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# “The Body and the Unity of the Homeric Man”

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## Introduction

The ‘corporeal’ is one of the most important themes in Homeric epic<sup>1</sup>. Even if it has been studied by contemporary scholarship in many ways, the subject remains open to further investigation. My lecture aims at analysing the meaning of the word *sōma* in the Homeric poems in order to get a clear picture of Homer’s conception of man. Homeric language possesses a rich vocabulary with regards to the ‘body’ and the ‘corporeal’, and the reader finds a range of diverse terms for ‘body’, none of which matches the contemporary notions of the human body. Before talking about the body, and in particular about the notion of *sōma*, I need to describe the Homeric conception of man. First, I will consider the unity of the Homeric man and its relation to the human body, and then I will move on to the notion of *sōma* and its meaning. I will conclude my discussion with a brief analysis of the occurrences of *sōma* in the Homeric poems and in two passages from the Hesiodic *Works and Days* and Pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*.

## The Homeric conception of man.

I shall then begin with some questions: Does Homer’s language have a word for a unitary conception of the soul and body of a living man? Was the Homeric man a unitary being? What kind of self-conception did the Homeric man hold?

We can approach the first question by comparing a famous theory on the subject with some methodological approaches. Bruno Snell, in his influential book, *The Discovery of Mind*, has attempted to reconstruct how the Homeric man regarded himself. He assumed that the Homeric man did not conceive neither the body nor the soul as unitary: the word for ‘soul’ (*psyché*) is only used for the image or shade (*eidōlon*) of the dead; on the other hand, the word for the body (*sōma*), which is translated as ‘body’ in Post-Homeric Greek, means ‘corpse’ in Homer. According to Snell, of course, the Homeric man had a body just like the later Greeks. He did not, however, conceive it as unitary, but rather as the mere sum resulting from smaller parts. Instead of ‘body’, Homer says either *gyia* (indicating the limbs as parts of the body moved by the joints) or *melea* (the limbs in their muscular strength). Among the early expressions designating what was later rendered as *sōma* or ‘body’, *gyia* and *melea* (both in the plural) are the only ones which refer to the physical nature of the body; for *khros*, instead, is merely the limit of the body, and *demas* represents the frame, the structure, and it only occurs in the accusative of specification.<sup>2</sup> As it is, the physical body of the Homeric man was conceived not as a unit but as an aggregate. The same argument can be held with regard to the soul. In this case too, said Snell, Homer would use a plurality of words, such as

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the Cambridge Graduate Conference in Ancient Philosophy 2017, “Body and Corporeality in Ancient Philosophy”, 24-25 march, Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup> Snell (1946), pp. 6-10.

*kardia, kē̄r, ē̄tor, phrenes, thymos, prapides* and *noos* so as to designate the mental and spiritual features of man. There would be, however, no unified concept of the soul, but only a collection of multiple cognitive and emotional parts. In the course of my lecture I will refer to this paradigm of a fragmented body as the conception of *Homo disgregatus*.

When facing a fragmentary being, we may resort to two ways of attempting unification. The first way is to combine all the elements into a larger unit. The second way is to separate all individual components from the bundle and distinguish them from one another, as Homer does with detailed and vivid descriptions of the bodily parts acting physically and of mental states of a human being. Only the latter proves a successful way of unifying a plurality: the bundle of elements thus becomes an organic whole.<sup>3</sup> As such, the aggregated individual parts do not generate an artificial unity, but rather every single body or mental feature allows us to better specify the unit that contains this aggregate of parts. It follows that the Homeric man is neither a unified multiplicity nor a *homo disgregatus*, but a whole described from multiple points of view. I would like to thank Professor Di Giuseppe for the important advice he gave me about this archaic conception of man, and for encouraging me to continue these studies.

