# Priam's Catabasis:
# Traces of the Epic Journey to Hades in
# *Iliad* 24[*]

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SUMMARY: This paper aims to prove that Priam's journey to Achilles' quarters in *Iliad* 24 is depicted at several points as a journey to Hades. The catabatic coloring of the episode has been sometimes acknowledged, but never systematically studied. The assumption that Homer's audience recognized some clear allusions to the tales of heroic descents to Hades offers a number of possibilities for exploration. Not only are several passages shown to have deeper poetic meaning in this light, but Homer's use of traditional themes and his aesthetic and ideological competition with other epic traditions are also illuminated by this case study.

## I. THE POETICS OF CATABASIS IN THE *ILIAD*

HOMERIC SCHOLARS AND READERS NEVER CEASE TO MARVEL AT THE SUBTLETY and depth of the last book of the *Iliad*. Yet an important element of its composition has not been subjected to the close scrutiny it deserves: Homer's use of the poetics of catabasis to depict Priam's journey to the Achaean camp. Some scholars have commented in passing on the most obvious catabatic elements in the episode, while others have alluded to the matter as a secondary point while pursuing other agendas.[1] However, the fact that such a reading of

[1] The catabatic reading emerged within French scholarship, with a marked ritualistic approach. Robert 1950: 202–3 postulated an earlier ritual poem in which Priam rescued his son Hector from death; Whatelet 1988 (the only specific study on the question, though ignored by later scholarship, no less than he himself ignored his predecessors)

Priam's trip has not been systematically explored has resulted in some points being taken for granted or simply missed. Its overall significance, moreover, has been overlooked. None of the many commentaries on *Iliad* 24 considers the subject.[2] At the same time, important finds in the past few decades have substantially increased our knowledge of eschatological versions of heroic descents to Hades. As a result, we are in a better position to consider the significance of some related themes in Priam's trip.[3] This paper aims to gather together the partial findings of previous scholarship on the subject of catabasis in *Iliad* 24, to add some new ones, and to explore their wider implications concerning the Homeric use of traditional themes.

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limits his scope to reflection of rites of passage. From a literary point of view, the suggestion of Whitman 1958: 217–18 about Priam's trip "taking the form of the journey to the dead, motifs from the familiar folk-tale entering one by one" is still the standard point of reference, echoed by Beck 1965: 28–29; Segal 1971: 66; Redfield 1975: 214; Willcock 1976: 269–70; Clark 1979: 136n45; Griffin 1980: 23; Whitehead 1984: 122; Lynn-George 1996: 9–10; van Duzer: 1996: 130, 137; and Louden 2006: 64. Whitman's observations have been expanded by Nagler 1974: 184; Nethercut 1976: 5; Frame 1978: 153–55; Crane 1988: 36–40 (echoed by Cook 1992: 247 and Danek 1998: 51); Stanley 1993: 232–39; Heiden 1998: 7–8; Mackie 1999: 488–91; 2008: 50–59. The particular contributions of each scholar will be specified below.

[2] No mention of the link with catabasis is made in the commentaries to *Iliad* 24 by Peppmüller 1876; Martinazzoli 1948; Deichgräber 1972; MacLeod 1982; and Richardson 1993. Now Brügger et al. 2009: 121 on 328 make a brief reference to some of the bibliography quoted in the previous note. Such omission is partially explained by the fact that no ancient source alludes specifically to the subject. The only hint of an ancient catabatic reading is the suggestion that Book 24 of the *Odyssey* may have tried to mirror the last book of the *Iliad* and that it is therefore significant that it began with a descent to Hades (Beck 1965: 29); cf. n13 below.

[3] The main finds have been new Orphic gold leaves (most of them dated from between the fifth and third centuries B.C.E.) with hexameters depicting moments in the descent of the soul to Hades (cf. Graf and Johnston 2007; Bernabé and Jiménez 2008; and Riedweg 2011 for reconstructions of the catabasis of the soul). Research on the sources of Verg. *Aen.* 6 has advanced recently (cf. Clark 2001; Bremmer 2009) with the aid of new papyri containing poetic catabaseis, such as *P.Bonon.* 4 (*Orphicorum Fragmenta* [henceforth *OF*] 717 Bernabé) and *P.Oxy.* 2622 (= Pind. fr. 346 Maehl. = *OF* 716), on which survives Pindar's version of Heracles' catabasis. This later evidence preserves, albeit with important modifications, formulae and motifs which derive from the ancient poetic theme of epic journeys to Hades. The inspiration in catabatic tales of Plato's eschatological myths and Aristophanes' *Frogs* has been recently studied by Edmonds 2004. On catabasis in general, cf. Ganschinietz 1919 and Clark 1979.

Death looms large over the entire *Iliad*, but its presence in the last books is overwhelming. Patroclus's appearance from Hades in Book 23 suggests that the realm of the dead will be the place where the poem's unresolved issues will come to the fore and ultimately find resolution. Book-ended by Patroclus's and Hector's funerals, Priam's journey has many mythical and ritual overtones which figure it as a descent to Hades. As we shall see, his departure from Troy is depicted as a funerary procession; Hermes' guidance recalls the journey through the netherworld; and Priam's interview with Achilles resembles in some points an encounter with the Lord of the Dead.

The journey to the land of the dead was a traditional epic theme in Near Eastern poetic traditions, with either a god as main character (e.g., Innana, Ishtar) or a hero (e.g., Gilgamesh). The same was also true in Greece: gods (e.g., Dionysus, Demeter in one tradition) and heroes (e.g., Heracles, Theseus and Peirithous, Orpheus) descend to Hades for different reasons.[4] The audience of the *Iliad* was surely acquainted with some such myths, some of whose generic markers were no doubt recognized as Homer sang of Priam's journey.[5] Allusions to other poetic traditions in many Homeric passages are well established, be they explicit or implicit, purposeful parallelisms, or marked divergences.[6] Nor is *Iliad* 24 an isolated case of playing with the themes of catabasis. To mention just the most obvious instance, the first *Nekyia* in *Odyssey* 11 conflates a necromancy scene with a visit to the Underworld.[7] The

[4] The main sources and bibliography for these myths are given by Ganschinietz 1919 and Clark 1979 (esp. 66n77 for the tale of Demeter's descent to Hades in search of her daughter; cf. *Orphic Hymn* 41 and Hyg. *Fab.* 251). Other mythical dangerous journeys present many elements parallel to catabasis. M. Davies 1988: 278–80 shows that Heracles' fetching Cerberus in Hades and Geryon's cattle at the ends of the earth follow identical patterns of a *Jenseitsfahrt*. Cf. Vermeule 1979: 138–41 for Perseus's journey to kill Medusa.

[5] By "Homer" I understand here the poet of *Iliad* 24 as we have it. The catabic reading does not prejudge whether the last book of the poem is by the same poet as the rest of the *Iliad* (and/or the *Odyssey*) or not. The structural connections between Book 24 and other central books of the *Iliad* (1 and 9) are clear (see now Louden 2006: 62–79 for those with Book 3), whether that means a unitarian composition of the whole or a later closure of a pre-existent poem. The same is true of the parallels between *Iliad* 24 and Books 7 or 10 in the *Odyssey*, or with the *Doloneia* in *Iliad* 10, but whether one should explain them through influence or shared narrative patterns is not a matter which affects the catabic reading and is therefore beyond the scope of this paper.

[6] Cf. Nagy 1979; Burgess 2009. Whether composition and performance was mainly oral or written in each phase of the Homeric tradition is not essential to this paper, since "intertextual" allusion is compatible with both.

[7] Cf. Clark 1979: 37–78. Also, Odysseus's arrival on Scheria was said by Wilamowitz and others to mirror an underworldly journey (Cook 1992; Burgess 1999: 180–81). As

degree of fluidity in the diverse poetic traditions, and the extent to which they had crystallized in fixed poems in archaic times, are difficult to determine. However, we may speculate as to the kinds of descents Homer and his public may have had in mind. There is one explicit reference in the *Iliad* to a journey to Hades, when Athena, lamenting that Thetis has persuaded Zeus to honor Achilles with the defeat of the Trojans, says (8.366–69):

> If in the wiliness of my heart I had had thoughts like this
> when Heracles was sent down to Hades of the Gates to hale back
> from the Kingdom of the Dark the hound of the grisly Hades,
> never would he have got clear of the steep-dripping Stygian water.

It is clear from this passage that the main elements of Heracles' catabasis were known to the poet and the audience of the *Iliad*, and it is therefore probable that Heracles' catabasis was the main target of the allusions in *Iliad* 24. Granted, since there are several versions of Heracles' journey to Hades, we cannot know whether Homer (and his public) had a specific poem in mind or rather a multiform mythical tradition.[8] However, as we shall see, the elements of catabasis in *Iliad* 24 are consistent with what later authors (e.g., Apollodorus) tell us about Heracles, drawing on earlier sources. Moreover, Richard Martin has convincingly argued that the *Iliad* draws at several points an implicit comparison between Heracles and the other great Panhellenic hero, Achilles, to the advantage of the latter.[9] The descent of Heracles was, correspondingly, the most likely poetic model to come to the mind of Homer's audience when they noticed the catabatic references at the end of the poem.

