

Ageless Aretē

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Ageless Aretē

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the Hellenic Heritage of Sicily and Southern Italy

edited by

Heather L. Reid & John Serrati

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Laura Massetti¹
Ageless *Aretē*: How Old is it?²

Aretē is “a pivotal term of Greek ethics”³ with a rich semantic history. Before the concept of “virtue” became a subject of Socratic investigation, it had a variety of meanings in different contexts. Although positive morality in the ancient Greek community relies, in a sense, upon the idea of *aretē*, it has not always been a moral or ethical concept. At the very beginning of Greek literature, “*being virtuous*” equates with “*being what someone is in a perfect way*,” accordingly, the first meaning of *aretē* is “excellence.” During the same period, however, in early aristocratic society, the idea of *aretē* is strictly connected to that of immortal glory, i.e., the glory achieved through poetic celebration. As Bruno Snell affirms:

Glory is for the primitive Greek that form of immortality that is also granted to the mortal. The aspiration to *aretē* therefore aims farther than the aspiration to usefulness and happiness, which induces man to worry above all about the duration of his life [...] Homer and many

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² This paper was written in the framework of the project “Hermes - God of Fire. Reconstructing the Indo-European Background of an Olympian God,” funded by the Carlsberg Foundation. My presentation at the “Interdisciplinary Symposium on *Arete*” in 2021 was made possible thanks to the Lucy Halsall Fund (Linacre College, Oxford). Reference texts for the cited translations are taken from Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). A special thanks goes to the editors for their patience and assistance during the editing process. The usual disclaimers apply.

³ David Sedley, “*Aretē*,” *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Greek Philosophy* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1998).

Archaic poets say, and this corresponds to very ancient Indo-European conceptions, that glory lives eternally in the word of the poet, and the glorious name is in fact handed down in the verse that wins over time.⁴

This study seeks to investigate the tie between *aretē*, glory, and immortality. Specifically, I will focus on a unique combination of words figuring in an unspecified and relatively free word-order featuring the term *aretē*, i.e., a phraseological structure which I henceforth refer to as *collocation*.⁵ My starting point is a collocation featured in a fragment by Euripides, which reads as follows:

ἀγήρων ἀρετήν
Ageless *aretē*⁶

To begin I must address a translation issue. While *agērōs* is unanimously translated as “ageless” (see below §1), *aretē* may be rendered by a palette of possible meanings. Its primary sense is “excellence or quality (of any kind),” as, e.g., in *Iliad* 15.642:

ἀμείνων παντοίας ἀρετῆς ἡμὲν πόδας ἠδὲ μάχεσθαι
καὶ νόον
better in every kind of *aretē*: in the foot-race, at fighting
and in thought.⁷

This understanding of the term is attested in texts of the 6th c. BCE and also in the *corpora* of poets and writers of the 5th c. BCE. In literary works of the Archaic Age, however, *aretē* is occasionally imagined as the “reward obtained through excellence, i.e., glory/

⁴ Bruno Snell, *La cultura greca e le origini del pensiero europeo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963), 239 (translation from the Italian original is mine).

⁵ For a definition cf. Hadumod Bußmann, *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 2008), s.v. *collocation*.

⁶ *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (henceforth *TrGF*), ed. R. Kannicht *et al.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981-2004), F 999.

⁷ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), (henceforth *LSJ*). On the semantics of the term in Homer cf. *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos. Begründet von Bruno Snell*. Band 1: A. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979) s.v. ἀρετή.

prosperity.”⁸ For this reason, in a variety of contexts, the word is taken as a synonym of “glory” (*kleos, doxa, kudos*, see below §2).⁹ As already touched upon, starting in the 5th c. BCE, the meaning “virtue,” with its possible moral connotations, is documented in philosophical writings. How, then, should we understand *aretē* in Euripides’s fragment 999? The passage is apparently too lacunose to securely opt for one of the standard translations (excellence, glory, or virtue).¹⁰ What other meanings might the term *aretē* embody, and how might those meanings affect our understanding of it? In what follows, I will address these questions through a cross-phraseological analysis of the collocation “ageless *aretē*.”

My general approach will be to contextualize this isolated juncture of terms within the Greek literary tradition and investigate its possible poetic background—which, I will argue, is very ancient. To begin, I will concentrate on the context in which Euripides’s fragment is transmitted (§1). I will then cross-reference the collocation with other phraseological structures found in Greek literature, namely: phrasemes in which the adjectives “ageless” and “immortal” apply to the same objects (§2). Based on this analysis, I will argue that the combination “ageless *aretē*” may be understood within a broader phraseological system where *aretē* is connected with the idea of immortality and, more specifically, with the idea of immortality achieved through fame (§3). Finally, I will discuss the etymology of the collocation (§4) and show how a comparison with its Old Indic congeners reveals that “ageless *aretē*” as well as “immortal *aretē*” (Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1420) may be an Indo-European phraseological inheritance which lived on in Greek poetry (§5). By concentrating on this particular occurrence

⁸ Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ed. Martin L. West (Oxford: University Press, 1978), 229: West interprets the opposition ἀρετή vs. κακότης in Hesiod, *Works and Days* 287-93 as “superior or inferior outstanding in society, principally determined by material prosperity.”

⁹ E.g., the translation of *aretē* as ‘glory’ by William Slater, *Lexicon to Pindar* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), for a series of Pindaric instances.