If the Homeric man is not a mere aggregate of parts, but a whole, then the body/soul division is at least problematic. The difficulty of distinguishing between ‘body’ and ‘not-body’ is, in other words, a difficulty of perceiving the difference between the so-called psychic/mental and the somatic phenomena ‘within’ the Homeric man. Both are more or less ‘corporeal’/‘physiological’ on the one hand, and ‘mental’ on the other. If we turn to the nouns *kardia, kē̄r, ē̄tor, phrenes, thymos, prapides* and *noos*, we can immediately see that these things are manifestations in action of an indivisible human whole, a whole in which the complexities of mental life make sense best if apprehended without trying to divide the man into mind and body. In Homeric epics, indeed, the verbs ‘to see’ and ‘to know’ tend to include both the mental act and the corresponding physical action in a single word, suggesting that the emotional, cognitive, and active sphere are not distinguished.<sup>4</sup> We can explain this by the primal unity of mind in which perception or cognition is associated, with or immediately followed by, an emotion and a tendency to action which varies in degree and kind according to the nature of the object.<sup>5</sup> A simple fact corroborates this interpretation. Nowhere do the entities listed above behave in opposition to each other, in the same way as, for example, reason and passion or heart and mind might be opposed in our own language. «The implication of all this is that Homer does not oppose mental life to the life of the body but takes them as an undifferentiated whole. There is no ‘ghost in the machine’: Homeric man does not *have* a mind, rather his thought and consciousness are as inseparable a part of his bodily life as are movement and metabolism».<sup>6</sup>

Now, we can go back to the questions we began with and answer them. First question: Does Homer's language have a word for a unitary conception of a living man's soul and body? We can say: no, Homer does not have a unitary conception of body and soul because he does not have a conception of body and soul as entities in which the man is divided. In the light of what I have already said, we can say that seeking a word for ‘body’ or ‘soul’ is to ask Homer a wrong and unanswerable question. That a man should have a body makes sense only if he has another part to be distinguished from it, for example the soul, and vice versa.

Second question: Was the Homeric man a unitary being? I say: yes, because it follows from the previous answer that the body, as the soul, is indistinguishable from the human whole. In both the

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<sup>3</sup> Di Giuseppe (1993), pp. 48-56.

<sup>4</sup> Colli (1948), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Onians (1951), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Clarke (1999), p.115.

psychological and physical life, the bodily and spiritual continuum can be identified unambiguously in many ways – *anthrōpos*, *autos*, the character's name, and so on. Moreover, there is no place for a name for either half of a dichotomy that does not exist. So, the thesis held by Snell of the *Homo disgregatus* is incorrect, the Homeric man is a unitary being.

Last question: What kind of self-conception did the Homeric man hold? About this question, I would quote a notorious definition of Homeric man given by Hermann Fränkel: «Not in his lifetime, but only in death [...] was Homeric man divided into body and soul. He felt himself not as a cloven duality but as a unitary being. And because he felt himself such, such he was in fact. [...] Homeric man is not the sum of body and soul, but a whole. But of this whole, specific portions, or better, organs, can sometimes occupy the foreground. All individual organs appertain directly to the person. Arms are as much an organ of the man himself, rather than of his body, as *thymos* [...] is an organ of the man, himself, rather than of his soul. The whole man is equally alive in all his parts; activity which we would term 'spiritual' can be attributed to each of his members». <sup>7</sup> In the course of this brief analysis, then, it was possible to show that Homeric man is a whole continuum in which the sources and processes of his mental life are inseparably united with the substance of what we would nowadays call the body.

## The concept of *sōma*

At this point, we can move on to the word *sōma*. I will first state my definition in relation to the concept of *sōma* in Homer. Subsequently, I shall analyse all the uses of the term and the proposals advanced by scholars so far, in order to test my assumption. In Homeric poems, *sōma* is the notion which designates a precise point of view on the human being as a whole: it is the physical mass which makes up a singular man or animal. The key concept here is that the *sōma* does not move itself: it is a motionless thing. We can also describe this by using the vocabulary of physics. In physics, the mass is a property of a physical body. It is the measure of an object's resistance to acceleration (a change in its state of motion) when a net force is applied. Therefore, there has to be an external force so that the physical mass moves from its inertial state to another state. In my opinion, then, the term has a broader meaning than corpse, in that it can also be used when a living being is described with respect to its physical mass. <sup>8</sup> As for now, let us begin now with the analysis of the term and its occurrences in Homer.