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for the *Iliad*, Mackie 1999 has persuasively suggested that Book 21 plays with the poetics of catabasis (cf. n21 below).

[8] At *Il.* 5.395–402 Heracles hurts Hades with an arrow in Pylos "amongst the dead men," which could reflect a violent entrance into the Underworld, a version different from that found in 8.366–69 (cf. Edmonds 2004: 147–48). Eur. *HF* 605–12 echoes the divergence between two versions of Heracles' entrance into Hades, by initiation and peaceful arrangement and by force. There was a sixth-century Eleusinian version of Heracles' descent, which is probably echoed in Apollodorus's account and Verg. *Aen.* 6 (cf. Robertson 1980 and n3 above). Some mythical details may have been invented *ad hoc* by Homer (cf. Willcock 1976: 272; *contra* Nagy 1996: 113–46).

[9] Martin 1989: 229–32. He refers to *Il.* 9.328–29, 5.638–42, 5.392–404, and 2.594–600. Mackie 1999: 490–91 notes the parallels with Heracles and says that "one might reasonably have expected to find in *Iliad* 24 a reference to some kind of Heraclean descent ... The elemental signs of the journey to Hades ... help to indicate the extraordinary bravery of Priam." As we shall see at the end of this paper, the parallels not only demonstrate Priam's bravery, but also sketch an alternative model to the heroism of Heracles.

Besides, other similar heroic descents, like those of Theseus or Orpheus, may also have been known to Homer, or may have arisen at a later date, following earlier models.[10] In any case, later catabatic poems, like the descent of the soul inscribed on the Orphic gold leaves, come from the same poetic tradition and, notwithstanding their religious innovations, share fundamental formal and structural elements with earlier versions of heroic descents.[11]

Nevertheless, some parallel elements in *Iliad* 24 and other catabatic tales may simply be due to the fact that shared narrative patterns necessarily have elements in common. If neo-analysis provides useful tools for detecting intertextuality in Homer, the oral-formulaic approach is fundamental to the explication of certain parallel scenes and formulae. Both Priam's trip and the tales of catabasis belong to a much broader epic theme, the heroic journey to an unknown land: detailed instructions, dangerous obstacles, spectacular arrivals are all typical motifs which generate similar formulae and scenes. They can be seen in many types of epic journeys, including the heroic descents to Hades, Priam's trip, or Odysseus's wanderings (e.g., his arrival in Scheria in *Odyssey* 6 or at Circe's house in *Odyssey* 10). Motifs like supplication, ransom, or a furtive trip are also widely encountered in these kinds of tales.[12] The journey to Hades can be seen as but the farthest and most dangerous voyage.[13] It is not always easy, therefore, to specify the exact point

[10] Theseus's and Peirithous's descents are mentioned in Hades in *Od*. 11.631, but this line has been suspected of being a later Athenian addition. According to Martin 2001, the *Nekyia* competes with the poetic tradition of Orpheus, the only other hero who could have narrated a catabasis in the first person as Homer's Odysseus does. In the *Nekyia*, Heracles' catabasis is also explicitly alluded to (11.618–26). For Crane 1988: 197–98, it is the model for Odysseus's underworldly adventure.

[11] On the relation of the gold leaves to previous catabatic traditions, see Edmonds 2004: 29–110. Cf. Burgess 2009: 108: "undoubtedly, mystery cults were very innovative in their ideas, and particularly novel is the concept of a possible happy afterlife for contemporary mortals, as opposed to the heroes of a distant past. The essential idea of an Underworld paradise found in these relatively late Greek religious concepts, though, probably builds upon earlier heroic traditions." Cf. the instances in n80 below.

[12] Arend 1933 describes the most frequent typical Homeric scenes and treats *Iliad* 24 in his analysis of "arrival" (28–52) and "chariot trip" (86–91) scenes. Crane 1988: 36–40 underlines the similarities of Priam's trip with *Odyssey* 10 and Currie 2006: 11–15 with *Odyssey* 6. Cf. n4 above.

[13] The most dangerous and furthest journey is often the last one, and therefore the last episode in a heroic biography. Thus, descending to Hades was the last of Heracles' labors, and Aeneas caps his travels around the Mediterranean with a descent, after which he is ready to found his new city. Likewise, in the Orphic tradition the soul was liberated from the "cycle of painful grief" of reincarnations and went into Hades for her final journey

at which an epic journey turns into a *Jenseitsfahrt*. Yet certain details in *Iliad* 24 that are particularly associated with catabasis make it evident that Homer is consciously referring to that poetic tradition. The few points at which the catabic overtones are patent have the effect of imparting the same coloring to the other more typical elements of the epic journey. In other words, most of these scenes or formulae would not be considered "catabic" separately, but the cumulative effect is strikingly consistent in marking the scene as a whole as a catabasis. On the other hand, we cannot rule out the possibility that the Homeric scenes influenced later poems.[14] Yet the risk of labeling as "catabic" some passage that the audience would not have recognized as such can be prevented by carefully analyzing the meaning and function of each element in *Iliad* 24. Some of them may be considered specific of a descent to Hades, while others are just compatible with that mold; in the case of the latter category, one may legitimately wonder whether they were also present in the early tales of heroic catabasis.

Having identified the literary challenges posed by the subject, a word on ritual is also necessary. If dangerous journeys frequently have the character of an initiatiory rite of passage, this is even more the case with the trip to land of the dead.[15] Death is the passage *par excellence*, and it is reasonable, therefore, for any poem depicting a real or figured trip to Hades to contain elements typical of initiation (e.g., landmarks separating one side from the other). The same is true of rites that deal with (or prepare for) death.[16] Both catabic poems and funerary rituals take their initiatory elements from their own connection with death, and they need not be derivative of each other. Nor do they need to maintain a fixed correspondence, since literary tradition

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(*OF* 488.5, 341–44). Only at the end of their deeds have heroes attained the spiritual state necessary to undertake a voyage to the realm of the dead, after which they will have reached the highest degree of heroism. The *Deuteronekyia*, and perhaps Priam's journey, may respond to the tradition of ending an epic poem with a catabic tale. Cf. Hölscher 1988: 120–21.

   [14] E.g., Beck 1965 suggests that *Iliad* 24 provides direct inspiration for *Od.* 10.275–317 (Odysseus's journey to Circe's house), while Deichgräber 1972: 114–17 and Crane 1988: 36–40 explain these parallels as resulting from common formulaic tradition (as does Currie 2006: 11–15 for those with *Odyssey* 6). For the tradition of Hermes *psychopompos* as derived partly from *Iliad* 24, cf. n22. Cf. the useful considerations of Burgess 2009: 59–71 on motif-transference.

   [15] Cf. Mackie 1996, who sees Telemachus's trip in Books 1, 4, and 15 of the *Odyssey* as an initiatory journey.

   [16] Van Gennep dedicates Chapter 8 of his classic *Les Rites de passage* (1909) to funeral rites. Cf n50 below on Plutarch's equation of mystic initiation and death-experience.

can survive independently and differently from ritual tradition. Attempts to establish firm genealogical relations between poems and rites (or between myth and ritual) have often led to frustratingly arbitrary solutions. We have no way of establishing whether there were initiatory or funeral rites attached to poems of descent to the Underworld by the time *Iliad* 24 was composed, or how such an attachment may have worked. It is thus difficult to say if the rhapsodes and their audiences would have perceived in the catabatic elements of Homer's poem any echoes of particular or local rituals.[17] However, the experience of death conveyed in rituals seems consistent with that of poems that sing of the confrontation with death. Funerals in themselves are to a large extent ritualized versions of the journey to the afterlife.[18] The blending of poems of catabasis and ritual in classical times (as witnessed, for instance, by the gold leaves) shows that their main patterns and elements were not contradictory, but largely complementary, precisely because of their sharing an initiatory pattern. Therefore, although my main element for comparison with Priam's journey will be the poetic traditions of descent to Hades, the ritual dimension of catabasis must not be forgotten when considering the associations that Homer's poem may have awakened in his audience.[19]

## 2. GOING TO HADES

The projection of Priam's journey through a catabatic lens is clearly defined at both the beginning and the end of the episode. Priam figuratively enters the realm of the dead in *Il.* 24.349–53:

οἳ δ᾽ ἐπεὶ οὖν μέγα σῆμα παρὲξ Ἴλοιο ἔλασσαν
στῆσαν ἄρ᾽ ἡμιόνους τε καὶ ἵππους ὄφρα πίοιεν
ἐν ποταμῷ· δὴ γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ κνέφας ἤλυθε γαῖαν.
τὸν δ᾽ ἐξ ἀγχιμόλοιο ἰδὼν ἐφράσσατο κῆρυξ
Ἑρμείαν.

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[17] Robert 1950 thinks that in an ancient ritual tale Hector would have returned to life. Heiden 1998: 7 suggests that the poet and audience of *Iliad* 24 would already have known the Eleusinian mysteries. The ritual evidence I shall use (the gold leaves, Plut. fr. 158) will be taken as expressive of the experience of death which may have been present in rituals concerned with death and poetic accounts, not as links to a particular ritual contemporary to Homer.

[18] Clarke 1999: 180–90 (180: "if Hades lies directly below the world of the living, a journey into the soil will bring one to the land of the dead"); Redfield 1975: 179–86; Garland 1985: 13–37. Cf. n38 below.

