆς ἰδεῖν,
πρῶτον μὲν ἤχη κέλαδος Ἑλλήνων πάρα
μολπηδὸν ἠυφήμησεν, ὄρθιον δ' ἅμα
ἀντηγάλαξε νησιώτιδος πέτρας
ἠχώ

Instead, when Day with her white horses
spread her brilliant light over all the earth,
first of all there rang out loudly a joyful song from the Greeks,
and simultaneously the echo of it resounded back
from the cliffs of the island. (386-91)

The disappearing sun serves as metaphor for the Persian fleet's futile preparations, foreshadowing the outcome of the battle. However, when attention turns to the Greek fleet, the messenger borrows Homeric diction, describing it as λευκόπωλος, "with white horses" (CF. *Od.*23.246).¹⁶⁴ Where Persian forces seemed sure to conquer at night, daylight reveals a Greek

¹⁶⁴ This line is remarkably similar to Sophocles' *Ajax* 672-3,

fleet singing loudly, followed by their “holy paeon-song,” παιᾶν’ ἐφύμνουσιν σεμνὸν (393). This balancing effect of Persian nightfall and Greek sunrise suggests cosmic alternation which Finglass sees as the “fundamental principle of a just and ordered universe” (2011:336). In short, the time of Persian imperialism wanes, and yields to an emergent Greek self-determination.

Moreover, a strong aural component initiates the battle of Salamis, one that suggests a supernatural factor to the battle’s beginning. Recalling that the messenger attributes Persian defeat to “some divinity” δαίμων τις (345), and ἀλάστωρ ἢ κακὸς δαίμων “some destructive or evil spirit” (354) we note that he narrates the battle as a manifestation of divine retribution, focusing on the sounds, songs, and shouts emanating from the Greek side. When the battle begins, Salamis itself echoes the κέλαδος, the Greek battle-cry from the νησιώτιδος πέτρας, “cliffs of the island,” an event suggesting coordination between landscape, divinity, and mortal effort, as if Salamis and its local divinities shout their support for the Greeks. Furthermore, the resounding paeon is met a few lines later with an anonymous rallying cry. At lines 400-5, the messenger relates

δεύτερον δ’ ὁ πᾶς στόλος
ἐπεξεχώρει, καὶ παρήν ὁμοῦ κλύειν
πολλὴν βοήν, ὧ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων ἴτε,
ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ’, ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ
παῖδας, γυναῖκας, θεῶν τέ πατρώων ἔδη,
θήκας τε προγόνων· νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών.

and then the whole fleet coming on behind,
and from all of them together one could hear a great cry:

ἐξίσταται δὲ νυκτὸς αἰανῆς κύκλος
τῇ λευκοπόλῳ φέγγος ἡμέρα φλέγειν

“night's dark orbit makes room for day
with her white horses to kindle her radiance.”

As in *Persians*, the idea of cosmic alternation is strong in Ajax’s speech as well. I will return to this idea and passage in the next chapter.

“Come on, sons of the Greeks, for the freedom of your homeland,
for the freedom of your children, your wives, the temples of your fathers’
gods, and the tombs of your ancestors! Now all is at stake! (400-5)

While the voice’s owner is not revealed, Gurd sees the voice’s “diffused presence and mysterious origin” as a way to “reinforce the messenger’s supposition that the Persian defeat was due as much to divine forces as to human ones” (Gurd 2016: 65-6). I suggest that because of its anonymity, its proximity to the paeon, the locale of Salamis, specifically named Ajax’s island, that the voice displays a supernatural quality, and that Ajax may be included as its possible owner.¹⁶⁵ Further, Herodotus reports that on the day before battle, the Greeks “decided to pray to all the gods, [and] they summoned Ajax and Telamon from Salamis” (Hdt.8.64.2). Bowie writes that “they [Telamon and Ajax] must have been thought to be physically present at the battle, because heroes had only local influence” (2007: 151), and Mikalson argues that Ajax must have contributed to the victory, because he received one of the three dedicatory Phoenician ships after the battle (2003: 130).

Furthermore, the disembodied harangue begins with a Homeric formula παῖδες Ἑλλήνων, fashioned like υἱὲς Ἀχαιῶν “sons of the Achaians” (*Il.* 1.162) and lends an epic distance and grandeur to the moment battle is joined. Additionally, the voice occurs at a critical moment for Greek survival, and if one looks to the *Iliad* for parallels, Ajax’s solitary defense of the ships in Books 15-16 provides the clearest analogy. In fact, the Athenian situation at Salamis corresponds with Achaean fortunes in the face of Hector’s assault in the *Iliad*. For instance, ceding ground to Xerxes’ armada, and with Attica overrun, the Athenian acropolis razed, and most non-military citizens transported to Salamis and Troezen, Athenian men of fighting age sought refuge behind

¹⁶⁵ Disembodied voices attributed to divinity of this sort are found at Sophocles *OC* 1610 and Euripides *Bacch.* 1078-9.

their “wooden wall” of triremes. Similarly, with Achilles absent, Hector has rallied Trojan forces, overrunning the makeshift Greek palisade on the beach and at last forcing the Greeks to their ships.

Greek survival hangs in the balance at Salamis and on the Trojan beachhead. Compelled to turn to their fleet, Athens and its coalition mount a last defense in the straits of Salamis; pressed against the beached ships by Hector and the Trojans, Ajax alone fends off the attack, leaping from deck to deck, furiously exhorting his compatriots to stand and fight,

ὥς Αἴας ἐπὶ πολλὰ θαάων ἴκρια νηῶν
φοίτα μακρὰ βιβάζ, φωνὴ δέ οἱ αἰθέρ' ἴκανεν,
αἰεὶ δὲ σμερδόνον βοόων Δαναοῖσι κέλευε
νηυσί τε καὶ κλισίησιν ἀμυνέμεν.

so Ajax was ranging over the many decks of the swift ships,
striding greatly, and his voice went to heaven,
and ever shouting fearfully, he called to the Danaans
to defend their ships and huts. (*Il.*15.685-88)

The greatest Greek defender at Troy, in the most critical moment of collective defense, offers a fitting exemplum for Athens at Salamis. In addition to his redoubtable martial skill, Ajax provides stark words of admonishment, commanding and exhorting his comrades to fight, indicating how dire their situation is,

ἤέ τινάς φαμεν εἶναι ἀοσητηῆρας ὀπίσσω,
ἤέ τι τεῖχος ἄρειον, ὃ κ' ἀνδράσι λοιγὸν ἀμύναι;
οὐ μὲν τι σχεδὸν ἐστὶ πόλις πύργοις ἀραρυῖα...

Do we think that there are defenders behind us,
or some stronger wall, to ward off destruction from men?
There is no city nearby fashioned with towers... (*Il.*15.735-77)

Like the disembodied voice at Salamis, Ajax is the voice shouting aloud to his compatriots, with a cry that “went to heaven” in his attempts to goad the Greeks into fighting.

In addition to these uses of Ajax in connection to Salamis, I would like to suggest that Ajax's name echoes through the text in instances of wordplay involving variations of the words αἶα, "earth," "land," and αἰἄ "alas!" This wordplay includes diction with variations of the diphthong αi-, which modulates the ideas of grief, terrain, and divine retribution with allusions to Ajax's name. These allusions are activated through their phonetic similarity to Αἶας, through Salamis' association with the Homeric hero, and because of Ajax's cultic associations with the battle which Athenians in Aeschylus' audience would have been familiar.

Moreover, the Greeks themselves have connected Ajax's name to the diction of grief. In fact, they attributed great significance to names, understanding critical connections between ὄνομα "name" and φύσις "nature" (Griffith 1978: 84n.5), believing that names reveal their bearer's character and destiny (Hesk 2003: 60).¹⁶⁶ The Sophoclean Ajax puns on his own name and connects his misfortune after he fails to kill the Greek commanders to his name's etymology as a cry of sorrow, αἰἄ (*Aj.*430-1). While the idea that Sophocles' popular etymologizing of Ajax's name is his invention, and although the *Ajax* is the first attestation of the etymology, Aeschylus offers precedent in other works for the way I suggest that he plays on Αἶας as a name to denote a cry of lament in *Persians*.

For instance, Aeschylus draws attention to Polyneices' name, and clearly connects νεῖκος meaning "quarrelsome" with πολύς in *Seven Against Thebes* (658-9) ἐπονύμφω δὲ κάρτα, Πολυνεΐκει λέγω, "for this man so well-named –Polyneices, I mean." In *Agamemnon* 681-99, Aeschylus puns on ἐλεῖν, "to seize" connecting Helen's name to Troy's destined capture. In each

¹⁶⁶"Take care that Pentheus not bring grief to your house, Cadmus! Πενθεὺς δ' ὅπως μὴ πένθος εἰσίσσει δόμοις / τοῖς σοῖσι, Κάδμε (*Ba.* 367). Discussing the pun on Pentheus' name, Dodds (Dodds 1960: 116) remarks "To us a pun is trivial and comic because it calls attention to the irrelevant; but the Greek felt that it pointed to something deeply relevant."

example, the play on a name's etymology suggests its larger function in the narrative. However, the *Suppliants* provides the strongest Aeschylean parallel for the type of plaintive wordplay that I suggest operates in *Persians*. When the chorus of Danaids connect their ancestry to the “cow, driven by the gadfly,” a periphrastic reference to Io, and then exclaim, “Ah Zeus, of Io, io!” [Greek text needed] they pun Io's name as a cry of lament. The date of the *Suppliants* (ca.470-63) places it close in time to *Persians*, and suggests that Aeschylus, at an even earlier point in his oeuvre, could have resorted to wordplay of the sort that I suggest occurs with Ajax.

I suggest that there are allusions to Ajax which, by their phonetic resemblance to his name, play on his function as an avenging divinity of Salamis. Beginning at line 59 Aeschylus writes,

τοιόνδ' ἄνθος Περσίδος **αἶας**
οἴχεται ἀνδρῶν,

such are the warriors, the flower of the Persian land
has departed. (59-60)

Aeschylus employs the word αἶα in the genitive to describe either the land that the Persian warriors departed from (separation), or the “flower of the Persian land” (partitive). The word Αἶας is striking, particularly in connection with a play treating the battle of Salamis, since merely capitalizing the initial alpha would yield Telamonian Ajax's name. But ἄνθος cannot be separated from αἶας, “the flower of the land of Persia, consisting in its men,” “the flower of the men departed from the Persian land,” or “the flower of the men of the Persian land” (Garvie 2009: 70). While ἄνθος belongs to and is limited by αἶας in the genitive, and αἶα is an epic variant of γαἶα, here, αἶας in the genitive spells out Ajax's name in the nominative, the name of the epic warrior most associated with Salamis, his birth place, site of cultic honor, and now the locale of Athens' greatest victory.

Nikoletta Kanavou has suggested phonetic similarity between Ajax’s name Αἴαξ, and the Homeric αἶα “earth” (e.g. *Il.*3.850, 8.1) (2015: 41-2). Discussing Ajax’s possible “proto-hero” name, she speculates that linked with αἶα, Ajax’s name may indicate his “earthly” identity, especially in relation to his role as the foremost warrior of defense. She draws further connections to characteristics of immovability with his epithet ἔρκος, a literal “earthwork.” Accordingly, Aeschylus plays on the epic connotation of αἶα, “land” on several levels; the warriors of the Persian land have met their doom by sea, and have perished off the coast of Ajax’s land, Salamis.¹⁶⁷ In this way, Aeschylus compounds the epic, Homeric register of αἶα with Ajax’s cultic association to Salamis by employing the genitive form of αἶα, the literal name of one of the Trojan War’s greatest heroes, in a play to celebrate an Athenian-won battle that will share the name of Ajax’s island.

Further, *Persians* relies strongly on a plaintive, aural component through interjections of grief, αἰαῖ, and its adjectival variations. In the atmosphere of the Persian court’s lament, the interjection’s frequency seems well-suited. However, considering how often variations of the αἰαῖ words appear with variations of αἶα meaning land, αἰαῖ, αἰανῆ, meaning woe, sorrow, and particularly as Salamis as the island of Αἴαξ appear, the play reveals a strong association between words for sorrow and land.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, I would like to suggest that both meanings are

¹⁶⁷ Men of fighting age are often referred to as the “flower” of a country, as they are two more times in *Persians* (252, 925), and ἄνθος often indicates the vitality of a young warrior (Garvie 2009: 70). If we read ἄνθος with Αἴαξ, according to later mythic tradition (and perhaps one that was operating at this moment) when Ajax committed suicide on the beach at Troy, his blood spilled over onto the common larkspur (*Delphinium Ajacis*), and spelled out his name as a cry of woe: ΑΙΑΙ! The tale is attested for the first time by Euphorion in his *Hyacinthus*, a Hellenistic writer, and is treated briefly by Ovid (*Met.*13.394-6), but the narrative may date to an earlier period.

¹⁶⁸ In the chart on the following page below, I have listed instances and line numbers for variations of 1) αἶα “earth,” “land,” 2) αἰαῖ, grief or lament, and 3) Αἴαξ, “Ajax.”

discernable in a play concerning Xerxes' defeat around Salamis, Ajax's island, and that we can read the isle of Ajax as the isle of sorrow, particularly Atossa and the Perisan court's sorrow.

For instance, as the chorus laments with Xerxes, newly arrived, it sings,

γαῖ' αἰάζει τὴν ἐγγαίαν
ἦβαν Ξέρξα κταμέναν Ἴαιδου
σάκτορι Περσᾶν.

The land laments its native youth
killed by Xerxes, who crammed Hades
with Persians. (922-24)

The connection between land and grief is emphasized through the heavy assonance of the diphthong αἰ and vowel α, creating an aural wailing effect when read aloud. Further, the conflation of land and grief receives further intensity as a result of the line's pathetic fallacy, in which the land cries aloud for the dead Persian youth.

Further, when the messenger appears and first relates their army's disaster, the chorus of Persian elders cries:

ὄτοτοτοῖ, μάταν
τὰ πολλὰ βέλεα παμμιγῆ
γαῖς ἀπ' Ἰσίδος ἦλθεν, αἰαῖ,
δαίαν Ἑλλάδα χώραν.

"Earth," "land"		Grief, "Alas!"		Ajax	
αἶαν	2	αἰαῖ	257	Αἶαντος	307
αἶας	59	αἰαῖ	270	Αἶαντος	368
αἶας	131	δυσαιανῆ	281	Αἶαντος	596
αἶα	250	αἰαῖ	283		
αἶαν	486	αἰαῖ	331		
αἶαν	495	αἰαῖ	433		
		αἰανῆ	636		
		αἰαῖ (2x)	673		
		αἰάζει	922		
		αἰαῖ (2x)	928		
		αἰακτὸς	931		
		αἰαῖ (2x)	1039		
		αἰακτὸς	1069		

Otototoi! It was all in vain
that those many weapons, all mingled together,
went from the land of Asia, aiai,
to the hostile land of Hellas. (268-71)

Once more the assonant wailing effect of αἰ and α is achieved by linking lament with terrain. In this instance, however, grief αἰᾶ, connects the land of Asia with the hostile land of Greece, in effect bridging the course (or interrupting) which the “many weapons, all mingled together” take to arrive in Hellas. Moreover, variant textual readings of line 270 speak to the phonetic resemblance of αἰᾶ, for grief, and αἶα, for land, which heavily colors this passage. While the transmitted text reads αἶαν, which Sommerstein keeps, I follow Garvie and Murray who suggest αἰᾶ. Additionally, Weil reads αἶας, which would also fit well with my interpretation (Garvie 2006: 153).

Salamis also appears at line 597, where the chorus describes the greatest ramification of Persian defeat, that mortals have been set free from tyranny—an idea consonant with the developing idea of political freedom, and linked with the notion that Persian blood nourishes Ajax’s isle:

οὐδ’ ἔτι γλῶσσα βροτοῖσιν
ἐν φυλακαῖς: λέλυται γὰρ
λαὸς ἐλεύθερα βάζειν,
ὡς ἐλύθη ζυγὸν ἀλκᾶς.
αἶμαχθεῖσα δ’ ἄρουραν
Αἴαντος περικλύστα
νᾶσος ἔχει τὰ Περσᾶν.