In attempting to define the meaning of *sōma*, the first consideration is its etymology. A large number of guesses have been brought forth, but none of them is sufficiently convincing. In his *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Hjalmar Frisk makes a list of the attempts on the etymology for the word. *Sōma* has been variously connected with the roots to be seen in *σῶος* (intact), *σῶτρον* (saviour, preserver), *σοῦσθαι* (to be put in quick motion), *σωρός* (heap), *σίντης* (ravaging), *σῆπεσθαι* (rot, moulder). Not one of these etymologies, however, is really conclusive or persuasive. Unfortunately, etymology is of no help here to determine the meaning of the word.

Nevertheless, a source has been used by all scholars as a starting point to define the meaning of *sōma*. In the *Lexicon Homericum* of Apollonius Sophista, we can read the following definition given by Aristarchus: *σῶμα Ὅμηρος οὐδέποτε ἐπὶ τοῦ ζῶντος εἶρηκεν* (Homer never said *sōma* of a living being). On the ground of this phrase, many scholars have argued the perfect equivalence between *sōma* and corpse, but the problem is not that simple. <sup>9</sup> As Robert Renehan pointed out,

<sup>7</sup> Fränkel (1951), pp. 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> For a similar interpretation see Renehan (1979), p. 279.

<sup>9</sup> Among eminent scholar who equate, without qualification, Homeric *sōma* with 'corpse' I may single out for mention Adkins (1970), p. 21; Gomperz (1932), p. 164; Guthrie (1962), II, p. 111; Snell (1946), p. 5.

indeed, Aristarchus does not tell us that *sōma* has the same meaning of ‘corpse’ or ‘dead body’, but only that in Homer it was not used of a living body. In other words, the meaning of a motionless physical mass is not excluded. I want to point out at the analysis, which I deem appropriate, of another word meaning ‘corpse’ in Homeric Greek. This word is *nekys* or *nekròs* (the two forms are fully synonymous, presumably interchanged for metric reasons). *Nekys/nekròs* is the Homeric usual label for a dead man, and its uses are quite different from those of *sōma*. I read a passage from Michael Clarke’s book, *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer*: «This word [namely *nekys/nekròs*] differs crucially from modern words like ‘corpse’, because it goes with the nominative rather than the genitive of the noun denoting the person who has died: a *nekys/nekròs* is not the corpse of someone, rather it is unambiguously identified with them [...] Those who lie on the battlefield are not men’s mortal remains but ‘men who have died’, νεκρούς κατατεθνηῶτας. Consistently *nekys/nekròs* stands in apposition with the proper name». <sup>10</sup> The use of the term *sōma* instead occurs within a distinct grammatical context. *Sōma* differs from *nekys/nekròs* in that it always puts the name of the person in the genitive, thus implying a different perspective: the *sōma* of someone is not quite the same thing as the man himself. This proves that Homer distinguishes the dead man (*nekys/nekròs*) from the physical mass (*sōma*) of someone. The *sōma* never goes to the kingdom of Hades; *nekys* and *nekròs* often do. *Sōma* is used for animals as well as for humans, *nekys* and *nekròs* only for humans. If, as Clarke suggests, both in the mortal world and in Hades the dead are regularly called by the same name, *nekys/nekròs*, ‘corpse, dead man’, we can then state that the meaning of *sōma* is not restricted to ‘corpse’, but it must be wider. On the one hand, *nekys/nekròs* is the word for the dead man or the corpse, and it represents the entirety of the person who was alive once. This is why *nekys/nekròs* stands as an apposition to the proper name. On the other hand, *sōma* is the term for a particular point of view applied to a person or an animal, namely to their physical mass. In conclusion, the term *sōma* encloses a broader meaning than ‘corpse’, and it is a particular aspect of the whole human being.