[19] On ritual and poetics, cf. the considerations and bibliography of Bierl 2007.

Now when the two had driven past the great tomb of Ilus
they stayed their mules and horses to water them in the river,
for by this time darkness had descended on the land; and the herald
made out Hermes, who was coming toward them at a short distance.

The exit is depicted in exactly inverse terms in 24.692–95:

ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δὴ πόρον ἷξον ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο
Ξάνθου δινήεντος, ὃν ἀθάνατος τέκετο Ζεύς,
Ἑρμείας μὲν ἔπειτ᾽ ἀπέβη πρὸς μακρὸν Ὄλυμπον,
Ἠὼς δὲ κροκόπεπλος ἐκίδνατο πᾶσαν ἐπ᾽ αἶαν.

But when they came to the crossing-place of the fair-running river,
of whirling Xanthus, a stream whose father was Zeus the immortal,
there Hermes left them and went away to the height of Olympus
and dawn, she of the yellow robe, scattered over all earth.

The river, the night, and Hermes' company are the three elements which mark
the start of the journey and, inversely, its end. A river as a frontier, darkness,
and the company of Hermes are the most recognizable features of a descent
to the Underworld. Ilus's tomb is a permanent landmark in the *Iliad*, but the
mention of a tomb just before crossing the boundary wholly agrees with the
conceit of entering the realm of the dead.[20] The river seems to function as
a liminal zone between the realm of the living and that of the dead in other
passages in the *Iliad*, a role we see reprised in this scene.[21] Hermes' attributes
as escort (πομπός: 153, 182) are repeatedly stressed: his sandals, the staff
with which he makes the guardians sleep (343–44, 445–46), and his epithet

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[20] Whitman 1958: 217; Nethercut 1976: 9; Griffin 1980: 23; Mackie 1999: 489. Ilus's
tomb appears in *Il.* 10.415, 11.166, 11.372. Located in the middle of the plain, it marks the
boundary between the territories dominated by the Trojans and the Achaeans, respectively.
In this context, it is the frontier between the realm of the living and of the dead.

[21] In 24.350 the river is left unnamed, and 24.693, which specifies that the river is
Xanthus, is thought to be a later addition, absent in some manuscripts and papyri (cf.
Richardson 1993 ad loc.). The anonymity would reinforce the effect of the stream of water
which isolates the realm of the dead (cf. Patroclus's description in *Il.* 23.73: "they will not
let me cross the river"). However, the later insertion of 693 is not totally misguided: Mackie
1999 suggests the association of Xanthus with infernal rivers in *Iliad* 21, where he sees
features of catabasis in Achilles' fight against the river in his "descent to the battlefield,"
as if it were part of Achilles' symbolic death after Patroclus's. In 14.433–39 Hector is in a
liminal state between life and death (cf. 15.252), and the Trojans carrying him stop at the
crossing place of the river to splash water on him. Lines 24.693–94 are identical precisely
to 21.1–2 and 14.433–34. Note also that drinking water when entering the Underworld
is a prominent motif in many gold leaves (*OF* 474–84).

διάκτορος, which most probably links him to the dead (339, 378, 389, 410, 432, 445).[22] The setting in the darkness of the night permits the poet to draw a pointed contrast with the subsequent dawn, which is thus figured as a kind of "return to life and light."[23] Granted, Hermes is a *pompos* and boundary-crosser in contexts other than death; the river is present in many other scenes of the poem; and night is the obvious moment to make a dangerous furtive expedition (as in the *Doloneia*). Accordingly, none of these elements in isolation would be sufficient to create an association with catabasis. But their appearance together at beginning and end of the journey casts the whole passage in the catabatic mold. Let us now examine the intermediate stages of Priam's journey.

The way to Hades traditionally is full of dangers (e.g., Cerberus), which the hero must overcome.[24] As Athena says, in connection with Heracles at 8.366–69, divine help is indispensable if the hero is to prevail in the face of these obstacles. In Heracles' descent, Athena and Hermes were his helpers.[25]

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[22] Stanley 1993: 237. The etymology of διάκτορος is disputed, but two of the three meanings proposed link Hermes to the world of the dead, either as "guide" or through a connection with the word κτέρες (νέκροι according to Hesychius s.v.). In later times it appears as an epithet firmly linked to Hermes *psychopompos*: cf. *LfrgE* s.v. (the alternative meaning "wealth-giver" does not seem adequate in the context of *Iliad* 24). Contrary to what many assume, Hermes' role as escort of the descending hero does not necessarily imply that he was also guide of the souls of the dead in the archaic period. Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 103–6 argues that his role of *psychopompos* is a relatively late derivation from his role of helper and boundary-crosser in archaic poetry, especially the heroic catabaseis and Homer. *Od.* 24.1–204 was athetized by Aristarchus precisely because Hermes is not a *psychopompos* elsewhere in Homer. Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.10.13–20, linking his role of *psychopompos* with his guidance of Priam.

[23] Such is Frame's formulation (based on etymological and literary comparison) of the essence of a heroic *nostos*, to which Priam's journey corresponds perfectly (1978: 153–55). Cf. n76 below. Robert 1950: 204 takes Cassandra, who sees Priam arriving with Hector on the horizon (24.697–701), as the transposition of a life-goddess. Mackie 1999: 490 (cf. 2008: 58) imagines the effect as if they came up from the earth. The literary contrast between night and dawn corresponds to that between "immortal night" (ἀμβροσίη νύξ) and "mortals" (βροτοί) in 24.363–64 (Stanley 1993: 237).

[24] A major difference from the usual catabasis tales is Priam's chariot, an addition necessitated by Priam's advanced age and the need to cart Hector's ransom. Yet it is not inconsistent with the image of an otherworldly trip, e.g., that of Parmenides or the voyage of the soul in Plato's *Phaedrus*. On underworldly monsters, cf. Mackie 2008: 21–59, and n47 below.

[25] *Od.* 11.618–26. Athena and Hermes take up the roles of instructor and of escort in many journey type-scenes in the *Odyssey* (e.g., Scheria and Circe). Hermes' guidance means that there is no need for topographic instructions for the journey, contrary to the

In *Iliad* 24, Iris takes the place of the anti-Trojan Athena: she gives Priam detailed instructions for the trip (171–87), and Hermes escorts him and eases his journey. The dangers which must be overcome are carefully outlined: the locks on the gates (446, 457, 566–67), the risk of Priam's discovery by the Achaeans (364–65, 686–88), and the anonymous gatekeepers who guard the camp (444, 566, 681).[26] Divine help, swift movement, and sleep as the solutions to these impediments are wholly consistent with the strategies required for a descent to Hades.[27]

Moreover, the house of Achilles is clearly constructed on the model of the house of Hades. This helps explain why Achilles' tent or hut (448: κλισίη) in a soldier's camp is nevertheless described as a large dwelling-place, with roof, courtyard, and bolted gates (448–56). These gates, we are told, only Achilles can open by himself (456), which recalls the description of Hades as "fastener of the gate" (πυλάρτης, precisely in the context of Heracles' catabasis: 8.367).[28] This transformation of a warrior's hut into a megaron complex is best explained by the association with the House of the King of the Underworld.[29] The dreamlike atmosphere where sudden reversals of reality are possible is

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detailed directions of Nausicaa to Odysseus in Scheria (6.255–315) or an authoritative voice (Mnemosyne's? Orpheus's?) to the deceased in the gold leaves (cf. Martin 2007 for a comparison of both scenes).

[26] These guardians recall the equally anonymous *phylakes* of the gold leaves (*OF* 474–77), who guard the house of the King of the Underworld (*OF* 474.13). At *Il.* 24.681 they are called "sacred gatekeepers" (ἱεροὺς πυλαωρούς). Although this exceptional instance of the adjective *hieros* can be explained as having a secular meaning (cf. Clarke 1995), its religious connotation adds to the catabatic tone of their presence as obstacles in Priam's way.

[27] The Sibyl makes Cerberus sleep in Verg. *Aen.* 6.417–25. Norden (1957 ad loc.) sees Vergil as imitating Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.139–61 (Medea putting to sleep the dragon who guards the fleece), but Mackie 1999: 489n13 reasonably argues that the passage is directly modeled on *Il.* 24.443–46—suggestions that are, in fact, not incompatible. The incident could also be considered characteristic of catabatic literature (cf. Edmonds 2004 for the obstacle-solution narrative pattern of catabasis).

[28] The epithet occurs also in *Il.* 13.415 (in another ironic remark about Hades). Cf. Crane 1988: 50n56, Mackie 1999: 490, and Stanley 1993: 393n15. A significant parallel is Parmenides B1.11–17 DK, where the bolted gates of Day and Night can be opened only by Dike, who must be persuaded through skill. Parmenides' proem is also molded in the catabatic tradition (cf. Burkert 1969).

