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Wild Landscape Perception in the *Iliad*. The Early Presence of Emotions Associated with Forests and Mountains in Ancient Greek Imagery

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Abstract. How did ancient Greeks experience their relationship with wild Nature? What feelings did a walk in the forest or a night spent in the woods evoke in them? Over the centuries, literature has built bridges between them and us and can bring us a little closer to grasping a hint of their mentality. Our analysis of the passages and similes that mention the natural world in the *Iliad* could shed some light on how they perceived their natural environment. Mountains and forests aroused different feelings in the minds of ancient Greeks, showing how fear, sacredness, bravery and fascination could converge in their rich and complex perception of the landscape.
Key words: Nature; Wilderness; Literature; Homer; Epic; Ancient Greece.

[esp] La percepción del paisaje agreste en la *Ilíada*. La temprana presencia de las emociones asociadas al bosque y a la montaña en el imaginario griego antiguo

Resumen. ¿Cómo experimentaban los antiguos griegos su relación con la naturaleza salvaje? ¿Qué emociones despertaban en ellos un paseo por el bosque o una noche en el interior de un paraje boscoso? La literatura puede servir para tender puentes entre épocas separadas por siglos, permitiéndonos entrever las sensaciones que la naturaleza provocaba en los antiguos griegos y acercarnos ligeramente a su mentalidad. Por ello, el análisis de los pasajes y símiles que mencionan espacios naturales en la *Ilíada* puede contribuir a desvelar la manera en que percibían su entorno natural. Las montañas y los bosques suscitaban diferentes sentimientos en la mente de los antiguos griegos, mostrando cómo el miedo, el carácter sagrado, la valentía y la fascinación podían converger en su rica y compleja percepción del paisaje.
Palabras clave: naturaleza; naturaleza salvaje; literatura; Homero; épica; antigua Grecia.

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1. Introduction

In all ages and cultures, human beings have conceptualized the natural world, since the more inhospitable natural spaces became anthropized, the more alienated people felt from their physical surroundings. They began to form the idea of the landscape[2] as a distinct and homogeneous entity,[3] and so Nature became an element that could be represented and understood as a defined space. The wilderness was perceived in Greek Antiquity as a world immersed in a rich symbology, which influenced the relationship that the ancient Greeks established with their territory, in general, and with certain geographical features, in particular. This study aims to provide a brief insight into the complex perception that ancient Greeks shared regarding natural places and the feelings that such wooded environments triggered in their minds. These sensations can be gauged through the bridges that literature has built across time and space, as we can immerse ourselves in literary passages and gather the impressions that can be found in certain scenes that are set in the wild.

We have chosen to analyse the *Iliad*[4] with the intention of detecting in its verses certain perceptive nuances concerning the wild rugged landscape that remained in the collective imagery in later periods of the history of ancient Greece. We will organise the study in sections corresponding to perceptive categories related to different emotions that were linked to the wilderness in ancient Greece. In every section we will explain how each of these emotions was present in the imagery of the ancient Greeks and how this perceptive nuance is already detectable in certain fragments extracted from the *Iliad*. In order to study how landscape was perceived in the literary passages, we will explore the interactions[5] between particular emotions and the natural settings in which they arise and to which they are linked in the narrative. For this purpose, we will extract passages from the *Iliad* that take place in wild natural settings, and analyse the perception of landscape in different categories of literary fragments. We have selected fragments that show the threatening forces of Nature, verses that allude to a certain divine presence in the wild, passages that link the wilderness to the boundaries, scenes that present wooded areas as protective spaces, verses that relate to the exploitation of natural resources, similes that mention the dangerous animals that dwell in the forests and mountains, expressions that refer to the bravery of men that venture into the remote lands and also the similes that compare the battlefield to wild Nature unleashed.[6] Due to the limited length of this article, we have focused on rugged wild landscapes, and therefore we have not included in the analysis cultivated environments, roads, inhabited and built natural spaces, coastlines and the sea itself, although all these places, where wild Nature and human action on it converge, constitute landscapes and are also present in other passages of the *Iliad*. Although the landscapes that predominate in the *Iliad*

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2 Following Cosgrove (1984, 13), we understand landscape as a cultural construction.

3 Without people there would be no landscape, there would only be wild Nature, for landscape is, by definition, a cultural construct (Van Wijngaarden 2011, 1).

4 We have chosen to study the passages that mention the natural world in the *Iliad* due to the paramount importance of this poem, its early date of creation and the great influence it exerted on the later Greek mentality.

5 Classical literature provides some of the earliest examples of interactions between landscapes and emotions (Felton – Gilhuly 2018, 5).

6 Most of the scenes in the *Iliad* are set on the battlefield, so the similes refer mainly to warriors in combat (Scott 1974, 85).

correspond to rugged aspects of Nature, we also find in the poem scenes that take place in pleasant landscapes. Natural environments of a spring-like character therefore exist in the *Iliad*, but they have not been included in this study, since the aim is to focus on the perception of the wilder and harsher Nature.[7]

The natural environment mentioned in the *Iliad* is recalled by the author in order to connect with experiences familiar to the audience. The landscapes described are not intended to take the listeners or readers to a fabulous world where they can let their imaginations run free, but to a natural world already familiar to them, so that they can recall the feelings that such places arouse in them. In this study, we have extracted the scenes in which natural or geographical features are mentioned in order to analyse the sensory content present in them,[8] and we have organised the sensations detected in landscape descriptions and in scenes set in the wild into different categories. Our analysis of the emotions, contexts and events associated with natural places in the narrative could reveal the underlying connotations that they entailed, as these perceptions of Nature found in the *Iliad* could be linked to the symbolic meaning that wild places had in ancient Greeks' collective imagery.[9]

The connection between everyday life and literary or mythological stories is rich in nuances.[10] These narratives shed light on the processes of landscape perception, which Buxton[11] argues are influenced by cultural factors, since communities shape the image they hold of their environment as they interact with it. In turn, these narratives, even the fictional and mythological accounts, permeate conceptions of everyday life and provide insights into how ancient societies understood their own world and identity.[12] Studying the symbolic content of the situations experienced in natural settings by the heroes of the *Iliad* could uncover the feelings that these places aroused in the minds of ancient Greeks, since Homer's epic poem, forged as a result of the convergence of long centuries of oral tradition, can powerfully transmit through time the perception of landscape and the stories that were connected to geographical features.[13] This study could shed some light on how they perceived their natural environment, with the ultimate aim of bringing us a little closer to grasping a hint of their mentality.

In Greek literature, the landscape is often simply traversed or serves as a general setting for events, but no attention is paid to its description or to the singling out of its various elements. Greek authors tend to ignore the landscape, as they consider their audience to be familiar with it, and only explain it briefly when the scenery is crucial to the story.[14] Therefore, there are very few descriptions of landscapes in Greek literature, in general,[15] and in the *Iliad*, in particular. However, for poetic

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7 We have included in our study the scene of the "Deception of Zeus" (Hom. *Il.* 14.153-353), since, as suggested in the corresponding section of this article, the forest can be perceived in this passage not only as a pleasant natural environment (Hom. *Il.* 14.346-351), but also as a place of protection and a space of the divinity.

8 We intend to focus on the more symbolic and less formal aspects of the natural world depicted in the literary passages, leaving also aside the agricultural and productive dimension of Nature.

9 Cultural concerns can be expressed and reflected in literary texts (Felton – Gilhuly 2018, 6).

10 Davies 1988, 36-37.

11 Buxton 2000, 87, 101, 115.

12 Buxton 2000, 98.

13 Van Wijngaarden 2011, 1-2, 4.

14 Rackham 1996, 22; Roy 1996, 104.

15 Roy 1996, 98.

purposes, in this poem the narrator includes abundant topographical markers, such as trees and rivers.[16] The spatial framework of the poem's narrative is relatively limited, as the action takes place in only three locations: the Achaean camp, Priam's citadel and the plain in between. However, this reduced setting of the Trojan War is constantly balanced by frequent comparisons that introduce alternative worlds into the audience's mind.[17] These comparisons or similes in the *Iliad* offer brief scenes with deep emotional implications,[18] in which warriors are transported from the battlefield and turned into hunters after their prey, equating human actions with natural events.[19]

Scattered throughout the poem, interspersed between the warlike actions, various similes suggest places that the audience glimpses only in passing, drawing their attention away from the battle and the blood,[20] like a window that opens and then rapidly closes.[21] These similes, mental images accessed for only a brief instant, help to alleviate the suffering caused by the cruelty of war and offer a place of refuge.[22] Such places, which bring relief[23] and introduce visual diversity, do not constitute a wondrous fantasy world, but the Greek landscape and its wild Nature, familiar to both the poet and his audience.[24] Therefore, the brief but intense narrative moments elicited by the similes are based on experiences and places that belong to their collective imagery.[25] Similes are created by evocative mental images, not by words,[26] and the allegorical[27] pictures that they recall depend on the symbolic associative patterns that listeners and narrator share. These comparisons associate the epic action with familiar situations and contexts,[28] helping listeners to visualise the scene,[29] lending vividness to a certain episode, or aiding in emphasising a crucial event.[30] By using similes, the story can be told orally more effectively and the development of the plot can be reinforced.[31] A study of the similes and the other scenes in the *Iliad* that mention the wild natural world might help us to perceive the symbolic connotations of landscape in the imagination of the author and his audience.

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16 Tsagalis 2012, 7-8.

17 Tsagalis 2012, 7.

18 The vividness of the images that refer to natural elements is closely related to their emotional power. Therefore, the characterisation, psychology and feelings of the heroes are reflected in the descriptions of the natural world (Tsagalis 2012, 266-268, 367-368).

19 However, the order of the natural world is applied to the world of Man without the natural phenomena taking on an anthropomorphic form (Austin 1982, 115-117, 133).

20 Brockliss (2018, 31) suggests that the bloody descriptions and cruelty of the warfare action in the *Iliad* would exert a certain fascination on the audience, who "might want to distance themselves from the abject horrors" but, at the same time, would experience a sort of "perverse joy" in listening to the poem.

21 Tsagalis 2012, 20, 266, 345, 347, 360.

22 Buxton 2004, 142, 151-155.

23 Saïd 2012, 351-352.

24 This is not an idealised natural world, since it also presents violence and disputes (Buxton 2004, 152).

25 The personal experience of landscape perception relies on society's ability to understand the links between past communal stories and geographical features. Therefore, oral tradition might help to connect these stories to the territory (Saïd 2012, 353).