¹⁰ See Helen Hatzichronoglou, *The Ideal of ἀρετή and its Treatment in Euripides* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1985).

of “*aretē*,” I will delve into the linguistic and semantic background of the word. The overall aim of the paper is twofold: (i) to gain a nuanced insight into the semantics of this complex term and (ii) to show that some poetic collocations and metaphors involving *aretē* trace back to an ancient phase of poetic language that goes back farther than Proto-Greek. I aim to provide new insight into the history of the word; not only before “*aretē*” came to designate “virtue,” but also, so to speak, before “*aretē*” became “*aretē*.”

1. Ἀγήρων ἀρετήν in context

As Kannicht’s edition specifies, Euripides’s F 999 figures among the fragments “of an uncertain play” (Latin: *incertarum fabularum*). That is, we do not know which play by Euripides originally featured it. Lacking this information, it is virtually impossible to provide a clearer understanding of it, i.e., to specify what character pronounces the line and, consequently, to translate the term *aretē* in a nuanced way. It is, however, possible to frame the collocation within its transmission context. The fragment comes from Pollux’s *Onomasticon*, a lexicographical work of the 2nd c. CE.¹¹ We can compare this passage from the same volume:

γέρων, προγήρω, γηραιός [...] Ἐενοφῶν [*Cyropaedia* 8.7.22] δὲ τὴν ἀγήρατον δόξαν, Ὑπερείδης [fragment 221 Bl.] δὲ τὸν ἀγήρατον χρόνον, Σοφοκλῆς [*Antigone* 608] δὲ τὸν ἀγήρω, καὶ Πλάτων [*Timaeus* 33a] τὸν ἀγήρω, καὶ Εὐριπίδης δὲ κόσμον ἀγήρω [F 910.6, Θουκυδίδης [2.43, 44.4] δὲ τὸν ἀγήρων, ὡς καὶ Εὐριπίδης [F 999] τὴν ἀγήρων ἀρετήν, καὶ Δημοσθένης [60.36] τιμὰς ἀγήρω.

¹¹ The *Onomasticon* by Pollux (or Polydeuces) from Naucratis was a wide-ranging lexicon in ten books, of which only an epitome survives, cf. Eleonor Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship: A guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises, from Their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 96. The Greek text is quoted from *Pollucis Onomasticon*, ed. Erich J.A. Bethe (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1900-37) = *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

Old, prematurely old, old [...] Xenophon [sc. writes/says] the ageless fame, Hyperides [sc. writes/says] the ageless time, Sophocles [sc. writes/says] the ageless [*agērō*; different accusative ending], and Plato the ageless [*agērō*; different accusative ending] Thucydides [sc. writes] the ageless [*agērōn*; different accusative ending] so as Euripides [says] ageless *aretē*, and Demosthenes [sc. says] ageless honors.

Here, the lexicographer seems mainly concerned with the form of the adjective “ageless.” As the text itself makes evident, the Greek language possesses two different forms: ἀγήρατος (as in the cited examples of Xenophon, Hyperides, and Sophocles) and ἀγήραος, which is also contracted as ἀγήρωσ (as in the examples by Plato, Euripides, Thucydides, and Demosthenes).¹² The two compounds are synonyms, being built with the same lexical material. They display a privative first member ἀ- < *n̥- “non, un-, -less,” and a second member derived from the Indo-European root *ǵerh₂- “to be old, ripen,” through different suffixes, namely: ἀγήρατος exhibits a *to*-suffix with possible de-instrumental value, i.e., “provided with” (like the one seen in Latin *barbatus* “bearded, i.e., provided with beard”). This reflects “provided with agelessness,” while ἀγήραος/ἀγήρωσ is a thematic derivative that means “without ageing.”¹³

¹² According to Klaus Strunk, “Flexionskategorien mit akrostatischem, Akzent und die sigmatischen Aoriste,” in *Grammatische Kategorien. Funktion und Geschichte*, ed. B. Schlerath (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1985), 490-514, 195 n.8, and Jón Harðarson, *Studien zum urindogermanischen Wurzelaorist und dessen Vertretung im Indoiranischen und Griechischen* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1993), 72-76, the root -γηρα- (vs. *ǵerh₂-, cf. γέρον “old”) was analogically extended from the sigmatic aorist ἐγήρασε* < *e-ǵēra-s-e(t) to the late-formed presents γηράσκω and γηράω as well as to the nominal derivatives.

¹³ Ferdinand Sommer, *Zur Geschichte der griechischen Nominalkomposition* (München: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1948), 19-20; Pierre Chantraine, *Grammaire Homérique. Tome I: Phonétique et morphologie*, 5th edn (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), 54.

The latter form is attested in hexameter poetry in the fixed collocation “immortal and ageless;” e.g., *Iliad* 2.447+:¹⁴

αἰγίδ’ ἔχουσ’ ἐρίτιμον ἀγήρων ἀθανάτην τε
having the highly-prized, ageless, immortal aegis

As Marcello Durante explains,¹⁵ the Homeric formula counts as an expanded expression for “immortal” or, say, “divine,” where the adjective “immortal,” i.e., “death-less,”¹⁶ is enlarged with an additional adjective “age-less” in an assonant binomial: Ἄ-γηρως Ἄ-θάνατος. Conversely, the adjective ἀγήρατος is first attested in poetic corpora of the 6th-5th c. BCE (Simonides and Euripides, see §2 below). Such a distribution speaks in favor of ἀγήραος/ἀγήρως as an older formation, contrasting with the more recent formation ἀγήρατος, which occasionally came to replace ἀγήραος/ἀγήρως. So, examining the transmission context of “ageless *aretē*,” we discover that the connection between the concepts of agelessness and immortality seems to be a very early one.