[29] Cf. Stanley 1993: 239 for the detailed analysis of Achilles' palace in association with the House of Hades (preluded by the image of the house of a rich man in 24.317–19). Arend 1933: 41–42 compares the scene with Odysseus' arrival in Scheria: if Achilles' hut

typical of Hades, where consistency with earthly categories is not required and often conspicuously ignored.[30]

A possible verbal indicator in the directions given by Zeus to Hermes in 24.338 helps to confirm this interpretation of Achilles' house as being equated with that of Hades: the expression Πηλεΐωναδ᾿ ἱκέσθαι ("come before the son of Peleus") is the only case in pre-Hellenistic Greek literature where the directive suffix -δε is added to a personal name.[31] But it is common in poetry, on the other hand, to say Ἀϊδόσδε, meaning "to the House of Hades" (perhaps with an implicit local name like δόμον). Such anomalous usage of the suffix with "the son of Peleus" could only have fostered an association with its one normal usage with a personal name, for Hades.

This verbal play reinforces Achilles' depiction in *Iliad* 24 as belonging already to the realm of the dead. As the audience is constantly reminded, Achilles is doomed to die very soon—Thetis weeps for him in 24.85 as if he were already dead, and death is beside him in 24.132. But his association with death is also active: as a human Hades who puts men under the power of death, Achilles is directly responsible for the death of many of Priam's sons and the main agent of destruction of his city—the hands kissed by Priam are *androphonoi* (479). Above all, he is the killer of Hector, the subject of ransom, whose corpse he has dragged with his chariot to the Achaean camp.[32] The former happiness of Priam, who was blessed (ὄλβιος) and reigned over the island of Makar, is contrasted with the destruction brought by Achilles sitting (ἧμαι) in Troy (542–44).[33] Furthermore, his sitting in a throne against

turns into a large dwelling-place, Alcinous's palace is given the features of godly palaces, such as golden gates (*Od.* 7.88) and a bronze threshold (*Od.* 7.84). The aggrandizement is similar in its proportions. Cf. Burgess 1999: 181 on walls as an underworldly image in several heroic trips.

[30] Redfield 1975: 214 and Mackie 2008: 56 underline the dreamlike, otherworldly quality of Priam's journey. For the mythical relation among night, sleep, dreams, and death, cf. Hes. *Theog.* 212.

[31] Cf. Brügger et al. 2009: 124 ad loc. for the discussions around this form, usually taken as a hyper-Homerism.

[32] *Il.* 24.204–5, 500, 520–21, 542. Cf. *Il.* 1.1–3, which programmatically link Achilles to Hades. Cf. Griffin 1980: 123 and Whitehead 1984. For Hades' chariot, cf. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 16–20. Homer stresses at the end of the poem that Achilless has unique control over which Trojans may live or die (24.653–58, 669–70).

[33] This (24.543) is the only appearance in the *Iliad* of the adjective ὄλβιος, and the variant in 24.544 μακάρων for Μάκαρος is well attested (the island of Lesbos would be the "abode of the blessed" instead of "the abode of Makar"). These expressions may carry a certain irony, since they are normally used to convey eschatological happiness (e. g.,

the wall (515, 597: ἥζετο) and his retiring from the scene with young Briseis (676) are details which also collaborate to draw his portrait as a sort of "King of the Dead."[34] This is wholly consistent with his heroic personality. Achilles' name was popularly etymologized as "the one who brings ἄχος (grief or fear) to the people (λάϝος)." Modern scholars have rehabilitated this etymology and shown its deep connection with his role in the *Iliad*.[35] Thus Achilles' constant association with death throughout the whole poem—in probable contrast to other myths in which he attained a happy afterlife—culminates in his figuratively playing Hades' role at the end.[36]

All these correspondences with the main stages of a catabatic journey give a subtler and deeper sense to lines 24.327–28, where Priam's departure is explicitly described in terms of death: "his kinsmen were following, lamenting greatly as if he were going to his death" (φίλοι δ' ἅμα πάντες ἕποντο / πολλ' ὀλοφυρόμενοι ὡς εἰ θάνατόνδε κιόντα). The expression θάνατόνδε, again with the directive suffix, is only used for the central moments of Patroclus's and Hector's deaths (16.693, 22.297), the only deaths described as a durative process in the whole poem (since Homer exceptionally relates their last words

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on a gold leaf from Thurii, *OF* 488.9: ὄλβιε καὶ μακάριστε). Achilles' effect on Priam is the opposite, in accordance with Homer's view that there is no blessed afterlife after one goes to Hades.

[34] These details are pointed out by Stanley 1993: 239 (and 393n20, with the detailed discussion of the identification of *thronos* and *klismos*). He then suggests a further identification of Achilles with Minos, as a judge of the dead (which would explain the simile of 24.480–83). This link with Minos, however, seems secondary to the main association of Achilles with Hades. It is notable that after Achilles retires with Briseis, the poet continues: "now the rest of gods and men who were lords of chariots slept nightlong" (24.677–78). Though the mention of "except Hermes" two lines later will clear up the ambiguity (half a line later than in a similar passage at 2.1–2), the first impression for the audience of 677–78 after hearing "the rest of gods and men" is that Achilles has gone to sleep as a god, and Priam as a mortal (cf. 24.363).

[35] Cf. Nagy 1979: 69–83, and 185 for the link between Achilles' fatherland, Phthia, and the root *phthi-* ("to die"). Holland 1993 (answered by Nagy 2004: 131–37) revises the proposed solutions and proposes that ἄχος in Achilles' name preserves an ancient meaning "fear," which is even more appropriate for his figurative role as Hades.

[36] This portrait adumbrates Achilles' later role as *anax* among the dead—a miserable honor—in the Underworld scene of the *Nekyia* (*Od*. 11.491; cf. Whitman 1958: 218). Cf. n80 below for a more optimistic meaning of "reigning among the dead." Hommel 1980 collects the evidence (not from *Iliad* 24) to argue that Achilles was formerly a death-god. Although he has been refuted (see Hooker 1988, who shows that Achilles received cult as a hero, not as a deity), he collects useful material confirming the literary and cultic association of Achilles with death. On Achilles' happier afterlife in epic traditions outside Homer, see Burgess 2009.

of agony). The line suggests a descending funerary procession,[37] immediately before the entrance into the realm of the dead which follows the final ritual libation (24.305–19). Hecabe's despair when she first hears of Priam's departure is consistent with this foreshadowing of death: her lament is described with the verb used for the funerary cry, κωκύω (24.200).

Given this general funerary atmosphere, the role of Priam, too, appears in a new light. When Iris flies to Troy, she finds "outcry and mourning, the sons sitting around their father inside the courtyard made their clothes sodden with tears, and among them the old man sat veiled, enveloped into his mantle" (160–63: ἷξεν δ᾽ ἐς Πριάμοιο, κίχεν δ᾽ ἐνοπήν τε γόον τε. / παῖδες μὲν πατέρ᾽ ἀμφὶ καθήμενοι ἔνδοθεν αὐλῆς / δάκρυσιν εἵματ᾽ ἔφυρον, ὃ δ᾽ ἐν μέσσοισι γεραιὸς / ἐντυπὰς ἐν χλαίνῃ κεκαλυμμένος). This seems like a scene of *prothesis*, the lying in state of the dead. In the depictions of geometric vases (9th–8th c. B.C.E.), scenes of *prothesis* are followed by scenes of *ekphora*, the carrying out of the corpse to the grave. At the symbolic level of the poem, the procession of his kinsmen out of the city to the entrance of the other realm, whose boundary is marked by Ilus's tomb, offers a striking parallelism to these depictions of a funerary process.[38] Priam is playing Hector's role in the symbolic funeral in order to gain back his body and give him a real funeral. He needs to die (or "go to Hades") symbolically to give his son a proper death.

In this light, Priam's words in 24.246 merit further attention: "But, for myself, before my eyes look (πρίν … ἰδεῖν) upon this city as it is destroyed and its people are slaughtered, my wish is to go sooner down to the house of Hades (βαίην δόμον Ἄϊδος εἴσω)." This rhetorical wish suggests a new and tragically ironic interpretation. For in a way, this is precisely what Priam is going to do: he will go to Hades (metaphorically) before his eyes see his city ravaged (actually). In *Iliad* 22, in which Priam's supplication, Achilles' death, and the fall of Troy were announced (58–76, 415–28), Priam had already said (425–26): "the sharp grief for Hector will carry me down to Hades (κατοίσεται Ἄϊδος εἴσω)."[39] Again, Book 24 gives his words a deeper significance.

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[37] The procession is framed by two expressions of descent, "down from the city" (24.327: κατὰ ἄστυ; 329: κατέβαν). Cf. Mackie 1999: 488n11. Again, this is the normal movement from the city into the plain (*Il.* 3.252), but it is wholly consistent with the image of catabasis. A Chian variant for 24.332 has καταβάντε instead of προφάνεντε (this seems to have been influenced by the previous passages). Cf. Vegetti 1998 for a similar case at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*.

[38] Cf. Kurtz and Boardman 1971: 58–61. Cf. n18 above for the equation of a funeral and a journey to Hades.