26 Tsagalis 2012, 268.

27 Austin 1982, 117-118

28 Van Wijngaarden 2011, 1-2; Tsagalis 2012, 372.

29 Tsagalis 2012, 266-268, 367-368.

30 Scott 1974, 4, 9, 49.

31 Scott 1974, 4, 5, 9.

2. Wild and hostile Nature

Most mentions of landscapes in the *Iliad* portray wild Nature as an untamed hostile world,[32] offering a stark contrast to the idea of civilisation. In the *Iliad*, Nature manifests itself as a combination of threatening phenomena beyond Man's control, and the natural world generally appears to be involved in violent and vigorous events.[33] Wild Nature is perceived in the Homeric imagination as the place where powerful forces are unleashed: wind, river, fire, forest and mountain. These ungovernable elements are conceived as being interrelated or confrontational. When they cooperate, their strength increases as they join together, and when they appear in confrontation, violence is released that is even more terrifying than the powerful elements themselves. Numerous similes in the *Iliad* present natural phenomena in this unleashed state. In the following fragment the deafening wind (ἄνεμος) is compared to the clamour of combat between the Achaeans and the Trojans.[34]

> Not so loud the gale that howls in the leafy crowns of oaks
> when it hits its pitch of fury tearing branches down,
> nothing so loud as cries of Trojans, cries of Achaeans,
> terrible war cries, armies storming against each other.[35]

Purves[36] explains that wind contributes to integrate the temporal dimension with the landscapes introduced by similes, and the effect of wind moving trees and leaves intensifies the sense of movement in the scenes that compare the natural world with the battlefield. According to this scholar, the passages[37] that allude to the absence of wind would function as pauses in the narrative and would emphasize the stillness of the moments in which there is no action on the Trojan plain.

In passages of the *Iliad* we find examples of clashes between forces that collide and cause a great noise, whether they belong to the same type of natural element or not. The energy with which these elements clash is compared to the impetus of armies going into battle or heroes fighting. In the following excerpt, the two armies are compared to two winds that collide, vying to be the first to attack the forest.

> As the East and South Winds fight in killer-squalls
> deep in a mountain valley thrashing stands of timber,
> oak and ash and cornel with bark stretched taut and hard
> and they whip their long sharp branches against each other,
> a deafening roar goes up, the splintered timber crashing
> so Achaeans and Trojans crashed.[38]

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32 The uncultivated landscape, still beyond human control, is a world meant to be exploited, revered and, at the same time, avoided (Buxton 2000, 87).

33 Buxton 2004, 145.

34 Wind similes often refer to the movement of a group or the noise it produces (Scott 1974, 63-64).

35 Hom. *Il*. 14.398-401. Fragments of the *Iliad* quoted in this study follow the translation by R. Fagles (New York, 1990).

36 Purves 2010, 326-328.

37 Hom. *Il*. 5.522-527.

38 Hom. *Il*. 16.765-770.

The only forces capable of opposing the sweeping momentum of the river are other natural phenomena, such as the wooded hillock that holds back the current, just like Ajax the Great and Ajax the Lesser together repel the Trojan attack to protect the body of Patroclus.

> The two Aeantes held the Trojans off as a wooded rocky ridge
> stretched out across an entire plain holds back a flood,
> fighting off the killer-tides of the mounting rivers.[39]

The uncontrollable and powerful force of fire (πῦρ) can devour the forest with the cooperation of the wind. The consideration of fire in the *Iliad* is positive in some cases and negative in others, wondrous and voracious, offering two complementary visions of the same natural element. In the first fragment, the whole Achaean army moving into battle is compared to fire, and in the second and third, the destructive might of fire is likened to the rage of Achilles and Agamemnon.[40]

> As ravening fire rips through big stands of timber
> high on a mountain ridge and the blaze flares miles away,
> so from the marching troops the blaze of bronze armor,
> splendid and superhuman, flared across the earth,
> flashing into the air to hit the skies.[41]

> Achilles now like inhuman fire raging on through the mountain gorges
> splinter-dry, setting ablaze big stands of timber,
> the wind swirling the huge fireball left and right.[42]

> Like devouring fire roaring down onto dry dead timber,
> squalls hurling it on, careening left and right and
> brush ripped up by the roots goes tumbling under
> crushed by the blasting fire rampaging on.[43]

Mighty and threatening mountains embody the grandeur of untamed wild Nature and are seen as disturbing to those living in civilised places, who prefer to contemplate them from afar and visit them only to leave again.[44] Mountains are perceived as overwhelming places, battered by strong winds and covered by thick snow. In the following fragment of the *Iliad* a snow-capped mountain (ὄρεϊ) is personified as a powerful force and compared to the mighty Hector.

> And out like a flashing snowcapped peak he moved,
> shouting, sweeping on through his ranks and Trojan allies.[45]

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39 Hom. *Il*. 17.747-750.
40 Scott 1974, 67.
41 Hom. *Il*. 2.455-458.
42 Hom. *Il*. 20.490-492.
43 Hom. *Il*. 11.155-157.
44 Buxton 2000, 88, 101.
45 Hom. *Il*. 13.754-755.

3. Mountains and forests as sacred places

In ancient Greece the world of Nature was identified with the world of the gods, who were believed to control it and to dwell in it.[46] Forests and mountains were perceived as spaces where Nature manifested itself in full force, being associated with the power emanating from the divinities. Mountains had a special status as prominent places in Greek mythical geography,[47] being considered wondrous because their peaks were situated beyond the upper geographical limits.[48] Above this upper barrier or dividing line, a series of effects took place,[49] which were linked to the heights and derived from their supernatural condition. In the *Iliad* the mountains are presented as majestic and powerful, especially Mount Olympus, which is frequently mentioned as the abode and seat of the gods.

> And Aphrodite the daughter of Zeus went home
> but Hera sped in a flash from Mount Olympus' peak.[50]

> The other gods kept dear, at their royal ease,
> reclining off in the halls where the roofs of each
> were built for the ages high on rugged ridged Olympus.[51]

The *Iliad* also mentions Mount Ida, from whose summit the gods witness the war.

> Zeus the Father whipped his team and hurtling chariot
> straight from Ida to Mount Olympus, soon to reach
> the sessions of the gods.[52]

> My team stands at the foot of Ida with all her springs,
> they wait to bear me over the good dry land and sea.
> But now it is you, you I have come to visit, Zeus
> speeding here from the heights of Mount Olympus.[53]

> And Iris riding the wind obeyed his orders,
> swooping down from Ida's peaks to sacred Troy.[54]

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46 Guettel Cole 1994, 199.

47 Greek mythical geography mentions impossible places within the geography of the region that is considered real, whilst also referring to places that existed at some point in the history of Greece's past and became part of the mythical world (González García 2001, 72-73).

48 In the mythical geography of ancient Greece certain barriers existed that had supernatural effects. On the upper plane existed a wondrous geographical boundary, the limit of the visible sky, above which the highest mountain peaks stood out. This boundary separated the lower parts of the Earth from the upper parts, that were regarded as privileged realms (Fernández Nieto 2001, 233-234).

49 Mythological stories spoke of the other side of the wondrous upper limit, where long-lived peoples enjoyed a peaceful life. Height also affected the perception of light from the summits, and the shadows cast by the peaks were considered prodigious and exceptional. On the summits of the highest and most sacred mountains a state of non-alteration reigned permanently, since they were located above the upper limit, beyond which atmospheric agents remained in suspense and did not affect the ashes of the sacrifices made on the altars (Fernández Nieto 2001, 235-236).

50 Hom. *Il*. 14.224-225.

51 Hom. *Il*. 11.75-77.

52 Hom. *Il*. 8.438-439.

53 Hom. *Il*. 14.307-309.

54 Hom. *Il*. 15.169-170.

One way of making Nature comprehensible was to imagine it to be full of deities who needed to be pleased and placated in order to be favourably disposed. Under these circumstances, the imagination of the ancient Greeks was quick to populate the wilderness with menacing divinities and lurking monstrous beings, and to fill life with rites and beliefs.[55] Among the gods mentioned in the *Iliad* Zeus appears especially associated with the heights,[56] either Mount Olympus or Mount Ida, and he is characterised by the lightning and the fearsome thunderbolt (στεροπηγερέτα Ζεύς).

> Bright as the moment Zeus the lord of lightning moves
> from a craggy mountain ridge a storm cloud massing dense
> and all the lookout peaks stand out and the jutting cliffs
> and the steep ravines and down from the high heavens bursts
> the boundless bright air.[57]

> As a huge oak goes down at a stroke from Father Zeus, ripped up by the roots
> and a grim reek of sulphur bursts forth from the trunk
> and a passerby too close, looking on, loses courage, the
> bolt of mighty Zeus is hell on earth.[58]

Zeus was not the only deity considered to master the wild, for different gods had shrines dedicated to them on the heights and in wooded areas, being believed to dwell in the mountains and forests. In remote areas, often on the borders and limits of the territory, different divinities were worshipped as protectors of the frontiers or related to the boundary areas. Above them all, Artemis shared the symbolism of the frontier landscape, mainly pastures and uncultivated land, and her presence on the border lands was particularly linked to her wild and mountainous character.[59] In the following excerpt of the *Iliad*, Phoenix narrates how the goddess, irritated at not having received the relevant sacrifices, released the famous wild boar that caused great destruction until it was killed by Meleager.

> How she fumed, Zeus's child who showers arrows,
> she loosed a bristling wild boar, his tusks gleaming,
> crashing his savage, monstrous way through Oeneus' orchard,
> ripping up whole trunks from the earth to pitch them headlong,
> rows of them, roots and all, appleblossoms and all![60]

In Greek imagery the forests and mountains were inhabited by minor divinities and supernatural creatures, which could be encountered at any time by an unsuspecting wanderer who dared to enter these territories. In the thickets of the forests, in the vicinity of lakes or springs, and on the banks of watercourses, beautiful nymphs and naiads played and bathed. A chance encounter with a divinity could have unforeseeable

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55 Tuan 1980, 53-55.

56 Being the god of the heights makes him a divinity associated with rain and, therefore, also with agriculture (Plácido 2001, 184).

57 Hom. *Il*. 16.297-300.

58 Hom. *Il*. 14.414-417.

59 Artemis, goddess of the mountains, was both a contrast and complement to Demeter, goddess of the hearth, associated with the cultivated fields (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 55-57).