2. From ἀγήρως ἀρετή* to ἀθάνατος ἀρετή*

The abovementioned Homeric formula “immortal and ageless” is significant for interpreting Euripides’s *TrGF* 999. Indeed, reference to the Homeric model may suggest that “ageless *aretē*” links closely with the phraseme “immortal *aretē*.” A collocation of this description is attested in other Greek literary sources in our possession, such as Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1420:

¹⁴ The sign (+) means that an expression or a term is attested in the quoted passage and elsewhere in Greek literature.

¹⁵ Marcello Durante, *Studi sulla preistoria della tradizione poetica greca*. (Rome: Ateneo, 1976), 98. Cf. R. Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 69-70.

¹⁶ Greek ἀθάνατος is a derivative of Indo-European **d^henh²-* “to leave” *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben, Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstamm-bildungen* [henceforth *LIV*²] (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2001), 144-45 connects the root with Ved. *dhánvati* “runs, flows”). Cf. Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968-80); Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, (Heidelberg: Winter, 1960-72); Robert S.P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), all s.v. θάνατος.

ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν ἔσχον

I [sc. Heracles] obtained immortal *aretē*.¹⁷

The reference to Pollux’s list of “ageless things” (cited in §1) confirms this assumption. Indeed, his short phraseological catalogue helps us to sketch the distribution of the adjectives “immortal” and “ageless” in connection with different objects and beings. Pollux’s passage recalls a variety of junctures which combine ἀγήρατος or ἀγήρως with various positive notions. In this connection, I argue that just as Euripides’s collocation “ageless *aretē*” lines up with Sophocles’s “immortal *aretē*,” other collocations with the structure “ageless X” listed by Pollux line up with corresponding versions of “immortal X,” attested in other Greek literary sources. More specifically:

(i) The collocation “ageless fame” (ἀγήρατον δόξαν, Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* viii 7.22) exists alongside “immortal fame” (ἀθάνατος ... δόξα, Euripides, *TrGF* 585.2). *Doxa* is a synonym of *kleos* and *kudos*,¹⁸ which are also described as “immortal” and “ageless” on occasion in Pindar, Bacchylides, Euripides+:

fame/glory	immortal	ageless
δόξα	ἀθάνατος (Euripides)	ἀγήρατον (Xenophon)
κλέος	ἀθάνατον (Bacchylides)	ἀγήρατον (Euripides)
κῦδος	ἀθάνατον (Bacchylides)	ἀγήραον (Pindar)

(ii) The collocation “ageless time” (ἀγήρατον χρόνον Hyperides, F 221 B1) does not seem to pair with a collocation

¹⁷ Cf. also Periander from Corinth, F 7, αἱ μὲν ἡδοναὶ θνηταί, αἱ δ’ ἀρεταὶ ἀθάνατοι (pleasures are mortals, virtues immortals) in *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume II: Beginnings and Early Ionian Thinkers*, Part 1, eds and trans. André Laks and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). Cf. also Plato *Symposium*, 208d.

¹⁸ Laura Massetti, *Phraseologie und indogermanische Dichtersprache in der Sprache der griechischen Chorlyrik: Pindar und Bakchylides*, PhD Dissertation (Universität zu Köln, 2019), 116-17.

“immortal time” (ἀθάνατος χρόνος*). However, one Pindaric fragment (94a.12-5 S-M) offers the phraseological combination “immortal ... days,” at close distance from the term χρόνος

[...] ἐπ’ Αἰολάδα
καὶ γένει εὐτυχίαν τετάσθαι
όμαλόν χρόνον·ἀθάναται δὲ βροτοῖς
ἀμέραι, σῶμα δ’ ἐστὶ θνατόν

[Sc. I pray] to extend success upon Aeoladas and his race for unbroken time. Humans have immortal **days**, but their body is mortal.¹⁹

This passage clearly contrasts the immortality of time and its units, i.e., days, (cf. όμαλόν χρόνον, ἀθάναται ... ἀμέραι) with the mortality of a human being with a mortal body (cf. βροτοῖς ... σῶμα ... θνατόν). We may thus conclude that Pindar’s passage indirectly allows us to reconstruct the collocation: “immortal ... (units of) time”* which exists alongside Hyperides’s ἀγήρατον χρόνον:

time (unit =day)	immortal	ageless
χρόνος	—	ἀγήρατος (Hyperides)
ἀμέραι	ἀθάναται (Pindar)	—

(iii) The collocation “ageless honors” (ἀγήρως τιμάς Demosthenes, lx 36) may be juxtaposed with “immortal honor(s),” which is first attested in Pindar’s poems, e.g., *Isthmian* 2.28-9:

ἴν’ ἀθανάτοις Αἰνησιδάμου
παῖδες ἐν τιμαῖς ἔμιχθεν

... Where the sons of Aenesidamus were joined to **immortal honors**.²⁰

Analogous to the situation sketched in (i), it is again possible to sum up the comparison as follows:

¹⁹ Pindar, *Nemean Odes, Isthmian Odes, Fragments*, ed. and trans. William H. Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Cf. also Pindar, F 121*.3 S-M+.

honor(s)	immortal	ageless
τιμή/τιμαί	ἀθάνατοις (Pindar)	ἀγήρωσ (Demosthenes) ²¹

The provided phraseological parallels invite us to connect Euripides's fragment 999 ἀγήρων ἀρετήν with the ἀθάνατον ἀρετήν, preserved in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and elsewhere. The individuation of this parallel in the *corpus* of a contemporary Greek tragedian invites us again to reflect on the possible meaning and translation of ἀγήρων ἀρετήν. As immortality and agelessness are usually prerogatives of the gods, we can say that both Euripides and Sophocles characterize *aretē* as somehow divine. Indeed, as the following analysis will reveal, *aretē* configures as the means to achieve immortality and thus transcend the mortal dimension.