[39] Cf. below p. 54 with n52 on 24.224–27. Other expressions in Book 22—see 22.389 and 22.482—could also be seen as preparing the image of Achilles taking Hector to Hades;

Homer has thus imbued a banal expression with dense poetic signification. To "go to Hades" was a basic metaphor deeply rooted in Greek poetic language which meant "to die," as it appears already in *Il.* 1.4 ("hurled to Hades many souls of heroes").[40] It was also used to describe very dangerous or long journeys.[41] If found in isolation, these sentences about Priam going to Hades might be taken as standard expressions to emphasize the dangers of a journey which might presumably end tragically, as when Eumaeus greets Telemachus when he comes back "as if he had escaped death" (*Od.* 16.21: ὡς ἐκ θανάτοιο φυγόντα). But at the end of the *Iliad*, by making these expressions precede unmistakably catabatic elements, Homer achieves tragic irony and renders otherwise standard formulae pregnant with a specific contextual meaning.[42]

## 3. FEELING DEATH

The feelings which the prospect of the journey to the Achaean camp awakens in Priam are very similar to those provoked by the confrontation of death. Hermes *pompos* is in charge of assuaging Priam's fear of death (24.152: μηδέ τι οἱ θάνατος μελέτω φρεσί μηδέ τι τάρβος, "let death not be a thought in his heart, let him have no fear"), and Iris tells Priam with those very words not to be afraid of dying, for Hermes will guide him and Achilles will not kill him (181–87). This encouragement is indeed necessary. From the very beginning, Priam feels an uncanny fear of confronting unknown dangers: when Iris approaches him, "the shivers took hold of his body" (170: τρόμος ἔλαβε γυῖα).

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cf. Redfield 1975: 214: "Priam declares that he is ready to die with his son." Cf. Tsagalis 2004: 42–44, 152–54 on death-wish as a typical feature of epic funerary lamentation.

[40] Poetic metaphors are built over conceptual ones (Lakoff and Turner 1985): "to go to Hades" is based on the basic image of death as a journey. In the gold leaf from Hipponion (*OF* 474.1–2) the expression θανεῖσθαι εἰς Ἀΐδαο δόμους makes "to die" a verb of movement (cf. Bernabé and Jiménez 2008: 19). Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1981 and Clarke 1999, esp. 231–82 for the blending in Homer of mythical and natural conceptions of the departure of the *psychē* from the body.

[41] Artem. *Oneirocrit.* 2.55: "the ancients used to say that who was absent for a long time was doing a trip to Hades ... and we use to say that whoever has been saved against any hope has gone up from Hades." Compare the similar English expression, "I have been through Hell."

[42] There is a similar irony in *Od.* 10.175, where Odysseus happily announces to his men that they will "not yet go to the House of Hades," when, in fact, they will have to go very soon, not metaphorically, but actually. Other Homeric passages, like *Il.* 13.414–16, also play with the possibilities of poetic and conceptual metaphors for death, which later becomes almost an ironic topos (*Od.* 10.560, Ar. *Ran.* 120–35).

And she assuages him with the usual Homeric formula with which gods encourage heroes who fear death: "take heart, Priam son of Dardanus, do not be frightened" (171: θάρσει, Δαρδανίδη Πρίαμε, φρεσί, μηδέ τι τάρβει). The epic θάρσει appears later as an exhortation in the face of death in many epitaphs, and we find it also as a mystic formula encouraging the soul to confront the dangers of the Underworld. Its presence in catabatic contexts is, therefore, all but expected.[43] Against ταρβεῖν, θαρσεῖν. Such divine encouragement carries all the power of an epiphanic utterance, and the speech-act has instant effects: Priam feels immediately that his *thymos* (198, 288) is strong enough to go to the Achaean camp despite Hecabe's resistance.

Nonetheless, despite his new courage and his knowledge that the gods are protecting him, Priam continues to feel fear throughout his journey (358–60) until its end (571, 689: ἔδεισεν). This fear is the instinctive and justified fear that any hero descending into Hades ought to feel. Comparison with Dolon's attitude in Book 10 (probably composed later than, and possibly influenced by, Book 24), is enlightening: unlike Priam, he does perish in his expedition. But also unlike Priam, Dolon is only frightened when he becomes aware that two Achaeans are following him (10.357). There is no hint of a supernatural fear in Dolon's nocturnal trip, in which there is no catabatic undertone. On the contrary, Priam's instinctive fear, as the desperation of those who escort him to the gates of Troy, like Hecabe, is very similar to the irrational ap-

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[43] In Homer, θάρσει ("take heart"), when addressed to a hero, is an exhortation to confidence before a lethal danger: e.g., *Il.* 4.184 (Menelaus reassuring Agamemnon that his injury is not fatal); 10.383 (Odysseus falsely assuring Dolon that his life will be respected); 15.254 (Apollo reviving Hector, who thinks he is "going to Hades"). Divine protection is usually implied, e.g., *Od.* 4.825, 8.197, 13.362. It is also a characteristic utterance in epiphanies: *Hom. Hymn* 5.193, 7.55; Mosch. *Eur.* 154; cf. Dickie 2004 for *tharrein* as an important element in sacred regulations which invite one to enter a *temenos*. In epitaphs θάρσει is often used both to affirm and deny a belief in immortality, a meaning derived from its use as an encouragement in the face of mortality (Simon 1936; Lattimore 1962: 231, 253; Park 2000: 47–62). Cf. Joly 1955 for its eschatological ring in mystic rituals (e.g., Firm. Mat. *Err. prof. rel.* 22.1). The epic utterance implying a confrontation of death is eminently appropriate for a catabasis, especially in mystic contexts: cf. Ar. *Ran.* 302, *Pax* 725; Lucian, *Dearum Iudicium* 3.2, *Menippus* 22 (probably parodying its use in mystic *legomena*, Bonnechere 2003: 206–8). If traditional assumptions about Vergil's being inspired by a Herculean catabasis are correct (Clark 2009, Bremmer 2009 with bibliography), *Aen.* 6.261 (*nunc animis opus, Aenea, nunc pectore firmo*) should echo a θάρσει in the original poem, probably uttered by Heracles' helpers, Athena or Hermes (cf. *Od.* 11.626). Cf. [Pl.] *Axi.* 371e: "the followers of Dionysus and Heracles, in their descent to Hades, were first initiated here and obtained courage for the journey there (τὸ θάρσος τῆς ἐκεῖσε πορείας) from the Eleusinian goddess."

prehension of Odysseus and his crew when they are told by Circe that they must go to the land of the dead (*Od.* 10.496–97, 567–70). They are afraid in spite of all her guarantees, as Priam and his people are afraid in spite of the manifest signs of divine protection. It is not only the threat that the Achaeans may discover him (364, 686), but the very purpose of the journey, the meeting with Achilles, which terrifies Priam. After all, the possibility that Achilles may kill him seems plausible not only to Priam (226) and Hecabe (204–5), but also to Achilles himself (569–70, 585–86). Coming back alive depends purely on Achilles' pity, and even when Zeus grants that the hero will spare one who comes as a suppliant (158, 187), we should recall that Achilles has recently been seen by all in the act of killing the suppliant Lycaon (21.99–113) and mocking Hector's final supplication (22.338–66).[44] The poetic suspense inherent in all descents to Hades is highly appropriate for depicting Priam's uncertain encounter with his most dreadful enemy.

Not only is Priam afraid of being killed or apprehended by Achilles or by the other Achaeans when arriving at the camp, he is also, albeit more vaguely, afraid of what he may find on the journey itself. When his herald tells him that someone (who turns out to be Hermes) is approaching, his panicked reaction is described with the following words (358–60): "the old man's mind was confused (νόος χύτο), he was badly frightened (δείδιε), and the hairs stood up all over his gnarled body and he stood dumbfounded."[45] Priam suddenly loses his reasoning, whence his panic. The herald is also afraid that the man he sees coming would "tear them to pieces" (355: διαρραίσεσθαι). This is more than fear of a human enemy like that experienced by Dolon. Only someone expecting Cerberus or some similar monster could foresee that strange possibility as the most likely thing that might happen.[46] The common concern

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[44] The addressee's freedom to decide whether or not to accept the supplication is essential to the institution, whose outcome is thus ultimately uncertain (Gould 1973: 80–82; Giordano 1999: 36–37; Naiden 2006: 105–70). In the best attested catabatic supplication, in the gold leaves from Thurii, even the soul of the initiate is not certain that Persephone will be benevolent, as shown by the subjunctive (*OF* 489–90.6–7: "now I come as suppliant (ἱκέτις ἥκω) to reverend Persephone, that she, benevolent, may send me (ὥς με πρόφρων πέμψηι) to the seats of the blessed." Rose 1969 describes the parallel case of the threatening possibility of an unfriendly reception of Odysseus by the Phaeacians. Cf. n72 below.

[45] Crane 1988: 38: "nowhere during all the killing in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is there any description of terror comparable to this." Nethercut 1976: 5 suggests that ταφών (dumbfounded) purposefully suggests τάφος (tomb). But here the search for catabatic resonances surely goes too far.

[46] Heracles' catabasis probably included a terrifying apparition of a monster, echoed in the Empousa of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (278–305; cf. Brown 1991: 49) and Vergil's Underworld (Clark 2001 and 2009). Cf. Odysseus's fear of meeting the terrible Gorgon's head in the

that dogs will eat one's corpse has turned here more vague and dreadful.[47] The catabatic atmosphere of the trip explains these apparently irrational fears. The description of the terrible things of Hades (τὰ ἐν Ἅϊδου δεινά) and of the terror that they cause in the descending heroes was a favorite theme of catabatic poems.[48] As the gods know, the terror that Priam is presumed to feel in 152 and 181 along with the thoughts of death (μηδέ τι οἱ θάνατος μελέτω φρεσὶ μηδέ τι τάρβος) is the kind of fear that those frightful imaginations awaken.