60 Hom. *Il*. 9.538-542.

and often dire consequences for an intrepid yet foolish man, whether shepherd, hunter or hero.[61] In the following verses of the *Iliad* Achilles, after releasing Hector's body, reminds Priam of the story of Niobe and mentions the nymphs who dwell in the mountains along the banks of the rivers.

> And now, somewhere, lost on the crags, on the lonely mountain slopes,
> on Sipylus where, they say, the nymphs who live forever,
> dancing along the Achelous River run to beds of rest.[62]

In certain places one feels, as the Greek felt in ancient times, a special connection with the landscape, whether it is the imposing presence of the heights and cliffs, as at Delphi, or the lyrical presence of birds and a stream in a grove.[63] This connection was probably perceived by the men who built the Greek sanctuaries and demarcated the sacred groves. Hence, one of the criteria for establishing a sanctuary was the choice of places associated with the manifestations of divinities, such as grottoes, fords, springs, hills and forests,[64] in addition to rational and functional criteria, and to the memory of the site.[65] Wild natural settings were, therefore, prime locations for sanctuaries due to their intense symbolic connotations. Among the sacred buildings and elements associated with remote natural areas,[66] border sanctuaries were of particular importance, as they had an enormous presence in the landscape and as liminal elements. Border sanctuaries, located on the frontiers of the territory of the polis, symbolically protected the border areas, and functioned as meeting places between communities, enabling the strengthening of relations with neighbouring groups.[67] The protection of the gods to whom the sanctuaries were consecrated increased the stability of the frontier,[68] and their symbolic neutrality safeguarded commercial activities and mediated between border communities,[69] both Greek and indigenous.[70]

Along with the sanctuaries, the Greek countryside abounded with heroes' tombs surrounded by trees and with sacred groves consecrated to the gods.[71] A pleasant harmony is still perceptible among Greek temples and their natural surroundings, which derives from the fortunate relationship between the gently undulating land,

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61 To furtively watch the nymphs was fatally dangerous for anyone who, like Actaeon, witnessed their games or surprised them bathing, for these beautiful creatures were terribly vindictive.

62 Hom. *Il*. 24.614-616.

63 Burkert 2007, 117-118.

64 Domínguez Monedero 2001, 118.

65 Antonaccio (1994, 79-80) considers that, in certain places in Greece, the sacred landscape was structured on the basis of the remains of sanctuaries, tombs and settlements from earlier times.

66 The liminal areas were also associated with the presence of divinities through sacred symbols such as altars, monuments, temples, statues or images of the gods (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 54).

67 Bremmer 2006, 57-58.

68 The sanctuary was a guarantee of stability as long as neighbours behaved peacefully, and even inhabitants of different territories participated together in celebrations (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 38, 55-57).

69 Domínguez Monedero 2001, 117-118, 120-121.

70 Frontier sanctuaries functioned as spaces of interaction between neighbouring communities and, in contexts of colonisation, they often corresponded to sites sacred to the natives (López Barja – Reboreda Morillo 2001, 10). Due to the spatial continuity of the location of worship places, they were venerated and respected by different cultures (Domínguez Monedero 2001, 120).

71 Segura Munguía 2005, 59.

laurels and cypresses and the elegantly arranged columns.[72] Within forests, the ancient Greeks performed rites in honour of the various deities that dwelt inside them,[73] and certain wooded sites were demarcated and protected as sacred groves. These sacred groves were enchanting places where Nature showed its gentle side and offered a sensory spectacle of colourful fragrant flowers, leaves rustling in the wind, birdsong and murmuring streams.[74] A fragment of Andromache's lament in the *Iliad* mentions a mound around which the nymphs planted elm trees (πτελέας), a sacred grove associated with the deities and the deceased hero, Andromache's father, who was killed by Achilles.

> For he burned his corpse in all his blazoned bronze,
> then heaped a grave-mound high above the ashes
> and nymphs of the mountain planted elms around it,
> daughters of Zeus whose shield is storm and thunder.[75]

Any place could be revered by the ancient Greeks if it was recognised as having a sacred character indicating a divine manifestation, which could be related to an existing tomb, a majestic landscape or a natural element, be it a spring, a rock or a tree.[76] Singular trees had an important protective symbolic connotation and clearly delimited the space that was protected under their canopy.[77] Beneath a particular tree, sometimes a tree of a specific species, situations could occur that would be unthinkable in a different environment. In the *Iliad*, various scenes of symbolic importance take place under singular trees. Calchas predicts that the war will last ten years by interpreting the omen that appears after the sacrifice under a palm tree (πλατανίστῳ) next to a spring. Beneath a prominent oak (δρυΐ), other events of intense meaning occur: a banquet depicted on Achilles' new shield, a conversation between Apollo and Athena, who support opposing forces in the war, and the care and attention given to Sarpedon after being wounded.

> We were all busy then, milling round a spring
> and offering victims up on the holy altars,
> full sacrifice to the gods to guarantee success,
> under a spreading plane tree where the water splashed,
> glittering in the sun, when a great omen appeared.
> A snake, and his back streaked red with blood, a thing of terror![78]

> Beneath a spreading oak,
> the heralds were setting out the harvest feast,
> they were dressing a great ox they had slaughtered.[79]

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72 Baridon 2004, 186.
73 Segura Munguía 2005, 57.
74 Burkert 2007, 117.
75 Hom. *Il*. 6.418-420.
76 Bruit Zaidman – Schmitt Pantel 2002, 44.
77 Trees and forests were sources of material resources and symbolic meanings (Daniels 1988, 43). In sacred contexts, trees were often associated with springs, combining both elements to reinforce a symbolism linked to flowing life.
78 Hom. *Il*. 2.305-308.
79 Hom. *Il*. 18.558-559.

> As the two came face-to-face beside the great oak,
> lord Apollo the son of Zeus led off.[80]
>
> But Sarpedon's loyal comrades laid him down,
> a man like a god beneath a fine spreading oak
> sacred to Zeus whose shield is banked with clouds.[81]

The forest is generally presented in the *Iliad* as a dangerous and threatening place; however, within the thicket can hide a meadow or a flowery glade, spaces perceived as peaceful and pleasant. The surrounding trees provide shelter and intimacy inside the forest clearing, where it is possible to enjoy the cool shade of the trees, the soft grass, the beautiful flowers, the fragrant scents and the birdsong. Being inside the forest, the peaceful clearing also shares a certain sacred character, which allows to host the scene of the "Deception of Zeus"[82] where the natural environment is perceived as a place of pleasure and also as a supernatural space where divinities manifest themselves. In the following fragment Hera seduces Zeus and both lie on the soft grass of Mount Ida.

> With that the son of Cronus caught his wife in his arms
> and under them now the holy earth burst with fresh green grass,
> crocus and hyacinth, clover soaked with dew, so thick and soft
> it lifted their bodies off the hard, packed ground…
> Folded deep in that bed they lay and round them wrapped
> a marvelous cloud of gold, and glistening showers of dew
> rained down around them both.[83]

4. Wilderness as a natural frontier

Greek geography is characterised by its abundant mountains and streams, by its tortuous coastline, which constantly twists and turns in steep inlets and outlets, and by the numerous islands in the Aegean Sea. The consequence is a fragmented geographical reality, crossed by rivers, mountain ranges and forests. As a result of this discontinuous geography, the broken-up landscape has conditioned the location of settlements and the forms of appropriation, delimitation and exploitation of the land since ancient times. The territory was vital for Greek states,[84] and the frontiers had wide-ranging meanings and functions.[85] The trajectory of the border followed a one-dimensional geometric line linking successive marker points, used as a system of visible references to identify the boundaries. The natural elements most commonly used as frontier markers were permanent geographical features such as forests, marshes, lakes, rivers,

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80 Hom. *Il*. 7.22-23.

81 Hom. *Il*. 5.692-694.

82 Hom. *Il*. 14.153-353.

83 Hom. *Il*. 14.346-351.

84 The territory was indispensable for the survival of the polis, thus, territorial disputes between nearby states were frequent, and neighbouring communities were perceived as a constant threat to territorial integrity (Gómez Espelosín 2001, 88).

85 Borders constituted transit areas, whose liminal character implied a permeability towards the inside and the outside (Domínguez Monedero 2001, 107, 125).

prominent trees, hills or mountain peaks.[86] Therefore, the wilderness often helped to delimit the territory, constituting both a boundary and a frontier zone.[87] Inaccessible forests and mountains functioned as natural barriers that were difficult to overcome and were perceived as a wild and alien outside world, as in the following passage of the *Iliad*, where mountains (οὔρεα) are presented as rugged rocky places.

> Suddenly down from the mountain's rocky crags
> Poseidon stormed with giant, lightning strides
> and the looming peaks and tall timber quaked.[88]

Whenever the landscape permitted, geographical elements, such as remarkable trees, were used as visible reference-points for the frontier line. In the absence of natural features, artificial elements such as *hóroi* were used.[89] According to Brockliss, in Homeric imagery trees and *hóroi* are associated with permanence and stability.[90] In the following fragments of the *Iliad*, trees and *hóroi* are used as boundary markers and are considered to have been set in place in earlier times, granting an ancestral character to the limits and borders. The dead tree (ξύλον) serves as halfway mark in the chariot race that takes place at the funeral of Patroclus, and the stone (λίθον) is hurled by Athena against Ares during a dispute between the gods, as they favour one or the other army.

> There's a dead tree-stump standing six feet high,
> it's oak or pine, not rotted through by the rains,
> and it's propped by two white stones on either side.
> That's your halfway mark where the homestretch starts
> and there's plenty of good smooth racing-room around it
> it's either the grave-mound of a man dead long ago
> or men who lived before us set it up as a goal.[91]

> And Athena backed away, her powerful hand hefting
> a boulder of the plain, black, jagged, a ton weight
> that men in the old days planted there to mark of plowland.[92]

Frontiers between territories were often made to coincide, where possible, with the course of rivers.[93] Ancient Greeks considered rivers to be barriers that isolated

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86 Individualizable heights within the landscape were frequently used as part of the boundary line, as their summit was considered to divide the space (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 49-50, 57).

87 Pascual (2001, 260) explains that the frontier was a fundamental element in the definition of the territory and was made up of the border, being a line or a landmark (*hóros*), and of the frontier area (*eschatiá*).