Nor do men any longer keep their tongue
under guard; for the people
have been let loose to speak with freedom.
now the yoke of military force no longer binds them.
In its blood-soaked soil
the sea-washed isle of Ajax
holds the power of Persia. (591-97)

The chorus proclaim, with clear implications for democratic Athens, what its defeat means to Atossa: men henceforth will be able to “utter their thoughts at will.” Aeschylus thus presents Greek victory not only in terms of political freedom from foreign domination,¹⁶⁹ but explicitly ties it to the survival of free speech, *παρρησία* or *ισηγορία* –a concept integral to Athenian democracy. When the chorus appraises the disaster, it links the inception of free speech to Persian defeat, and celebrates through its lamentation a distinct ideal of Athenian political life as a boon to all mankind.

Because Athens defeated Persia at Salamis, the chorus can proclaim a new political trajectory for mankind (*βροτοῖσιν*). When it prophesies Athens’ future, attributing its political situation at 472 BCE to its victory at Salamis in 480 BCE, the chorus reveals a key feature of Athens’ ideological development. According to Georges Duby (Duby 1985: 154), cultures construct ideology through history as “a projected future in which society will be closer to perfection, built on the memory, objective or mythical, of the past.” *Persians* accomplishes this by retelling Athens’ achievement at Salamis as an event fully invested with the implications for the present Athenian political situation of 472 BCE. Further, Aeschylus unites Athens’ recent past in 480 BCE with the revelation of its inevitability of 472 BCE, all framed within the Homeric tradition. The juxtaposition of the recent past with a prediction for the political climate and time in which *Persians*’ audience exists mitigates what Grethlein calls the “contingency of chance.” He posits that Greek authors represent their past in such a way as to reduce tensions between past experiences and expectations. By pointing their audience to familiar narratives,

¹⁶⁹ *Persians* in general and this passage specifically underscore what has been called “the ideology of freedom” (Rosenbloom 1995: 91). The “ideology of freedom” emphasizes the destruction of hubris and the eradication of external domination. Rosenbloom asserts that this ideology “functions as a transparent template superimposed upon events, an inference from history” and is particularly true for Athenian civic ideology (*ibid.*).

continuity, and the inevitability of events, authors can allay the audience's anxiety at the unpredictability of chance in their past (2013:5-11). Due to the traumatic nature of Xerxes' invasion, allowing "the audience to re-experience a recent event that involved an extreme experience of contingency" would lessen its tension (2013: 86-104). By featuring the battle of Salamis as an instance in the continuum of myth stretching back to Homer, and presenting it as an analogue to readily available Greek *topoi*, Aeschylus reframes the unexpected outcome to a discernable pattern consonant with the epic past. Moreover, and pointedly, when Aeschylus describes the carnage of Salamis' aftermath, he depicts the island as an unassailable bastion of resistance, emphasizing its connection to the greatest Greek defender in the *Iliad* through a periphrasis, naming it "Ajax's island." Aeschylus connects the shores of Ajax's island, cluttered with τὰ Περσῶν "all that once was Persia,"¹⁷⁰ and seemingly nourished by its enemy's blood (αἱμαχθεῖσα δ' ἄρουραν "blood-stained soil")¹⁷¹ with the chorus' forecast of Greek freedom: because Ajax's island withstood the Persian invasion, Greece is free. By placing in sequence the recent historical moment of Athenian resistance at Salamis with Ajax's resistance on the ships at Troy allows Athens in 472 to understand its great moment of 480 as a discernable iteration of its cultural tradition.

Conclusion

Greeks began to articulate their memory of the Persian invasions within a framework of the Trojan War tradition soon after Persian mainland defeat in 479 BCE. The decade following

¹⁷⁰ ἔχει τὰ Περσῶν: "has in its possession the things of the Persians," "all that once was Persia." "It includes all that once made Persia Persia, its empire, its power, and its hope for the future" (Garvie 2009: 248).

¹⁷¹ As an internal accusative, ἄρουραν perhaps connotes arable land, with the implication that Persian blood has fertilized Salamis island, and as a result all Greece is nourished from its harvest.

would witness the proliferation of commemorative media, described as “celebration culture,” in which Greece used art and architecture to laud its expulsion of Persians from its shores. An important aspect of this celebratory atmosphere was the renewed image of epic Greeks fighting Trojans, an apt analogue for contemporary Greeks fighting Persians. In Simonides’ Plataea Elegy –perhaps composed for Plataea’s victory celebration, Sparta is commemorated as leader of the coalitional army, integrating Achilles as an epic and Panhellenic analogue for the battle of Plataea to promote its interests in the Greek world.

By turning to Achilles and the Trojan War as comparanda for contemporary history, Greeks of the early classical period could look to an established cultural tradition in order to make sense of their experience in the Persian Wars. That Simonides so soon after Plataea treats it as an event that prevented Sparta and Greece from seeing “the day of slavery,” reveals how thoroughly the Persian invasions disrupted the Greek world. Contemplating such a narrow escape from political domination would lead Greeks to turn to relevant stories from tradition in order to commemorate what happened through a consonant narrative palatable to Greek sensibilities.

The Eion epigrams provide the earliest evidence for Athens’ assimilation of the Trojan War as a model for its action in the Persian Wars, depicting Athens’ role at Eion with Menestheus and the Athenian contingent from the *Iliad*. While Menestheus’ role in the *Iliad* is well attested, however, his connection to Telamonian Ajax lends greater importance to Athens’ association with the much more famous Homeric warrior. Although Athens’ assimilation of the Ajax myth began in the sixth century in local disputes between Megara and Corinth over Salamis, and it used Ajax’s proximity to Menestheus and the Athenian contingent in the *Iliad*’s

catalogue of the ships to support its claims, the battle of Salamis would provide a serendipitous moment to appropriate Ajax as a model for their leadership in the Persian Wars.

In 472 BCE, Aeschylus produced *Persians*, a historical tragedy which depicted the Persian court's reaction to defeat at the battle of Salamis. Despite its general diplomatic tone, *Persians* attributes Salamis to Athenian orchestration, and underscores Athens' role as the defender of Hellas through references and allusions to the Iliadic Ajax. Similar to the relationship of Menestheus with Ajax, Athens emphasized the naval battle's proximity to Salamis island in order to promote its prestige and to project itself as the Ajax of the Persian invasions likening itself, in turn, to the great defensive warrior *par excellence* of the Homeric tradition. By associating itself with Ajax as the "bulwark of the Achaeans," Athens can articulate for itself and the Hellenic world an ideology as the preserver of Greek freedom.

Accordingly, as the fifth century continued, Athens asserted its hegemonic claims as it led the newly minted Delian League -the former Hellenic alliance sans Sparta, and manipulated its identity as defender of Greek freedom in order to justify oppressive tactics in dealing with Delian League member states. In the unfolding century, this identity of liberty that Athens cultivated in its experience with Persia would be used against itself as the Delian League was transformed into the Athenian empire. However, criticism would arise from Athens itself and once again a tragedian would turn to the Homeric Ajax in order to critique the political life of his polis.

Chapter 3: Sophocles' Athenian *Ajax*

In this chapter, I argue that Sophocles' *Ajax* can be read as a meditation on Athens' shifting identity from Panhellenic defender in the Persian Wars to imperial aggressor in the Peloponnesian War. I suggest that when Ajax recalls his duel and weapon exchange with Hector (654-665 recalling *Il.*7.161-312), he invites Athens to recall its former identity in the Persian War to contrast it with its current imperialist identity. Ajax sees the moment he received Hector's sword as the beginning of his present misfortunes, understanding that "the gifts of enemies are no gifts" (661-5). Similarly, by acquiring its massive trireme armada in order to confront Xerxes, Athens received the weapon of its enemy, establishing its imperial infrastructure, and fundamentally altering its former identity as the defender of Hellas. I also examine how the *Ajax* evokes Aeschylus' *Persians* through several intertextual allusions, suggesting that Sophocles has embedded the Athenian moment of Salamis in the epic past of the Ajax myth, which in turn portends the battle of Salamis in Aeschylus' play. This in turn aligns the heroic trajectories of Athens and Ajax, inviting Athens to contrast its current imperious activity of the 440s to its own epicized past. In this sense, I read the *Ajax* as a reproach to Athens, which contrasts the city's current imperial hegemony with its former "Greek Bulwark" identity.¹⁷²

The *Ajax* is Sophocles' most Homeric tragedy. Concerning the final day of the *Iliad*'s second most prestigious warrior, the play spotlights the contrast between two Ajaxes, examining the difference between Ajax's former Iliadic character and the figure on stage responsible for the attempted murder of his Greek comrades. By detailing the stark about-face of a highly politicized

¹⁷² Pi. fr.76.

Athenian epic hero, Sophocles, I suggest, invites his audience to compare Athenian history with its recent turn toward imperial hegemony.

Athens spent considerable political capital linking the Ajax myth to its polis, especially in connection to Salamis, Ajax's home island and the inaugural site of Athenian imperialist ambitions. From the 6th century, Athens had vied with Megara, Corinth, and Aegina in efforts to claim Ajax and Salamis as its own native hero (see above).¹⁷³ In 480 BCE, the battle of Salamis cemented Athens' reputation as the defender of Hellenic freedom, and Ajax and his island were ever after linked to Salamis as the "Athenian moment" of Greek salvation. When Sophocles depicts Ajax on stage, forming his chorus from Ajax's Salaminian sailors and treating the final moments of a hero who reportedly fought at the battle, the political and historical implication for his thematic choice is readily apparent. Thus, Ajax's myth provided an accessible political model, which features a hero contemplating present misfortunes by recalling his former prestige.¹⁷⁴

As a *dramatis persona*, Sophocles' Ajax brings a unique mythico-political biography to his stage character, partly due to Athens' extensive efforts to appropriate Ajax and Salamis in the decades before the play, and partly as a figure of cult (Hdt.8.121.1).¹⁷⁵ In this way, Ajax was an Athenian hero existing both in the epic and recent historical imagination, one thoroughly embedded in Athens' fifth century imperialist foundation. Further, the Sophoclean Ajax

¹⁷³ For extensive discussion, Taylor 1997.

¹⁷⁴ I approach the *Ajax* from a standpoint not unlike P. E. Easterling (1997:52), who argues that tragedy features "subjects which were multivalent enough to be used for dramatizations of a range of possible issues, political, social, moral or existential, without imposing a narrowly limiting interpretation in any of them."

¹⁷⁵ According to Herodotus, Ajax was summoned before the battle of Salamis, and afterward received one of three Phoenician triremes. After Salamis, Ajax's cult was associated with Athenian victory at Salamis. See J. Mikalson 2003:130.

represents the Athenian heroicized recent past, offering Athens a politically charged avatar with which to contemplate and contrast its tumultuous contemporary political atmosphere. The concept of “Ajax” for Athens carries with it something akin to the portrayal of an historical or political figure in film today, an act that inevitably informs, in some fashion, the contemporary political landscape of the audience which “constructs” that figure.

Concerning the *Ajax*, Peter Rose (1995:63) writes that “the dramatist’s choice of myth entails a prima facie presumption that the myth and version chosen reflect some specific problematic as a focus of interest.” From a historicist’s perspective, the pressing issue at the time of *Ajax*’s production was the defection of subject states, formerly willing allies, from the Athenian empire. In the *Ajax*, Sophocles complicates this problem through a Homeric warrior who revisits his own recent past in an effort to understand his current problem. Because the *Ajax* contrasts and contemplates the heroic past and problematic present of Ajax, a figure who has Iliadic, geographical, and religious ties to Athens,¹⁷⁶ it provides a parallel point from which to consider contemporary Athenian geopolitical turmoil in comparison to its epic, Persian War past.

Further, the *Ajax*’s concern with its protagonist’s epic past finds similarities in the Homeric tradition. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* demonstrate an awareness of a time previous to the epic characters they depict, supplying the history of an earlier generation of heroes to which Greek warriors frequently compare themselves.¹⁷⁷ This generation, whom the aged Nestor represents, consisted of the fathers of the heroes of the present Trojan War such as Tydeus, and

¹⁷⁶ Eurysakes and Philaios, sons of Ajax, had shrines at Melite and Braurion, respectively. Wickersham (1991:18) notes in reference to this, Athens’ claims to Salamis were “unshakable” in its dispute with Megara, “since the tradition included the details that Philaios had settled in Braurion and Eurysakes in Melite, with Philaios being the eponym of the deme Philaidai.”

¹⁷⁷ For example, Diomedes and Glaucus stop fighting one another when they recognize that *xenia* exists between their ancestors (*Il.*6.119-236).

Telamon, and just as they surpass in martial strength the current generation, so too the generation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* surpass the generation who listen to epic now, (e.g. “those who lift a stone that *not two men today* could lift *Il.5.302-4*). Rooted in this Homeric tradition, the *Ajax* also conveys an embedded perspective on Greek history. Yet, whereas the *Iliad* illustrates warriors living beneath the previous generation’s heroic standard, setting for them a premium exemplum to imitate, the *Ajax* interprets Achilles’ death as a new line of demarcation which separates and distances Iliadic heroes from the figures in Sophocles’ play.

Jonas Grethlein (2012:15). has termed Homeric poetry’s awareness of its own epic history, the “epic plupast.” He describes it as “the past that preceded the main action of the song... an embedded past of the heroes that mirrors the heroic past presented in epic poetry.” The span of time envisioned to separate the the epic present of Achilles from the past of Meleager, for example, is commensurate with the amount of time separating Achilles from the present rhapsodic performance. In other words, the link existing between the audience of the Homeric performance and the poem’s heroes, exists between Achilles and the generation preceding him. Likewise, the tragedian’s depiction of a Homeric episode can lend itself to a similar “mirrored distancing,” with the tragic audience acting like the audience of a Homeric performance. Moreover, the Athenian tragic audience reassembles the reenactment of a Homeric episode to construct a model for comparison and meditation on one or more of its contemporary problems. Thus, the tragedian’s art is geared toward direct reflection on current communal activity, expressing an amplified link between the epic past and the present.¹⁷⁸ When a play treats

¹⁷⁸ On tragedy and epic’s relation to temporality, Eric Csapo and Margaret Miller (1998: 100-11) note Goethe and Schiller’s distinction between the two, that epic is “absolute past,” and tragedy is “absolute present.” Nagy argues that since the Archaic mimesis of epic is the reenactment of an archetype, that the performer does not perform per se, but channels Homer, and thus the bard looks to the “ultimate model,” taking part in a chain of reenactment reaching back to an ultimate

a Homeric character like Ajax, with inherent historical ties to Athenian polis identity, and whose depiction before the community concentrates heavily on criticism of his own epic past, the play lends itself to a self-reflexive examination of contemporary Athenian politics.

While Greek myth as a whole provided subjects for drama, certain myths are more explicitly linked with Athenian civic ideology and history than others. For example, *Persians* relates a historical account of Athenian victory at Salamis, Theseus' appearance in *Medea* and *Hippolytos* reflects his role as one of Athens' earliest kings, the *Ion* addresses Athenian civic foundations through the story of the eponymous hero of the Ionians, and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* considers the distinctive Athenian habit of integrating foreign exiles and suppliants.¹⁷⁹ The Ajax myth of Sophocles' play, however, occupies a liminal space somewhere between the explicit historical narrative of the recent battle of Salamis and the far distant mythic past of *Ion*. In this way, the *Ajax* provides a unique opportunity for Sophocles to bridge the epic past of Homeric poetry with its own recent epic past at the battle of Salamis, while linking it to the present of the *Ajax*'s production.

Grethlein (2010: 94) has suggested that Aeschylus employs a similar tack in *Persians*. He sees "the link between the past on stage and the present of the audience mirrored" in the Darius necromancy scene, arguing that it can be read as a *mise-en-abyme*. Since Darius belongs to the generation before Xerxes, his appearance represents a "plupast" in *Persians*, which in itself

archetypal past (Nagy 1996). Tragedy, on the other hand, represents the composition of a single production, and unlike epic, pertains to the "ill-disguised present unperturbed by glaring anachronism" (Csapo and Miller 1998: 111).