Despite all his fear, Priam succeeds in doing what "no other mortal on the earth has yet done" (505: οἳ οὔ πώ τις ἐπιχθόνιος βροτὸς ἄλλος; cf. 565: οὐ γάρ κε τλαίη βροτὸς ἐλθέμεν, "no mortal has dared to come"). Such claims of a unique experience for mortals are adequate descriptions of the conquest of death. A gold leaf greets the soul of the defunct saying: "you have undergone the experience that you never underwent before."[49] A wondrous accomplishment after so much fear is precisely the experience of mystic death-experience. Plutarch offers a famous description of a mystic rite that simulates death, after which the initiate is prepared for a happy afterlife among the blessed. He describes the experience with these words: "Wandering astray in the beginning, tiresome walking in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then immediately before the end all the terrible things, panic and shivering, and sweat, and amazement (τὰ δεινὰ πάντα, φρίκη καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἱδρὼς καὶ θάμβος). And then some wonderful (θαυμάσιον) light appears ....."[50] It is wholly consistent with this pattern that after the fearful trip Homer

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*Nekyia* (*Od.* 11.633–34). Polygnotus's painting of Hades in Delphi included a dark *daimōn*, Eurynomos, who would eat the flesh of the corpses and just leave the bones (Paus. 10.28.7). Perhaps we should see a trace of such a threat in Achilles' rage against Priam, the most dangerous moment of the whole episode, when the hero is compared to a lion (24.572).

[47] Dogs are prominent in Priam's visions of death (e.g., *Il.* 22.42–66). On their association with death, not only as corpse-eaters (*Il.* 1.3), but also as denizens of Hades, see Vermeule 1979: 106–12. One of the most ancient vases depicting Priam's supplication (*LIMC* s.v. Achilleus 650, cf. Lowenstam 2008: 54–55) shows a dog under the table, ambiguously either guarding or threatening Hector's body.

[48] The terrors of Hades are a traditional notion, turned by Orphic poetry into punishments for the uninitiated and/or evildoers. The Derveni commentator in the fourth century B.C.E. complains that people do not believe in them *(P.Derveni*, col. 5). Cf. Garland 1985: 17–20, 74–76. Cf. Aeneas's reaction to the appearance of monsters in the darkness on his way to Hades (Verg. *Aen.* 6.290): *subita trepidus formidine*.

[49] *OF* 487.3: χαῖρε παθὼν τὸ πάθημα τὸ δ'οὔπω πρόσθ' ἐπεπόνθεις. There is a probable parody of such utterances in catabasis in Ar. *Ran.* 488: "no other man would have dared."

[50] Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach, which links τελετή (initiation) and τελευτή (death). Cf. Martín Hernández 2005.

should insist, with emphatic repetition, on awe as the main feeling that Priam's appearance awakens in those who *see* him (482–84: θάμβος ... θάμβησεν ... θάμβησαν), and also that Priam and Achilles, when finally reconciled, should admire each other (629–31: θαύμαζ' ... θαύμαζεν). After having been so nervous and hurried, Priam enjoys a tranquility that even allows him to eat and sleep peacefully, so much so, in fact, that Hermes must remind him that he is still on dangerous ground (683–89). This succession of fear, awe, and calm matches the experience that in mystic rites was thought to be that of death. It is not too speculative to think that such experiences may have been reflected in earlier tales of encounter with death— that is, of journeys to Hades.[51]

## 4. SCENES OF CATABASIS

Once these clear links between Priam's journey and catabatic traditions have been recognized, we can spot further elements in *Iliad* 24 that may also have been present in contemporary poems of descent to Hades. After all, the most typical reason for going to the Underworld was to bring someone back: Heracles goes down to fetch Cerberus, and on the way rescues Theseus, who had himself gone down with Peirithous to bring up Persephone. In other tales of catabasis, preserved in later versions, Heracles goes down to bring Alcestis back, Orpheus descends for Eurydice, and Dionysus for Semele. Priam's ransoming of Hector's corpse from Achilles so as to prevent its decomposition and give the hero a proper funeral bears some resemblance to those tales. As we have seen, he undertakes symbolically the journey that his son has already undertaken in reality. In fact, his words at 24.224–27 seem to play with the theme (fully exploited in the tale of Alcestis) of the hero who goes down to Hades, not wanting to live without the beloved: "if it is my destiny to die (εἰ δέ μοι αἶσα / τεθνάμεναι) there by the ships of the bronze-armored Achaeans, then I wish that Achilles may slay (κατακτείνειεν) me at once, holding my own son in my arms, once I have my fill of mourning him."[52]

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[51] Segal 1990: 414 commenting on the Pelinna leaves (*OF* 485–86): "these markers of urgency contrast with the calmer mood of the last line, the assurance of the bliss that awaits the addressee. This movement from intensity to reassurance constitutes the dynamics or the implicit drama of the represented event." The dactylic lines at the beginning and end of the tablet may be taken as an indication that the poetic dialogue in Hades followed the same dynamics.

[52] For the typical death-wish of epic mourning, cf. n39 above. Orpheus could well have spoken in a similar way when going down to get his wife; cf. Ov. *Met.* 10.38–39: *quodsi fata negant veniam pro coniuge, certum est / nolle redire mihi: leto gaudete duo- rum.* The *pathos* of these lines sounds Hellenistic, but the parallel of Priam suggests

The ransoms of catabaseis were typically obtained by permission of the king of Hades. This interview with the Lord of the Dead, the climactic moment of any catabasis tale, was generally envisaged as a supplication: Heracles, Orpheus, the soul of the gold leaves—they all supplicate Hades and Persephone.[53] This is also the central moment of Priam's visit to the Achaean camp. Unique though Priam's supplication is, the elements of uncertainty and the importance of saying the right words to awaken the pity of the addressee must have been common to the supplication scenes in other poems of catabasis and heroic journeys. Achilles' response to Priam's supplication likewise seems to exploit the similarity with a catabasis scene, when he says that he cannot bring Hector back to life, as if reminding him of the different nature of his ransom: "you will never take him back to life whatever you do" (551: οὐδέ μιν ἀνστήσεις, πρὶν καὶ κακὸν ἄλλο πάθησθα).[54] Priam's subsequent words could also be seen as an allusion to the Underworld journey from which the hero comes back safe and sound by the grace of Hades: "since you have permitted me / to go on living myself and continue to look on the sunlight" (557–58: ἐπεί με πρῶτον ἔασας / αὐτόν τε ζώειν καὶ ὁρᾶν φάος ἠελίοιο).[55]

Before the climactic encounter, preliminary meetings and dialogues with some secondary figure were typical of the journeys to the Underworld, as well as of the more general type of the "visit scene" (e. g., Odysseus encounters Nausicaa and Athena before Arete). The "Orphic" gold leaves, for instance,

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that it may be more ancient. Eurydice's tale is probably of a late date (Bremmer 1991), but the narrative model of a hero descending to rescue a loved one may have existed much earlier. A probable parody of such expressions may be found in Ar. *Ran.* 579, 586.

[53] Cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.12, where Heracles asks Hades for permission to take Cerberus after obeying a request from Persephone. For Orpheus's supplication, cf. Verg. *G.* 4.487 (*Proserpina dederat*), Ov. *Met.* 10.31 (*oro*). The gold leaves from Thurii present a supplication of the soul to Persephone (*OF* 488–90) similar to that of Odysseus to Arete (*Od.* 7.146–52). The characteristic vocabulary of the ransom (λύσις, ἄποινα; cf. *Il.* 1.20) is also present in some leaves (*OF* 485, 486, 493), referring to the soul's redemption.

[54] The catabatic reading would support the interpretation of the scholiast to *Il.* 24.551 (Arn/A; cf. Richardson 1993 ad loc.) against the alternative of "soon you must go through yet another sorrow" (Lattimore). Reminding Priam of the certain fall of Troy has little to do with the context. For the meaning of ἀνίστημι as "resurrect," cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1361, Soph. *El.* 139. Homer may be playing with that meaning in *Il.* 15.287 and even 24.515 (cf. n64 below).