88 Hom. *Il*. 13.17-18.

89 The most commonly used artificial boundary markers were columns, pillars, stelae, *hóroi*, piles of stones, roads, shrines, tombs, temples and sacred or profane buildings (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 49, 53, 57, 58).

90 Brockliss (2019, 160, 165) explains that the poet may have chosen to introduce remarkable trees and *hóroi* into the narrative to help his audience understand more complex ideas and concepts, such as stability and cosmic order.

91 Hom. *Il*. 23.327-332.

92 Hom. *Il*. 21.403-405.

93 The presence of a river served to establish a border in an effective way, avoiding friction and disputes, as the river ran between two territories and constituted a wetland area that belonged to neither (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 23, 25, 51-52).

different areas, provided defence against threats from the surrounding territories, and favoured the existence or absence of certain animals on one side or the other of the riverbed.[94] They could divide two territories in real life, but symbolically they could separate two worlds. In riverside vegetation, divinities such as nymphs might hide, while fords were important symbolic crossing points to reach the other bank, which sometimes meant entering a different world. In the following fragment of the *Iliad* the ford of the river functions as a boundary that is crossed to another world. Hermes crosses the river Xanthus and from there departs for Mount Olympus, after escorting Priam's return to Troy with the body of Hector.

> Once they reached the ford where the river runs clear,
> the strong, whirling Xanthus sprung of immortal Zeus,
> Hermes went his way to the steep heights of Olympus
> as Dawn flung out her golden robe across the earth.[95]

In Ancient Greece, limits and boundaries were perceived as sacred and seen as powerful and insurmountable barriers, capable of retaining or repelling those who tried to cross them. Borders, regulated by men and sanctioned by the gods,[96] were the elements through which the polis felt protected by its territory.[97] The ancient Greeks perceived the inhabited Earth to be full of boundaries and considered that beyond the limits of the Earth existed an untamed and dangerous external world. Mortals cannot travel to the boundaries of the Earth, but in the *Iliad* we ascertain how easily gods may travel to those limits and back.[98] The formula used to describe the "boundaries of the Earth" is πείρατα γαίης.[99] As Bray points out,[100] we are not given any description of the landscapes beyond the limits of the Earth, but we can imagine an unpleasant sight, since we are told that even the sun and wind do not reach there, "where not a ray of the Sun can warm their hearts, not a breeze"[101] and they are associated with the underworld "the depths of Tartarus wall them round".[102] The limits of the Earth are only mentioned in the *Iliad* in "hypothetical or dishonest statements"[103] concerning disputes between Hera and Zeus. Zeus warns Hera that he would not feel pity for the fighting Greeks even if she travelled to those limits to blackmail him,[104] and in two later identical passages[105] Hera lies by saying that she is going to the boundaries of the Earth in order not to reveal her true intentions, for soon after she will seduce Zeus to distract him and thus allow a change in the course of the war.

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94 Fernández Nieto 2001, 238-239.

95 Hom. *Il*. 24.692-695.

96 Domínguez Monedero 2001, 107.

97 The inviolable character of limits and boundaries was reinforced by divine protection and could extend to a given area. Safety was granted through the very elements that individualised the boundaries, which were sacred in themselves, whether they delimited the territory of a polis, a private property or a sanctuary (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 26).

98 Bray 2018, 48.

99 Bray 2018, 46.

100 Bray 2018, 46.

101 Hom. *Il*. 8.481.

102 Hom. *Il*. 8.482.

103 Bray 2018, 46.

104 Hom. *Il*. 8.477-483.

105 Hom. *Il*. 14.200, 14.301.

> You and your anger, rage away! I care nothing for that.
> Not even if you go plunging down to the pit of earth and sea
> where Cronus and Iapetus make their beds of pain,
> where not a ray of the Sun can warm their hearts,
> not a breeze, the depths of Tartarus wall them round.
> Not if you ventured down as far as the black abyss itself.[106]
>
> I am off to the ends of the fruitful, teeming earth[107]

Limits and frontiers were erected to protect the civilised world and were believed to have a supernatural capacity to defend those within from the evil that dwelled outside. Their protective character was reinforced by invocations to the divinities so that these barriers would close more securely, and the inner world they delimited would be better isolated and defended from external threats.[108] The areas beyond the borders were places of purification and expulsion,[109] and ritual formulas were pronounced to symbolically expel the harm away from the community to uninhabited places,[110] such as deserts and mountains, in order to avoid the pain and damage it could cause if it remained inside. The *Iliad* presents a beautiful example of a harmful element that should have been banished to keep the community safe: Helen herself wishes she had been banished to the mountains so that so much misfortune could have been avoided, and so she tells Hector before he bids farewell to Andromache.

> Oh how I wish
> that first day my mother brought me into the light
> some black whirlwind had rushed me out to the mountains
> or into the surf where the roaring breakers crash and drag
> and the waves had swept me off before all this had happened![111]

Forests and mountains, which often constituted frontier areas, were perceived in ancient Greece as appropriate places for initiation rites, due to the threats that lurked inside the wilderness, and to the supernatural character attributed to the natural spaces that were associated with the divinities. Wild and border areas were seen as particularly suitable spaces for processes of growth, transformation and integration, because, from an anthropological point of view, liminality was a structural component of the initiation mechanism in society.[112] In the liminal wilderness, in some parts of ancient Greece, the military education of young men took place, during a time when young men were not yet full members of the community nor hoplites. Thus, in certain regions of ancient Greece, such as Sparta or Athens, the young faced a period of initiation that marked the transition from childhood to adulthood, with adulthood

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106 Hom. *Il*. 8.477-483.

107 Hom. *Il*. 14.200, 14.301.

108 Fernández Nieto 2001, 233.

109 Danger was expelled from the community through exile. Individuals who transgressed the established order or committed impiety were often forced by the rest of society to leave the group (Tuan 1980, 187).

110 At times boundaries became momentarily permeable, occasionally allowing unwanted or harmful effects or elements to pass over to the opposite side (Fernández Nieto 2001, 227).

111 Hom. *Il*. 6.345-348.

112 Montepaone 1999, 3-8.

being associated with war and political life.[113] During the *Crypteia* and *Ephebia*,[114] young men were initiated into warrior life in the wilderness of the frontier and prepared to enter society. The formative stage of the young ephebe was related to the uncultivated space of the wilderness, associated with the frontier and also with the border sanctuaries.[115] The festival of the *Apaturia* commemorated the return of the Athenian ephebes, who had their hair cut "as a sign of accession to manhood" and sacrificed their adolescent hair, usually offering it to the river.[116] In the following fragment of the *Iliad*, we find a symbolic example of a hero's hair being offered as a sacrifice to a river. Achilles himself offers his hair before the pyre of Patroclus, and recalls the promise made by Peleus to offer his son's hair to the river Spercheus if he returned alive. With this gesture Achilles invalidates the promise made by his father, and declares that he is aware that his life will end on the battlefield. The sacrifice of Achilles' hair to the river, which will not happen, would have taken place at the spring where the river rises, a sacred place in the wilderness, where we are also told that there is an altar. Emilio Crespo[117] considers it possible that young men cut their hair and offered it to the divinity when they reached adulthood, and explains that Achilles left Scyros very young, so perhaps he had not yet participated in this rite.

> Spercheus! All in vain my father Peleus vowed to you that there,
> once I had journeyed home to my own dear fatherland,
> I'd cut this lock for you and offer splendid victims,
> dedicate fifty young ungelded rams to your springs,
> there at the spot where your grove and smoking altar stand![118]

The role models for the young were the heroes, whose adolescence and education took place in the mountains in numerous myths.[119] Moreover, the heroes of mythology, such as Herakles or Theseus, had to overcome challenges in the course of their lives that consisted of hunting activities and fights against beasts or order-disruptive individuals, often in the frontier and wild areas, outside the city and the surrounding cultivated land.[120] One of the heroes who spent his adolescence in the mountains was Achilles, who, as recorded in the *Iliad*, was educated by the wise centaur Chiron on Mount Pelion. Chiron gave to Peleus the spear that Achilles wields in the *Iliad*, as detailed in the lines of the poem.

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113 Vidal-Naquet 1983, 25.

114 The main features of Lacedaemonian *Crypteia* were the isolation imposed on young people during puberty and life in the forest. During the *Ephebia*, young Athenians spent a period of marginal life associated with the frontier areas, which served as a transition between childhood and incorporation into society, signified by marriage and entry into the hoplite army (Vidal-Naquet 1983, 25, 130, 131, 135-137, 143, 145, 157).

115 In Attica, the ephebes were trained to join the corps of citizens by performing a guard service along the borders of the territory. They patrolled the mountainous frontier areas, the wooded and mountainous places far from the inhabited centre, and the sanctuaries located along the route, since their area of competence was the borders of the territory (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 85, 90).

116 Vidal-Naquet 1983, 131, 133-134, 139, 143, 148, 157.

117 Crespo 1991, 559, n. 376.

118 Hom. *Il*. 23.144-148.

119 Various classical sources (for example, Pindarus' *Odes*, such as *Pythians* 3 and 4, or *Nemean* 3) refer to this stage in the life of different heroes, as Paris on the Ida before he was recognised as a Trojan prince, or Asclepius, Jason, Achilles, Actaeon and Aristeus, who were instructed by the centaur Chiron on Mount Pelion.

