“The Death of Sarpedon” from the *Iliad.*
Document put together by Daniel Newsome.

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Excerpt from Book Sixteen of the *Iliad*

Outline: Patroclus begs Achilles to send him back to the war to help the Achaeans; Achilles agrees but sets conditions; Hector breaks Ajax's spear, sets fire to the ship; Achilles sends Patroclus to war with the Myrmidons; Patroclus arms himself; Achilles organizes the Myrmidons in fighting groups; Achilles prays to Zeus; Patroclus goes into battle, driving Trojans back from the ships; Trojans retreat; Sarpedon, son of Zeus, rallies the Lycians (fighting on the Trojan side), fights Patroclus; death of Sarpedon; Apollo cures Glaucus' wound; the fight over Sarpedon's body; Trojans are driven back towards Troy, Hector kills Patroclus.

Last revised Sept. 2009
[Note that the numbers in black square brackets refer to the Greek text and the other numbers to another edition. Ignore them.]

[Blue square brackets are additions I put in from the Robert Fagles translation, which sometimes has a nice dramatic touch.]


[Red square brackets are my additions for clarity.]

L`y-cia [Lí-sia]
Sarpedon was a Lycian prince, son of Zeus. [Helen was the daughter of Zeus (swan) and Leda if you are familiar with that myth.]

Homer writes…

When Sarpedon observed his Lycian companions, who wear no belt around their tunics, being cut down by the hands of Menoetius' son Patroclus, he called out to reprimand his godlike Lycians:

"Shame on you Lycians! Where are you running? Now's the time for you to fight on bravely. I'll stand up to this man, so I'll find out who it is that fights so well, who brings with him so much destruction for the Trojans, breaking the limbs of many fearless soldiers."

Sarpedon finished. He jumped out of his chariot down to the ground
holding his weapons. On the other side, when Patroclus saw him, he leapt from his chariot. Then they rushed at each other, screaming like vultures fighting with hooked talons and curved beaks, screeching on some rocky height.

Looking down on the two men, the son of crooked-minded Cronos [Zeus] pitied them. He spoke to Hera, his sister and his wife:

"Alas—Sarpedon, dearest of all men, is fated now to die, killed by Patroclus, son of Menoetius. My heart's divided, as I think this over. Should I snatch him up, while still alive and place him somewhere else, in his rich land of Lycia, far distant from this wretched fighting, or have him killed, at the hands of Menoetius' son."

Ox-eyed queen Hera then replied to Zeus:

"Dread son of Cronos, how can you say this? The man is mortal, doomed long ago by Fate. Now you desire to rescue him from miserable death. Do as you wish. But we other gods will not all agree with you. And I'll tell you something else—make sure you remember it. If you send Sarpedon home alive, take care some other god does not desire to send his dear son from the killing zone. Around Priam's great city, many men, sons of the immortals, are now fighting. You'll enrage those gods and make them bitter. But if Sarpedon's dear to you, if your heart feels pity for him, then let him be killed in a fierce combat at Patroclus' hands, son of Menoetius. Once his living spirit has abandoned him, send Death and sweet Sleep to carry him away, back to the spacious land of Lycia, where his brother and his kinsmen will bury him with a mound and headstone. That's what appropriate for those who die."

Hera spoke. The father of gods and men agreed. But he shed blood rain down upon the ground, tribute to his dear son Patroclus was about to kill in fertile Troy, far from his native land.

The two approached within range of each other. Patroclus threw and struck renowned Thrasymelus, lord Sarpedon's brave attendant, low in the gut. His limbs gave way. [Fagles: Patroclus suddenly picked off Thrasymelus the famous driver, the aid who flanked Sarpedon—he speared him down the guts and loosed his limbs. But Sarpedon hurled next with a flashing lance and missed his man but he hit the horse Bold Dancer, stabbing his right shoulder and down the stallion went. screaming his life out, shrieking down in the dust as his life breath winged away.] Then Sarpedon charged Patroclus. His bright
spear missed him, but it struck a horse, Pedasus, in its right shoulder. The horse screamed, gasping for life, then fell down in the dust, moaning as the spirit left him. The two other horses reared, [470] their yoke cracked, and their reins got intertwined [550] with the trace horse Pedasus lying in the dust. But famous spearman Automedon cleared the tangle. Pulling out the long sword on his powerful thigh, he dashed in and, without a pause, cut the trace horse loose. [Fagles' translation: --it worked. The team righted, pulled at the reins and again both fighters closed with savage frenzy, dueling now to the death.] The two other horses straightened out, then pulled together in their harness. The two men kept going, taking up again their heart-destroying combat. Once more Sarpedon failed with his bright spear. Its bronze point sailed past Patroclus' left shoulder, missing him. Then Patroclus, in his turn, threw his bronze spear, [480] which did not leave his hand in vain. It struck [560] right between Sarpedon's midriff and his beating heart. [Fagles: He struck him right where the midriff packs the pounding heart…] Sarpedon toppled over, as an oak tree falls, or poplar or tall mountain pine which craftsmen cut with sharpened [Fagles: hew down with whetted axes] axes, to harvest timber for a ship—that's how he lay there stretched out before his chariot and horses, groaning and clawing at the bloody dust. Just as a lion moves into a herd, then kills a bull, a sleek great-hearted steer among the shambling cattle, which bellows as it dies right in the lion's jaws— 570 that's how Sarpedon, leader of the Lycian spearmen [Fagles: shieldsmen], [490] struggled as he died [at Patroclus' hands], calling to his dear companion:

"Glaucus, my friend, you warrior among men, now you must really show yourself a spearman, a true courageous fighter. You must now embrace this evil war, if you're brave enough. First, move around and urge the Lycian leaders to make a stand here by Sarpedon [apparently referring to himself in the 3rd person]. And then, you fight over me in person with your bronze. I'll be a source of misery to you, 580 and shame as well, for all your days to come, if Achaeans strip my armour now [that] I'm down [500] among the fleet of ships. So hold your ground with force. Spur on the army."
[Fagles: Death cut him short. The end closed in around him, swirling down his eyes, choking off his breath.] As he said this, death's final end covered Sarpedon's eyes and nostrils. Then Patroclus set his foot upon Sarpedon's chest, pulled his spear out of the body. The guts came with it. So in the same moment he tugged out the spear point and took Sarpedon's life. [Close by, the] Myrmidons reined in the horses, snorting in their eagerness to bolt, now they'd left their master's chariot.
Sarpedon, slain son of Zeus, carried off the Trojan War battlefield by Sleep [Hypnos] and Death [Thanatos]. *Summa Publications*

From a different vase also painted by Euphronios.