# Heroes In Greek Mythology: Homer

Heroes acquire such pristine and honourable status. A Greek hero was distinguished from the rest of humankind by their external and internal characteristics. Their prowess, boldness, and courage. This essay will expand on the status and function of a hero and the ways they are commemorated, by using examples of heroes in Greek mythology.

Heroes were half-god and the presence of divinity really set them apart from everyone else. They lived in a space between that of the gods and the mortals, not being able to fit completely in either one of the worlds. Heroes and their cults acted as a fundamental threshold in Greek social and political life. They were used to legitimize authority and create a communal sense of identity and association. I argue that in Greek mythology the commemoration of heroes and the establishments of their cults is not only because these individuals demonstrate exemplary skill and value, but these heroes serve as role models. Mortals constantly yearn the divinity and immortality of gods and these heroes provide a step closer to that divinity. Heroes empower and motivate those who are apart of their cult. They are highly respected and sacred; this is seen in their burial rituals and role they play.

Heroes received god-like status. Homer writes on the burial of the hero Hektor, he writes about the procession and the certain rituals that took place. After his body was cremated his bones were wrapped in “purple robes, laid them in a golden kist” (Homer, Iliad, 797) The colour purple represents ‘nobility’ and ‘royalty’, the golden kist further reinforces the god-like status of the hero. Overall separating the hero from the average mortal. The duration of Hektor’s pyre lasted “for nine days they gathered huge supplies of wood” (Homer, Iliad, 784) again the procession to gather supplies along with the duration shows the significance of these heroes. It ended with a “glorious feast” (Homer, Iliad, 803), indicating they were celebrated aptly.

Heroes vary accordingly, but what we encounter with Homeric hymns are warrior heroes, heroism associated with battle, with being a warrior. Warrior heroes have different narratives but often have the same fate. Tyrtaeus writes on the benefits of dying in battle. If one were to die during battle the “whole city misses him and grieves him” (Tyrtaeus, 650 BC), beyond this the hero brings fame to their city and “his name and glory never perish”. The benefits mentioned show how the hero is commemorated and why their cults are established to preserve their honour and glory. Such writings act as propaganda to an extent, in that it encourages and convinces those reading to follow in the steps of the warrior. It shows the reader the ways in which they will be commemorated.

Funerary rites were an essential part in celebrating the hero. Effort was put into the construction of the site. An area was designated for individuals to make offerings. “Soon after the burial, the nearest and dearest may leave offerings of food and drink for the deceased” (Coldstream,1976:8). There is evidence of deceased people being promoted to the status of heroism. Thucydides writes about the burial of Brasidas, who became a hero after death he received all the elements associated with the hero cult, “they sacrificed to him as to a hero” (Thucydides, 422 BC), offerings were crucial as it allowed those who were alive to express their gratitude. These heroes have tomb cults which was where “a hero’s strength was supposed to be concentrated” (Coldstream,1976:8). Hence, the sacredness and the care taken in the

funerary procession. It is important to note that they did not wish to treat the hero as a superhuman power but rather to acknowledge the divinity that existed and memorialized it.

Conclusively, heroes play an important role in Greek society and Greek religion. They operate in a realm beyond that of the average man and were commemorated and highly appreciated and distinguished. Heroes showed skill and possessed qualities that others could learn from. The funerary rites were sacred, heroes brought status to their cities and were r

## Reference List:


1. Coldstream, J.N. 1976. Hero cults in the Age of Homer. Journal of Hellenic Studies 96: 8-17
2. Homer, Iliad. Translated by Whitaker.