120 Vidal-Naquet 1983, 25.

> And spread the soothing, healing salves across it,
> the powerful drugs they say you learned from Achilles
> and Chiron the most humane of Centaurs taught your friend.[121]
>
> And then, last, Achilles drew his father's spear
> from its socket-stand, weighted, heavy, tough.
> No other Achaean fighter could heft that shaft,
> only Achilles had the skill to wield it well:
> Pelian ash it was, a gift to his father Peleus
> presented by Chiron once, hewn on Pelion's crest
> to be the death of heroes.[122]

In ancient Greece there were also female equivalents to the practices of segregation and initiation performed by male youths in the wild areas. As an example, we can recall the festivities held in honour of Artemis at the sanctuary at Brauron,[123] in which young girls of pre-marital age celebrated a rite of passage related to the transformation they had to undergo before entering the community. At the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, the bear, an animal associated with the wild, was a central element of the rite, and its symbolism was linked to the nature of young girls, who had to be tamed in order to enter society. The rite dramatized the transition of girls from the wild to civilisation. They may have worn a ritual disguise of bearskin, and, at the most significant moment, they would leave their animal condition and nudity to wear clothes in accordance with their social status.[124]

In the *Iliad*, we find a passage in which an animal disguise is used, although in this case it does not have a ritual function but a hiding purpose. The disguised man is Dolon, a Trojan son of a herald, who is described in an unheroic manner, for his appearance is vile, though his feet are fast. Dolon offers himself as a spy to go and secretly listen to Agamemnon's deliberations, in exchange for Hector's promise to give him Achilles' chariot and horses. Hector agrees and Dolon departs furtively, armed with bow (τόξα) and spear (ἄκοντα), and disguised in animal skins, covering his body with a wolf skin (λύκοιο) and his head with a weasel skin (κτιδέην). While the spear is an honourable weapon, the bow is only used by cowards who intend to strike from afar without harm. The negative concept associated with the bow, together with the dishonourable description of Dolon and the unenthusiastic way in which Hector pronounces his oath anticipate that Dolon's attempt will not be successful, as he will end up being killed by Odysseus and Diomedes. Dolon wears a wolf skin, an animal associated with bravery in the similes off the *Iliad*, but in this passage, which is not a simile but belongs to the narrative of the action, the wolf skin does not confer any strength on Dolon and does not help him to successfully complete his mission. This disguise does not share any symbolic aspect with the girls who wore bearskins

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121 Hom. *Il*. 11.830-832.

122 Hom. *Il*. 19.387-391.

123 The goddess Artemis presided over the liminal space, and ritual practices of an initiatory nature were offered to her in various sanctuaries located in places characterised by their ruggedness (for example, in the sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis or in the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia). The protagonists of these rites were generally young individuals who found themselves in situations of passage or integration into society (Montepaone 1999, 3-4).

124 Montepaone 1999, 5, 13, 20, 26, 33.

at the sanctuary at Brauron. By disguising themselves as bears, the girls assumed the characteristics of the wild animal as belonging to the uncivilised world, while Dolon only uses the wolf skin to hide but receives neither strength nor bravery from it, as his non-courageous action is not in accordance with the characteristics attributed to the animal.

> So Hector vowed-with an oath he swore in vain
> but it spurred the man to action. Dolon leapt to it,
> he quickly slung a reflex bow on his back,
> over it threw the pelt of a gray wolf
> and set on his head a cap of weasel skin
> and taking a sharp spear, moved out from camp,
> heading toward the fleet-but he was never to come back
> from the enemy's beaked ships, bringing Hector news.
> Putting the mass of horse and men behind him
> Dolon picked up speed, hot for action now,
> but keen as a god Odysseus saw him coming.[125]

5. Protective woodlands: A refuge for the weak and the transgressive

Wild areas constituted real protective spaces, as they were often part of the boundaries that delimited a territory and separated it from neighbouring lands, whether they belonged to other Greek communities or to non-Greek populations. The defensive dimension of border areas was multifaceted, as they were sometimes the setting or the cause of conflicts,[126] and, at times, a place of containment or provided a buffer regarding confrontations.[127] Beyond the formal defence systems, such as towers and fortresses, the forests and mountains constituted spaces of protection where those who would not risk fighting in the open could take refuge as a kind of "momentary acropolis".[128] Hoplites fought on the plain,[129] and during a battle the brave who were outnumbered could seek advantage in a higher position and continue the fight from there. Only cowards avoided combat by hiding in the bushes, as it was a shameful escape. The complicit forest protected the weak, the coward, the defeated, the deserter and those who surrendered or were unjustly persecuted. In the *Iliad* the protection offered by the wooded mountain is dishonourable, for only cowards flee from danger and take refuge in the wilderness. In the following fragment, the Trojan hero Agenor is shocked by his own cowardice, which encourages him to run away and hide in the bushes (ῥωπήϊα) in order not to face Achilles.

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125 Hom. *Il*. 10.332-340.

126 The tolerance that existed on the frontiers was unacceptable elsewhere, and the invasion of liminal zones was not perceived as an armed incursion that violated territorial sovereignty, but as a conflict to appropriate areas considered no man's land. Frontier conflicts generally only affected the area in which they occurred, and the victor annexed the disputed territories, redrawing the border according to his own demands (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 225-227).

127 Daverio Rocchi 1988, 240.

128 Buxton 2000, 90.

129 Mountains and forests were rarely the setting of battles, as hoplite armies fought in open spaces (Buxton 2000, 93).

> But if I leave my comrades panicked before his charge,
> this Prince Achilles, slip away from the wall on foot
> and race the other way, out to Ilium's plain and
> reach the spurs of Ida, hide in the underbrush
> and then, in the dying light...
> once I've washed my sweat away in the river,
> yes, I just might make it back again to Troy,
> but why debate, my friend, why thrash things out?[130]

Open fields and valleys do not offer protection, unlike the forest, which is an enclosed place that provides shelter to its dwellers from outside aggressors and weather phenomena. The forest offers refuge and also escape through the labyrinth of familiar trees, while preventing the entry and attack of the disoriented outside enemy. The wilderness, perceived as hostile from the outside, conceals a protective world in which the mountain range or the palisade of trees function like natural fortresses. Those who live in the forest risk a world of dangers but, at the same time, live secretly, sleeping under the trees, hunting for subsistence and drinking from the springs or rivers. In Greek mythology complicit Nature welcomes adultery and transgressive unions, as the forest offers a safe haven away from the community and its norms, a space of protection outside society and against society. In the *Iliad* the forest hosts the presence of pregnant women and provides the setting for secret encounters.

> Bucolion, son himself to the lofty King Laomedon,
> first of the line, though his mother bore the prince
> in secrecy and shadow. Tending his flocks one day
> Bucolion took the nymph in a strong surge of love
> and beneath his force she bore him twin sons.[131]

In ancient times, wild Nature was admired for having an untamed character and a power beyond Man's control.[132] In the thickets of the forests, and in the heights of the inaccessible mountains, the only laws that prevailed were those of the natural world. Greek mythology relates unexplainable and unpredictable supernatural events that could occur in the wilderness, as forests and mountains were considered spaces of transgression, that could host metamorphoses and unions between mortals and deities.[133] The consequences of these encounters with divinities were sometimes dire for the mortals, but in other cases the result of the union was the birth of a hero. Some fragments of the *Iliad* recall encounters between deities and mortals, alluding to the divine genealogy of different heroes.

> And now the prince, the captain of men Aeneas
> would have died on the spot if Zeus's daughter
> had not marked him quickly, his mother Aphrodite
> who bore him to King Anchises tending cattle once.[134]

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130 Hom. *Il*. 21.556-562.
131 Hom. *Il*. 6.24-26.
132 Tuan 1980, 211.
133 Buxton 2000, 97.
134 Hom. *Il*. 5.311-313.

> And first by far was Oileus' son, quick Little Ajax,
> he lunged out and his spearhead skewered Satnius,
> Enops' son the lithe nymph of the ford once bore
> to Enops tending his flocks by Satniois' banks.[135]

6. Distant landscapes as the source of resources

Mountains and forests located far from the centre of the polis often constituted frontier zones. Their particular[136] land uses and means of economic exploitation derived from their specific geography, their liminal condition[137] and their contact with adjacent communities.[138] These places provided alternative resources[139] to those supplied by other areas of the territory and were indispensable for the self-sufficiency of the polis.[140] Trees that grew in rugged wild areas were valued resources as their wood was essential for various purposes, such as construction, shipbuilding or firewood. The mentions of trees we find in the *Iliad* are not scientific,[141] but nevertheless they provide us with information about the kind of species that existed in ancient Greek countryside and the types of wood that were employed for different uses. In the *Iliad* we find several mentions of wood as a construction material and as firewood (ὕλην) for the heroes' pyres. The fragment quoted below refers to Patroclus' pyre (πυρὴν).

> But the chief mourners stayed in place, piled timber
> and built a pyre a hundred feet in length and breadth.[142]

In the *Iliad* the most frequently mentioned wooden objects are weapons, as befits an epic poem. The verses detail the tree from which every weapon is made according to the hardness or elasticity of each type of wood, such as Pisander's axe (ἀξίνην) made of olive (ἐλαΐνῳ) or Achilles' spear (δοῦρε) made of ash (μελίη).

> Clutched beneath his shield
> his good bronze ax with its cleaving blade
> set on a long smooth olive haft.[143]

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135 Hom. *Il*. 14.442-445.

136 The frontier had its own characteristic landscape within the territory of the polis, featuring few constructions and a weaker economic exploitation than other areas (Pascual 2001, 260).

137 In forests and mountains, territorial organisation was frequently conditioned by the insecurity of the border, and often remained in the form of desert or virgin areas (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 17, 37-38, 130, 224-225).

138 Border areas could also benefit from trade opportunities as transit zones and contact points with neighbouring communities (Daverio Rocchi 1988, 22).

139 Mountainous and wooded areas, and their margins, provided hunting grounds and grazing fields for livestock (source of dairy products, wool, leather and bones), they featured beehives that produced honey and wax, they allowed extensive agriculture in which olive and other dryland species could grow, and they offered stone, metals and wood, used both as firewood and for building and craftsmanship. Shipley (1996, 10) adds, as resources from the uncultivated wilderness, edible herbs and vegetables, and plants to be transplanted and cultivated.

140 The resources provided by mountain slopes and forests were complementary to those obtained from the rest of the territory and were essential to maintain an independent community with a certain degree of self-sufficiency (Pascual 1997, 125-128).

141 Forster 1936, 97.

142 Hom. *Il*. 23.163-164.

143 Hom. *Il*. 13.611-613.

> No other Achaean fighter could heft that shaft,
> only Achilles had the skill to wield it well:
> Pelian ash it was, a gift to his father Peleus.[144]

In addition to weapons, numerous objects are made of wood in the *Iliad*, such as the yoke of boxwood (πύξινον) of Priam's charriot, the beams of pine (ἐλάτης) of Achilles' tent, and the fragrant cedar (κέδρινον) of Priam's chamber. Cedar wood deserves special mention as a building material highly prized in Antiquity, as it is durable, aromatic, easy to work, straight-growing and suitable for polishing.[145]

> They lifted off its hook a boxwood yoke for the mules.[146]

> They approached royal Achilles' shelter,
> the tall, imposing lodge the Myrmidons built their king,
> hewing planks of pine.[147]

> Then down he went himself to his treasure-chamber,
> high-ceilinged, paneled, fragrant with cedarwood
> and a wealth of precious objects filled its chests.
> He called out to his wife, Hecuba.[148]

One important wooden object mentioned in the *Iliad* is the sceptre, whose handcrafting process is described as part of the solemn oath Achilles angrily swears, assuring that there will come a day on which the Achaeans will long for him when Hector terrorises and kills many of them.