¹⁷⁹ Athenians prided themselves on accepting foreign exiles and suppliants. R. Scodel (2006: 77) notes that in the *Oedipus Colonus* and the *Ajax* there is "a discourse that maintains the separateness of Athenians [that] is intimately linked with one that praises willingness to accept outsiders. The paradox invites speculation that, for Sophocles, Athenian autochthony is the basis of a nobility of character that makes the acceptance of foreigners possible."

crafts an epic past for Xerxes and the battle of Salamis, and positions the Athenian audience as the audience of a Homeric performance separated from heroes of the epic past, and the generation before them. Similarly, the Sophoclean Ajax demonstrates an awareness of the epic plupast when he questions how his father Telamon could ever look upon him, not having gained the prize of glory which his father had won (*Aj.*462-5). However, whereas this dramatic performance juxtaposes Ajax's current predicament with the epic "plupast" of Telamon, Ajax later settles on his more recent history as a source for criticism, and cites his aborted duel with Hector and weapon exchange as the start of his troubles (*Aj.*661-3). Accordingly, for Athens, Ajax's recollection of his own recent epic past gives further epic distance to that Iliadic episode, in the way that Darius' necromancy provides for *Persians*. Although *Persians* is more historically explicit than the *Ajax*, the Athenian audience shares a communal moment of *critical* epic memory with the Ajax figure whose link with Salamis and active participation in that battle can be paralleled by an episode of the recent Athenian epic past. In this way, the *Ajax* addresses the battle of Salamis as an event from Athens' epic past, which it may examine with the same critical esprit that Ajax employs for his epic past.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Performance and the tragic mask may facilitate the perception of the epic past's distance from the present moment of the audience. David Wiles (Wiles 2007:251) argues that when "actors animate timeless masks" they resurrect the dead for the living audience, creating moments of mutual spectatorship in which the masks' blank expression reflects back the gaze of the audience. Concerning the *Ajax*, he states that the performance "make(s) Ajax the Homeric hero engage with the world of the present... to create a living encounter with a figure from the past" (*ibid*). While other aspects of Wiles' thesis have been hotly contested, this idea that the "living encounter" with Ajax can bridge the Athenian present to the epic past suggests a unique and stark way to juxtapose the value system, history, and ideological identity of Athens with the tragic downfall of Ajax, an adopted Athenian hero, and native son of Salamis.

Perhaps dated to the mid 440s, the *Ajax* was produced in the shadow of the Samian revolt, during the build-up to the Peloponnesian War,¹⁸¹ and at the height of Athenian imperial activity. In contrast to 472, when Aeschylus celebrated Athens at the battle of Salamis, the 440s witnessed Athens' transformation from Delian league hegemon to brutal imperial master.¹⁸² The Delian league, at first a joint Hellenic venture to check Persian encroachment, became for Athens the vehicle of its empire. One of the *Ajax*'s political subtexts is the transformation of the defensive alliance, and the play poses for Athens in mythic form the problem of its contradictory socio-political identity –the intractable freedom fighter polis who defended Greece in the Persian Wars, now the brutal imperial master of Hellas.

The *Ajax* and the *Persians*

In the previous chapter, I argued that Ajax lurks within the text of Aeschylus' *Persians*, suggesting that the Iliadic Ajax's defense of the Greek fleet at Troy parallels Athens' Panhellenic defense of Greek liberty in the Straits of Salamis. While Aeschylus lived and fought in the battles of Marathon and Salamis, and died ca. 456, Sophocles too witnessed the Persian Wars, yet he also lived to see Athens transform into an imperial power, descending into the brutality of the Peloponnesian War. Accordingly, in contrast to the laudatory political tenor of *Persians*, the *Ajax* reveals a critical and unsettling depiction of Athens' adoptive Homeric hero, depicting the

¹⁸¹ At the time *Ajax* was performed 443-40, Sophocles was chosen as the chairman of the board of the Athenian Hellenotamiae, an office of ten magistrates (from the ten Athenian tribes) which served to collect the contributions of the allied poleis of the Delian League –essentially the financial officers of the Athenian Empire (Thuc. 1.96). Moreover, Sophocles more than likely served as strategos during the Samian Revolt and was probably instrumental in its suppression (Thuc. 1.115.1).

¹⁸² For the “Athens as the new Persian enslaver” motif, especially in the words of Spartans, cf. 1.122.3, 2.63.2, and for the Mytilenean take, 3.10.3-5.

suicide of the cult figure who fought with the Athenians at Salamis for Athens in the turbulent 440s.¹⁸³

Scholars have commented on several links between these two disparate plays. G. Wolff, for example, in the late nineteenth century, compiled an impressive list of diction shared between *Persians* and the *Ajax*,¹⁸⁴ and although Jebb relegates this prevalence to Sophocles' early Aeschylean influence, he also adds two more instances. However, recent scholars have taken up Wolff's torch, interpreting the resonant Aeschylean diction of Sophocles' *Ajax* as a critical nod to *Persians*. Recently, Francis Dunn (2012) utilized Wolff's suggestions and argued that *Persians* and *Ajax* share a "metonymic connection" between their plots, and because *Persians* showcases Ajax specifically as Salamis' owner (307, 367, 596), that when Sophocles' play echoes *Persians* it evokes the battle of Salamis as a point of contemplation for Ajax's audience. He also suggests that echoes of the messenger speech from Aeschylus' *Persians* appear throughout the first half of Sophocles' *Ajax*.

By employing the verb ῥαχίζω to describe how the maddened Ajax slaughtered the herds and flocks, for example, Sophocles alludes to the *Persians*' messenger speech when he describes how Greeks fell on Persian sailors at the battle of Salamis. In the opening scene of the *Ajax*, Athena, preening over Ajax's maddened state, describes how he attacked the livestock,

ἔνθ' εἰσπεσὼν ἔκειρε πολύκερων φόνον
κύκλω ῥαχίζων:

then he fell on the many horned beasts and slaughtered them, hacking at them all around him and cutting through their spines. (55-6)

¹⁸³ R. Kennedy (2009:140) encapsulates Ajax's suicide, stating "it is the downfall of a generation's ideal. Through his relationship to both the allies and to the Salaminian heroes of Athens' past, Ajax represents an era in Athenian history when bravery and freedom came before safety and moderation. In the new world of the empire, such bravery is self-destructive."

¹⁸⁴ Wolff lists: *Aj.*56 = *Pers.* 426, *Aj.*412 = *Pers.* 367, *Aj.*673 = *Pers.*386, *Aj.* 740 = *Pers.* 489, *Aj.*172, 954 = *Pers.* 633, *Aj.* 1404 = *Pers.*584; Jebb adds: *Aj.*789 = *Pers.*248, *Aj.* 769 = *Pers.* 477.

Persians relates:

τοὶ δ' ὥστε θύννους ἢ τιν' ἰχθύων βόλον
ἀγαῖσι κωπῶν θραύμασιν τ' ἐρειπίων
ἔπαιον, ἐρράχιζον.

But, as if our men were tuna or some haul of fish,
the foe kept striking and hacking them with broken oars
and fragments of wrecked ships. (424-6)

According to Dunn, ῥαχίζω is used in this sense, meaning to hack, only in *Persians* and the *Ajax*, and its appearance links Ajax's bloody slaughter of animals with the slaughter of Persians in the Straits of Salamis.¹⁸⁵ He also suggests that Sophocles presents Ajax's killing of the livestock as a monumental event, and that it provides a distancing effect, meant to emphasize its consequence. Further, Athens' foundational civic identity as the defender of Greek freedom, established through the violent "hacking" of Persian invaders at Salamis, takes on new meaning in the *Ajax* who "hacks" animals who he thinks are Greek comrades in the *Ajax*. Considering Ajax as Athens, the allusive ῥαχίζω that connects both events contrasts through parallel diction the Athenian moment at Salamis in *Persians* with Ajax's savagery in Sophocles' play.

Another instance where the *Ajax* shares similar diction with *Persians* occurs at 596-8, where the Salaminian chorus exclaims:

ὦ κλεινὰ Σαλαμῖς, σὺ μὲν που
ναίεις ἀλίπλακτος, εὐδαίμων,
πᾶσιν περίφαντος αἰεὶ.

Oh famous Salamis, you lie, I think, beaten by the sea and prosperous,
forever conspicuous to all men's eyes. (596-8)

the correlative *Persians*' passage relates:

Τενάγων τ' ἄριστος Βακτρῶν ἰθαιγενῆς

¹⁸⁵ According to Hesychius, the verb ῥαχίζω seems also to have religious connotations, with the initial stroke and then the division of the meat.

θαλασσόπληκτον νῆσον Αἴαντος σποδεῖ.

Tenagon, noble and best of the Bactrians
pounds Ajax's island beaten by the sea. (306-7)

The word ἀλίπλακτος, occurring elsewhere only in Pindar's *Pythian* 4.14, is modeled on Aeschylus' θαλασσόπληκτον. Both adjectives refer to Salamis, and in each instance a speaker mentions the island in a form of lamentation –the Persian messenger laments Tenagon's death, his corpse now beating against the island, and in the *Ajax*, Salaminian sailors speak in nostalgic apostrophe to Salamis, anachronistically referring to it as famous from the Trojan beach. The anachronism, however, is pointed. For Sophocles' Athenian audience, ὦ κλεινὰ Σαλαμῖς will evoke Athenian fame at the battle, and perhaps conjure the prophetic cadence of the Delphic oracle, related later by Herodotus in apostrophe,

ὦ θείη Σαλαμῖς, ἀπολεῖς δὲ σὺ τέκνα γυναικῶν

O Holy Salamis, you will destroy children of women (*Hdt.*7.142.2).

ὦ κλεινὰ Σαλαμῖς, σὺ μὲν που
ναίεις **ἀλίπλακτος**, εὐδαίμων. (*Aj.*596)

As noted in the last chapter, the appearance of Ajax at *Pers.* 307 implies that he assisted in the battle of Salamis,¹⁸⁶ and if ὦ κλεινὰ Σαλαμῖς evokes the oracle's ὦ θείη Σαλαμῖς (and they are metrically equivalent), the *Ajax*'s ἀλίπλακτος has created an allusive link constructed around two separate appearances of Salamis island. While the *Persians*' passage praises Athenian victory at Salamis through an enemy's report, the *Ajax* passage casts Salamis island as an already famous landmark, one which the chorus of Salaminian sailors anticipates. This allows figures of the

¹⁸⁶ An implication that Herodotus confirms when he relates that after the battle the Greeks dedicated three Phoenician triremes to the gods, one was sent to the Isthmus, one to Sounium and one to Salamis for Ajax (*Hdt.* 8.121.1).

epic past and the contemporary present of Sophocles' audience to focus on the single glorious moment of Salamis in 480 BCE. By linking these three temporal perspectives, Sophocles invites Athens to contrast its current political machinations with its own heroic recent past.

Sophocles offers another link connecting Salamis island and Ajax's domain in Aeschylus' *Persians*. After Tecmessa attempts to dissuade Ajax from committing suicide, he relates:

ἰὼ
πόροι ἀλίρροθοι
πάραλά τ' ἄντρα καὶ νέμος ἐπάκτιον,
πολὺν πολὺν με δαρὸν τε δὴ
κατείχεται ἄμφι Τροίαν χρόνον

Oh, you **paths of the roaring sea**,
you caves beside the sea and wooded pastures by the shore,
for long for far too long
a time you have detained me at Troy. (412-414)

The line “paths of the roaring sea” is the same phrase that Aeschylus employs when the *Persians*' messenger describes Xerxes' battle plan at Salamis,

τάξαι νεῶν στίφος μὲν ἐν στοίχοις τρισὶν
ἔκπλους φυλάσσειν καὶ **πόρους ἀλιρρόθους**,
ἄλλας δὲ **κύκλω νῆσον Αἴαντος πέριξ**:

to arrange the array of ships in three columns, and
to guard against (Greeks) sailing out on the paths of the roaring sea
and the others in a circle around Ajax's island. (*Pers.* 367-8)

In an appeal to natural surroundings, Ajax repeats the phrase πόρους ἀλιρρόθους “paths of the roaring sea,” used in *Persians* of Xerxes' plan to trap Greeks κύκλω νῆσον Αἴαντος πέριξ, “in a circle around Ajax's island.” This phrase appears elsewhere only in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (1205), and its rarity causes it to resonate all the more loudly, especially considering the fact that in *Persians* it follows immediately upon the mention of Salamis. Commenting on this, Dunn writes that it “implies a connection between the living hero in one play and the place that

commemorates him in the other” (2012: 276). In this way, Sophocles promotes a transgenerational moment of civic reflection, one that spans the Trojan War, the Athenian recollection of Salamis, and the time of the *Ajax*’s production. As a project that serves to engender civic identity, the *Ajax*’s incorporation of the epic past, of Athens’ epic recent past, and the inclusion of the problematization of Athenian imperialist activity provides for Athens a point of ideological examination.

Finally, in the passage most noted for linking *Ajax* with *Persians*, when Ajax offers his long speech on cosmic change and alternation, he employs the same phrase for daylight that the *Persians*’ messenger uses when he describes day’s arrival, and the turning of the tide at the battle of Salamis,

ἐπεὶ γε μέντοι λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα
πᾶσαν κατέσχε γαῖαν εὐφεγγῆς ἰδεῖν,
πρῶτον μὲν ἤχη κέλαδος Ἑλλήνων πάρα
μολπηδὸν ἠυφήμησεν, ὄρθιον δ’ ἅμα
ἀντηγάλαξε νησιώτιδος πέτρας
ἠχώ

Instead, when Day with her white horses
spread her brilliant light over all the earth,
first of all there rang out loudly a joyful song from the Greeks,
and simultaneously the echo of it resounded back
from the cliffs of the island. (386-91)

In the *Ajax*, in what seems like Ajax’s newfound acceptance to live, he aligns himself with the natural cycle of the universe,

καὶ γὰρ τὰ δεινὰ καὶ τὰ καρτερώτατα
τιμαῖς ὑπεῖκει: τοῦτο μὲν νιφοστιβεῖς
χειμῶνες ἐκχωροῦσιν εὐκάρπῳ θέρει:
ἐξίσταται δὲ νυκτὸς αἰανῆς κύκλος
τῆ λευκοπώλῳ φέγγος ἡμέρα φλέγειν:

For even things that are terrible and very strong
yield to what is held in honor; firstly, winters

which cover the roads with snow give way to
summer with its lovely fruit;
and the eternal rotation of the night
withdraws for **day with its white horses to kindle its light.** (669-73)

The rare phrase λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα only appears earlier in this form at *Odyssey* 23.246. In each passage, it describes day bringing light to earth (εὐφεγγής in *Persians* and φέγγος in *Ajax*). To be sure, the dramatic occasion sets each instance apart, and the historical account of the battle of Salamis seems poorly matched to the philosophical tone of Ajax's soliloquy. Nevertheless, this is perhaps Sophocles' intention. On this passage, Richard Garner states that both plays "remind us that Salamis is the home of Ajax" and that the "phrase, rhythm, and thought have all been borrowed by Sophocles from [*Persians*] which describes the most famous event at his hero's home" (1990:50). Despite Garner's general claim that their "dramatic contexts preclude allusion," I would argue that allusion is not bound by dramatic convention, but that it also extends to political subtexts. Where Aeschylus fetes Salamis as the inaugural site of Athenian military preeminence, Sophocles depicts its most famous denizen in existential turmoil, and has him utter the same phrase that Aeschylus employed to begin the narrative of the greatest victory in Athenian history.