3. Immortal and ageless *aretē* and immortal and ageless glory

The meaning of “immortal *aretē*” in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is debated. In order to cast light on the possible meaning of the collocation, I present the verse in context (1418-22):

καὶ πρῶτα μὲν σοὶ τὰς ἐμὰς λέξω τύχας,
 ὄσους πονήσας καὶ διεξεληθὼν πόνους
 ἀθάνατον ἀρετήν ἔσχον, ὡς πάρεσθ' ὄραν.
 καὶ σοί, σάφ' ἴσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν,
 ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον.

And first I [*sc.* Heracles] will tell you of my fortunes, of how many *labors* I endured to go through to win **eternal *aretē***, as you can see. For you too know it for sure, destiny is the same, after these *sufferings* to **make your life glorious**.²²

To translate “ἀθάνατον ἀρετήν” (1420), Jebb proposes “glorious immortality,” Lloyd-Jones “eternal glory,” and Schein “immortal

²¹ Euripides's “un-ageing *kosmos*” (κόσμον ἀγήρω F 910.6 TrGF) may be juxtaposed with Aristaeus (F 53.2), where κόσμος is interpreted as “to be immortal and ageless.”

²² Sophocles, *Antigone. Women of Trachis. Philoctetes. Oedipus at Colonus*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

glory.”²³ In contrast, Kamerbeek argues for “glory of immortality.”²⁴ According to Webster, however, in this passage ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν means “immortal excellence” or “excellence of an immortal distinct from a mortal.” In Webster’s own words:

Glory can be deathless without its possessor being immortal; that kind of immortality Philoctetes will have with his εὐκλέα βίον [1422] when he has been ‘judged first in ἀρετή.’ Heracles had this kind of ἀρετή in his life [cf. *Trachiniae passim*], now he has ‘immortal ἀρετή,’ the excellence of an immortal distinct from that of a mortal.²⁵

In the Sophoclean passage, Heracles is predicting the destiny of Philoctetes by comparing the *aretē* he achieved after his labors (πόνους, v. 1419) to the good fame (εὐκλεᾶ ... βίον) Philoctetes will achieve after his sufferings (ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ[ε]). The parallelism between Heracles’s and Philoctetes’s *ponoi* allows us to compare Heracles’s “reward” of immortal *aretē* to Philoctetes’s reward of “a glorious life.” The passage thus clearly supports a tie between the idea of “immortal *aretē*” and that of “immortal glory.”

As anticipated in §1, such semantic nuance is not isolated; *aretē* and glory are interconnected notions. As the analysis of choral lyric texts makes evident,²⁶ glory, especially immortal glory, is the reward of *aretē* (excellence, virtue) when it is celebrated through poetry. This “*aretē*-glory-ideology” is illustrated by an exemplary passage from Bacchylides’s *Epinician* 13 (175-81), which recalls the tight bond between *aretē*, *doxa*, and the idea of visibility:

²³ Sophocles, *The Plays and Fragments*, ed. Richard C. Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 1890); Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, ed. Seth L. Schein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁴ *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. Part IV. Philoctetes*, ed. Jan C. Kamerbeek (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

²⁵ Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, ed. Thomas B. Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 157.

²⁶ Massetti, *Phraseologie*, viii-ix.

οὐ γὰρ ἀλαμπείϊ νυκ[τός
πασιφανῆς Ἀρετ[ᾶ
κρυφθεῖσ' ἀμαυρο[ῦται καλύπτρα,
ἀλλ' ἔμπεδον ἀκ[αμάτα
βρούουσα δόξα
στρωφᾶται κατὰ γᾶν [τε
καὶ πολυπλάγκτον θ[άλασσαν

For **Excellence, shining among all men**, is not dimmed, hidden by the lightless [veil] of night: flourishing constantly **with untiring fame** she ranges over the land and the sea that drives many from their course.²⁷

In these verses, the relationship between *aretā* (excellence) and *doxa* (fame) is portrayed in metaphorical terms: excellence provides visibility to those who possess it and are celebrated through poetry. In this way, excellence is all-shining. At the same time, *aretā* flourishes with untiring fame, which circulates everywhere (the earth and sea count here as designations for “all earthly realms,” i.e., dry and moist territories alike).

Significantly, in this same passage, Bacchylides ascribes to *aretā* and *doxa* prerogatives which usually belong to the sun or the Sun-god Helios: *Aretā* possesses a *shining* light, which contrasts with the dark veil of the night (cf. ἀλαμπείϊ νυκτός ... καλύπτρα). To the modern-day reader, the epithet πασιφανῆς “shining among all the (men)” recalls a Homeric attribute of the Sun-god Helios, φαεσίμβροτος, i.e., “shining on the mortals” (*Odyssey* 10.138+).²⁸ In fact, the comparison between πασιφανῆς and φαεσίμβροτος is grounded on an internal Greek phraseological pattern: compounds with the structure Χ-μβροτος exist beside collocations of the type “πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν – Χ;” for example, δαμασίμβροτος, (taming/overpowering mortals Pindar, *Olympian* 9.79+); πανδαμάτωρ (all-overpowering/taming, *Iliad* 24.5+); μελησίμβροτος, (object of care for the mortals, Pindar, *Pythian*

²⁷ Trans. David Campbell, *Greek Lyric, Vol. IV: Bacchylides, Corinna, and Others* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

²⁸ Cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 10.191; Hesiod, *Theogony* 958, Theognis, *Elegy* 1183.