> I tell you this, and I swear a mighty oath upon it...
> by this, this scepter, look,
> that never again will put forth crown and branches,
> now it's left its stump on the mountain ridge forever,
> nor will it sprout new green again, now the brazen ax
> has stripped its bark and leaves.[149]

Besides the information provided about the uses of different types of wood, the fragments of the *Iliad* that mention trees can convey nuances about the perception of these natural elements in Greek imagery. In the poem, several similes include trees, both as a mass of greenery in the forest and as individual elements that are compared to the body of a falling warrior. In both cases, species are mentioned that were familiar to ancient listeners and that are still abundant in the Mediterranean landscapes. In certain verses of the *Iliad* we can recognise an attitude towards specific species of trees, especially in the similes that illustrate the death of different heroes,

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144 Hom. *Il*. 16.142-143. The origin of Achilles' spear has been explained in section 4 as well as the hero's education on Mount Pelion by the centaur Chiron.

145 It was the favourite wood for woodworkers and was mainly used for ships and buildings. In addition, its resin was used to caulk vessels and to make oils, ointments, medicines and balms (Shackley 2004, 417, 420).

146 Hom. *Il*. 24.268.

147 Hom. *Il*. 24.448-450.

148 Hom. *Il*. 24.191-193.

149 Hom. *Il*. 1.233-237.

associating the image of a falling felled log with the evocative yet dramatic vision of the lifeless body of the warrior. Along with the beauty of the images that they evoke, these similes have a hypertextual function, as they convey to the audience the sound of the collapsing body. These fragments offer a double source of information as they often mention the use to which the wood of a particular tree was put in ancient Greek craftmanship and also associate the characteristics attributed to that tree with the warrior to whom it is compared. Brockliss stresses that comparisons with enduring tree species emphasise the steadfastness and strength of the dying warrior, as necessary attributes to fulfil his warfare task.[150] We offer a couple of examples of beautiful similes that compare falling trees to dying heroes. The first passage refers to the death of the Trojan warrior Simoisius, who was engendered near the banks of the river Simois, and thus he is compared to a black poplar (αἴγειρος), a tree that abounds in the riverbeds and whose wood we are told was used to build chariot rims. In the second fragment, the dying Sarpedon is compared to a felled tree falling to the ground. Two species are mentioned, the white poplar (ἀχερωΐς) and the pine (πίτυς), both suitable for shipbuilding, both strong and sturdy, as befits an outstanding hero like the Lycian Sarpedon, who fought on the Trojan side.

> And down in the dust he fell like a lithe black poplar
> shot up tall and strong in the spreading marshy flats,
> the trunk trimmed but its head a shock of branches.
> A chariot-maker fells it with shining iron ax
> as timber to bend for handsome chariot wheels.[151]

> And down Sarpedon fell as an oak or white poplar falls
> or towering pine that shipwrights up on a mountain
> hew down with whetted axes for sturdy ship timber.[152]

Without detailing every tree in the poem, we can point out that the most frequently mentioned tree in the *Iliad* is the oak,[153] which appears both in narrative passages and in similes, and of which we can recognise two botanical varieties.[154] The most common type of oak (*Quercus robur*, δρῦς)[155] is present, for instance, in a simile that pictures the wind roaring through an oak forest, already discussed at the beginning of this study.[156] A prominent oak of a different type (*Quercus aesculus*, φηγός) existed near de Scaean Gates and is mentioned several times in the *Iliad*[157] appearing for the first time in the following fragment that narrates Hector's return to Troy.

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150 Brockliss 2019, 328-330.

151 Hom. *Il*. 4.482-486.

152 Hom. *Il*. 16.482-484.

153 Several examples of prominent oak trees in the *Iliad* have already been discussed in the paragraph that develops the symbolic connotation of the singular tree, at the end of the third section, which studies the sacred character of the forest and mountain.

154 The analysis of each of the tree species mentioned in the *Iliad* is beyond the scope of the present study. We refer to the oak as an example, since it is the tree most often mentioned in the poem. The work on the subject published by Forster (1936, 97-104) examines every plant and tree in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* and gives its scientific name.

155 The scientific names of each species are taken from the study published by Forster (1936, 97-104).

156 Hom. *Il*. 14.398-401.

157 Hom. *Il*. 6.237, 9.354, 11.170, 21.549.

> And now, when Hector reached the Scaean Gates and the great oak,
> the wives and daughters of Troy came rushing up around him,
> asking about their sons, brothers, friends and husbands.[158]

The oak (δρῦς) is also compared in the following verses to the falling body of the dying Trojan Asius, emphasising the weight of the collapsing warrior. As in the analogous similes cited above, the aforementioned tree species is associated with strength and endurance. Both characteristics made it suitable for being employed as shipbuilding material, and it is therefore used in the similes to highlight the same virtues in the hero who has just died.

> And down the Trojan fell as an oak or white poplar falls
> or towering pine that shipwrights up on a mountain
> hew down with whetted axes for sturdy ship timber.[159]

The wilderness provided a livelihood for charcoal burners, woodcutters, shepherds, goatherds and herdsmen, occupations that were often negatively considered because they belonged to marginal areas.[160] The life of those who extracted resources from the forests and mountains was difficult because of the harshness of their work and the weather, but also because of the frequent looting, cattle rustling and vandalism perpetrated by villains.[161] However, some passages and similes in the *Iliad* offer bucolic visions of life in the wild and a more amiable view of these occupations.

> You, Phoebus, herded his shambling crook-homed cattle
> along the spurs of Ida's timbered ridges.[162]

> The armies grouping now, as seasoned goatherds
> split their wide-ranging flocks into packs with ease
> when herds have mixed together down the pasture:
> so the captains formed their tight platoons,
> detaching right and left, moving up for action.[163]

In the following simile extracted from the *Iliad* a shepherd enjoys a clear night and rejoices at the sight of the moon and stars because it heralds a peaceful day, especially desirable in an environment at the mercy of the weather. In another seemingly bucolic situation narrated in a simile, a woodcutter savours a well-deserved meal, but rest comes after the strenuous task of felling trees.

> As stars in the night sky glittering
> round the moon's brilliance blaze in all their glory

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158 Hom. *Il*. 6.237-239.

159 Hom. *Il*. 13.389-391.

160 The activities that took place in remote areas were vital for the survival of the inhabitants of the polis, but they were discredited and those who carried them out were frowned upon by the community, who branded them as suspicious and marginal for living in the mountains or visiting them frequently and out of economic necessity (Buxton 2000, 89, 90).

161 Daverio Rocchi 1988, 17, 224.

162 Hom. *Il*. 21.448-449.

163 Hom. *Il*. 2.474-476.

> when the air falls to a sudden, windless calm...
> all the lookout peaks stand out and the jutting cliffs
> and the steep ravines and down from the high heavens bursts
> the boundless bright air and all the stars shine dear
> and the shepherd's heart exults, so many fires burned.[164]

> But just when the woodsman makes his morning meal,
> deep in a mountain forest, arm-weary from chopping
> the big heavy trunks and his heart has had enough
> and sudden longing for tempting food overtakes the man
> and makes his senses whirl.[165]

The *Iliad* also records difficult situations faced by the inhabitants of the wild areas, whose lives were full of hardships, and whose minds were tormented by fear. In the following simile, a goatherd and his flock, helpless against the storm, take refuge in a grotto.

> Think how a goatherd off on a mountain lookout
> spots a storm cloud moving down the sea...
> bearing down beneath the rush of the West Wind
> and miles away he sees it building black as pitch,
> blacker, whipping the whitecaps, full hurricane fury,
> the herdsman shudders to see it, drives his flocks to a cave.[166]

This fear of an uncontrollable force is compared in the *Iliad* to the anxiety felt by men in battle. The above fragment reminds listeners of the insecurity associated with the dangerous wilderness, for the literary space serves not only to locate the scene, but also to convey its cultural meaning.[167] In mountainous areas attacks and ambushes were particularly frequent,[168] being added to other dangers that tormented shepherds, such as invasions from neighbouring communities and the inclement weather. The following excerpt of the *Iliad* transmits the herdsman's growing fear as the fog makes him feel even more helpless and at the mercy of bandits.

> When the South Wind showers mist on the mountaintops,
> no friend to shepherds, better than night to thieves,
> you can see no farther than you can fling a stone,
> so dust came clouding, swirling up from the feet of armies
> marching at top speed, trampling through the plain.[169]

Another fear faced by shepherds and goatherds was the constant threat of wild animals that could attack their flocks, whether they were grazing on the mountain

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164 Hom. *Il*. 8.555-559.

165 Hom. *Il*. 11.86-89.

166 Hom. *Il*. 4.275-279.

167 Tsagalis 2012, 2.

168 In the ancient Mediterranean world, no region was free of bandits. Where state authority was weakest, outlaws and mountain bandits were most prevalent and posed a constant threat to farmers, herdsmen and shepherds (Tuan 1980, 135).

169 Hom. *Il*. 3.10-14.

slopes or gathered in the stable or sheepfold. The following similes of the *Iliad* convey the vulnerability felt by those living in mountainous areas, particularly herdsmen, who were defenceless as their cattle were exposed to the voracity of wolves and other beasts. In the first, a group of Trojans, likened to lambs (μήλων), are terrorised by the Myrmidons, likened to wolves (λύκοι) and inflamed by Patroclus' harangue. In the second, the Achaean chiefs stand vigil, like dogs (κύνες) tending their sheep (μῆλα), while the Trojans hover over their army.

> As ravenous wolves come swooping down on lambs or kids
> to snatch them away from right amidst their flock, all lost
> when a careless shepherd leaves them straggling down the hills
> and quickly spotting a chance the wolf pack picks them off,
> no heart for the fight.[170]

> Like sheepdogs keeping watch on flocks in folds,
> a nervous, bristling watch when the dogs get wind
> of a wild beast rampaging down through mountain timber,
> crashing toward the pens, and the cries break as he charges,
> a din of men and dogs, and their sleep is broken, gone.[171]

7. Hunting in the abodes of the wild beasts

The presence of wild animals was one of the characteristics of mountains and forests in the imagination of the ancient Greeks, as shown in the following verse of the *Iliad*: "Reaching Ida with all her springs, mother of wild beasts".[172]

Many similes of the *Iliad* compare the heroes to beasts, equating their bravery with the courage and strength of men in combat. Therefore, the most frequently cited animals are those considered powerful and fierce, as they symbolise the qualities of the heroes. We could associate these numerous mentions of the dangerous animals that dwell in the forests and mountains with a consideration of wild Nature as a terrifying place full of ruthless beasts. In the fragment below the arrogance of Panthous' son is compared by Menelaus to the bravery of different powerful animals.

