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## Paragraphoi

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This section publishes short essays exploring topics of interest to the profession. Submissions should run to no more than 1200 words. Diverse opinions and spirited exchanges are welcome. Contributions will be evaluated by the editor, who reserves the right to return those deemed unsuitable for the format.

### ΕΚΤΟΡΟΣ ΛΥΤΡΑ

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Dedicated to Mark Edwards  
φιλίας χάριν καὶ παιδείας

The *Iliad* concludes with a mighty adaptation of the theme, the struggle of Akhilleus and Priam for the body of Hektor.

Mark W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, V: 61

Professor Edwards' magnificent description of the end of Homer's *Iliad* is in full agreement with the oldest illustrations of the last scene<sup>1</sup> by artisans of the first quarter of the sixth century B.C.E. who probably worked in Corinth. The material has been collected in three publications: Kunze 145–48 (Beilage 10,2 and 11,1–3; Tafel 19, 45, 59); Friis Johansen 49–51 with fig. 7, 127–38, 246 with fig. 10, 267–68 with fig. 20; and Kossetz-Deismann, *LIMC* 1.1.147–61 s.v. "Akhilleus" (especially 147–49), 1.2.121–27. The popularity of the scene showing Priam's visit to Akhilleus is remarkable. The most striking innovation is the presence of Hermes, whose earlier leavetaking was clearly indicated by Homer (24.468–69; cf. Verg. *A.* 4.276–78 for a similar sudden departure, *mortalis visus medio sermone reliquit*). To be sure, Hermes, prior to his return to Mount Olympus, had had a long conversation with Priam (362–467, later resumed at 683–88; compare 2.1–2), and Akhilleus is well aware that some

<sup>1</sup>Basista offers a full treatment of the Homeric episode. Although his view of the relationship between archaic illustrations of epic myth and the Homeric texts differs from that presented here, Lowenstam's comprehensive discussion of the evidence for the painters' sources is extremely useful.

divinity has been helping Priam. Considering the Homeric convention of introducing gods to mortals in the form of human beings, one may wonder whether Hermes in our pictures is thought to be visible to the others as Hermes. In the Olympia metopes, Athena stands by Herakles but may not be thought to be physically present.

Fortunately, we have a Corinthian painted plate “near the Chimaira Painter” (ca. 580 B.C.E.) showing this scene (figs. 1 and 2; see Kossetz-Deismann 1.1: 148).<sup>2</sup> The similarity of this representation to the examples of metalwork discussed by Kunze (145–48)<sup>3</sup> is so striking that we must ask whether they depend on each other or on a common model. We know from Pausanias’ description of the Kypselos chest (5.17.5–19.10) that such works of art existed at that time. Differences between the metal reliefs and the vase painting are not significant: the position of Hektor’s body; whether the hero is naked or dressed, shaven or bearded; whether Akhilleus’ shield is hanging on the wall or worn on his arm. What attract our attention are the gestures of the members of this three-figure group. The painting seems to be more expressive than the metal reliefs.

The main character is Priam, who stretches out his right hand to touch Akhilleus’ chin. In turn, Akhilleus’ right hand, in a fist, is grasped in Hermes’ left hand, and the double gesture holds the group together.

It is possible to identify the passage that the artists sought to illustrate. Priam in his speech to Akhilleus (24.486–506) has followed Hermes’ advice (465–67) to appeal to Akhilleus in the name of Peleus. Hektor had done the same thing (22.338–43) and was rudely rebuffed (345ff.). Yet the increasing number of references to Akhilleus’ own impending death, first prophesied by Thetis (as described by Akhilleus at 9.410–16), mentioned by Patroklos (16.36–37), by Hektor (22.358–60), and, more concretely, by Akhilleus himself in conversation with Thetis (18.88–126), suggest that a growing awareness of both his own death and its effect on his father Peleus has been used by Homer to motivate Akhilleus’ changed attitude to Priam and his son, Hektor. Priam’s claim that he was taking upon himself what no other mortal had done, “to reach out his hand to the face of the man who had killed his son” (24.506), is vividly depicted on the plate. Homer adds that Akhilleus was so impressed by Priam’s action and speech<sup>4</sup> that he thought of his father, touched Priam’s hand, pushed

<sup>2</sup>It is on display at the Princeton University Art Museum.

<sup>3</sup>Kunze suggests that some of the bronze reliefs he discusses (including a mirror handle) are cast from the same mould.

<sup>4</sup>The shocking simile (480–83) in which Homer compares and contrasts a murderer’s plea for asylum that astonishes those present with the reaction of Akhilleus (the murderer) to the

the old man (who was kneeling) back (508), and afterward made him stand up (515).<sup>5</sup> This is the moment illustrated by the artists.

We can now understand the additional presence of Hermes, the god who has provided divine help to Priam, as Akhilleus suspects (563–67). Appreciation of the father-son relationship of Priam and Hektor, of Peleus and Akhilleus, of Priam and Akhilleus (and even of Priam and Hermes in disguise: see also 24.371) concludes the *Iliad* and recalls its beginning, the mistreatment of another father, Khryses, by Agamemnon. Akhilleus' *mênis* had already come to an end (19.35, 67, 75). The ransoming of Hektor's body demanded by Zeus (24.133–37), agreed to by Akhilleus (139–40) and finally proposed by Priam (501–2) was not a business deal. Akhilleus' mind (*thymos*) is to be warmed (147, 176, 196), and Zeus tells Iris (157, 186) that Akhilleus is neither senseless (*aphrôn*, the opposite of *sôphrôn*) nor sinful (*alitêmôn*). Priam himself prays to Zeus (309) to let him come to Akhilleus as a friend (*philos*) to be pitied (*eleeinos*), and pleads with Akhilleus to think of his father (486) and show pity (503–4). This emphasis on pity is an element underscored by Aristotle in his treatment of tragedy (*Po.* 1453b), although its social value was questioned by Plato (*R.* 10.605c–6e; see also Arist. *Rh.* 1385b–86b and Barnes 267–68 and 277–81).

Homer's concluding theme has been understood by the artists of the Archaic Period. It was Homer who introduced the element of pity (*eleos*) into epic poetry and stressed its impact on the characters of the *Iliad* as well as on its audience. The artists recognized and illustrated this motif.

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sight of the father of his victim (Hektor) has now been discussed by Heiden, who will find confirmation for his interpretation in the countless illustrations showing Akhilleus' astonishment (θάμβος) at the appearance of Priam.

<sup>5</sup>On the non-verbal meanings expressed through these actions, see Lateiner 32–55.



Fig. 1. Greek, Corinthian, Middle Corinthian period, ca. 580 B.C.E. Plate, near the Chimaera Painter. The Ransom of Hektor. Terracotta; diameter 29.0 cm.

Credit: The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, anonymous gift in memory of Isabelle K. Raubitschek and to honor Antony E. Raubitschek.



Fig. 2. Greek, Corinthian, Middle Corinthian period, ca. 580 B.C.E. Plate, near the Chimaera Painter. Underside, opposing bearded sirens.

Credit: The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, anonymous gift in memory of Isabelle K. Raubitschek and to honor Antony E. Raubitschek.