4.15); $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\iota$ μέλουσα (object of care for all [men], *Odyssey* 12.70). At the same time, the epithet *akamas* referred to *doxa* (178-79) and may be taken as a further hint at sunlight since the adjective regularly applies to Helios in Greek hexameter poetry (*Iliad* 18.238+). Finally, the idea of fame spreading over the earth and sea in a continuous, constant movement ($\sigma\tau\rho\omega\phi\acute{\alpha}\tau\alpha\iota$, 180) is evocative of the Sun-god's course, which covers the earth and the sea in common literary and poetic accounts (e.g., Mimnermus F 12 W).²⁹

In light of the presented literary evidence on the phraseology of (a) beings and objects which are "immortal" and "ageless" and (b) the tie between *aretē* and "fame/glory," it is possible to frame the Euripidean expression ἀγήρων ἀρετήν (*TrGF* 999) within a system of concepts, namely: the idea of immortality achieved through glory, i.e., the celebration/renown of *aretē* (excellence, virtue) and *aretai*, (acts of excellence, i.e., accomplishments). A possible translation of *TrGF* 999 may thus be "ageless glorious excellence" or "ageless glory achieved through excellence."

The comparison with the passage from Bacchylides's *Epinician* 13 indirectly confirms the developing interdependence among the notions of *aretē*, glory, and immortality (achieved) through poetry/fame. On the one hand, *aretē* becomes visible in action, i.e., through excellent deeds. On the other, *aretē* is necessary to achieve glory—i.e., visibility, compare the sun-light metaphor—in life and beyond the mortal life-span. It follows that *aretē* is a necessary prerequisite to achieve immortality: only by proving to be excellent, i.e., by proving to be *what someone is in a perfect way*, are mortal men granted the continuation of their name thanks to the celebration of *aretē*, which triumphs over time. The etymological focus on the Greek term as well as its linguistic and phraseological congeners will show, however, that the tie between *aretē*, glory and immortality is probably not an independent product of Greek civilization but must derive from a more ancient, prehistoric phase.

²⁹ On the passage cf. Archibald Allen, *The Fragments of Mimnermus: Text and Commentary* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), 94-109; Laura Massetti, "Antimachus's Enigma. On Erytheia, the Latvian Sun-goddess and a Red Fish," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 47 (2018): 223-40.

4. Aretē: etymology and linguistic cognates

As has long been proposed,³⁰ *aretē* is a derivative of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) *[H]ar- (to fit or join together), which can be reconstructed as **h₂er-* or, possibly, *[*h₁*]ar-³¹ (: LIV² s.v. 1 **h₂er-*), underlying the Greek *arariskō* (to join) and *harmozō* (to harmonize). Such an etymological connection can be perceived within the Greek *Sprachgefühl*; that is, the language as elaborated by its native speakers. Indeed, a Hesychian gloss (*Lexicon*, α 41 L-C) equates *aretaō* (to thrive, prosper/choose the path of valor; *LSJ*) and *harmozō* (to fit together, join, harmonize; *LSJ*):

ἀρέτησαν ἤρμισαν

aretēsan: they fitted together/harmozined.

From the point of view of its formation, then, *aretē* may be taken as (a) an *etéh₂*-derivative of PIE *[H]ar-, whose suffix carries the value **“good to,”* i.e. *“good to join/articulate”* > *“excellence;”*³² and (b) a feminine/collective of an *-e-tó*-derivative with an elative semantic nuance.³³ It is thus possible to interpret Greek *aretē* as *“the great*

³⁰ Cf. Walther Prellwitz, “Zur griechischen Etymologie. ἐτάζω, ἑταῖρος, ἐτοῖμος, ἀρετή,” *Glotta* 19 (1931): 85-89.

³¹ Proto-Indo-European *(H)ar- stands here for a root reconstructed on the basis of two sets of derivatives, namely: those listed under LIV² 1. **h₂er-* “fit, join” and LIV² 2. **h₂er-* “take for oneself.”

³² As proposed by Brent Vine, *Aeolic ὄρπετον and Deverbative *-etó- in Greek and Indo-European* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1998), 61.

³³ Derivatives of this description exhibit a “Caland-behaviour,” that is, they may be framed in a system of morphological suffix-replacements. In particular, *-e-tó*-derivatives pair with *u*-stems and/or *s*-stems. See G.R. Solta, “Betrachtungen über die indogermanischen Komparationssuffixe,” *Die Sprache* 9 (1963): 168-92, 168-78; Vine, *Aeolic ὄρπετον*, 61; Georges-Jean Pinault, “Genesis of the PIE gerundival suffix *-etó-*,” in *Adjectifs verbaux et participes dans les langues indo-européennes*, eds Claire Le Feuvre et al. (Bremen: Hempen, 2017), 343-75, 349; cf. the minimal pairs *παχύς* (thick); *παχετός* (massive); *μῆκος* (length); *περιμήκετος* (very high). Analogous Caland-derivatives can be identified for *[H]ar- (fit, join [together]), namely: Greek ἄριστος (best), YAv. *arš°*, OAv. *arš°*, (“right, rightly, truthfully”).

arrangement" i.e., "the ensemble of things, which are best joined/fitted together," hence: "excellence, virtue."