We can now compare the term *sōma* with the other words that are specially referred to physical parts of man. We have already seen how rich vocabulary Homer has to indicate the parts of the body: this could be explained by the fact that both poetry and popular speech conspicuously tend to be as specific as possible. Not by chance, each of these terms has a specific meaning in relation to the totality of the human being. *Demas*, cognate with *demō*, refers to one’s physical ‘build’, and it represents the frame, the structure. *Eidos* refers to one’s appearance, or look. *Gyia*, from *guion*, is always plural in Homer’s poems: they are the limbs as moved by the joints. *Melea*, from *melos*, is always plural as well, and it means the limbs with respect to their muscular strength. *Khrōs* means the skin, the complexion (color) or flesh of the human being. *Phyē* refers to one’s growth or stature. It has been correctly observed by Snell that these words tend to occur in the accusative of specification, but the inference drawn from this grammatical fact has been made only by Renehan. In grammar, the accusative of specification must refer to something, and that something is a unit, the whole man in the Homeric poems. When we read: «Tydeus was small with respect to his build (Τυδεύς τοι μικρὸς μὲν ἔην δέμας)» we refer *demas* to a man, a physical and psychological unit, a living human being. Now, if we accept the use of *sōma* in reference not only to the corpse of a dead man but also to living beings, then *sōma* could be read in the same way as *demas*, *eidōs*, *gyia*, *melea*, *khrōs*, *phyē*, namely as a point of view on the human being as a whole.

At this point, we are ready to deal with the analysis of the passages in which Homer uses the term *sōma*. There are eight occurrences of the word in Homeric poems (*Il.* 3.23, 7.79, 18.161, 22.342, 23.169, *Od.* 11.53, 12.67, 24.187). In two of these passages *sōma* is perhaps used in relation to a living being. I will start with those passages in which the connection with the meaning of ‘corpse’ is more evident (English translations by A. T. Murray revised by W. F. Wyatt).

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<sup>10</sup> Clarke (1999), p. 158.

*Iliad*, book VII, lines 77-86. In this passage, Hector is delivering a speech to challenge the best of the Achaeans to fight in a duel, and so to decide the outcome of the Trojan War. He describes his future in case of defeat or victory in this way:

εἰ μὲν κεν ἐμὲ κείνος ἔλῃ ταναήκει χαλκῶ,  
τεύχεα συλήσας φερέτω κοίλας ἐπὶ νῆας,  
σῶμα δὲ οἴκαδ' ἐμὸν δόμεναι πάλιν, ὄφρα πυρός με  
Τρῶες καὶ Τρώων ἄλοχοι λελάχωσι θανόντα.  
εἰ δέ κ' ἐγὼ τὸν ἔλω, δώη δέ μοι εὐχος Ἀπόλλων,  
τεύχεα σύλησας οἴσω προτὶ Ἴλιον ἱρήν,  
καὶ κρεμόω προτὶ νηὸν Ἀπόλλωνος ἑκάτοιο,  
τὸν δὲ γέκυν ἐπὶ νῆας εὐστέλμους ἀποδώσω,  
ὄφρα ἔταρχύσωσι κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοί,  
σῆμά τέ οἱ χεύωσιν ἐπὶ πλατεῖ Ἑλλησπόντῳ.

“ [...] if that man slays me with the long-edged bronze, let him strip me of my armor and carry it to the hollow sips, but my body [*sōma*] let him give them to take back home, so that the Trojans and the Trojan wives may give me my share of fire in my death. But if I slay him, and Apollo gives me glory, I will strip him of his armor and carry it to sacred Ilios and hang it on the shrine of Apollo, the god who strikes from afar, but his corpse [*nekyn*] I will give back to the well-benched ships, so that the long-haired Achaeans may give him burial, and heap up for him a mound by the wide Hellespont.

Why does Homer use *sōma* and then *nekys* so closely, in both cases to refer to a corpse? I would suggest a possible answer. In the former occurrence of the term, Hector is talking about his corpse (*σῶμα ἐμὸν*). Here, the Trojan hero wants to refer to that part of himself that will remain without movement once his breath (*thymos*) flies away and his ego is dead. The perspective is that of a person who is talking about a part of his whole. In the latter case, instead, Hector is talking about the possibility that he will be the winner of the duel against his still unknown Achaean opponent. Here, the term *nekys* means the indivisible unity of the enemy warrior who in those circumstances is a living man, but could be a dead man. Consequently, *nekys* indicates the corpse as if it was the self of the dead person.