Moreover, the appearance of λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα in *Persians* marks the beginning of the battle of Salamis. When dawn's white horses spread their kindly light across the land, Greeks begin the paeon, the land resounds its supernatural assent, and the light presages the disembodied voice that will exhort the allied Hellenes to victory (400-1). Prior to this, Xerxes and his armada were confident of their victory, and had uselessly sailed all night to prevent Greek forces from escaping –something they never intended to do. Thus, λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα ushers in the beginning of the turning of the tide for Greece –it marks a moment of profound historical

transition, the moment the Persian advance has reached its limit, and the point where Athens begins to forge its political fortunes.

In a similar tack, Ajax employs λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα in order to describe the alternation principle, the force responsible for shifting natural phenomena as well as the vicissitudes of his social order. The principle of alternation is the idea that time causes the observable world and social relations to yield to their opposite.¹⁸⁷ Night yields to day, winter's snow yields to summer's fruit, friends become enemies, and warriors who fought honorably descend into humiliation (666-77). Ajax centers on the interval between his former state and his new immediate condition, and finds the salient point where former identity has shifted to new –the moment when his fortunes worsened –when he received Hector's sword in gift exchange after an aborted duel. Ruminating on his heroic past, he considers Hector's sword, given in friendly exchange in the past, only now to reveal itself as his killer. The force of Ajax's recollection of receiving Hector's sword from the *Iliad*, of considering his own recent epic past activates the allusion to λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα found in *Persians*. Ajax models for the Athenian audience a heroic recollection and recognition of degraded contemporary standards in contrast to an epic and honorable encounter that occurred before. The λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα, accordingly, alerts us to an Athenian political subtext since it links the celebration of the battle of Salamis, a glorious

¹⁸⁷ Ajax couches his soliloquy on cosmic reciprocity within the *trugrede*, or deception speech – the most controversial part of the play. For interpretations debating whether Ajax has decided not to kill himself, and become a model of *sophrosyne* see Bowra 1944, Stanford 1978. Whether he deliberately misleads akin to the methods of his rival Odysseus see Blundell 1989. Garvie sees Ajax's eloquent exposition on the alternation principle as sufficient reason to “believe that it is not all deceit or bitter sarcasm...It is hard to believe that all of this is expended on a lie” (1998: 186). There is the idea that Ajax “deceives without actually lying” (Finglass 2012). When Ajax declares that he will submit to the Atreidae, as part and parcel to the alternation principle, he states “the power that yields is extinguished,” indicating his intention to die (Heath 1987).

moment in Athens' recent past, and a play concerning the suicide of the island's most famous son, produced in a turbulent time witnessing Athens' increasing imperialistic brutality.

These textual allusions to the *Persians* clarify how the *Ajax* looks backward in order to consider contemporary Athenian politics. By alluding to *Persians*, the *Ajax* can depict a Homeric myth that foreshadows Athenian military preeminence, since the allusions are found in sections which alert us to the battle of Salamis in Aeschylus' play. As such, the allusions draw attention to an intentional anachronism. While the *Ajax* looks back to *Persians* to contrast its optimism to current Athenian political fortunes, the mythic time of the *Ajax* looks forward to the battle of Salamis. By including this type of temporal loop, Sophocles has created a current of reflection flowing from the celebratory tenor of the battle of Salamis in 472, to the dark moment of Ajax's madness, his attempt to murder comrades, and his suicide featured in the 440s.

Sophocles' *Iliad*: Ajax and Hector

The *Iliad* is ever present in the background of the *Ajax*. Depicting for fifth century Athens the problematic closing arc of the *Iliad*'s second greatest warrior, the play complicates any clear-cut attempt to idealize the Homeric warrior ethos in service to the democratic polis.¹⁸⁸ In communion with the *Iliad*, the *Ajax* looks to the relational dynamics between its characters to inform the thoughts, actions, and trajectory of the figures in the play. For the Sophoclean Ajax, it is the haunting presence of two deceased Iliadic warriors, Achilles and Hector that come to define his character's dramatic path.

¹⁸⁸ Scholars have written copiously on Iliadic intertextual allusion in the *Ajax* and its implications for the Athenian polis. Hesk (2003:32) notes, "the *Ajax* can only make sense if its implied dialectic between Homeric 'intertext' and Athenian context is acknowledged and pursued. Most notably for this study, see Bradshaw 1991:99-125, Rose 1995: 59-90, Hesk 2003, Futo-Kennedy 2009:113-146, Mueller 2016.

Ever second best (*Il.*2.768-9), The Achilles’ standard is always just beyond reach of Ajax. In fact, the *Iliad* emphasizes this ranking to such a degree that the Homeric audience is treated to a pathetic irony in its extra-narrative knowledge of the outcome of the judgment of the arms. It is fitting then, as scholars have noted, that the *Ajax* reads like a miniaturized version of the story of Achilles’ rage.¹⁸⁹ It is Ajax’s *Iliad*. The *Iliad* and *Ajax* relate the aftermath of denying a hero the material representation of his *kleos*. Agamemnon takes Briseis, while the Greek leaders vote away Achilles’ arms to Odysseus. But, where Athena restrains Achilles from killing Agamemnon (*Il.*1.188-223), she darkens Ajax’s mind, crafting his humiliation, and fueling his rage upon the livestock (*Aj.*50-65).¹⁹⁰ Ajax’s reaction is the natural result of an insatiable devotion to the standards of his warrior society. What is more, Ajax fails to achieve the mark of distinction that his devotion to his warrior ethos has groomed him—as indeed the *Iliad*’s audience expects with repeated mention of Ajax’s second place standing—to attain the armor of the “best of the Achaeans.” For Ajax, losing Achilles’ armor is an intolerable failure, that the greatest warrior after Achilles should not receive Achilles’ armor at his death.¹⁹¹

As best of the Achaeans, Achilles exists at the pinnacle of arete, and in this security he better manages his initial anger in the assurance of his heroic identity—he is more amenable to

¹⁸⁹ In most assessments, scholars note the disparity in Achilles’ and Ajax’s response to dishonor. See Heath 1987: 173, Garvie 1998: 11.

¹⁹⁰ Ajax’s reaction seems disproportionate compared to Achilles, but Achilles’ response may not seem that different, particularly in relation to Athena’s role in each case. Operating under the precept of double-determination, Ajax’s rage actually surpasses Achilles’ initial anger in this moment. Achilles’ choice is ἢ ὃ γε φάσγανον ὄξυ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ / τοὺς μὲν ἀναστήσειεν, ὃ δ’ Ἀτρεΐδην ἐναρίζοι, “whether to draw from beside his thigh/ the sharp sword, driving away all those who stood between and kill the son of Atreus” (*Il.*1.190-1), or to restrain his anger.

¹⁹¹ While Ajax directly attacks his comrades (so he thinks), one could argue that Achilles is also responsible for the same scenario since his rage and self-imposed exile result in the affliction of “pains thousandfold upon the Achaeans, hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades, strong souls of heroes” (*Il.*1.1-4).

Athena’s pliant suggestion that “with words you may abuse (Agamemnon),” and that “three times over such shining gifts shall be given you” (*Il.*1.211-14). Heroic insecurity plagues Ajax, who enjoys no such rapport with Athena, nor the consideration that he may receive comparable recompense (what could compare with the greatest award of his warrior society?), rather the opposite, he enjoys her enmity. Athena not only “cast grievous imaginations on his eyes” (*Aj.*51-2), but she “urged the man on in his frenzied movement with attacks of madness” (59-60). In the *Ajax*’s intertextual communication with *Iliad* book 1, Sophocles depicts Athena’s disparate relationships with Achilles and Ajax: one in which Athena cooperates with Achilles and the other in which she revels in humiliating and exercising control over Ajax, a former comrade in their expedition against Troy.¹⁹²

The death of Achilles divides the world of the *Iliad* from the world of the *Ajax*. While Achilles lives, his existence marks the pinnacle of heroic achievement, when warriors better understood their position in relation to his primacy. The *Ajax* depicts a heroic generation wrestling with its existence in the aftermath of the heroic ideal, and lacking Achilles as arbiter, the judgment of his arms seems underhanded.¹⁹³ Ajax gives voice to his world without Achilles,

καίτοι τοσοῦτόν γ’ ἐξεπίστασθαι δοκῶ:
εἰ ζῶν Ἀχιλλεύς τῶν ὀπλῶν τῶν ὧν πέρι
 κρίνειν ἔμελλε κράτος ἀριστείας τινί,
 οὐκ ἄν τις αὐτ’ ἔμαρψεν ἄλλος ἀντ’ ἐμοῦ.

And yet this much at least I think I understand:
 if Achilles were alive and was to assign to anyone
 the victory for excellence in the matter of his own arms,
 no one else would have seized them instead of me. (*Aj.*441-44)

¹⁹² Rebecca Futo-Kennedy aligns Athena’s comments in the play’s prologue with the Athenians’ sentiments in the Melian Dialogue of Thucydides (134-41). She reads Athena’s language as indicative of the realpolitik of asymmetrical power relationships.

¹⁹³ Additionally, consider Achilles’ arbitrational role in distributing prizes for Patroclus’ funeral games –often checking violent eruptions between warriors who would ultimately defer to Achilles (*Il.*23.257-897).

Without the adjudicating living presence of Achilles, Homeric warriors struggle to secure their identity. Accordingly, this model invites the Athenian audience of the 440s to consider historical comparisons. For example, living in the shadow of the generation of Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea –those Greeks who encountered and repulsed the existential Persian threat, the Athenian generation viewing Sophocles’ *Ajax* now administer an imperial bureaucracy originally founded as a willing coalition of mutual protection based on the expression of the heroic ideal at Salamis. Athenian leadership failed to provide a commensurate encore to Greek victory in the Persian Wars in the decades after the “Athenian moment” of 480BCE, and devolved into an oppressive empire, capable of lashing out in reprisal at allies if they refused to acquiesce to Athenian demands.

The Sophoclean Ajax epitomizes this decline, and analogizes an older aristocratic order’s inability to reconcile its accustomed position of prestige with the allied and multilateral confederation of Hellenic states, when they began to chafe and rebel against Athens’ lead. Ajax’s suicide is the self-destruction of the Homeric warrior ethos, and the result of an inability to integrate in multilateral alliances. Looking to Rose’s description of Ajax as an Athenian *strategos* (2003:32), we see Ajax as an aristocratic naval commander leading his Salaminian sailors, a concept reflected in the relationship between Athenian *stratego*i and the majority of Sophocles’ audience, sailors for Athens’ trireme navy. While Rose sees the figure of Ajax as a means to discuss Athenian class struggle (an argument with which I agree), Ajax can also serve as the representation of Athens’ past heroic Persian War ideal in contrast with its contemporary dealings with allied city-states. The point is emphasized in the argument over whether Ajax

should receive burial, as Teucer and Odysseus argue with Agamemnon and Menelaus, a significant Athenian/Spartan debate.¹⁹⁴

Besides Achilles, Hector is the other dead Homeric warrior whose presence permeates the *Ajax*. Whereas Achilles' *arete* subordinates all other warriors, Hector and Ajax are most often depicted in balance –they are doubling figures. As I discussed in chapter 1, the *Iliad* depicts Ajax and Hector as counterpoints, whose names are metrically equivalent, and are paired more often in battle in the *Iliad* than any other Greek and Trojan warrior. Additionally, Ajax and Hector share an insatiable dedication to αἰδώς, the “shame of something thought to be dishonorable” (Redfield 1975: 113-119). Moreover Hector and Ajax serve as symbols of their city's defense –they are the “walls” of their people. Hector is the chief defender of Troy, and when he dies, Troy will soon fall too. Likewise, when Achilles withdraws, and Ajax defends the ships alone, he activates his epithet as the ἔρκος, “bulwark of the Achaeans.”

Without Achilles and Hector, the Sophoclean Ajax exists in a world lacking worthy peers, a theme which Sophocles returns to in the *Philoctetes*.¹⁹⁵ That the outcome of the *hoplon krisis* denied the second best of the Achaeans the glorious armor of Achilles, confirms for Ajax that men of his and Achilles' quality no longer exist. In the void of competent rivals, Sophocles presents the figure of Hector, Ajax's counterpart in the *Iliad*. The *Ajax's* frequent allusions to

¹⁹⁴ Rose (1995:85n.46) suggests that the debate carries “ferveant anti-Spartanism,” but that it is Athenian imperialist propaganda, noting that in the growing enmity between Athens and Sparta, we may see the “mechanism of projecting the imperial nation's aggression onto the objects of that aggression.

¹⁹⁵ Notably, Philoctetes laments that heroes like Achilles (Ajax included) should have died while a man like Odysseus lives, φεῦ φεῦ: τί δῆτα δεῖ σκοπεῖν, ὅθ' οἶδε μὲν / τεθνᾶσ', Ὀδυσσεὺς δ' ἔστιν αὖ κἀνταῦθ' ἵνα / χρῆν ἀντὶ τούτων αὐτὸν ἀδᾶσθαι νεκρόν; (*Phi*.428-30) “Alas! What then are we to look for, when these men have died, but Odysseus here again lives, when in their place he should have been announced as dead?”

Hector craft an awareness of his absence that takes shape over the first half of the play.¹⁹⁶

Further, Sophocles employs the Hector-Ajax counterbalancing imagery of the *Iliad* to illustrate Ajax's isolation. Garner argues that Sophocles employs diction linking the martial feats of the Iliadic Ajax to his savage rampage against the livestock, in mistaken belief that they were Greek comrades. One such moment to which Sophocles alludes appears in the Ajax-lion simile of Book 11 of the *Iliad*. When Odysseus is surrounded by Trojans, Ajax appears and drives the Trojans away from Odysseus. In response, Hector and Kebriones see this and decide to confront him,

Αἴας δὲ κλονέει Τελαμώνιος: εὖ δέ μιν ἔγνω:
εὐρὴν γὰρ ἀμφ' ὀμοισιν ἔχει σάκος:
ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας ἵμασεν καλλίτριχας ἵππους
μάστιγι λιγυρῆ.

'The Telamonian Ajax drives them; I know him surely
for he carries the broad shield on his shoulders...'
So he spoke and lashed forward the bright-maned horses
with the singing whip. (*Il.* 11.526-32)

When the Trojans press back against Ajax's assault, Ajax is likened to a savage lion that only begrudgingly cedes ground. Overwhelmed and repulsed, the lion retreats, hungry. In this way, Garner (1990:58) sees the Iliadic lion simile employed in the "action and imagery of his [Sophocles'] play." He further argues that when the play opens, Sophocles features "Ajax the flashing and devouring lion" as a figure who has just preyed on the Greek livestock.¹⁹⁷ Garner's evidence (1990:55) is the fact that the adjective αἶθων "blazing," often "crops up" in Ajax

¹⁹⁶ Melissa Mueller (2016: 15-16, Gell's idea) argues that Hector's sword is depicted on stage in such a way that it exhibits "distributed personhood," a key concept in crafting Hector's presence for the play in light of his physical absence.

¹⁹⁷ Bradshaw (Bradshaw 1991: 102n.9) states, "I doubt that there is any connection between the image of Ajax as the devourer of the stag and the description of the slaughter of the cattle by Ajax in Sophocles." Garner's analysis of similar diction shared between the Iliadic passage and the *Ajax* strongly counters Bradshaw's claim.

passages from the *Iliad*, and that Sophocles plays with this language, employing it in proximity to the verb παπταίνω “to glance around,” and to μάστιγι λιγυρῆ “shrill whip,” which also occur together in the Ajax-lion simile from the *Iliad*. Moreover, where in the *Iliad* Hector’s appearance stalls Ajax’s attack as the lion simile itself bears out this rebuff, in Sophocles, Hector’s absence allows the lion to ravage the livestock unabated. In Garner’s words: “Ajax’s problem in the *Ajax* is that there was no one to drive him back from the Greek livestock which he attacked in non-metaphorical fashion” (ibid).