The word-formation of *aretē* may also be juxtaposed with two Indo-Iranian terms, crucial in the religious traditions of the two cultures: the Vedic *ṛtá-* and Avestan *aša-*.³⁴ These terms are *to*-derivatives to the Indo-European root *[H]ar-, "to fit, join (together)."³⁵ Their basic meaning may be identified as "the arranged thing,"* which acquires the abstract value of "rightness," "truth," "correctness" and, in some contexts, "cosmic order."³⁶

³⁴ As a representative investigation on the semantics of the terms cf. Heinrich Lüders, *Varuṇa II. Varuṇa und das ṛtá-*. *Aus dem Nachlass hrsg. von Ludwig Alsdorf* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

³⁵ Several reconstructions are possible for (Av.) *aša-*: Plr. *ar-tá- (Karl Hoffmann, "Avestisch š," in *Studia grammatica Iranica*, eds R. Schmitt and P. Skjærvø [Munich: Kitzinger, 1986], 168-83). Cf. Av. *mašīia-* < *mártīia-* "mortal": OPers. *martiya-*, Ved. *mártīya-*; *ár-ta- (Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch: zusammen mit den nacharbeiten und vorarbeiten* [Strasbourg: Trübner, 1904], 46), with substantivation through secondary full-grade/vr̥ddhi (Jeremy Rau, "YAv. *haosrauuah-* and *dəus.srauuah-*," *Historische Sprachforschung* 107 [2007]: 159-68, 166), cf., e.g., YAv. PN *Hao-srauuah-* (Yt. 5.49+) vs. *hu-srauuah-* (: Greek εὐκλε[ε]ῖ[ς] or **ṛ-ta-* or **ár-ta-* (Alberto Cantera, "Zu avestisch *aša-*," in *Paitimāna. Essays in Iranian, Indo-European, and Indian Studies*, ed. S. Adhami [Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2003], 250-65).

³⁶ Such semantic development is hardly isolated. Roots meaning "to join/align" often display a shift to "make/be (morally) appropriate/right." This is the case of the Vedic *ṛtá-* and Avestan *aša-*, which parallels the Proto-Indo-European *(h_x)reith₂- (to join, mix, combine) from which the Latin *rīte*, (correctly, properly) and Tocharian AB *rittwatār/rittētār* (is fitting) are derived, cf. Michael Weiss, "The rite stuff: Lat. *rīte*, *rītus*, TB *rittētār*, TA *ritwatār*, and Av. *raēθβa*," *Tocharian and Indo-European Studies* 16 (2015): 181-98. Likewise, the Proto-Indo-European *h₂zent- (set the warp, begin to weave) is linked to the Hittite *ḫandā(i)-* (to align) and *ḫandānt-* (just, moral, right[eous]), cf. Craig H. Melchert, "Hittite *ḫandā(i)-* 'to align, arrange, etc.' and PIE Metaphors for '(morally) right,'" in *Dispersals and Diversification*, eds M. Serangeli and T. Olander, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 166-78. The Proto-

As I have shown in a previous study,³⁷ the linguistic relationship between the Greek *aretē* and Graeco-Aryan terms is reflected on a phraseological level. Greek *aretē*, Vedic *ṛtá-*, and Avestan *aša-* are all connected with the same poetic images: Ved. *ṛtá-*, Av. *aša-* are compared to quintessentially “joined” objects like the wheel and chariot in the Indo-European world, while the Greek term for “chariot,” ἄρμα, is recognizable as a derivative of the same PIE root *(H)ar- “to join, arrange.” As such, they are things which can be guided, conveyed or directed. Compare the following passages:

Rigveda 1.164.11b *vársvartī cakráṃ pári dyām ṛtásya*
The **wheel of truth** [ever] rolls around heaven.

Rigveda 2.23.3ab *jyótiṣmantam rátham ṛtásya*
You mount [*ā ... tiṣṭhasi*] **ṛta’s** light-bearing **chariot**.³⁸

Yašna 46.4 *ašahiī važdrāṅ*
Conveyors of the truth.

Although collocations like “wheel of *aretē*”^{*} and “chariot of *aretē*” are not attested in Greek literary sources, ‘wheel’ and ‘chariot’ are metaphorically connected with the ideas of truth and justice. For example, a fragment of Parmenides (1.28-29 DK) mentions εὐκυκλῆς Ἀληθείη (the truth of a beautiful wheel) and Simonides F 11.12 W speaks of an ἄρμα δίκης (chariot of justice). Pindar also portrays ἀρετά as something to be driven in *Nemean* 3, 74-5:

ἐλαῖ ... ἀρετὰς ὁ θνατὸς αἰὼν
[Our] mortal life **drives** [a team of four] **aretai** [virtues]

Indo-European *kes- forms the basis for both the Greek κέ(σ)ω* (to burst) and κόσμος (order), cf. J. Puhvel, “The Origins of Greek *Kosmos* and Latin *Mundus*,” *American Journal of Philology* 97 (1976): 154-67.

³⁷ See Laura Massetti, “Gr. ἀρετή, ved. *ṛtá-*, av. *aša-* e l’ecceellenza come ordine aggiustato,” *Müchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 67 (2014): 123-48.

³⁸ Cf. the collocations “bridle of *ṛta*,” *ṛtásya raśmī-* (*Rigveda* 1.123.13ab), “chariot-pole of *ṛta*” *ṛtásya dhūrśáda-* (*Rigveda* 1.143.7a), *rathī- ṛtásya* “charioteer of *ṛta*,” cf. Calvert Watkins, “Is tre fir flathemon: marginalia to Audacht Morainn,” *Ériu* 30 (1979): 181-90.

