

Il. 23.161-261

King Agamemnon hearing this, promptly dismissed the men to their well-crafted ships, though the chief mourners remained, and piling up the wood to make the pyre a hundred feet square, sad at heart they placed the corpse on top. They flayed and dressed numerous fine sheep and sleek shambling cattle before the pyre, and noble Achilles took fat from them all and wrapped the corpse in it, head to foot, and piled the flayed carcasses around. Then he leant two-handled jars of oil and honey against the bier, and groaning aloud swiftly threw the bodies of four proud horses on the pyre. Of the nine dogs Patroclus fed beneath his table, Achilles cut the throats of two and threw their bodies on the pyre. Then he completed the grim task he had in mind, killing twelve noble sons of the brave Trojans with his bronze blade, and setting the pyre alight so the pitiless flames would spread. Then he gave a groan, and called his dear friend by name: 'All hail to you, Patroclus, though in the House of Hades. See how I keep the promises I made. Twelve noble sons of brave Trojans, the fire will devour with you. But the dogs, not the flames, shall feed on Hector, son of Priam.'

Yet, despite his threats, no dogs defiled Hector's corpse, for Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter, kept them from him, night and day, and anointed him with sweet ambrosial oil of roses, so Achilles would not tear the flesh dragging the corpse about. And Phoebus Apollo drew a dark cloud down from sky to earth, and cloaked the whole place where the dead man lay, to prevent the sun shrivelling the flesh and sinews of his limbs.

Now the pyre of dead Patroclus would not burn. Fleet-footed Achilles took thought, then standing back from the pyre prayed to the winds, Boreas the North-wind, Zephyrus the West, promising them fine offerings. Pouring libations from a golden cup, he begged them fervently to blow, so the wood might kindle and the bodies might burn. Iris heard his prayer, and flew swiftly to give the Winds his message. They were feasting together in Zephyrus' house, Lord of the Western Gales, when Iris halted on his stone threshold. They sprang up when they saw her, and called her to sit beside them. But she refused, saying: 'I can't, I must return to Ocean's stream, and the land of the Ethiopians, where they are sacrificing to the immortals, and share in their sacred feast. But Achilles asks for you Boreas, and you wild Zephyr, and promises fine offerings if you'll kindle the pyre where Patroclus lies, for whom the Achaeans grieve.'

Then she left while the winds rose with a roar, driving the clouds in rout before them. Soon they were out at sea, stirring the swelling waves with their stormy blast. Reaching the fertile land of Troy, they attacked the pyre, raising a great column of roaring fire. As one, their blast beat on the flames, howling all night long, and all night long swift Achilles drew wine from a golden bowl in a two-handled cup, and poured it on the ground, wetting the earth and calling to the spirit of poor Patroclus. And Achilles, pacing heavily round the fire, groaned without cease, while his friend's bones burned, as a father groans for a newly-wedded son whose death leaves his wretched parents in despair.

At the hour when the Morning Star rises, heralding the new day, and in his wake saffron-robed Dawn spreads light on the waves, the fire died down and the flames ceased. The Winds returned home over the Thracian Sea, roaring above the surging waves. Achilles turned away from the smouldering pyre, lay down exhausted, and instantly slept. But his comrades gathered round him, and the noise of their voices and footsteps roused him once more. Sitting upright, he spoke to them: 'Atreides, and you other leaders of the Achaeans, quench the glowing pyre with red wine, wherever there are embers, then let us collect the ashes of Patroclus, Menoetius' son, separating them from the rest, though that is easy since he lay at the centre of the pyre, while the men and horses and the rest were burned at its edge. Then we will place the ashes in a golden urn, sealed with a double layer of fat, until such time as I too vanish to Hades. As for the mound, provide what is fitting but no more, and whichever of you

survive among the benched ships when I am gone, then you must build our joint mound broad and high.'

They did as fleet-footed Achilles requested, first quenching the fire with wine to its edge, where there were embers; then, in tears, collecting the white ashes of their gentle comrade, placing them in a golden urn sealed with a double layer of fat, and covering it with a soft linen cloth they took it to his hut. Next they traced the circuit of his mound, setting a ring of stones around the pyre then piling earth inside. When they had raised the barrow, they made as if to leave, but Achilles stopped them and made them sit in a wide ring where he had decided funeral games would be held, and sent for prizes from his ships; cauldrons, tripods, horses, mules, sturdy oxen, female slaves and grey iron."