While Garner draws attention to the allusion to the *Iliad*, there are other thematic connections that link the Iliadic Ajax and Odysseus with their characters in the *Ajax*.¹⁹⁸ Shortly before Hector repulses Ajax’s attack, when Odysseus first becomes encircled by Trojans, he is likened to a wounded stag facing the “rending scavengers.” When Ajax appears,

ἐπί τε λῖν ἤγαγε δαίμων
 σίντην: θῶες μὲν τε διέτρεσαν, αὐτὰρ ὃ δάπτει:
 ὥς ῥα τότε ἄμφ’ Ὀδυσῆα δαΐφρονα ποικιλομήτην
 Τρῶες ἔπον πολλοί τε καὶ ἄλκιμοι, αὐτὰρ ὃ γ’ ἦρωσ

¹⁹⁸ While Animal similes in the *Iliad* are numerous, particular attention must be given to the lion type. In the hierarchy of heroic *arete*, with Achilles foremost, the best of the Achaeans will address Hector in such terms before he kills him, “Ἐκτορ μή μοι ἄλαστε συνημοσύνας ἀγόρευε:/ ὥς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά,/ οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν,/ ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν,/ ὥς οὐκ ἔστ’ ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ φιλήμεναι, οὐδέ τι νῶϊν/ ὄρκια ἔσσονται, πρὶν γ’ ἢ ἕτερόν γε πεσόντα/ αἵματος ἄσαι Ἴρηα ταλαύρινον πολεμιστήν (*Il.22.261-7*). “Hector, you wretch, do not speak to me of compacts: just as there are no oaths to be trusted between lions and men, nor do wolves and sheep have like-thinking minds, but always have hostile intent against each other—even so there can be no friendly treatment between me and you, and we will make no oaths.” Clarke (1995: 144). regards Achilles’ use of the lion simile on himself as a departure from its typical deployment when warriors analogize others as beasts, and that Achilles has crafted the simile “in terms of his own personality rather than the fixed codes of warrior society. His words do not merely characterize the immediate situation or the addressee: instead, they present the speaker in a startlingly new aspect.” Achilles effaces his humanity by applying the lion simile to himself and affirms Hector’s in his helplessness. When the lion-Ajax scatters Trojans in the *Iliad*, he corresponds in a normative animal simile usage, however, in the *Ajax*, he attempted to become the lion in his attack on the livestock, in another failed volley in his attempt to reach the Achilles-state.

ἄϊσων ᾧ ἔγγει ἀμύνετο νηλεὲς ἦμαρ.
Αἴας δ' ἐγγύθεν ἦλθε φέρων σάκος ἠῦτε πύργον,
στιῆ δὲ παρέξ: Τρῶες δὲ διέτρεσαν ἄλλυδις ἄλλος.
ἦτοι τὸν Μενέλαος ἀρήϊος ἔξαγ' ὀμίλου

But some spirit leads that way a dangerous
lion, and the scavengers run in terror, and the lion eats it;
so about wise much-devising Odysseus the Trojans
crowded now, valiant and numerous, but the hero
with rapid play of his spear beat off the pitiless death-day.
Now Ajax came near him, carrying like a wall his shield,
and stood forth beside him, and the Trojans fled one way and another.
(*Il.* 11.480-6)

Ambiguity exists as to what connects Odysseus as stag, set upon by scavenging Trojans, and Ajax as lion, who disperses the scavengers to eat the deer alone.¹⁹⁹ Bradshaw (1991:102) suggests that a connection points to Ajax and Odysseus' adversarial relationship, which, due to propriety, cannot "be part of the text." Moreover, to complete the simile, the dispersed Trojan "scavengers" would make way for the lion Ajax to consume Odysseus as stag, a scenario precluded when Hector appears and Zeus instills fear in Ajax.

Book 11's lion simile epitomizes Ajax's character in the Homeric tradition. In the *Iliad*, Ajax is a figure who effects rescue, comrades call upon him for defense; when Menelaus hears Odysseus' cries for help, he turns immediately to Ajax and declares that they must go to his assistance (*Il.* 11.459-71). As Ajax appears, he defends his comrades and disperses the enemy, only to be frustrated at the last and forced to retreat. In thematic terms, the Ajax summoned to defend his comrades embodies the great bulwark of the Achaeans. As the battle continues, Zeus interferes and Ajax is precluded from attaining his desire: routing the Trojans.

¹⁹⁹ In the ambiguous analogies, there may be a veiled reference to extra-Iliadic stories about Ajax and Odysseus.

Sophocles adapts the *Iliad*'s frustrated lion imagery for a diminished heroic age in which Hector fails to appear to rebuff Ajax's savage night attack.²⁰⁰ Whereas in the *Iliad* Odysseus is the wounded stag and Ajax the prowling lion, now the lion reappears and ravages the livestock in Sophocles' play, with no Hector to counter, and with Odysseus assiduously on its trail. Sophocles' inversion of the scene begins in Athena's opening speech, when she says of Odysseus,

ἔνδον γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἄρτι τυγχάνει, κάρρα
 στάζων ἰδρῶτι καὶ χέρας ξιφοκτόνους.
 καὶ σ' οὐδὲν εἴσω τῆσδε παπταίνειν πύλης
 ἔτ' ἔργον ἐστίν...

For Ajax has just arrived home, his head and **sword killer's hands** dripping with sweat. There is no longer any need for you **to peer** inside this gate... (9-11).

Athena employs the verb παπταίνω to describe Odysseus apprehensively looking into Ajax's tent, and while παπταίνω is rare, and "exclusively poetic in classical Greek," it appears in the *Iliad* seventeen times, and as Garner (1990: 231) notes, five times in Ajax passages: 4.497, 8.269, 11.546, 12.33, and 17. 115 (Finglass 2011: 141). Garner linked the verb to the lion simile passage from book 11, but in my opinion, he did not pursue the connection far enough. In Garner's examination of the book 11 passage, he fails to tie Odysseus' initial predicament –being overrun by Trojans to Hector's appearance, and the repulse of Ajax's attack. I argue that Sophocles distorts and inverts this passage in order to illustrate how much Ajax's world has changed, an idea consonant with the corrupting power of time which he later laments. After Ajax

²⁰⁰ In the aftermath of the night attack, the *Ajax* emphasizes the surprise that a human is responsible for the slaughter when Odysseus says to Athena, ἐφθαρμένας γὰρ ἄρτίως εὐρίσκομεν/ λείας ἀπάσας καὶ κατηναρισμένας /ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτοῖς ποιμνίων ἐπιστάταις (25-7) For we have just discovered all the plundered animals destroyed and killed by human hand, together with the overseers and the flocks." Perhaps there was question at first as to whether a lion or other wild animal was responsible.

rescues Odysseus (the stag) from death, and launches an offensive against the Trojan line, Zeus
“drove fear on Ajax,”

Ζεὺς δὲ πατὴρ Αἴανθ' ὑψίζυγος ἐν φόβον ὄρσε:
στῆ δὲ ταφῶν, ὄπιθεν δὲ σάκος βάλεν ἑπταβόειον,
τρέσσε δὲ παπτήνας ἐφ' ὀμίλου θηρὶ ἐοικῶς
ἐντροπαλιζόμενος ὀλίγον γόνυ γουνὸς ἀμείβων.
ὥς δ' αἴθωνα λέοντα βοῶν ἀπὸ μεσσαύλοιο
ἔσσεύαντο κύνες τε καὶ ἀνέρες ἀγροῖῳται,
οἳ τέ μιν οὐκ εἴῳσι βοῶν ἐκ πῖαρ ἐλέσθαι
πάννουχοι ἐγρήσσοντες: ὃ δὲ κρειῶν ἐρατίζων
ἰθύει, ἀλλ' οὐ τι πρήσσει: θαμέες γὰρ ἄκοντες
ἀντίον αἴσσουσι θρασειάων ἀπὸ χειρῶν
καιόμεναί τε δεταί, τάς τε τρεῖ ἐσσύμενός περ:
ἦῶθεν δ' ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἔβη τετιηότι θυμῷ

He stood stunned, and swung the sevenfold ox-hide shield behind him
and drew back, **throwing his eyes round the crowd of men,**
like a wild beast,
turning on his way, shifting knee past knee only a little;
as when the men who live in the wild and **their dogs have driven**
a tawny lion away from the mid-fenced ground of the oxen,
and will not let him tear out the fat of the oxen, watching
nightlong against him, and he in his hunger for meat closes in,
but he can get nothing of what he wants, for the raining javelins
thrown from the daring hands of the men beat ever against him,
and the flaming torches, and these he balks at for all of his fury
and with the daylight goes away disappointed of desire;
so Ajax, disappointed at heart, drew back from the Trojans (*Il.* 11.544-55)

In the midst of Ajax's rampage, Zeus hurls φόβος into his heart. Fearing death, Ajax looks
around anxiously (παπταίνω), and, stalled by φόβος in his attempt to rout the Trojans, he is
featured in simile as the lion once more. This time the lion is αἴθωνα λέοντα, picking up where
his earlier lion simile left off a few lines before when he comes to Odysseus' defense (*Il.* 11.480-
1). The word αἴθων, an adjective occurring often in the *Iliad*, is used to describe the color of
Ajax's lion, as well as to describe Ajax's sword in connection to the slaughter of Greek

livestock.²⁰¹ When the Chorus of Salaminian sailors repeats the rumor, attributed to Odysseus, that Ajax has destroyed the Greek livestock, they state that he did so by “killing the animals with the flashing sword” αἶθωνι σιδήρῳ (*Aj.* 147). The sword, as will become known later, was Hector’s –given in gift exchange after their duel in the *Iliad*. But its connection here with Ajax’s nighttime raid draws a distinction between Ajax’s epic past and the savage act he has recently committed. The audience is cued early to this allusion when Athena mentions the sword in adjectival form at line 10 (ξιφοκτόνους), weaving weapon, warrior, and crime in a single word.²⁰² That Ajax wields Hector’s sword, gained in the ethos of *xenia*, to butcher cattle by night, contrasts the warrior of aristocratic sensibility in book 7, with the animalistic savagery that has turned his tent into an abattoir. The irony now is that Ajax has become the lion of his simile from Book 11, allowed to fulfill his onetime frustrated homicidal impulse against his Greek comrades in the absence of Hector’s counterbalancing presence, using Hector’s sword. Again, the *Ajax* presses its audience to contemplate Ajax’s epic past in contrast to his current deeds by means of Hector’s sword.

The *Ajax* also alludes to Hector by playing on Ajax’s familial relationships, paralleling Tecmessa with Andromache and Eurysakes with Astyanax.²⁰³ Ajax and Tecmessa revive Andromache’s speech to Hector at *Il.* 6.407-39 in Tecmessa’s speech to Ajax at 480-582, and

²⁰¹ While Garner has noted shared diction between episodes, an expanded commentary and interpretation for its importance to the *Ajax* is still needed. I springboard from his observation and interpret the episode wholly, attempting to examine the play in relation to Athenian socio-political identity.

²⁰² Mueller (2016:20) notes that compound adjectives such as this are markers for “high literary diction,” and “have the effect of framing the sword as a kind of heroic “actor.” She also notes the aural quality of these adjectives describing weapons, which are heard by the audience before they even appear on stage.

²⁰³ Both sons are named for their father’s epithets: Astyanax is “lord of the city” (Ἀστυάναξ) as Hector alone defends the city. Eurysakes is the “broad-shield,” and Ajax is the greatest Greek defender, who alone wields the ἐπτάβοιον ἄρρηκτον σάκος.

Ajax's prayer for Eurysakes at 6.545-82, recalling Hector's playful encounter with Astyanax.²⁰⁴

Ajax seems nearly swayed when Tecmessa describes her isolation, lack of familial ties, and pleads for her son's welfare. Additionally, like Hector, Ajax demands that Eurysakes be brought before him and prays for his son. However, although these allusions cue us to parallels, they also heighten our awareness of the differences. Consider first how Hector addresses Astyanax,

αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ὄν φίλον υἷὸν ἐπεὶ κύσε πῆλὲ τε χερσὶν
εἶπε δ' ἐπευξάμενος Δί τ' ἄλλοισίν τε θεοῖσι:
Ζεῦ ἄλλοι τε θεοὶ δότε δὴ καὶ τόνδε γενέσθαι
παῖδ' ἐμὸν ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ περ ἀριπρεπέα Τρώεσσιν,
ὧδε βίην τ' ἀγαθόν, καὶ Ἰλίου ἴφι ἀνάσσειν:
καὶ ποτὲ τις εἶποι πατρός γ' ὅδε πολλὸν ἀμείνων
ἐκ πολέμου ἀνιόντα: φέροι δ' ἔναρα βροτόεντα
κτείνας δῆϊον ἄνδρα, χαρεῖη δὲ φρένα μήτηρ.

Then, taking up his dear son he tossed him about in his arms, and kissed him, and lifted his voice in prayer to Zeus and the other immortals: 'Zeus, and you other immortals, grant that this boy, who is my son, may be as I am, pre-eminent among the Trojans. great in strength, as am I, and rule strongly over Ilion; and some day let them say of him: "He is better by far than his father," as he comes in from the fighting; and let him kill his enemy and bring home the blooded spoils, and delight the heart of his mother.' (6.473-81)

Turning now to Ajax's speech to Eurysakes,

αἶρ' αὐτόν, αἶρε δεῦρο: **ταρβήσει** γὰρ οὐ
νεοσφαγῆ που τόνδε προσλεύσσω φόνον,
εἵπερ δικαίως ἔστ' ἐμὸς τὰ πατρόθεν.
ἀλλ' αὐτίκ' ὁμοῖς αὐτόν ἐν νόμοις πατρός
δεῖ πωλοδαμνεῖν κάξομοιοῦσθαι φύσιν.
ὦ παῖ, γένοιο πατρός εὐτυχέστερος,
τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ὁμοῖος: καὶ γένοι' ἂν οὐ κακός.

²⁰⁴ Echoes of Homeric diction link each scene: Hector and Ajax mention ἀνάγκη (*Aj.*485, *Il.*6.458), each piece employs the verb ταρβέω to describe Astyanax's fear of his father's helmet (*Il.*6.469), and to describe how Eurysakes will not fear Ajax (*Aj.*545). In fact, the Sophoclean Scholia refer six times to the Hector and Andromache scene from *Il.*6 in order to inform the Ajax, Tecmessa, and Eurysakes scene from the *Ajax*. See Garner 1990:51-64

Lift him, lift him up here, for he will have no dread,
when he looks on this newly-slaughtered blood, if
indeed his inheritance makes him rightly mine. He
must immediately be broken in like a young horse in
his father's savage ways, and be made like him in his
nature. My son, may be more fortunate than your father,
but in other respects, like him; you could not then be bad. (545-51)

Each episode depicts a father's wish for his son's future, and gives vision to that son living and fighting in a world without their father. Whereas the Iliadic scene begins in nonverbal exchange between Hector and Astyanax –Hector reaches out for his baby, ὀρέξατο (6.466), Astyanax shrinks back crying, ἐκλίνθη ἰάχων, terrified ταραβήσας, as the horsehair crest of Hector's helmet nods, νεύοντα –Ajax gives voice to these actions by negating them: he does not pick up Eurysakes, but commands that he be lifted up before him, and instead of shrinking back from his father's bronze-helmed visage, Ajax declares that he will have no dread ταραβήσει γὰρ οὐ, “when he looks on this newly-slaughtered blood” (546). Sophocles omits key details of what the Homeric poet includes, and what Sophocles does include, he alters.

Compared to Hector and Astyanax in Troy, the tableau outside of Ajax's tent blurs the boundary between domestic and martial life. When Hector sees that Astyanax is afraid of his helmet, he removes it. By recognizing his son's fear Hector recognizes the separation of home and battlefield, a gesture that bears a degree of pathetic irony considering what will occur in this same domestic space in the near future.²⁰⁵ Conversely, Ajax commands that his son gaze upon the unwashed gore of his father's helmetless face,²⁰⁶ and that he “immediately be broken in like

²⁰⁵ One may imagine that when Troy falls, helmeted (Greek) men will once more terrify Astyanax, and this time the child's fear will be justified.