[55] The second verse is generally suspected (Richardson 1993 ad loc.) to be a late addition for the sake of giving an object to the verb ἐάω, which had ceased to be used intransitively. Even if this is the case, one may yet think that the interpolator's mind was caught up in the catabatic atmosphere of the whole episode. On the association of life with light in catabasis context, cf. n23 above.

record instructions given to the soul by an authoritative voice (Mnemosyne, or perhaps Orpheus himself), like Iris in the *Iliad* or Athena in the *Odyssey*. This catabasis of the soul, which turns the tradition of the heroic descent into a soteriological guide for the afterlife, also contains some dialogues with the anonymous guardians of the Underworld.[56] In *Iliad* 24, Priam first meets Hermes disguised as Achilles' servant and has with him a preparatory conversation in which he learns how to arrive, how to talk, and what to ask. In this meeting, there are some questions and answers which do not necessarily belong to the typical "nocturnal encounters," as their differences from the dialogic scenes in the *Doloneia* show.[57] Instead, the conversation between Priam and Hermes seems to have an oblique relation with the dialogues in Hades as witnessed by the leaves: the questions about identity, "Who are you? Who are your parents?" (24.387: τίς δὲ σύ ἐσσι, φέριστε, τέων δ' ἔξεσσι τοκήων); the reason for being there (24.363, 381); and the request to be told "the whole truth" (407: πᾶσαν ἀληθείην κατάλεξον), a typically Odyssean request which in the *Iliad* appears only in this scene (cf. 380: ἀτρέκεως κατάλεξον, "tell me exactly"), are the same as those posed by the guardians to the soul in the leaves (*OF* 478–84: τίς δ' ἐσσι; πῶ δ' ἐσσι, "Who are you? Where are you from?"; *OF* 474–75: οἳ δέ σε εἰρήσονται ... ὅττι δὴ ἐξερέεις Ἅιδος σκότος ὀρφνήεντος: "they will ask you ... why you are seeking out the gloomy shadow of Hades"; *OF* 477: οἳ δέ σε εἰρήσονται ὅ τι χρέος εἰσαφικάνεις / τοῖς δὲ σὺ εὖ μάλα πᾶσαν ἀληθείην κατάλεξαι: "they will ask you for what need you have come; and you should tell them very well the whole truth").[58] Similar, too, is the answer in which, as heroic codes demand, the addressee recounts his ancestry and fatherland.[59] Such similarities, in deep narrative structure and not only in occasional formulae, must be attributed to a common hexametric tradition, rather than to direct dependence of the leaves from Homer. These are all typical formulae of scenes of arrival to a strange land, and they therefore

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[56] Cf. Reece 1993: 12–13 on this traditional motif of preliminary dialogue in arrival scenes, as well as Martin 2007, who compares the instructions of the leaves with those received by Odysseus upon his arrival at Scheria.

[57] Danek 1988: 199–203 compares both scenes in detail, underlining the differences.

[58] Cf. the expression "the whole truth" from the lips of a traveler who recounts his journey in *Od.* 7.297, 16.226, 17.108, 17.122, 21.212. The *alētheiē* mentioned in the leaf of Pharsalos (*OF* 477) stands in close relation to the fountains of Mnemosyne, from which the soul must drink, and the fountain of Oblivion (Lethe), which it must avoid.

[59] While Hermes invents his lineage and fatherland (24.397), in the leaves they are given in cosmic terms (*OF* 474–84: "I am son of earth and starry Heaven"). Cf. Herrero de Jáuregui 2011 for a detailed analysis of the dialogues in the gold leaves, in comparison with other Homeric dialogues.

appear often in the *Odyssey*. They do not belong specifically to catabasis, but are highly compatible with it.

Unlike in a typical "arrival scene," however, here it is not the guardian who asks, but the visitor Priam; and instead of the truth he is told a lie about his addressee's identity, lineage, and fatherland. Precisely the fact that Hermes is the interlocutor seems to suggest that Homer is playfully reversing the usual role of the typical characters in Underworld dialogues: Hermes the god acknowledges inferiority and admiration before a mortal (371). This reversal of roles easily lends itself to irony, as when Hermes says that as *pompos* he could escort him even to Argos (437), or when the god, sent to assuage, must now remind Priam that danger remains (683).[60] Something similar is going on in the inverted simile in Priam's supplication to Achilles, in which a murderer supplicates a rich man (480–83)—the very opposite of Priam's own situation. Paul Wathelet has studied such inversions of categories and roles as features of initiation; they are most appropriate in journeys to the Underworld, where the realm of the dead seems a negative inversion of the world of the living.[61]

As much as in the dialogue, echoes of Underworld encounters can be spotted in the behavior of the characters. Hermes welcomes Priam and assuages his fear by means of an unequivocal gesture: "but the kindly god himself coming closer took the old man's hand" (360–61: χεῖρα γέροντος ἑλών).[62] Not only does Hermes reassure Priam in this way, but Achilles too "took the aged king by the right hand at the wrist, so that his heart might have no fear" (24.671–72: ἐπὶ καρπῷ χεῖρα γέροντος / ἔλλαβε δεξιτερήν, μή πως δείσει' ἐνὶ θυμῷ). Already in 508 and 515, Achilles had touched Priam's hand as a gesture of accepting supplication, and now, his mind at peace, he definitively seals his agreement with the handclasp. The handclasp is, of course, a reassuring or welcoming gesture in many different situations, but it seems to be a particularly appropriate element in the context of going to Hades, as is shown by the extremely popular theme of *dexiōsis* engraved in tomb-steles.[63] It was

[60] Lynn-George 1996: 10.

[61] Wathelet 1988: 329–30, 334–35. He points out some other salient elements of the episode which are typical of initiation: disguising, Hermes' ephebic status, Priam's testing of Hermes' loyalty, inversion of roles (Hermes-Priam, Priam-Achilles). On inversions in this episode, cf. also Redfield 1975: 284–85; Stanley 1993: 239; and Heiden 1998: 7–8.

[62] Hermes' handclasp in *Od.* 10.280 is another instance either of *Iliad* 24 inspiring the Odyssean episode (with Beck 1965) or both drawing from a traditional gesture (with Deichgräber 1972: 114–17). Cf. other parallels in Wathelet 1988: 330n38.

[63] See G. Davies 1985: 628–30 on the variety of meanings that handclasp may have in funerary steles (family union, welcome to the Underworld, departing).

probably a typical gesture of the tales of catabasis, where this reassurance is most adequate because it means nothing less than salvation. Heracles saves Theseus by giving him his hand, and Parmenides' goddess takes his right hand into hers as a sign of her goodwill (χεῖρα δὲ χειρὶ / δεξιτερὴν ἕλεν).[64]

Yet another of Priam's gestures may also carry a catabatic resonance: his offer of a cup to Hermes (429–31).[65] He does so at the moment when he asks Hermes to escort him, and, as if by mental association, after having said that Hector used to give the gods their due offerings. Priam's instinctive gesture may echo the handing over of some physical object to the guardian of the Underworld in exchange for safe passage (in later poems we find the coin to Charon, Aeneas's golden bough, perhaps the gold leaves themselves).[66] But as other gods do in the Homeric poems (e.g., *Od.* 1.315), Hermes politely refuses the human offer: Homer plays freely with different typical scenes and refuses to follow any narrative (or ritual) model slavishly.

All these scenes are centered on a single man. The poet insists that while Priam travels, other mortals sleep (363, 677). Twice it is said that Priam must go "alone" (οἶον: 148, 177). Such insistence is remarkable, since, as the following line says, Priam is not entirely alone but accompanied by the herald Idaeus, who later helps him carry Hector's body. The herald is merely instrumental, so much so that, in contrast to the normal practice when heroes travel with

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[64] Heracles: Apoll. 2.5.124 (in the text he fails to reach Peirithous's hand, while some vase paintings emphasize their handclasp; cf. G. Davies 1985: 628 and *LIMC* s.v. Peirithous 71); Parmenides: B1.22 DK (cf. Burkert 1969 for its connection with catabasis). Iconography in vases also emphasizes the gesture, often signifying rescue from death (cf. G. Davies 1985: 628–29, 635–36): an Apulian vase found in a tomb now in Toledo, OH shows Dionysus grasping Hades' hand. Sundell Torjussen 2006: 94–95 refers the scene to Dionysus's rescue of Semele: the handclasp would represent his agreement with Hades, not far from the Iliadic scene. Johnston and McNiven 1996: 30, linking the vase to the Orphic leaves, suppose that "the handclasp is Hades' physical sign of acknowledgement." At *Il.* 24.515, χειρὸς ἀνίστη may be playing with the meaning of the verb as "resurrect" (cf. n54).

[65] Reece 1993: 36 notes that a gift is typical of the arrival scenes (*Od.* 4.613–19, 21.31–35). However, Priam's offer specifically aims at persuading Hermes to guide him. The cup had been given by the Thracians to Priam and seems to be the most valuable object of the ransom (24.234–35): Priam gives it to Hermes because it is the easiest object to hand over.

[66] The payment to Charon (Ar. *Ran.* 140, 270) is a clear instance of blending ritual actions with catabasis narrative myth: cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 347–61; Edmonds 2004: 127; on the golden bough (*Aen.* 6.406: *ramum hunc*), cf. Clark 1979: 185–204. A possible reading of the Hipponion leaf (*OF* 474.2) says "this is the gift (τόδε δῶρον) of Mnemosyne." The deictic pronoun is characteristic of token-giving, and is also present in Priam's offering (429: τόδε δέξαι, "accept this").

servants, he does not even drive the wagon. It is Priam who does (323, 709), until Hermes takes charge (441). Even so, the emphasis on Priam's solitude seems slightly inconsistent with the presence of the herald.[67] As was the case with Achilles' house, the oddity may be due to the parallelism with heroic descents to Hades. On the one hand, Homeric protocol calls for a king to be attended by a herald; on the other, a descent to Hades is not a trip for the many, nor can it be undertaken by a group, rather, it is a solitary journey appropriate only for a select few.[68] Priam's acting alone also serves to underline that the king is repeating on the symbolic level the real "going to Hades" of his son. As one scholar has pointed out, "by visiting Achilles alone, Priam does exactly what he begged Hector not to do; the old men in Troy try in vain to change his mind just as he failed to change his son's mind. In this respect, father and son have become one."[69]

Finally, some other possible catabatic resonances in *Iliad* 24 are worth enumerating here. To begin with the most general, the *consolatio* by Achilles (517–51) and the paradigmatic myth of Niobe (602–17) both seem appropriate subjects for a conversation in Hades. Subsequent descents, like that of Aeneas, contain long disquisitions about life and death illustrated with figures of famous dead, and they may be following an older pattern. Niobe is the paradigmatic woman eternally suffering the punishment of her hybris that one would not be surprised to find in catalogues like those of the *Nekyia*.[70] But the

[67] This inconsistency must have caused the appearance of the variant οἶος (in nominative, referring to the herald) in 148 and 177. The herald Idaeus is also present in Priam's trip to the battlefield in Book 3 (cf. Louden 2006: 66–67). Later Athenian vases depict a whole procession of Trojans bringing a splendid ransom to Achilles, replacing the Homeric catabatic atmosphere with a more spectacular scene, as Aeschylus also did in the lost *Phrygians* (cf. Miller 1995: 450–51 and *LIMC* s.v. Achilleus).