In another passage, *Iliad*, book XXII, lines 339-343, we can see an identical use of *sōma* (it is a formulaic expression). Hector has fallen to the ground and is addressing Achilles with his last plea:

λίσσομ' ὑπὲρ ψυχῆς καὶ γούνων σῶν τε τοκίῳ  
μὴ με ἔα παρὰ νηυσὶ κύνας καταδάσαι Ἀχαιῶν,  
ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν χαλκὸν τε ἄλις χρυσόν τε δέδεξο  
δῶρα τὰ τοι δώσουσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,  
σῶμα δὲ οἴκαδ' ἐμὸν δόμεναι πάλιν, ὄφρα πυρός με  
Τρῶες καὶ Τρώων ἄλοχοι λελάχωσι θανόντα.

I beg you by your life and knees and your own parents, do not let the dogs devour me by the ships of the Achaeans; but take heaps of bronze and gold, gifts that my father and queenly mother will give you, but my body [*sōma*] give to be taken back to my home, so that the Trojans and the Trojans' wives may give me my share of fire in my death.

A similar use of *sōma* is to be found in the *Odyssey*, book XI, lines 51-55, where Odysseus has just completed the ritual to talk to the souls of the dead.

πρώτη δὲ ψυχὴ Ἑλπήνορος ἦλθεν ἑταίρου:  
οὐ γάρ πω ἐτέθαπτο ὑπὸ χθονὸς εὐρουοδείης:  
σῶμα γὰρ ἐν Κίρκης μεγάρῳ κατελείπομεν ἡμεῖς  
ἄκλαυτον καὶ ἄθαπτον, ἐπεὶ πόνος ἄλλος ἐπειγε.

The first to come was the spirit of my comrade Elpenor. Not yet had he been buried beneath the broad-wayed earth, for we had left his corpse [*sōma*] behind us in the hall of Circe, unwept and unburied, since another task was then urging us on.

In this passage, the word *sōma* refers to that part of the human whole which has remained unburied and unwept in Circe's house. The use of the term is identical to that seen above in the case

of Hector. The fact that Hector was alive, whereas Elpenor here is dead, does not change anything: as Clarke has brilliantly shown, the Homeric man preserves the unity even after death. Not by chance, when Odysseus returns to retrieve the corpse of Elpenor in book XII, lines 10-13, and celebrates the funeral with his companions, the word used is always *nekys/nekros*. Furthermore, we can read the expression ‘νεκρὸν Ἐλπήνορα’, the ‘deceased Elpenor’, where *nekros* stands as an apposition to the proper name.

In another passage, *Odyssey*, book XXIV, lines 186-187, we can see an identical use of *sōma*. Here, the souls of the suitors killed by Odysseus are talking with the soul of Agamemnon.

ὡς ἡμεῖς, Ἀγάμεμνον, ἀπωλόμεθ', ὅν ἔτι καὶ νῦν  
σώματ' ἀκηδέα κεῖται ἐνὶ μεγάροις Ὀδυσῆος:

Thus we perished, Agamemnon, and even now our  
bodies [*sōmata*] still lie uncared-for in the halls of  
Odysseus.

In the *Iliad*, book XXIII, lines 166-169, the Achaean heroes are preparing the pyre for the cremation of Patroclus.

πολλὰ δὲ ἴφια μῆλα καὶ εἰλίποδας ἔλικας βοῦς  
πρόσθε πυρῆς ἔδερον τε καὶ ἄμφεπον: ἐκ δ' ἄρα πάντων  
δημὸν ἐλὼν ἐκάλυψε γέκυν μεγάθυμος Ἀχιλλεὺς  
ἐς πόδας ἐκ κεφαλῆς, περὶ δὲ δρατὰ σώματα νήει.

And many noble sheep and many sleek cattle of  
shambling gait they flayed and dressed before  
the pyre; and from them all great-hearted  
Achilles gathered the fat, and enfolded the dead  
[*nekyn*] in it from head to foot, and about him  
heaped the flayed bodies [*sōmata*].