²⁰⁶ ταραβήσει γὰρ οὐ /νεοσφαγῆ που τόνδε προσλεύσσω φόνον (545-6). “For he will have no fear when he looks upon the newly slaughtered gore.” I interpret this to mean that Ajax is still covered in the gore and blood of the livestock slaughter, and that he commands Eurysakes to look at his face (mask) that is also spattered. Garvie (1998: 175) writes that “It is almost as if he (Ajax) were standing among, not the slaughtered animals, but his enemies on the battlefield.”

a young horse” (πωλοδαμνεῖν).²⁰⁷ The paradox of “taming into savagery” and Ajax’s interaction with Eurysakes indicates the distorted world which Ajax inhabits. Public and private boundaries, military and domestic, childhood and warfare, and friends and enemies are called into question before Ajax’s tent.

The difference between the *Ajax* and the Hector and Astyanax scene reveals a political subtext for Athens. In disturbing imitation, Ajax dismisses out of hand a concern for his son’s feelings, “for he will have no dread, when he looks on this newly-slaughtered blood.” Where Hector’s interaction with Astyanax looks to a domestic life partitioned from the sphere of war, Ajax wants Eurysakes immediately initiated into his “savage ways,” and “be made like his father in nature” (548-9). On the Trojan walls, where Hector removes his helmet to soothe his son, he sheds the warrior identity and partitions domestic sphere from the battlefield;²⁰⁸ at his tent, Ajax appears bloodied before Eurysakes, declaring that he will not fear, enjoining Eurysakes to take up his father’s shield, the physical representation of his warrior identity, and to actualize his given name,

ἀλλ’ αὐτό μοι σύ, παῖ, λαβὼν ἐπόνυμον,
Εὐρύσακες, ἴσχε διὰ πολυρράφου στρέφω
πόρπακος, ἐπτάβοιον ἄρρηκτον σάκος:
τὰ δ’ ἄλλα τεύχη κοῖν’ ἐμοὶ τεθάψεται.

But you, my son, Eurysakes, must accept from me the very thing from which you get your name, and keep it, wielding it with its well-stitched loop, my unbroken shield, made of the hides of seven bulls; the rest of my armor shall be buried along with me (574-77).

C.E. Sorum (1986: 368) writes that “Ajax insists that the boy establish his parentage by becoming acquainted with the blood and gore that is evidence only of the father's shame.”

²⁰⁷ Garvie (1998:175) notes the paradoxical nature of employing this verb, that to break a horse is to tame it, but here, Ajax desires that Eurysakes be tamed into savagery, into “his father’s savage ways.”

²⁰⁸ Mueller (2016:142) suggests that when Hector removes his helmet the haptic action has “transported Hector into a reverie about his son’s future—the weapon itself acting as the medium for his meditation.”

The shield and Eurysakes blend together in the language of Ajax’s “will” for him. Saying λαβὸν ἐπόνυμον, “take up your surname” or “assume my broad shield” (Εὐρύσακες), Ajax desires Eurysakes to continue his father’s existence, albeit one predicated only on Ajax’s shield, the emblem of his former heroic prowess from the *Iliad*. Further, emphasis on his son’s name links to the beginning of this scene when Ajax laments at line 430-1, αἰαῖ: τίς ἄν ποτ’ ὤθεθ’ ὄδ’ ἐπόνυμον τοῦμόν ξυνοίσειν ὄνομα τοῖς ἐμοῖς κακοῖς; “Aiai! “Who would have thought that the name by which I am called would so correspond with my misfortunes!” The onomastic power for misery that Ajax attributes to his name, he sees as a means of future arete for his son –so named for the defensive implement of his past epic glory. P. J. Finglass reads Ajax’s pronouncement with a “tone of optimism,” particularly “if Ajax’s name marked him out for sorrow, onomastical destiny links Eurysakes to deeds of prowess” (Finglass 2011: 304-5n.574-6). For Ajax, his *sakos* is the only honorable material possession he can bequeath to Eurysakes – the lone symbol of his former *kleos*, uncorrupted by present misfortune, which he pointedly refers to as ἐπτάβοιον ἄρρηκτον σάκος, “the **unbroken** shield, made of the hides of seven bulls.” Since onomastic origins foretell future behavior, Ajax specifically entrusts his shield, his Iliadic legacy, to Eurysakes.²⁰⁹

Heroic identity and the hero’s weapons are closely entwined –so much so that weapons are often bywords for their wielder. This is a key feature of the *Ajax*, which emphasizes Ajax’s great shield in connection to his identity and legacy, but one that Sophocles also manipulates by

²⁰⁹ Goldhill (1987: 70-1) interprets this scene in light of a ritual at the Dionysia where state-supported war orphans parade about in hoplite gear. Finglass (2011:305) doubts this premise, noting among other things, that Eurysakes receives the shield directly from his father, not as an orphan “from a third person,” and that the two sources for this ceremony fall one century after the date of the *Ajax* (*Isoc.* 8.82, *Aesch.* 3.154).

focusing on Ajax's ownership of another warrior's weapon, Hector's sword. Indeed, the plot of *Ajax* is predicated on what Ajax sees as the misallocation of armor, since Ajax's heroic identity is effaced when he is denied Achilles' arms, which are his by aristocratic right, as the Homeric poet continuously reiterates that Ajax is "best in Achilles' absence," or "best after Achilles" (*Il.*2.768-70, 17.279-80). For Ajax, the hero indistinguishable from the seven layered tower shield, he soon discovers that all his trouble has originated from Hector's sword, given in *philia* in exchange for a war-belt. When Ajax recalls this moment (657-666), he realizes that he not only exchanged weapons, but somehow corrupted his identity.

Ajax's shield is his iconic weapon. The massive "tower shield," conspicuous on the battlefield, visually identifies Ajax and functions in tandem with his epithet to solidify his identity as the bulwark of the Achaeans, the Greeks' greatest defensive fighter in the *Iliad*.²¹⁰ When the *Ajax* mentions the shield at the beginning (18), it foregrounds Ajax's iconic implement in order to evoke the Iliadic Ajax, setting up the disparate image of exhaustless defender and manic slaughterer of livestock.²¹¹ It is jarring therefore that the *Ajax* focuses such great attention on his connection to Hector's sword, the weapon of his Iliadic enemy counterpart. Linking with the *Iliad*, the sword spotlights, Hector and Ajax's *monomachia* from *Iliad* Book 7, setting their epic confrontation as the catalyst of present evils for Ajax.²¹² Ajax recalls more than the weapon

²¹⁰ Ajax's shield type, the Mycenaean body-shield, perhaps in figure-eight form, was obsolete probably 100 years before Homer's time. See A.M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*. London 1967.

²¹¹ On line 18, Garvie (1998: 126n.18-19) writes, "the epithet is not ornamental. We are meant to recall the *Iliad*, in which he is the possessor of the great, tower-like, body shield... Even more than his sword, which will turn into a symbol of his destructive madness and tragedy, his shield symbolizes his status as a warrior and hero and as the protector of his people."

²¹² The exchange also wrought evil for Hector. In fact, Sophocles may have introduced the idea that 1) Achilles did not kill Hector with a spear thrust, but that he was dragged to death behind his chariot, 2) that Hector was fastened at the ankles with the war-belt he received from Ajax, instead of ox-hide straps in the *Iliad* (22.395-404).

exchange since the preliminaries for the duel reveal for us the most detailed description of his shield. In lieu of a traditional arming scene, his shield receives an origin story, a description in miniature of its construction in the tradition of Achilles' shield from *Iliad* 18. The detail of Ajax's shield corresponds to the significance of the duel in which he fights Hector. When Ajax faces his counterpart in hand to hand combat, it is Ajax's shield that receives distinction, and we understand what the Sophoclean Ajax means when he names it ἄρρηκτον. When Hector makes the first spear-cast, he

καὶ βάλεν Αἴαντος δεινὸν **σάκος ἑπταβόειον**
ἀκρότατον κατὰ χαλκόν, ὃς ὄγδοος ἦεν ἐπ' αὐτῷ.
 ἔξ δὲ διὰ πτύχας ἦλθε δαΐζων χαλκὸς ἀτειρής,
ἐν τῇ δ' ἑβδομάτῃ ῥινῶ σχέτο:

threw it and struck the sevenfold-ox-hide terrible shield of Ajax
 in the uttermost bronze, which was the eight layer upon it,
 and the unwearying bronze spearhead shore its way through six folds
 but was stopped in the seventh ox-hide. (7.244-8)

Resorting to large stones, Hector hurls a boulder at Ajax, and he

τῷ βάλεν Αἴαντος **δεινὸν σάκος ἑπταβόειον**
 μέσσον ἐπομφάλιον: περιήγησεν δ' ἄρα χαλκός.

struck the sevenfold-ox-hide terrible shield of Ajax
 in the knob of the center so that the bronze clashed loud about it.(7.266-8)

In each exchange, Ajax's *sakos* remains intact while each of his volleys compromise Hector's armor and shield. In this episode, more than others, the shield's integrity indicates Ajax's warrior integrity.²¹³ The encounter formalizes Ajax's defensive identity and introduces his role as the only warrior able to maintain the Greek defense in Achilles' absence. Featuring the single

²¹³ On the “dynamic interplay between man and weapon” in Ajax and Hector's duel, Mueller (2016: 138-9). notes how “the weapons (shields and projectiles) are presented as the true combatants,” and that “the fighting hero is a perfectly blended person-weapon, the boundaries of his autonomous self vanishing into those of the panoply he has donned. Weapons fuse with the warrior identity, which for Ajax is his shield –the material accident of his protective essence.

warrior most responsible for their people’s survival in single combat –Hector for Troy and Ajax for the Greeks, the Homeric poet presents in miniature the type of impasse that will ensue since Achilles has quit the field. If the duel were allowed to continue, the progression would result in Hector’s death or concession, but this is not permitted.

With Ajax’s final throw, the boulder smashes through Hector’s shield, breaking it “inward under the stroke of the rock like a millstone,” causing Hector’s knees to loosen, knocking him on his back with shield falling on top of him. Yet before Ajax can land the winning blow, Apollo resuscitates Hector and heralds of Zeus interrupt, imploring them to stop fighting, declaring that “to Zeus who gathers clouds both of you are beloved” (*Il.* 7.280). At this request, Ajax curiously defers to Hector, prompting him to speak first and to declare terms.

While Ajax remains silent, Hector suggests a gift exchange,

δῶρα δ’ ἄγ’ ἀλλήλοισι περικλυτὰ δώομεν ἄμφω,
ᾧφρά τις ᾧδ’ εἴπησιν Ἀχαιῶν τε Τρώων τε:
ἡμὲν ἐμαρνάσθην ἔριδος πέρι θυμοβόροιο,
ἦδ’ αὐτ’ ἐν φιλότῃτι διέτμαγεν ἀρθμήσαντε.

Come then, let us give each other glorious presents,
so that any of the Achaeans or Trojans may say of us:
‘These two fought each other in heart-consuming hate, then
joined with each other in close friendship, before they were parted.
(*Il.* 7.299-302)

As Mueller reads the scene, Ajax grants Hector full authority to dictate the terms of their weapon exchange, and in the “act of trading objects, (Hector) ventriloquizes a stranger’s (Ajax’s) point of view” (2016:24).²¹⁴ Ajax loses agency by silently acquiescing and accepting Hector’s sword, and since warrior identity is tied to weaponry, Ajax adulterates his heroic character by receiving and

²¹⁴ Mueller (2016: 24) understands Hector “affix(ing) his own interpretation to the exchange. As Hector suggests, the gifts will be seen as a pledge of friendship, though in reality they serve as a placeholder for future conflict.”

owning his enemy's weapon. When Hector speaks for Ajax, he offers no resistance, and he permits and believes that Hector's prediction of the future will come to pass, which, when we read *Ajax* 1028-40, Teucer contradicts and falsifies,

σκέψασθε, πρὸς θεῶν, τὴν τύχην δυοῖν βροτοῖν.
Ἔκτωρ μὲν, ᾧ δὴ τοῦδ' ἐδωρήθη πάρα,
ζωστῆρι πισθείς ἰππικῶν ἐξ ἀντύγων
ἐκνάπτειτ' αἰέν, ἔστ' ἀπέψυξεν βίον:
οὗτος δ' ἐκείνου τήνδε δωρεὰν ἔχων
πρὸς τοῦδ' ὄλωλε θανασίμῳ πεσήματι.
ἄρ' οὐκ Ἐρινὸς τοῦτ' ἐγάλκευσεν ξίφος
κάκεινον Ἄιδης, δημιουργὸς ἄγριος; (1028-35)

Consider, I entreat you, the two men's fortune.
Hector, with the belt which he received as a gift
from this man here, was fastened to the chariot rail
and continuously mangled, until he breathed out his life;
while Ajax, the possessor of this gift of Hector,
has been killed by it in a fatal fall.
Was it not a Fury that forged that sword,
and Hades that belt, a savage craftsman?

The *Ajax* answers Hector's wish for the future, when Teucer repudiates his words after Ajax kills himself. Teucer, in this sense, has activated Hector's imagined scenario when he becomes the future speaker, *τις ᾧδ' εἴπησιν Ἀχαιῶν τε Τρώων τε* "someone of the Greeks and Trojans will say of us." Tendered here is the theme that an enemy's gifts are fatal gifts, that Hector and Ajax's newly found *philia* (friendship) at the duel's end was never bereft of hostility.²¹⁵ For a match that witnessed the full expression and sustainability of his ἄρηκτον shield, its origin, and how Ajax nearly defeated Hector in *monomachia*, Ajax walks away, "happy in his victory" with

²¹⁵ Stanford (145n.665) notes that the proverb "an enemy's gifts are no gifts" appears here, probably for the first time. For a similar idea in Euripides, *cf. Med.* 618. The weapon exchange does not establish a lasting tie of *xenia*, but serves as a bookmark for their hostility (and mutual recognition of warrior prowess), which is meant to be revisited at a later date (*Il.* 7.302). A constant theme running through the Ajax saga is the misallocation of weapons and armor, and the misallocation of *kleos*.

Hector's sword in hand.²¹⁶ It is this moment of exchange and the weapon he receives, Hector's sword, that the Sophoclean Ajax recalls in the deception speech –an object imbued with “Hector's personhood” (Mueller 2016: 42). To own an enemy's weapon is to retain an essence of that warrior. Thus by bequeathing his shield to Eurysakes and killing himself with Hector's sword, the Sophoclean Ajax aligns his tragic identity with his Iliadic character.

Book 7's *monomachia* for the first time illustrates Ajax's quintessential quality as the Greeks' greatest defensive warrior. With Achilles gone, the Achaeans turn to the warrior next in line “after Peleus' glorious son,” Ajax. During the battle phase of Hector and Ajax's encounter, Ajax's proficiency with his shield, and the shield's ἄρηκτον “unbroken” quality evince the integrity of his warrior's *arete*, which reaches its fullest activation at the defense of the Greek ships. It is this element of his identity that Ajax wishes to bequeath to Eurysakes in his unbreakable shield. When Ajax receives Hector's sword, he accepts his enemy's weapon on his enemy's terms, and it becomes a cause of misery for him. The sword represents the enemy's corrupting influence, as an item which in Ajax's keeping has annexed his identity by keeping an enemy's weapon, born from a moment when Ajax willingly received it.

For the Sophoclean Ajax looking back regretfully to this moment, the duel demonstrates on a small scale a pattern that is repeated until Achilles returns: 1) Ajax and Hector fight, 2) Ajax gains advantage over Hector 3) Zeus intervenes and frustrates Ajax. We witness this in the single combat with Hector (7.273-82), again when Ajax rescues Odysseus and Zeus thwarts his

²¹⁶ While the duel clearly ends in a tie, the *Iliad* reports that Ajax departs “happy in his victory” (7.311-12). Commenting on this scene, Irene de Jong reads Ajax's understanding of the duel's outcome as if he has won the duel, that is, Ajax's happy victory is his own focalization of the outcome. See I. de Jong *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the “Iliad.”* London 1987. Ajax's happy mental state post duel may also indicate how he views the outcome of the weapon exchange.

onslaught against Hector and the Trojans (11.537-73), and lastly when Ajax battles Hector alone at the Greek ships, attempting to prevent Hector from setting their vessels ablaze (16.101-121). Losing Achilles' armor was the final insult for Ajax, and even then, Athena intervenes to thwart his intention to exact revenge. Receiving Hector's sword has set Ajax on this path.

