

A EULOGY OF ACHILLES*

by

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In memoriam of Kostas Kalimtzis

ABSTRACT: We often hear about Achilles' wrath as being a central theme of the *Iliad* and about its destructive character. In my paper I intend to offer a different reading and to make a strong case for his outstanding personality. To do this, after an introduction, I shall, firstly, reconstruct the sequence of events relevant to Achilles' responses, then I shall make sense of his responses and exploit them in order to set up Achilles' internal biography. Next, I shall consider the counterfactual in the light of Aristotle's correctness criteria for anger to see whether any better option was available to Achilles. I conclude by considering Achilles' mental progress.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the *communis opinio* the *Iliad* is a poem about the wrath of Achilles¹ which has as its outcome the most terrible consequences both for the Achaean army and for Achilles himself². For instance, in his celebrated dictionary Pierre GRIMAL succinctly summarises the *communis opinio* thus: “l’*Iliade*, dont le sujet est, non la prise de Troie, mais la colère d’Achille, qui, au cours de cette expédition, faillit causer la perte de l’armée grecque” (GRIMAL 1951:

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¹ The paper's scope is restricted to the Iliadic Achilles exclusively.

² I am not claiming that this is the *only and exclusive* reading. My point is that this is by far a general trend of seeing Achilles with an impact going beyond the Homeric studies and even the classics. For alternative readings, less traditional, more comprehensive in my view, see e.g. BEZANTAKOS (1980), MONSACRÉ (1984), ZANKER (1994), SHAY (1995), BATTEZZATO (2019).