

The Funeral of Sarpedon

Zeus mourns deeply:
Patroklos has killed Sarpedon.
Now Patroklos and the Achaians rush on
to snatch up the body, to dishonour it.

But Zeus doesn't tolerate that at all.
Though he let his favourite child be killed-
this the Law required-
he'll at least honour him after death.
So he now sends Apollo down to the plain
with instructions about how the body should be tended.

Apollo reverently raises the hero's body
and carries it in sorrow to the river.
He washes the dust and blood away,
heals the terrible wounds so there's no trace left,
pours perfume of ambrosia over it,
and dresses it in radiant Olympian robes.
He bleaches the skin, and with a pearl comb
combs out the jet black hair.
He spreads and arranges the beautiful limbs.

Now he looks like a young king, a royal charioteer-
twenty-five or twenty-six years old-
resting himself after winning
the prize in a famous race,
his chariot all gold and his horses the fastest.

Having finished his task this way,
Apollo calls for the two brothers,
Sleep and Death, and orders them
to take the body to Lykia, the rich country.

So the two brothers, Sleep and Death,
set off on foot toward the rich country, Lykia;
and when they reached the door
of the king's palace,
they handed over the honoured body
and then returned to their other concerns.

And once the body was received in the palace
the sad burial began, with processions and honours and dirges,
with many libations from sacred vessels,
with all pomp and circumstance.
Then skilled workers from the city
and celebrated craftsmen in stone
came to make the tombstone and the tomb.

Constantine P. Cavafy

Son of Zeus and Laodamia



The death of Sarpedon, depicted in Lycian attire, at the hands of Patroclus. Red-figure hydria from Heraclea, c.400 BCE.

King of Lycia, a descendant of the preceding, was a son of Zeus and Laodamia, daughter of Bellerophon. Sarpedon became king when his uncles withdrew their claim to Lycia. He fought on the side of the Trojans, with his cousin Glaucus, during the Trojan War becoming one of Troy's greatest allies and heroes. He scolded Hector in the *Iliad* (Book 5, lines 471–492) claiming that he left all the hard fighting to the allies of Troy and not to the Trojans themselves, and made a point of saying that the Lycians had no reason to fight the Greeks, or no real reason to hate them, but because he was a faithful ally to Troy he would do so and fight his best anyway. When the Trojans attacked the wall newly built by the Greeks, Sarpedon led his men (who also included Glaucus and Asteropaios) to the forefront of the battle and caused Ajax and Teucer to shift their attention from Hector's attack to that of Sarpedon's forces. He personally held up the battlements and was the first to enter the Greek encampment. This attack allowed Hector to break through the Greek wall. It was during this action that Sarpedon delivered a noble speech to Glaucus, stating that they had been the most honoured kings, therefore they must now fight the most to repay that honour and prove themselves and repay their loyal subjects. While he was preparing to plunge into battle, he told Glaucus that together they would go on to glory: if they were successful, the glory would be their own; if not, the glory of whoever stopped them would be the greater.



The death of Sarpedon, depicted on the obverse of Euphronios krater, c.515 BCE. When Patroclus entered the battle in the armour of Achilles, Sarpedon met him in combat. Zeus debated with himself whether to spare his son's life even though he was fated to die by the hand of Patroclus. He would have done so had Hera not reminded him that other gods' sons were fighting and dying and other gods' sons were fated to die as well. If Zeus should spare his son from his fate, another god might do the same; therefore Zeus let Sarpedon die while fighting Patroclus, but not before killing the only mortal horse of Achilles. During their fight, Zeus sent a shower of bloody raindrops over the Trojans' heads expressing the grief for the impending death of his son.



Sarpedon carried away by Sleep and Death, by Henry Fuseli, 1803. When Sarpedon fell, mortally wounded, he called on Glaucus to rescue his body and arms. Patroclus withdrew the spear he had embedded in Sarpedon, and as it left Sarpedon's body his spirit went with it. A violent struggle ensued over the body of the fallen king. The Greeks succeeded in gaining his armour (which was later given as a prize in the funeral games for Patroclus), but Zeus had Phoebus Apollo rescue the corpse. Apollo took the corpse and cleaned it, then delivered it to Sleep (Hypnos) and Death (Thanatos), who took it back to Lycia for funeral honours. One account holds that the first and second Sarpedon are both the same man, and that Zeus granted Sarpedon an extraordinarily long life that had to end at the Trojan War. However, the favoured account is that Sarpedon, brother of Minos, and Sarpedon, who fought at Troy, were different men who lived generations apart. A genealogical link is provided between the two Sarpedons, through Laodamia. Laodamia (called Deidamia in that particular account) is said to have married Evander, son of the first Sarpedon, and to have presented Evander with a son named Sarpedon (in reality her son by Zeus). An asteroid is named after the Trojan hero, 2223 Sarpedon.