Here again, we can see the difference in the use of the two terms. *Nekys* stands for the dead Patroclus, as a whole person, and this word is also used with the same meaning in the previous lines (160; 165). The specification ‘from head to foot’ (ἐς πόδας ἐκ κεφαλῆς) makes even clearer the idea of the unitary being and indicates a totality. *Sōma*, instead, refers to the flayed bodies of the animals sacrificed for the funeral rite. In this case, the emphasis falls on the physical mass of these inert bodies: of course, this *σώματα* are corpses, but their identity is not relevant in this passage. In other words, the focus does not revolve around the animals’ death, but it deals with the accumulation of motionless bodies about dead Patroclus.

In the *Odyssey*, book XII, lines 66-78, Circe is telling Odysseus the perilous sailing past the Planktai:

τῆ δ' οὐ πώ τις νηὺς φύγεν ἀνδρῶν, ἣ τις ἵκηται,  
ἀλλὰ θ' ὁμοῦ πίνακας τε νεῶν καὶ σώματα φωτῶν  
κύμαθ' ἀλὸς φορέουσι πυρός τ' ὀλοοῖο θύελλαι.

And thereby has no ship of men ever yet escaped  
that has come thither, but the planks of ships and  
bodies [*sōmata*] of men are whirled confusedly by  
the waves of the sea and the blasts of baneful fire.

Here, Koller and Harrison deny that the *sōmata* are dead, and they may be correct.<sup>11</sup> But the characterization of the term is clarified through a careful reading of the passage: the question of whether the bodies are alive or dead is not fundamental. Homer presents the reader with a parallel between the *sōmata* of men and the planks of ships: what is the connection between these two things? Wooden planks were the primary material in ship building, and we could say that the planks are the physical mass of a ship. Similarly, the *sōma* is that part of matter which physically

<sup>11</sup> Harrison (1960), p. 64. Koller (1958), p. 277.

constitutes the man. This poetic description of a sea disaster depicts the planks and the *sōmata* as dispersed among the waves, like any physical object taken from the fury of the sea.

The second possible example of a living *sōma* occurs in *Iliad*, book III, lines 21-28, when Menelaus sees Paris.

τὸν δ' ὡς οὖν ἐνόησεν ἀρηϊφίλος Μενέλαος  
ἐρχόμενον προπάροιθεν ὀμίλου μακρὰ βιβάντα,  
ὡς τε λέων ἐχάρη μεγάλῳ ἐπὶ σώματι κύρσας  
εὐρῶν ἢ ἔλαφον κεραὸν ἢ ἄγριον αἶγα  
πεινάων: μάλα γάρ τε κατεσθίει, εἴ περ ἂν αὐτὸν  
σεύωνται ταχέες τε κύνες θαλεροὶ τ' αἰζηοί:  
ὡς ἐχάρη Μενέλαος Ἀλέξανδρον θεοειδέα  
ὄφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδῶν:

But when Menelaus, dear to Ares, caught sight of him as he came out in front of the throng with long strides, then just as a lion is glad when he comes upon a great carcass [*sōmati*], having found a horned stag or a wild goat when he is hungry; for greedily doth he devours it, even though swift dogs and vigorous youths set on him: so was Menelaus glad when his eyes beheld godlike Alexander;

Here, the *mega sōma* refers to Paris, who is alive and remains alive. Can we say then that *sōma* can also be referred to a living body in Homer? Yes, we can. Nonetheless, as in the previous example, the main point of the issue is another. I would argue that the meaning of *sōma* in the simile matches exactly with the definition given earlier. When a lion comes across a large animal, such as a horned stag or a wild goat, he is pleased with his prey's stature and physical mass, because the reward of the fight will be greater. Therefore, *sōma* means the material constitution of an animal.

In his imitation of this passage, the author of the Pseudo-Hesiodic *Scutum* corroborates the assumption that the *sōma* could be referred to a living being. I read the verses 425-428 (translated by G. W. Most).