> Not even the leopard's fury makes the beast so proud,
> not even the lion's, not the murderous wild boar's,
> the greatest pride of all, bursting the boar's chest,
> they're nothing next to the pride of Panthous' sons
> with their strong ashen spears.[173]

In the poem's similes, combat scenes are equated with animal fights to make it easier for the audience to visualise the scene.[174] The brave hero is associated with a

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170 Hom. *Il*. 16.352-355.
171 Hom. *Il*. 10.183-186.
172 Hom. *Il*. 15.152.
173 Hom. *Il*. 17.20-23.
174 Tsagalis 2012, 344.

ferocious animal hunting alone, such as the lion,[175] the panther, the wolf or the wild boar. Narrating how these beasts pounce on their prey adds life and colour to the scene and simplifies the understanding of the action. Similes of lions (λείουσιν) and boards (κάπροισιν) are used to call attention to main characters and to glorify them when they engage in a fight, like Hector and Ajax in the following fragment. The comparison with these brave animals emphasizes the confrontation and make the two heroes distinct from the rest of the figures that stay in the background.[176]

> Both seized their lances, wrenched them from the shields
> and went for each other now like lions rending flesh
> or a pair of wild boars whose power never flags.[177]

Battle scenes involving groups of warriors are compared in the *Iliad* to animals hunting in packs, such as dogs or wolves.[178] In these collective scenes, the bravery and fierceness of the beasts are positively emphasised, applying these qualities to the strong and courageous fighters, such as the Myrmidons combating next to Achilles. The comparison highlights the warriors' desire for battle as if they were a pack of hungry wolves (λύκοι).[179]

> Prince Achilles, ranging his ranks of Myrmidons,
> arrayed them along the shelters, all in armor.
> Hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh,
> hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies,
> off on the cliffs, ripping apart some big antlered stag
> they gorge on the kill till all their jaws drip red with blood.[180]

Menelaus and Achilles are equated to powerful birds of prey, the eagle (αἰετός) and the hawk (κίρκος), emphasising their keen eyesight and speed, which enable them to identify their victims and swiftly swoop down on them. In the first of the following fragments, Menelaus searches for Antilochus so that he can bring the news of Patroclus' death to Achilles. The second of the fragments refers to the pursuit of Hector by Achilles before the final combat between the two.

> And with that the red-hatred captain moved ahead
> like an eagle scanning left and right, the bird men say
> has the sharpest eyes of all that fly the heavens.[181]

> Achilles went for him, fast, sure of his speed
> as the wild mountain hawk, the quickest thing on wings,
> launching smoothly, swooping down on a cringing dove.[182]

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175 The lion symbolises single combat, being used to describe the hero in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Saïd 2012, 348-349).

176 Scott 1974, 41, 44.

177 Hom. *Il*. 7.255-257.

178 Saïd 2012, 348-349.

179 Scott 1974, 71.

180 Hom. *Il*. 16.155-158.

181 Hom. *Il*. 17.673-675.

182 Hom. *Il*. 22.138-140.

In ancient Greek imagery, mountains and wooded areas are symbolically confronted with the open lowlands and the cultivated plains.[183] The mountain is not only conceptually defined by the elevation of its peak, but also by its contrast with the civilised spaces of the polis and the crop fields.[184] Unlike the dense forest, the open plain offers no hide-out for beasts, and it is the place where tame animals run, especially deer, who are associated with lack of courage. In the following passage of the *Iliad*, Agamemnon reviews the Achaean troops and reprimands those he sees showing weakness, comparing the cowards to fawns (νεβροί). Fawns, even more fragile than deer, are also a symbol of timidity, and are always associated with frightened groups of men in the similes of the *Iliad*.[185]

> Have you no shame?
> Just standing there, dumbstruck like fawns
> done in from hightailing over some big meadow,
> winded and teetering, heart inside them spent.[186]

Due to the abundance of wild animals, the most attested activity in the forests and hills was hunting,[187] associated with courage, strength and the violent and masculine world of combat.[188] It is essential to differentiate between small game hunting and big game hunting, as they had different meanings and, at times, even opposite social connotations. Small game hunting was seen by aristocrats as a clandestine and dishonourable activity, typical of marginal individuals of low social standing. Despite being perceived as an unworthy resource by aristocratic ideologies, most of society considered it a regular activity,[189] and it was common among the young men who patrolled the borders.[190] Literary mentions of small game hunting are very scarce, as most authors condemn it to oblivion with the greatest possible contempt: they ignore it. In the *Iliad* we find numerous allusions to big game hunting in the mountains and forests, although there is only one fragment, which we offer below, that describes small game hunting. It corresponds to a scene involving bowhunting, considered a dishonourable weapon, as opposed to the spear and honourable hand-to-hand combat, since arrows enabled one to wound at a great distance without exposing oneself to danger. Those characterised as archers were generally seen as cowards, like Paris in the *Iliad*. In the next scene Athena persuades a Trojan warrior to offend the Achaeans by being the first to attack. This will cause the Trojans to break the oath that Agamemnon has imposed on them to deliver Helen, riches and a fine, after Menelaus

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183 The "mountain - not mountain" contrast can, in some cases, be perceived as a "mountain – city" symbiosis in resource-use contexts and in ritual situations (Buxton 2000, 88, 96, 98, 101).

184 The settlements and the cultivated countryside were perceived as being opposed to the wilderness, for the crop fields were as important a sign of civilisation as the presence of a polis (Vidal-Naquet 1983, 26; Smith 1996, 154).

185 Scott 1974, 71.

186 Hom. *Il*. 4.243-245.

187 Buxton 2000, 90.

188 Vella 2008, 31.

189 Meat provided by hunting helped to supplement a poor diet, especially in rural areas when other sources of sustenance were scarce.

190 Individual hunting with bow and net was associated in Greek imagery with the young men who roamed and guarded the wild remote areas before entering adulthood, becoming hoplites and participating in honourable collective hunts armed with spears (Vidal-Naquet 1983, 152-155; Leitao 1999, 257).

has defeated Paris, who has fled the battle thanks to Aphrodite. The warrior chosen by the goddess for this dishonourable task is an archer, for the moral consideration of archers was inferior to that of hoplites, as was their weapon, the bow (τόξον), dishonourable in contrast to the honourable spear (δόρυ). In this scene, the negative character of the bow is accentuated by the fact that it is made from the horns of a goat (αἰγὸς) that was killed in an ambush by the archer himself, that hid in the manner of bandits and betrayers.

> Then and there he unstrapped his polished bow,
> the horn of a wild goat he'd shot in the chest
> one day as the springy ibex clambered down a cliff.
> Lurking there under cover, he hit it in the heart
> and the fine kill went sprawling down the rocks.[191]

Big game hunting was considered a hallmark of the status of the elites.[192] Collective hunting constituted an entertainment for the aristocracy, a pastime in times of idleness and a training for war, an activity in which leisure and politics converged.[193] It was perceived as an expression of the aristocratic identity and was often followed by a banquet at which the game was served. Fundamental aristocratic values were associated with hunting-connected activities and objects,[194] and so related imagery was deeply linked to aristocratic ideals and was, therefore, chosen to decorate prestige goods designed specifically for the elites.[195] The similes of the *Iliad* abound in big game hunting scenes that emphasise the danger of this activity. The following fragment highlights the courage of a lion (λέων) that faces the hunters to protect its cubs, which is compared to the bravery of Ajax, who fights in battle and defends the lifeless body of Patroclus. The lion, the most powerful of all beasts, appears in the similes that refer to scenes where an "especially impressive or bloody tone" is needed, and when a prominent hero stands out, either because he enters the combat or because he remained unnoticed among the warriors and now takes centre stage.[196]

> But Ajax, shielding Patroclus round with his broad buckler,
> stood fast now like a lion cornered round his young
> when hunters cross him, leading his cubs through woods,
> he ramps in all the pride of his power, bristling strength,
> the heavy folds of his forehead frowning down his eyes.
> So Ajax stood his ground over brave Patroclus now.[197]

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191 Hom. *Il*. 4.105-108.

192 Lane Fox 1996, 122.

193 Shipley 1996, 9.

194 Big game hunting involved a journey to dangerous territories, usually into the woods and mountains, the abodes of wild beasts. Fighting prey required courage, strength and dexterity. Weapons were skilfully crafted and decorated with prized natural materials, such as ivory, which were obtained as trophies and transformed into valuable prestige objects after being worked by experienced craftsmen.

195 Prestige goods, mainly decorated with fighting and hunting scenes, were exchanged as hospitality gifts among aristocrats, and also given to non-Greek local authorities, for this heroic imagery was common to the elites of different Mediterranean cultures (Vella 2008, 23, 29-32).

196 Scott 1974, 39, 40, 60, 62.

197 Hom. *Il*. 17.132-137.

Many excerpts of the *Iliad* compare battle scenes to big game hunting, in which packs of dogs confront a lone animal. These complex and dynamic situations are more easily understood through comparisons with the animal world, where fierce dogs are likened to groups of brave warriors fighting their enemies, or the prey is associated with a hero struggling alone against many. Sometimes the bravery of the dogs is emphasised in comparison with a less courageous animal, a hare or a deer. In other cases, the strength of a solitary beast, such as the lion (λὶς) or the wild boar (κάπριον), is extolled while fighting against a hostile group of dogs (κύνες),[198] and the fierce animal is compared with an outnumbered hero who fights bravely. In the following scene, Odysseus faces several Trojan warriors alone after Paris has wounded Diomedes with an arrow and the rest of the Argives have fled. Despite being surrounded by Trojans, Odysseus manages to kill several and resist, until he is helped by Ajax and Menelaus.