Though the wheel and chariot references are limited to notions of “truth” and “justice,” these values are consistently linked with *aretē*. This indirectly allows us to connect the notion of *aretē* and that of “wheel” and “chariot.” Consider the following passages:

Pindar, fragment 205 S-M

ἀρχὰ μέγας ἀρετᾶς, ὤνασσο Ἀλάθεια

Starting point of great *aretā*, Queen Truth

Phocylides, fragment 10 W

ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνη συλλήβδην πᾶσ' ἀρετῆ ἵσι

In **justice** there are the **virtues** all together.

Finally, the Greek *aretē*, Vedic *ṛtá-*, and Avestan *aša-* are all connected with the image of the “right/straight path” and as qualities opposed to “crooked” ways, things, or people:

Rigveda 1.46.11ab

ábhūd u pāram étave ' pánthā ṛtásya sādhuṃyā

And the **path of truth** has come into being to lead

right to the far shore

Yašna 34.12

sīšā nā ašā paθō vañhāuš x^aaētāñg manañhō

Show us **through truth** the **paths** of good thought,

easy to go **through**

Pindar, fragment 108a.3 S-M

εὐθειᾶ δὴ κέλευθος ἀρετᾶν ἐλεῖν

Straight indeed is the **path to achieve** *aretē*

Rigveda 4.23.8b

ṛtásya dhítir vñjinā ni hanti

The vision of **truth** **smashes** the **crooked**.

Not coincidentally, in a well-known passage of the *Phaedrus* (253de), Plato describes the characteristics of the soul’s “good” and the “bad” horses in terms of *aretē* and “crookedness”:

ἀρετῆ δὲ τίς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἢ κακοῦ κακία [...] νῦν δὲ
λεκτέον. ὁ μὲν τοίνυν αὐτοῖν [...] εἶδος ὀρθὸς καὶ
διηρθρωμένος [...] κελεύσματι μόνον καὶ λόγῳ

ήνιοχεῖται· ὁ δ' αὖ σκολιός [...] μάστιγι μετὰ
κέντρων μόγις ὑπείκων

We have now to define ... **what the goodness of the one and the badness of the other is. The one** of them ... **is upright** and has clean limbs ... he is guided only by the word of command and by reason. Instead, **the other is crooked** ... hardly obedient to whip and spurs.

The comparative analysis has so far shown that *aretē*, *ῥτά-*, and *aḡa-* are not simply associated with ideas of positive things such as harmony, justice, and truth, but they are also connected to similar metaphors, namely: the images of “arranged” or “joined” objects (i.e., the wheel and the chariot) and of the straight path. In light of this rich system of common links, it is legitimate to wonder if ἀγήρων ἀρετήν (Euripides) and its “sister-collocation,” ἀθάνατον ἀρετήν (Sophocles) have parallels in Old Indic, and, if so, whether it is possible to reconstruct a common association between the “well/best-arranged thing/quality” and the idea of immortality.

5. Greek ἀγήρων ἀρετήν and the “unageing wheel of the *ῥτά-*”

The answer to the abovementioned questions is positive: both of the collocations “immortal *aretē*” and “ageless *aretē*” do have Vedic comparanda. To begin, the collocation “immortal *aretē*” (Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1420) has a partial match in Vedic, where *ῥτά-* is defined as “immortal,” cf.

Rigveda 1.68.4

bhājanta vísve devatvāṃ nāma
ῥtām śápanto amṛtam évaiḥ

All have a share in divinity and in its name, as they serve **immortal truth** in their own ways.

The Vedic *iunctura* *ῥtām ... amṛtam* constitutes a partial match to ἀθανάτον ... ἀρετήν. Vedic *ῥτά-* is etymologically related to *aretē*, although the terms display a slightly different word-formation (cf. §4), and *amṛtam* and *athanaton* are adjectives meaning “immortal.”

Both words are compounds with a privative first member Vedic *a-* and Greek $\alpha-$, derived from Proto-Indo-European $*\eta-$ (non, un-) and a second member meaning “death.”³⁹

As already shown, the image of the wheel occurs in Greek literature in connection with the notion of truth, which is also associated with *aretē* (§5). The same “arranged object” is connected with Vedic *ṛtá-*. Significantly, the association between *ṛtá-* and ‘wheel’ is also connected with the motif “light of the *ṛtá-* (world-order/rightness)

Rigveda 1.164.11ab

dvādaśāraṃ nahī tāj jārāya
vārvartī cakrām pári dyām ṛtāsya

Twelve-spoked, the **wheel of truth** [=the Sun] ever
rolls around heaven—yet not to old age.

This passage belongs to the so-called “Riddle Hymn,” *Rigveda* 1.164, and is difficult to interpret. Since the wheel of the *ṛtá-* is provided with “twelve spokes” and “rolls around in heaven,” Jamison and Brereton propose a possible identification between the “wheel of the *ṛtá-*” and the sun.⁴⁰

The overall metaphor of *Rigveda* 1.164.11, i.e., “wheel of the *ṛtá-*” – “sun” is thus comparable to that of Bacchylides, *Epiničan* 13.175-81. As already noted, the choral lyric text describes *aretē* and

³⁹ Vedic *-mṛta-* is based on the Indo-European root $*mer-$ (to die), which underlies the Greek $\beta\theta\omicron\tau\omicron\varsigma$ (mortal), $\alpha\mu\beta\theta\omicron\tau\omicron\varsigma$ (immortal), and $\alpha\mu\beta\theta\omicron\sigma\iota\alpha$ (ambrosia, i.e. the drink of immortality).