Accordingly, by bequeathing the shield to Eurysakes apart from his other weapons, Ajax casts the honorable element of his warrior identity into the future. Buried with his armor, and with Hector's sword "buried" in his body, Ajax secures his "bulwark" legacy by having Eurysakes assume the implement most responsible for his ἔρκος epithet and the icon of his defender identity as a type of inheritance for Athens.²¹⁷ Athenian descendants watching Eurysakes accept Ajax's σάκος can witness the origin of Ajax's shield as an emblematic token of Athenian civic identity.²¹⁸ When Eurysakes received the shield, he assumed and bestowed a protective identity for the Athenian people, projecting this role for Athens into the future. As a Panhellenic warrior, Ajax and his Iliadic shield offered protection for all Greeks, not just the Athenians, and in the *Ajax*'s nod to the future moment of Athenian glory at the battle of Salamis, when the shield "warded off the day of slavery" for Greece, the evocation of this moment in the 440s perhaps called into question current Athenian imperial practice.²¹⁹ In this way, as Rose (1995: 78) notes, Ajax functions for Athens as the "ideological response to the contradictory needs of the empire" – a way for the polis to justify its exploitation of Greek resources and

²¹⁷ Athenians of Sophocles' audience would be quite familiar with the Eurysakeion, often confused with the Aiakeion, a shrine attributed to Ajax or his son in the agora. On the shield as epic heirloom, Mueller (Mueller 2016:147) notes that "it requires little to imagine then that this "relic" could be taken from Troy to Salamis and from there to Athens, where it would give rise to the foundation of a shrine that the Athenians themselves called the Eurysakeion."

²¹⁸ Rose (Rose 1995: 70) employs the term "interpellate" as a way to understand how the Athenian audience identifies with Ajax and his Salaminian sailors.

violent suppression of allied city-states while at the same time promoting itself as the defender of Greece and the apex of sophistication.

Ajax and Eurysakes' imitation of Hector and Astyanax's paternal-filial moment invites the Sophoclean audience to contemplate intergenerational Athenian identity. Each tableau emphasizes the son in proximity to a consequential piece of his father's panoply. Astyanax recoils from Hector's helmet, prompting Hector to remove it and allowing the brief moment of familial relief to play out.²²⁰ The hopeful prayer for Astyanax's birthright and the intimate interplay between father and son are separated by the sequential acts of the helmet's removal, its placement on the ground, and Hector picking up his son. Like Ajax's shield, Hector's helmet identifies him on the battlefield –he is “Hector of the flashing helmet,” the defensive implement that responsible for his epithet. Both helmet and shield are defensive armaments, and each object is a centerpiece for the interaction between father and son. Where Hector demarcates warrior from household by removing his helmet when Astyanax shrinks back in terror, Ajax operates with a sense of urgency and disturbs the boundaries of domesticity and warfare by hurriedly bestowing his shield upon Eurysakes.

Despite nearly vanquishing the greatest Trojan warrior, the Sophoclean Ajax looks back on this episode as the catalyst for his present miseries. Now, humiliated by having lost Achilles' arms, and regretting that he accepted Hector's sword, on the Athenian stage Ajax looks to his shield, deeming it the only implement worth bequeathing to Eurysakes. For Ajax, the *sakos* retains and represents his steadfast, uncompromised warrior persona. His glory originated in his

²²⁰ On the scene with Astyanax, Thomas van Nortwick writes “Hector, by taking off his helmet, sheds the war.” See “Like a Woman: Hector and the Boundaries of Masculinity.” *Arethusa*, Vol. 34, No. 2, *The Personal Voice in Classical Scholarship: Literary and Theoretical Reflections* (Spring 2001), pp. 221-235.

identity as the bulwark of the Achaeans, the lone defender who preserves the Achaean army, not the maddened warrior who attempts to murder comrades.

Ajax's sword is a material focal point of the play. Indeed, as Mueller (Mueller 2016:19) points out, the sword has a strange kind of agency, possessing a biography with its own epic history, and even "inflects Ajax's decision-making." Searching for a definable turning point in his past, the Sophoclean Ajax recalls the aborted duel from *Iliad* 7, when he received the "silver-studded sword," and claims "for ever since I received it in my hand as a gift from Hector, my worst enemy, I have never yet had any good from the Argives." Ajax's sword thus establishes an allusive link bridging the Iliadic Hector and the Sophoclean Ajax. From the outset, the focus given to Ajax's sword as the instrument of his misdeeds (10), foregrounds Ajax's tragedy with intimations of Hector's presence, and as the play unfolds, we glean more information about its last possessor (661-6, 1026-39). Mueller (2016: 42) reads the sword as a "material, metonymic link to its past owner, Hector. It is Hector's personhood that is evoked with his sword." Accordingly, the moment Ajax received the sword he invited the hostile Trojan prince into the Greek camp.

While Mueller pays special attention to the sword as an object of "distributed agency," that is, to the idea that inanimate objects are often imbued with vitality and are capable of eliciting human response, I focus on the sword's multivalent quality as an instrument of socio-historical memory for mid fifth-century Athens.²²¹ I read Ajax's recollection of acquiring

²²¹ Mueller (2016: 15-16) argues in favor of applying Alfred Gell's idea of "distributed personhood" to the field of objects in Greek drama, particularly to the sword and shield of Ajax. She argues that these weapons possess "uncanny agency", and function as objects replete with epic biographies, allowing them to interact and inform. Mueller contends that their usage would allow an Athenian audience to draw intertextual allusions from the aborted duel between Hector and Ajax at *Iliad* 7 to a fifth-century tragic performance. While I agree with Mueller's treatment

Hector's sword, and his idea that this past exchange marked the decline of his life's trajectory, as analogy for a transformative event from Athens' past, the acquisition of its trireme fleet to confront the Persians, and the ultimate source of its imperial power.²²² Rosenbloom (1995: 95), writing about the *Persians*, argues that the newly constructed fleet was "a radical innovation both in Athens and among Hellenic poleis," and that by managing the fleet through oppressive levies and tribute to dominate the Aegean post Salamis, Athens' "fleet was an invention of Persia, an importation and transformation of an eastern concept."²²³ In this sense, Athens accepted the armament of its enemy when it confronted Persia—the war with Persia altered Athens through "cultural exchange in which the victor adopts the identity of the vanquished" (Rosenbloom: 96).

Fighting the Persians altered Athenian martial identity. In order to preserve its civilization, with its acropolis destroyed and city razed, Athens took to the sea—a marked departure even from its previous hoplite-centered encounter with Darius in 490 at Marathon. Thucydides' Sicilians remark on this Athenian transformation from a land-based people to a naval one, declaring that Athens' naval enterprise is "neither ancestral nor eternal; they were more a land people, compelled by Persians to become a naval people" (Thuc.7.21.3). Athenian anxiety over its naval power stems from aristocratic fears of foregoing its tradition as a hoplite,

of Ajax's sword, she focuses more on its performative and epic aspects; I view the sword as the symbol of Athenian imperial initiation.

²²² Sailing and expeditions in general were viewed suspiciously. Ships in Homer indicate war, and are often at the mercy of vengeful deities. Hesiod writes that the just θάλλουσιν δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διαμπερές: οὐδ' ἐπὶ νηῶν /νίσσονται, καρπὸν δὲ φέρει ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα. (Hes.*Op.*236-7) "flourish continually with good things, and do not travel on ships, for the grain-giving earth bears them fruit," and he views shipbuilding as the end of agricultural independence. In *Persians*, David Rosenbloom (1995: 95-8) argues that Athenians of the aristocratic, hoplite order were wary of the new trireme power that their democratic polis had acquired. He argues that the fleet "was a source of anxiety to Aeschylus both as a citizen and as a poet," since "naval power was foreign to (Athenian) civic tradition."

²²³ Rosenbloom (1995) also cites Plato who refers to the Athenian fleet as "a base imitation of the enemy" (*Leg.*705c9-d1).

infantry based society in favor of the relatively new concept of *isonomia* and enfranchising the demos. In this way, the Ajax myth offers a tale amenable to Athenian political apprehensions. Accordingly, in order to confront the Persian Empire, Athens assumed a facet of that Empire, a massive fleet, which facilitated its transformation into the kind of despotic force it once fought against. In this way, Ajax's soliloquy on time and the alternation principle, triggered by his reflection on receiving Hector's sword from his own heroic past, provides an epic model for contemporary Athens, and suggests that the alternation principle also operates in the arc of Athenian history.

Events from the *Iliad* and the *Ajax* coalesce in the sword in a way that Ajax cannot accept. The sword was an object of warrior-honor spoiled by time and by his own hand—the gift of an enemy that was really no gift. Like Ajax, the sword is a relic of an epic past no longer viable in the new world of devalued warrior values, a world in which Odysseus receives honor over the second best of the Achaeans, a world of flux, and of yielding. Thus, thematically, the sword conveys time's corruptive power through its tangible presence and bridges what Ajax conceives as the honorable souvenir of a cessation of hostilities in the *Iliad* to the inescapable reality that he experiences on the Athenian stage.

In the *Trugrede*, the “deception speech,” Ajax understands that he is not immune to the cosmic principle of alternation. Recalling his duel with Hector, he sees alternation at work in his own epic biography, when in hostility he entered into single combat only to depart in amity with a guest-gift, the sword with which he now ends his life. Now the sword is a memento of his former status. Ajax, once the honorable bulwark and greatest defender of the Achaeans, has now plotted murder against his Greek comrades under the cover of night. Contemplating his ownership of Hector's sword spurs his comments:

ἀλλ' ἔστ' ἀληθῆς ἢ βροτῶν παροιμία,
ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα κοῦκ ὀνήσιμα.
τοιγὰρ τὸ λοιπὸν εἰσόμεσθα μὲν θεοῖς
εἴκειν, μαθησόμεσθα δ' Ἀτρείδας σέβειν.
ἄρχοντές εἰσιν, ὥσθ' ὑπεικτέον. τί μὴν;
καὶ γὰρ τὰ δεινὰ καὶ τὰ καρτερώτατα
τιμαῖς ὑπείκει:

True is men's proverb,
that the gifts of enemies are no gifts and bring no benefit.
Therefore we shall know in future to yield to the gods,
and we shall learn to reverence the sons of Atreus.
They are rulers, so one ought to yield- of course one ought.
For even things that are terrible and very strong
yield to what is held in honor. (664-70)

In Ajax's "deception speech," his newfound acquiescence to the alternation principle rouses justified skepticism as does his resolve to live. Whether Tecmessa has persuaded Ajax, and he has accepted *sophrosyne*, or whether Ajax is deceiving us, when he appears outside of his tent at this moment, he counters an audience expectation of his death, and instead says,

ἅπανθ' ὁ μακρὸς κἀναρίθμητος χρόνος
φύει τ' ἄδηλα καὶ φανέντα κρύπτεται:
κοῦκ ἔστ' ἄελπτον οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἀλίσκεται
χῶ δεινὸς ὄρκος καὶ περισκελεῖς φρένες.
κἀγὼ γάρ, ὃς τὰ δεῖν' ἐκαρτέρουν τότε,
βαφῆ σίδηρος ὧς ἐθελύνθην στόμα
πρὸς τῆσδε τῆς γυναικός.

Long and immeasurable time brings forth all things
that are obscure and when they have come to light
hides them again; there is nothing that is beyond
expectation, but even the terrible oath falls into time's
power, and minds which are too strict. For even I,
who at the time was so terribly firm, like iron
hardened by dipping, have been softened like a woman
in my speech...(646-51)

For Ajax, time's elemental aspect discloses and nullifies mankind's feeble pretense to permanence—it renders the mortal oath useless, and causes intractable minds to fall, even turning Ajax into a softened iron implement.

Here, Ajax presents two ideas. First, while time generates the cosmic cycle for mankind, it degrades the quality of each generation. This idea comes close to the Hesiodic conception of the universe, that is, the decline of the diminishing ages of man. In fact, Ajax deploys a metallurgic simile to instantiate how time has corrupted his character, he has become “like iron (σίδηρος) hardened by dipping,” like Hesiod's γένος σιδήρεον (176). In the ages of mankind's degeneration, Ajax straddles the interval between the heroic and the iron—the age of the Trojan War and the current age of man, Hesiod's fifth generation. Evoking the idea of this iron generation at 651, Ajax comments on the bleak state of human existence which he has become a part in his failed attempt to murder Greek compatriots. Second, the simile of iron's corruptibility funnels our attention to Ajax's sword. Despite the fact that Homeric weapons were made of bronze, Sophocles has referred to Ajax's sword as “iron” at line 147 where the chorus refer to the αἶθωνι σιδήρῳ “glittering iron” which Ajax uses to kill the flocks. When Ajax follows the softened iron description with his intention to “hide his sword” and “dig in the ground,” and comments how acquiring his sword was the start of his problems, we can trace how Ajax's allegedly weakened “iron” will links to his comments on Hector's sword, which he now realizes was no true gift.

Ajax's deception speech shares other similarities with Hesiod's description of the fifth generation of men, the γένος σιδήρεον in the *Works and Days*. Treating the Golden, Silver, Bronze, and the Heroic, Hesiod regretfully describes his own age:

μηκέτ' ἔπειτ' ὄφελλον ἐγὼ πέμπτοισι μετεῖναι
ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ πρόσθε θανεῖν ἢ ἔπειτα γενέσθαι.

νῦν γὰρ δὴ γένος ἔστι σιδήρεον: οὐδέ ποτ' ἦμαρ
παύονται καμάτου καὶ οἰζύος, οὐδέ τι νύκτωρ
φθειρόμενοι. χαλεπὰς δὲ θεοὶ δώσουσι μερίμνας:

Would that I were not then among the fifth men,
but either dead earlier or born later!
For now it is a race of iron; and they will never cease
from toil and misery by day or night,
in constant distress, and the gods will give them harsh troubles. (174-8)

Focusing on the deterioration of social bonds, Hesiod's description suggests a temperament similar to Ajax's exposition on time. Yet, where Hesiod rues his current membership in the iron age, Ajax distances this as an eventuality from his current state by employing the future tense to describe an existence not yet realized,

therefore *we shall know* in the future to yield to the gods,
and *we shall learn* to reverence the sons of Atreus...
how *shall we not learn* good sense? I shall; for at this late hour
I understand that our enemy is to be hated only to the extent
that *he will later become* our friend, while as far as a friend is concerned
I shall want to serve and help him only so far, believing that *he will not*
always remain so.

For the audience, the proliferation of the future tense marks Ajax's speech with an unexpected, yet unclear tinge of hope. Contrary to even the oldest variant of his myth's trajectory, it seems Ajax may actually avoid death. However, the future tenses may not intend to mislead but to create temporal distance for an Ajax who understands that his existence has changed. The Iliadic Ajax of *aidos*, the greatest friend and defender of the Achaeans is also the Sophoclean Ajax, the most hated Greek who attempted to kill the Achaeans. Ajax realizes that he has become an unwilling player in the incessant dance of cosmic alternation.

Moreover, Ajax's realization arises from an epiphanic moment with Hector's sword, as indeed in it is the most physically present and tangible object that he discusses in his exegesis on cosmic alternation. Ajax is caught in a transitional period, caught between the final moments of

the age of heroes and the advent of the age of iron. The audience is explicitly disabused of any notion that Ajax intends to live when it witnesses Ajax's suicide on stage. What Ajax says concerning his intention to understand *sophrosune*, and to accept that bonds of comradeship and friendship will ultimately yield to hostility, receives the starkest rebuttal in the form of his suicide; Ajax will not live.