αὐτὸς δὲ βροτολογιὸν Ἄρην προσιόντα δοκεύσας,  
δεινὸν ὄρων ὄσσοισι, λέων ὡς σώματι κύρσας,  
ὅς τε μάλ' ἐνδυκέως ῥινὸν κρατεροῖς ὀνύχεσσι  
σχίσσας ὅττι τάχιστα μελίφρονα θυμὸν ἀπήυρα:

And as mortal-destroying Ares attacked he himself [Heracles] observed him closely, glaring terribly with his eyes, like a lion that has come upon an animal [*sōmati*] and, very ravenously rending the hide with his strong claws, deprives it as quickly as possible of its sweet spirit.

The meaning of the term here is identical to the previous passage of the *Iliad*, and even more striking is the fact that the lion's prey is alive. In this case, indeed, *sōma* certainly refers to a living being.

The lion's simile is also used in book XVIII of the *Iliad*, lines 161-164. Here, the Achaeans are trying in vain to recover Patroclus's body from Hector's fury.

ὡς δ' ἀπὸ σώματος οὐ τι λέοντ' αἴθωνα δύνανται  
ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι μέγα πεινάοντα δῖεσθαι,  
ὡς ῥα τὸν οὐκ ἐδύναντο δύο Αἴαντε κορυστὰ  
Ἴκτορα Πριαμίδην ἀπὸ νεκροῦ δειδίξασθαι.

And as shepherds in the field cannot in any way drive from a carcase [*sōmatos*] a tawny lion when he hungers greatly, so the two warrior Aiantes could not frighten Hector, Priam's son, away from the corpse [*nekru*].

Here, the lion is close to his prey, which can be already dead or about to die, and he is making the recovery of the animal's body impossible for the shepherds. Even in this passage the term *sōma* means that part of the animal which is his mass and cannot move itself without the intervention of



another force, for example the *menos*. Patroclus' corpse, on the contrary, is defined as *nekròs*, because the Achaean hero has just died and his unit as a person is still in the corpse lying on the ground. A good evidence to support my interpretation is that the term is subsequently used with the same meaning in the next lines (173; 180).

At the end we have a passage from Hesiod, *The Works and Days*, lines 536-540 (translated by G. W. Most).

Καὶ τότε ἔσασσθαι ἔρυμα χροός, ὡς σε κελεύω,  
γλαῖνάν τε μαλακὴν καὶ τερμιόεντα χιτῶνα·  
στήμονι δ' ἐν παύρῳ πολλὴν κρόκα μηρύσασθαι·  
τὴν περιέσασσθαι, ἵνα τοι τρίχες ἀτρεμέωσι  
μηδ' ὀρθαὶ φρίσσωσιν ἀειρόμεναι κατὰ σῶμα·

And that is when you should put on a defense for  
your skin, as I bid you: a soft cloak and a tunic that  
reaches your feet. Wind plenty of woof on a puny  
warp: put this around you, so that your hairs do not  
tremble nor stand up straight shivering along your  
body [*sōma*].

It has been noted by scholars that this passage Hesiod clearly refers to a living body. If we wanted to accept the original meaning of 'corpse' for *sōma*, we should then assume that there has been a change in perspective from the Homeric texts to Hesiod's. But a semantic transition from 'corpse' to 'living body' is hardly plausible. Renehan's opinion is that «if *sōma* meant originally 'dead body', then it is very difficult to explain the semantic development whereby it came to be used, as it was, of a living body». <sup>12</sup> In any case, this change of meaning comes to be unnecessary. The definition I gave of the word *sōma* appears to work also for the passage of Hesiod. Here, the term means the physical support, without motion, on which the hair can stand up straight.

## Conclusion

After analysing all the occurrences of the term in Homeric epics, I can restate my definition of *sōma*. *Sōma* is the notion which designates a precise point of view on the human being as a whole: it is the physical mass which makes up a singular man or animal. The development of the idea of the body from Homer to later Greek is thus understandable in this way. The meaning of a physical mass without movement remains: we find it even in Plato, where the thing moving is the soul, whereas the body is motionless. But the general concept of man changes completely, and while Homeric *sōma* is a point of view on the whole person, in later thinkers *sōma* is one of the two parts into which man is divided.

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<sup>12</sup> Renehan (1979), p. 271.

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