⁴⁰ *The Rigveda. The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, trans. S. Jamison and J. Brereton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 355. Some common points may be identified. In the Old Indic hymns from the *Rigveda*, the sun is commonly described as a wheel, cf. *Rigveda* 1.130.9+ *sūras cakrá-* (wheel of the sun), and an object moving around the sky, cf. *Rigveda* 10.12.7d *pári dyotanīm carataḥ*. One may additionally note that the use of the intensive Vedic form *vārvartī* (to from the root *vart* “to turn,” cf. Proto-Indo-European $*uert-$ “to turn,” Latin *uertō*) in *Rigveda* 1.164.11 adds to the similarities which the *cakrām ... ṛtāsya* and the sun have in common (cf. *Rigveda* 2.11.20c *āvartayat sūriyo ná cakrām* “he rolled [Namuci’s head] like the sun its wheel”).

doxa (fame) as possessing similar prerogatives as the sun/Sun-god. But there is more. The expression Ved. *cakráṃ ... ṛtásya ... nahí táj jārāya*, (the wheel of the *ṛtá-* [which rolls] yet not to old age, *Rigveda* 1.164.11a) can compare with ἀγήρων ἄρετήν. The Vedic sequence *nahí ... jārāya* (not ... to old age [dat. sg.]) exhibits the same lexical material as Greek ἀ-γήρωσ: Greek ἀ- and Vedic *nahí* are derived from the negative particle **ne-/*n-*, and the Vedic *jāra-* may be traced back to the Indo-European **ǵerh₂-* “to become old.” The phraseological matches can be summarized thus:

arranged-thing correctness/excellence	immortal	ageless
ἄρετή	ἄθάνατος (Sophocles)	ἀγήρωσ (Euripides)
<i>ṛtá-</i> <i>cakrá- ṛtásya</i>	<i>amṛta-</i> (<i>Rigveda</i>)	<i>nahí ... jārāya</i> (<i>Rigveda</i>)

It is finally significant that in both Greek and Vedic texts, the “well/best arranged things,” *aretē* and *ṛtá-*, are poetically linked to the notion of immortality. In Vedic, the wheel of the *ṛtá-* is the instrument which measures time—the wheel has “twelve spokes,” (cf. Vedic *dvādaśāra-*, having twelve spokes, *Rigveda* 1.164.11a)—but it also transcends time since it does not grow old. In Greek, the bond between *aretē* and immortality is built by making reference to the notion of visibility and continuous movement, which, thanks to time-transcending poetic words, spreads fame *everywhere*: πασιφανής Ἀρετά ... στρωφᾶται κατὰ γᾶν [τε || καὶ πολυπλάγκτον θ[άλασσαν (Excellence, shining among all men ranges over the land and the sea; Bacchylides 13.176-81, trans. Campbell).

Conclusions

In this paper, I have endeavored to frame the collocation ἀγήρων ἄρετήν (Euripides *TrGF* 999) within the Greek literary tradition and its inherited phraseological background. First, by analyzing the “ageless” collocations of Greek ἀγήρωσ/ἀγήρωσ and ἀγήρωσ, I showed that ‘ageless’ combines with the ‘immortal’ in Greek hexameter poetry. The phraseological distribution of the members of the binomial “immortal and

ageless” shows that the same things are denoted as ageless and immortal, namely: glory, honor(s), and *aretē* (excellence, virtue, glory). In addition, the Greek *aretē* often associates with the notion of visibility, since “excellence” (or “excellent action”) is the ultimate means to achieve glory, which, in turn, thanks to the poetic celebration, defeats the law of time and aging. Indeed, it is the celebration of *aretē* that grants immortal glory to mortals. For this same reason, both *aretē* and *doxa* are connected with the notion of shining and visibility in Bacchylides (*Epinician* 13.175-81), who also relates them to the sun. An analogous metaphor applies to the Vedic wheel of the *ṛtá-* in *Rigveda* 1.164.11, just as Sophocles’s collocation ἄθάνατος ἀρετή may be compared to Vedic *ṛtá- ... amṛta-* (*Rigveda* 1.68.4). The Greek *aretē* and Vedic *ṛtá-* are etymologically related and share significant semantic components associated with the notion of truth and justice. Thus, the collocation ἀγήρων ἀρετήν in Euripides is comparable to the Vedic collocation *cakrá- ṛtásya ... nahí ... járāya* (the wheel of *ṛtá-*, [which rolls] not to old age; *Rigveda* 1.164.11ab). The highlighted parallels not only provide support for the proposed etymology of ‘*aretē*’ (to IE *[H]ar- “to join, arrange”), they also confirm that the match between the Greek phraseology “immortal/ageless *aretē*” and the Vedic “immortal/ageless *ṛtá-*” is not pure coincidence.

The results of my study suggest that Euripides’s fragment 999 ἀγήρων ἀρετήν preserves a very ancient piece of Indo-European phraseological inheritance. Significantly, the match between the Greek and Old Indic phraseological structures may additionally be framed in a broader system of concepts and ideas: the linguistic analysis shows that the notion of *aretē* and its tie with harmony is reflected on a formal level. Moreover, in both diverse but related Indo-European languages *aretē* and *ṛtá-* are parts of an ideological system in which glory, immortality and “best-arranged things” (rightness, correctness, and virtue) are connected together.