A key to understanding the deception speech follows from the way Ajax understands his epic past. Ajax zeroes in on the moment when he exchanged weapons with Hector in the *Iliad*, understanding this point as the moment when his fortune plummeted and when either he or Hector ought to have perished by the other's hand:

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐξ οὗ χειρὶ τοῦτ' ἔδεξάμην
παρ' Ἑκτορος δῶρημα δυσμενεστάτου,
οὐπω τι κεδνὸν ἔσχον Ἀργείων πάρα.

For ever since I received it in my hand as a gift from Hector, my worst enemy, I have never had any good from the Argives (661-3)

That he possesses his enemy's sword as a token of friendship, reveals the moment of compromise that led to the corruption of Ajax's intractable nature. He understands that the alternation principle affected him when he took Hector's sword. Accordingly, by planting Hector's sword in the Trojan beach, Ajax kills himself in a manner seeking to compensate for this error –with hilt buried in the earth. Perhaps Ajax envisions Hector receiving back his sword, holding it beneath the earth as Ajax falls on it.

Recalling the weapon exchange with Hector, Ajax remembers the moment when his warrior fortunes began to turn. That encounter set in motion a series of events responsible for his contemporary humiliation. When the Athenian audience witness Ajax recall this personal moment of recent history, by analogy, it is invited to consider its own recent "epicized" past. The chorus' concerted emphasis on Ajax's Salaminian identity (134), together with his and the

Salaminian sailors' ancestral ties to Athens, casts Ajax's recollection of his epic past as an Athenian reflecting on their recent past. For example, when Tecmessa first addresses the Salaminian chorus she laments,

ναὸς ἄρωγοὶ τῆς Αἴαντος,
γενεᾶς χθονίων ἀπ' Ἐρεχθειδῶν,
ἔχομεν στοναχὰς οἱ κηδόμενοι
τοῦ Τελαμῶνος τηλόθεν οἴκου.

Crew of Ajax's ship, men of the race descended from the earth-born line of Erechtheus, we have cause to wail,
we who care for the house of Telamon. (*Aj.*201-4)

Erechtheus, the autochthonous ancient king and founder of the Athenian polis, is ancestral father to Ajax's crew. Tecmessa has, in effect, elided the distinction between Salaminian and Athenian. By calling them the "men of the race descended from the earth-born line of Erechtheus" she aligns them with the Athenian viewership, and her collective appeal that "we have cause to wail, we who care for the house of Telamon," echoes beyond the stage.

Moreover, Ajax utters his final words to praise "divine" Salamis in connection with "famous" Athens,

ὦ φέγγος, ὦ γῆς ἱερὸν οἰκείας πέδον
Σαλαμῖνος, ὦ πατρῶον ἐστίας βάθρον
κλειναί τ' Ἀθῆναι καὶ τὸ **σύντροφον γένος**
κρηναί τε ποταμοὶ θ' οἶδε, καὶ τὰ Τρωϊκὰ
πεδία προσαιδῶ, χαίρετ', ὦ τροφῆς ἐμοί:
τοῦθ' ὑμῖν Αἴας τοῦπος ὕστατον θροεῖ,
τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐν Ἄιδου τοῖς κάτω μυθήσομαι.

Oh light, oh holy soil of my native Salamis, oh foundation of my father's hearth, and famous Athens, and the race that has grown up with me, these springs and rivers, and the Trojan plains I call on, farewell, my nurses; this is the last word that Ajax speaks to you; the rest I shall say in the House of Hades to those below. (*Aj.*859-65)

With his last words Ajax beatifies the “holy (ἱερόν) earth of Salamis” in tandem with “famous (kleinai) Athens.” Salamis’ soil is a light, a φέγγος, and that light extends to Athens, bestowing upon it an anachronistic fame for Ajax’s time. We have heard similar language from Ajax before. When waxing on the inevitability of the cosmic cycle, he comments

ἐξίσταται δὲ νυκτὸς αἰανῆς κύκλος
τῇ λευκοπόλῳ φέγγος ἡμέρα φλέγειν (*Aj.* 672-3)

the eternal rotation of the night withdraws
for day with its white horses to kindle its light.

As noted earlier, this line is strikingly similar to the appearance of dawn right before the battle of Salamis in Aeschylus’ *Persians*, when the Greeks begin their paean of war, and Salamis island curiously echoes back its assent,

ἐπεὶ γε μέντοι λευκόπῳλος ἡμέρα
πᾶσαν κατέσχε γαῖαν εὐφεγγῆς ἰδεῖν,
πρῶτον μὲν ἠχῆ κέλαδος Ἑλλήνων πάρα
μολπηδὸν ἠυφήμησεν, ὄρθιον δ’ ἅμα
ἀντηγάλαξε νησιώτιδος πέτρας
ἠχώ:

But, when Day with her white horses spread her brilliant light over all the earth, first of all there rang out loudly a joyful song from the Greeks, and simultaneously the echo of it resounded back from the cliffs of the island. (*Pers.*386-91)

As I remarked earlier, scholars have linked Ajax’s light (φέγγος) to the λευκόπῳλος ἡμέρα which brings “brilliant light” (εὐφεγγῆς) in *Persians*. When Ajax echoes this Aeschylean line, tied as it is to Daylight’s arrival on the morning of the battle of Salamis, and proclaims Salamis island as φέγγος, he links his final moment from the epic past to Athens’ future moment of fame at Salamis. In a type of refracted allusion, Ajax’s final address to Salamis as a φέγγος, and γῆς ἱερόν οικείας πέδον Σαλαμῖνος in his play, embeds himself as the possible source of the echo to the Greek paean in Aeschylus’ drama.

Besides the word φέγγος, Ajax employs diction connecting his final words to the battle of Salamis. Invoking Salamis island as ὦ γῆς ἱερὸν οἰκείας πέδον, “Oh holy soil of my native land,” Ajax uses the adjective ἱερός, “holy,” “consecrated,” or “filled with divine power,” to address his native country. Jebb notes that ἱερός is the “epithet given to cities for their πολιτισσοῦχοι,” or “eponymous heroes dwelling in the city,” and that “Ajax refers especially to Zeus and the Aiakidai,” when he speaks ὦ πατρῶον ἐστίας βᾶθρον, “oh foundation of my father’s hearth” (Jebb 1907: 859). Further, the vocative phrase ὦ ἱερὸν πέδον Σαλαμῖνος, while employing a different adjective, evokes the Pythia’s second response to the Athenians in Herodotus, when she proclaims Salamis to be ὦ θεῖη Σαλαμίς, “Oh divine Salamis” (*Hdt.*7.143).²²⁴ Accordingly, Salamis’ holiness in the *Ajax* derives from a salvific link to Greek victory in 480 originating in its cultic ties to Zeus, Ajax, and the Aiakidai, when Ajax proclaims its sacredness aloud on the Athenian stage.

Moreover, the vocative sequence connecting “holy Salamis,” to the βᾶθρον “foundation” of Ajax’s ancestors, to famous Athens and its race, and to the Trojan plain, weaves together elements of the epic past with Athens’ recent past. When Ajax names Athens, κλειναί τ’ Ἀθῆναι, “famous Athens,” he speaks as a semi-divine being from the standpoint of the epic past in which

²²⁴ This passage also serves as Herodotus’ formal introduction to Themistocles, who correctly interprets the oracle for Athens:

ἦν δὲ τῶν τις Ἀθηναίων ἀνὴρ ἐς πρώτους νεωστὶ παριών, τῷ οὔνομα μὲν ἦν Θεμιστοκλῆς, παῖς δὲ Νεοκλέος ἐκαλέετο. οὗτος ὄνηρ οὐκ ἔφη πᾶν ὀρθῶς τοὺς χρησμολόγους συμβάλλεσθαι, λέγων τοιάδε: εἰ ἐς Ἀθηναίους εἶχε τὸ ἔπος εἰρημένον ἐόντως, οὐκ ἂν οὕτω μιν δοκέειν ἠπίως χρησθῆναι, ἀλλὰ ὥδε ‘ὦ σχετλίη Σαλαμίς’ ἀντὶ τοῦ ‘ὦ θεῖη Σαλαμίς,’ εἰ πέρ γε ἔμελλον οἱ οἰκήτορες ἀμφ’ αὐτῇ τελευτήσειν.

Now there was a certain Athenian, by name and title Themistocles son of Neocles, who had lately risen to be among their chief men. He claimed that the readers of oracles had incorrectly interpreted the whole of the oracle and reasoned that if the verse really pertained to the Athenians, it would have been formulated in less mild language, calling Salamis “cruel” rather than “divine” seeing that its inhabitants were to perish. (*Hdt.*7.143.1)

Athens is not yet κλειναί, and portends its fame in an oracle-like manner. Κλειναί was, however, a common epithet for Athens in the mid fifth century, especially in connection with its leading role at the battle of Salamis, and its appearance here may be an allusion to a fragment of Pindar which states,

ὦ ταῑ λιπαραῑ καὶ ἰοστέφανοι καὶ ἀοίδιμοι
Ἑλλάδος ἔρεισμα, κλειναὶ Ἀθῆναι,
δαιμόνιον πτολίεθρον.

Oh gleaming and violet-crowned and celebrated in song,
bulwark of Greece, famous Athens,
divine city. (*Pi.* fr.76)

These lines were famous at Athens and were frequently alluded to in tragedy.²²⁵ Yet, while the *Ajax* evokes κλειναὶ Ἀθῆναι of the Pindaric fragment, its allusion cues us to the preceding phrase in Pindar's line: Ἑλλάδος ἔρεισμα, the "bulwark of Greece." The word ἔρεισμα is synonymous with ἔρκος and each is applied metaphorically to the protective identity of a hero.²²⁶ Further, Pindar praises Athens as the "bulwark of Greece" for its leading role in the battle of Salamis and its victory that protected Greece's political freedom. Thus, when the *Ajax* alludes to κλειναὶ Ἀθῆναι it also evokes Athens as the Ἑλλάδος ἔρεισμα, an epicized designation in imitation of Ajax's epithet in the *Iliad*. In sum, Ajax's final words recall the future moment of Athenian victory in which he and Athens share a common epithet for their protective service to Greece.

The Sophoclean Ajax evokes the battle of Salamis in *Persians* in order to invite the Athens of the mid-fifth century to contrast its current imperial management with its foundational identity, established with victory at Salamis in 480BCE. The *Ajax* facilitates a triangulation in

²²⁵ Especially in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* at lines 54-8.

²²⁶ CF. *Pi.* O.2.6-6: Θήρωνα δὲ τετραορίας ἔνεκα νικαφόρου / γεγωνητέον, ὅτι δίκαιον ξένων, ἔρεισμ' Ἀκράγαντος "Theron who is just in his regard for guests, / and is the bulwark of Acragas, the bulwark of the city."

perspective in which figures of the epic past such as Ajax look to the future moment of Athenian fame at the battle of Salamis, while the Athenian audience in the current moment of the theater of Dionysus look to that battle as a moment of their recent epic past.

Conclusion

Considered to be the “maintenance and development of its mental infrastructure,” tragedy allowed Athens to consider problematic political and social issues filtered through the safe medium of performative myth (Meier 1993: 4).²²⁷ The *Ajax*, however, provided Athens with a unique interpretative nexus, as it depicted the downfall and rehabilitation of an adopted hero which it appropriated in service to its imperial foundations. As the native son of Salamis –island of Ajax’s birth and locale of Athens’ most prestigious naval victory –Ajax carries connotations for Athens’ former military exploits, particularly as an avatar for Athens’ salvific feat for Greece in the straits of Salamis. Thus, he is imbued both with historical and epic implications when he appears on stage in the 440s.

The *Ajax* is a play about the disparity of identity over time. On stage, Ajax distinguishes his existence from his former self in the *Iliad*, identifying the moment he exchanged weapons with Hector as his life’s turning point –when he faced his enemy, and received his sword, the source of his present troubles. Ajax then kills himself, incorporating the sword into his body, and becoming a point of contention to be discussed among Greeks. In this way, Athens aligns itself with Ajax and understands that its civic identity has also altered through time. Founded on the principle of Panhellenic liberation, Athenian civic identity must synthesize the disparate idea that

the acquisition of its naval fleet in service to Panhellenic victory against Persian domination was the catalyst for its transformation into empire. The *Ajax* allows Athens to incorporate these dissonant ideas. Accordingly, the *Ajax* can be read as a way for Athens to problematize shifting civic values and to incorporate that problematization into a civic identity based on the exemplum of Ajax.

Accordingly, the arc of Ajax's story can be paralleled to the arc of Athenian history –the bulwark of the Achaeans has now attempted to slaughter the Achaeans, while the defender of Greek liberty is now the enslaver of Hellas. In this way, the *Ajax* allows its audience to reexamine *the* formative event of Athenian imperialism, the battle of Salamis, through Ajax's deluded slaughter of cattle, his final moments, and suicide, and of a dishonored Homeric warrior.

.ς δαμάσαντ[
]. εἰδομεν[
-ώ]νυμον α.[

1 str[uck you... and you fell, as when a larch]
or pine-tree in the [lonely mountain] glades
is felled by woodcutters...
and much...

5 [A great grief seized] the war-host; [much they honored you,]
[and with Patr]oclus' [ashes mingled yours.]
[It was no ordinary mortal] laid you low,
['twas by Apoll]o's [hand that you were struck.]
[Athena] was at[hand, and smote the famous t]ow[n]
10 [with Hera; they were wro]th with Priam's sons
[because of P]aris' wickedness. The car of God's
Justice o'ertakes [the sinner in the end.]
[And so] the valiant Danaans, [best of war]iors,
sacked the much-sung-of city, and came [home;]
15 [and they] are bathed in fame that cannot die, by grace
[of one who from the dark-] tressed Muses had
the tru[th entire,] and made the heroes' short-lived race
a theme familiar to young men.
[But] now farewell, [thou son] of goddess glorious,
20 [daughter] of Nereus of the sea, while I
[now summon] thee, i[llustriou]s Muse, to support,
[if thou hast any thought] for men who pray:
[fit ou]t, as is thy wont, this [grat]eful song-a[rray]
[of mi]ne, so that rem[embrance is preserved]
25 of those who held the line for Spart[a and for Greece,]
[that none should see] the da[y of slavery.]
They kept their co[urage, and their fame rose] heaven-high;
[their glory in] the world [will] never die.
[From Eu]rotas and from [Sparta's] town they [marched,]
30 accompanied by Zeus' horsemaster sons,
[the Tyndarid] Heroes, and by Menelaus' strength,
[those doughty] captains [of their fath]er's folk,
led forth by [great Cleo]mbrotus' most noble [son,]
...Pausanias.
35 [They quickly reached the Isthmus] and the famous land
of Corinth, the [furthest bounds] of Pelops' [isle,]
[and Megara, N]isus' [ancient] city, where the r[est]
[then joined the army from] the country round.
[Again they marched, the ome]ns giving confidence,

[and soon they reached Eleusis'] lovely plain,
driving [the Persians from Pan]dion's [land, by help]
of that most godlike se[er, the Iamid.

Appendix 2

Eion Epigram III (transmitted in Aeschines *In Ctes.* 185), translated by H. A. Shapiro

ἔκ ποτε τῆσδε πόλιος ἄμ' Ἀτρείδησι Μενεσθεὺς
ἠγεῖτο ζάθεον Τρωικὸν ἄμ πεδίον,
ὄν ποθ' Ὅμηρος ἔφη Δαναῶν πύκα χαλκοχιτώνων
κοσμητῆρα μάχης ἔξοχον ἄνδρα μολεῖν.
οὕτως οὐδὲν ἀεικὲς Ἀθηναίοισι καλεῖσθαι
κοσμητὰς πολέμου τ' ἀμφὶ καὶ ἠνορέης.

Once from this city Menestheus, together with the sons of
Atreus,
Led his men to the divine Trojan plain;
Menestheus, who Homer said was an outstanding marshaller of
battle (*kosmeter*)
Among the well-armored Achaeans who came to Troy.
Thus there is nothing unseemly for the Athenians to be called
Marshallars (*kosmetai*), both of war and manly prowess. (trs. H.A. Shapiro)

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