> Like hounds and lusty hunters dosing, ringing
> a wild boar till out of his thicket lair he crashes,
> whetting his white tusks sharp in his bent, wrenching jaws.[199]

In some of these scenes the dogs, fighting together as groups of warriors, are suddenly interrupted by a wild beast of greater strength and courage, a mighty lion representing the hero who enters the fight. In the following fragment the Achaeans were fighting bravely until Hector, a hero who surpasses them all, easily terrified and dispersed the enemy warriors.[200]

> Think how dogs and huntsmen off in the wilds
> rush some antlered stag or skittish mountain goat
> but a rocky gorge or shadowed forest gives him shelter,
> they see it's not their lot to bring that quarry down,
> their shouting only flushes a great bearded lion
> ramping across their path, suddenly charging them,
> scattering men and packs despite their lust for battle.[201]

In the hunting scenes we have recalled, the natural world is evoked in the *Iliad* to illustrate the human world,[202] comparing the warriors to brave lions, wolves, dogs or wild boars, but also to coward fawns. The nuance of each simile gives us an insight into how the ancient Greeks associated a particular animal with a specific human characteristic, providing us with an idea of the symbolic perception they had of wild Nature.

8. Conclusion. Violence, dread, and courage in the wild

Throughout this study we have noted how attitudes towards landscape that existed in later periods of the history of ancient Greece were already present in the perception

198 Scott 1974, 61.
199 Hom. *Il*. 11.414-416.
200 Scott 1974, 59.
201 Hom. *Il*. 15.271-276.
202 Buxton 2004, 145.

of landscape that emerges from the verses of the *Iliad*. In the different fragments, we have analysed how the wilderness was perceived in the *Iliad* as an unpredictable, dangerous and even cruel[203] place that tormented men, exposing them to harsh trials and causing them to suffer hardship. As a result, the most prominent aspect of Nature we can observe in the *Iliad* is its violent character. We can find a reason for the omnipresence of violence in Nature in the fact that many of the fragments studied come from similes, most of which are used in the *Iliad* to illustrate actions on the battlefield, and are thus related to violent events. However, we cannot forget the violence inherent in wild Nature and the importance that this violent character had in the perception of the wild landscape in the imagination of the ancient Greeks. Wild Nature threatened men's lives and also the existence of their herds and crops,[204] while the inclement weather instilled terror and a sense of helplessness. Untamed wilderness was perceived as an unsafe world full of hazards, and mountains and forests were seen by the ancient Greeks as spaces of fear and violence. Beasts and dangerous animals were major threats in the wild areas, and they frightened men greatly, as can be inferred from the terror felt when encountering a snake (δράκοντα), which is compared in this excerpt of the *Iliad* to the fear that Paris feels at the sight of Menelaus.

> As one who trips on a snake in a hilltop hollow
> recoils, suddenly, trembling grips his knees
> and pallor takes his cheeks and back he shrinks.[205]

Powerful Nature distressed those who ventured into it, yet, at the same time, the remote areas played a vital role as a source of material resources for the polis.[206] Moreover, Greek communities used the characteristic violence of the wilderness as an additional resource that offered another important benefit to the society. The uncultivated frontier territories provided a fundamental and necessary service to the polis as training grounds for young men, for they spent their adolescence in the regions of wild Nature, and returned to the community prepared to become future citizens and hoplites. Borderlands and wild areas were considered spaces of aggressiveness and the channelling to these areas of the violence characteristic of young men created a place for their martial formation within the social order as protectors of the borders. Thus, their violent impulses were transformed into defensive actions beneficial to the collective.[207]

Entering the forest and climbing the mountain meant, for the ancient Greeks, venturing into a place of danger and risk and leaving civilisation and the community. The process of entering the forest or mountain entailed stepping into an unknown, uncivilised world, where the established order was transgressed and where social

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203 For the ancient Greeks, forests and mountains were places of fear and cruel violence (Buxton 2000, 94).

204 Ancient farmers feared the beasts that attacked their cattle and struggled to keep their fields free of invasive weeds, which seemed to approach them with malign intentions (Tuan 1980, 107-108, 211-212).

205 Hom. *Il*. 3.33-34.

206 Shipley 1996, 10.

207 Leitao (1999, 248, 268-270) believes that youth rituals and festivals, which sent young people into the border wilderness, served to release the energy and aggression of adolescents safely at the frontiers and redirect it outwards against foreign invaders. This prevented their violence from causing harm within their own community and re-established rights and privileges, avoiding conflict with previous generations.

norms did not rule, but the unpredictable forces of Nature.[208] The wilderness was considered the space of danger, of the supernatural and also of transgression, and therefore to it belonged those who transgressed the norm. Ancient Greeks imagined forests and mountains inhabited by deities, mythical creatures, evildoers and individuals outside society. In real life, they were places only suitable for men who lived off the resources of the wilderness, for hunters and also for young men in transition to adulthood,[209] who emulated the bravery of heroes with their actions. Forests and mountains were deeply feared but, at the same time, their defiant character made them the perfect setting for adventure and heroic deeds, for in them men's strength and courage could be revealed. Wild Nature was perceived as the realm of unpredictable situations and uncontrollable forces, and this lack of order meant that ferocious beasts, hybrid monsters or evil individuals could appear at any moment, triggering the hero to fight them. Therefore, the hero, aware of these threats, would go into the wilderness in search of adventures to prove his courage and, thus, become worthy of recognition. Likewise, forests and mountains were the dangerous places where hunters showed their strength and bravery by fighting the beasts and then returning triumphantly to the city.[210] In the fragment of the *Iliad* below, the monstrous creatures of the mountains (ὀρεσκῴοισι) are seen as the toughest adversaries, the worthiest opponents to fight against the strongest of men. Nestor alludes to the heroic Lapiths who fought against the centaurs that tried to abduct the women during the wedding of Hippodamia and Pirithous.[211]

> They were the strongest mortals ever bred on earth,
> the strongest, and they fought against the strongest too,
> shaggy Centaurs, wild brutes of the mountains.[212]

Both in Greek imagery and among ancient cultures in general,[213] wild Nature was considered inaccessible and was seen as a dense, impenetrable and strange place, one that entailed countless dangers and symbolised the open outer world that extended beyond the limits of the known world. In addition to being considered mainly as a dangerous place, we have observed throughout our analysis of the fragments of the *Iliad*, that in the imagination of the ancient Greeks the wilderness combined different but mutually dependent symbolic worlds: unknown and threatening Nature, a space of adventure and danger; protective and complicit Nature, a refuge for the weak and for transgressors; nurturing Nature, a source of benefits and fundamental resources for the polis; instructing Nature, a setting for the education and transformation of the young; and sacred Nature, the abode and realm of the gods. The thick greenery, which often delimited the remote territories of the polis, provided shelter from attackers, but in its dark interior unexplainable events took place and unforeseeable risks lurked, both beasts and divinities alike. As counterpoint to the controlled,

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208 Felton – Gilhuly 2018, 5.

209 Hunting and wandering in remote areas were activities generally associated with young men in the Greek imagery (Leitao 1999, 257).

210 Buxton 2000, 90.

211 Crespo 1991, 111, n. 8.

212 Hom. *Il*. 1.267-268.

213 Tuan 1980, 208.

familiar and safe civilised world, the forests and mountains were perceived as supernatural and overwhelming places, characterised by the hostile and the alien. All these aspects of Nature share, in one way or another, the sense of threat that prevails in the wilderness, so we can conclude that the emotion that best characterises the perception of landscape in the *Iliad* is dread, as the feeling that something unpleasant may be about to happen. Complicit Nature protected the weak against danger, so fear was implicit in the very feeling of the need for protection. Natural resources provided a livelihood, but those who extracted them or tended livestock in the wilderness were exposed to constant danger from weather, bandits and beasts. Hunters went into the forest in search of prestige but often risked their lives in confrontation with wild animals. The young men who underwent their initiation period in the rough frontier areas faced harsh situations for military training and inner growth, and their tasks involved constant threats. Even the consideration of Nature as a sacred space was linked to a sense of supernatural threat in the ancient Greek imagery, since the deities who dwelt in the forests showed their cruel and vengeful side within the wilderness, and could unleash their wrath on the foolish mortal who ventured into the thicket and came across them by chance.

Most of the nuances of the complex symbolism associated with landscape in the *Iliad* are condensed in this last fragment below, which brings together many of the aspects of landscape perception mentioned throughout this study. The passage belongs to the scene of the "Deception of Zeus" and begins by describing the mountain as a place rich in springs and home to wild animals, synthesising the two realities that conditioned the lives of those who found sustenance in the wilderness: the presence of abundant natural resources and, at the same time, the danger posed by beasts. Then, the forested mountain becomes threatening and uncontrollable, stirring under the wind, one of the powerful forces of mighty Nature. The supernatural dimension of the wilderness is later introduced with the personified presence of Sleep, who, like a thief on the prowl, hides in the thickets to avoid being seen by Zeus, the divinity with the strongest presence in the mountains, which underlines the sacred character of wild Nature as the abode and domain of the gods. Sleep climbs a singular tree, the species of which is specified, as it so often is in the *Iliad*. It is a great fir tree (ἐλάτην), specifically the tallest specimen on Mount Ida, chosen as a landmark in the forest because of its lofty height. This height led Zeus to choose Mount Ida to watch the Trojan War from its summit, and the height also makes the top of this tree a particularly prominent place, situated beyond the wondrous upper limit, piercing the air and penetrating into the ether. The leafy canopy of the tree offers Sleep a refuge in which to hide, evoking how the forest protects its inhabitants, such as the birds. The fragment ends by alluding to the song of a mountain bird that is named differently by gods and by men, a detail that recalls the distance between both worlds, which converge in the woods in transgressive situations. By mentioning men, the author makes the audience of the poem feel included in the narrative, enabling them to recall how they felt when listening to the singing of the birds in Nature, a familiar and pleasant experience that allows them to forget for a moment the harshness of the battle between the Achaeans and the Trojans.

> They reached Mount Ida with all her springs,
> the mother of wild beasts, and making Lectos headland,
> left the sea for the first time and swept over dry land

as the treetops swayed and shook beneath their feet.
There Sleep came to a halt,
before the eyes of the Father could detect him,
and climbed up softly into a towering pine tree.
The tallest trunk there was on the heights of Ida,
it pierced the low-hung mist and shot up through the sky.
There he nestled, hidden deep in the needling boughs,
for all the world like the bird with a shrill cry,
the mountain bird the immortals call Bronze Throat
and mortals call the Nighthawk.[214]

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