[68] "Alone in the night" is a typical formula of nocturnal trips of one or two people (cf. in the *Doloneia*, *Il.* 10.40, 82, 141). It is also appropriate to catabasis, as is shown in Vergil's famous hypallage in *Aen.* 6.268–69: *ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram / perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna.* The group arrival of the suitors' souls in *Od.* 24.1–14 is exceptional as a transition to an Underworld dialogue. In the first *Nekyia*, only Odysseus undertakes a dialogue with the dead, while his men are silent. In the gold leaves, the deceased is always alone and welcomed into the company of the blessed.

[69] Tsagalis 2004: 153, referring to 22.39, 22.416. Cf. Redfield 1975: 157. Mackie 2008: 58 underlines the differences between Hector and Priam facing Achilles, although "the one leads to the other."

[70] *Od.* 11.225–330. The Orphic catabasis of the Bologna Papyrus (*OF* 717.1–10) begins with the punishment of female sinners (cf. also Verg. *Aen.* 6.440–76). Niobe's location with ἔνθα (24.617) in an imprecise mythical land corresponds to the location of other characters in the Underworld in catabatic poetry (cf. *Od.* 11.568, 24.14). Van Duzer 1996:

parallels with catabasis are clearer in the details that create an atmosphere of permanent danger, in which a slight mistake may spoil everything. Achilles tells Priam to sit (522) and Priam refuses (553), which makes Achilles unexpectedly angry. Priam's haste jeopardizes the whole enterprise. Yet his initial refusal to sit is perhaps not ungrounded. Hades' offering a seat was lethal to Theseus and Peirithous, who were trapped forever. Similarly, Persephone ate a pomegranate and was thus linked permanently to Hades. Careless acceptance of hospitality in Hades could be very dangerous.[71] In the Homeric scene, however, Priam finally sits and shares food with Achilles, which consolidates their mutual respect. It looks as if a different poetic path, that of the unfriendly reception of Priam and a harsher treatment of Hector's body, had been a temptation for Achilles (and for Homer), and he had decided to act kindly, in accordance with a more civilized choice.[72] The same delicate game is perceptible in the care Achilles takes to avoid Priam's seeing Hector's face, so that their recent bond is not broken if the old man loses his mind (582–84; 600–1: "tomorrow you will see him"). This could easily be associated with the traditional taboos of the heroic catabasis which, if breached, will ruin the whole enterprise. The interdiction on Orpheus's looking at Eurydice is an obvious example.[73] Here,

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137n82 suggests (unconvincingly) that Niobe is a "ritual substitute for Priam, who dies in Priam's place in order that Priam may live."

[71] *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 371–73, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.24. Nagler 1974: 184n24 points out a parallel from the Akkadian Descent of Innana, where the "sexless creatures" refuse everything but the goddess they want. Odysseus refuses to eat Circe's food until he "sees with his own eyes" (ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδω) that his companions are freed (*Od.* 10. 385–87, perhaps drawing again from *Iliad* 24? Cf. Beck 1965: 11–12). The diffidence implied in the expression offends Achilles, as if Priam were doubting his good will (cf. next note).

[72] Lowenstam 2008: 57–63 shows that Athenian vases depicted a threatening Achilles with a sacrificial knife, eager to accomplish the cruel fantasy he articulates at *Il.* 22.346–54, namely, to butcher Hector's body and eat it raw, giving the rest to dogs and rejecting any ransom. This imagined cannibalistic meal (cf. the parallel with Circe in the previous note) would be the opposite of the reconciliation banquet between the two (cf. Segal 1974; Redfield 1975: 183–86; Mackie 2008: 56). Similarly, the terrible destiny of being devoured in the afterlife (cf. n47 above) or conversely unable to eat (e.g., Tantalus) is the opposite of the symposium of the blessed (Pl. *Resp.* 363e, Empedocles B115 DK).

[73] Cf. Foley 1994: 50, referring to *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 243–45: "Metaneira's spying on Demeter's secret ritual with Demophoon should probably be interpreted in relation to the seeing of prohibited sights in related myths such as those of Orpheus and Eurydice, Amor and Psyche." Cf. Bremmer 2004 on the taboo of looking back in other myths, such as the biblical story of Lot's wife. These prohibitions need not be only of sight: cf. the prohibition in some gold leaves of drinking from a specific fountain (*OF* 474–78: "Do not even get close to that fountain!"). The catabatic motifs of handclasp and looking straight

the suspense ends with the agreement, sealed with a handclasp, that a truce be made to allow for Hector's funeral. This businesslike management of practical details, once the *pathos* of the ransom is accomplished, resembles the contract which determines how long Persephone will stay each year in Hades and among the living, or Hades' agreement with Heracles to lend him Cerberus if he uses no weapons and promises to bring the hound back.[74]

These parallels do not have the unmistakable catabatic ring of other elements described above (although it is possible that such an association was indicated by means of verbal affinities with contemporary catabatic poems, which are now undetectable for us). They may simply come from scenes of ransoming, supplication, or other dangerous journeys full of obstacles for the epic hero. But none of them is inconsistent with the tales of descent to Hades. The coincidences serve as suggestive pointers concerning the formulae and scenes which may have been used in the lost epic poems telling heroic journeys to the Underworld.

## 5. A NEW HEROISM

In *Iliad* 24, the poem of war *par excellence* concludes with the formulation of a radically new kind of heroic virtue in comparison to that on display in the previous books. Priam, a weak, old man, will end up doing what "no mortal on the earth has yet done": not killing a terrible enemy, but kissing "the hands that slew his son" (505–6). The love for his dead son has given him "a heart of iron."[75] Apart from the indispensable divine help, in order to succeed in his enterprise he needs courage (θυμός: 198), endurance (τλα–: 505, 519), and intelligence (νόος: 354, 358). Given the possible etymological relation of *noos* to *nostos*, Homer's insistence on *noos* as a main requirement for Priam's journey (four times in 24.354–77) is appropriate to the catabatic atmosphere of the episode, in which he must "save himself from a lethal danger."[76] These

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into the face to certify a rescue from the dead are reworked in Eur. *Alc.* 1115–18; cf. G. Davies 1985: 10–12 for the iconography of Alcestis's handclasp.

[74] *Hom. Hymn Dem*. 441–48, Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.12.

[75] This expression is uttered by both Hecabe (205) and Achilles (521), but with very different meaning. For the former it means senseless temerity, for the latter extreme courage. This variation is also representative of the inner change of Priam. Cf. Mackie 2008: 52.

[76] The etymological link was established by Frame 1978: 153–55 (cf. *LfrgE* s.v.). Bonifazi 2009 argues that the core meaning of *nostos* is "survive from a lethal danger," whence the associations with light and homecoming. Cassandra's cry when she sees Priam carrying Hector's body seems to link the actual return of the hero's corpse with previous "safe homecomings from the battle" (705: ζώοντι μάχης ἐκνοστήσαντι).

qualities, in fact, bear an obvious resemblance to the kind of heroism that Odysseus must display in his own *nostos*.[77] Thus, at the end of the *Iliad* Homer moves the concept of heroic *aretē* much further beyond the strict martial terms to which it was restricted in the rest of the poem.

It is not strange that this shift occurs in a catabasis-like episode.[78] In the journey to the Underworld, courage to defeat fear had to be complemented by talent, the skill to know how to act, and special tactfulness and knowledge to tell the dangerous Underworld powers what they wanted to hear. In order to return from Hades it was not enough to be a good warrior (perhaps, as in the case of Orpheus, not even necessary). A catabasis draws an uncrossable line between those few heroes who are courageous, ingenious, and pious enough to accomplish it successfully and those who, no matter how strong in battle, are not fit for it (e.g., Peirithous, whose temerity was doomed to fail). It is the moment where the boundary between usual and special heroes is defined, where the hero becomes different. As we have seen, the journey to Hades has a definite initiatory character, so the catabatic image is wholly consistent with the inner change of the characters of *Iliad* 24. After their meeting, Priam and Achilles are different from the way they were before; they are more able to accept the deaths of Hector and Patroclus and to feel communion with the enemy and with the dead; they are capable of mutual understanding. The long, silent, admiring look that they give each other while they finally eat together (629–32) sums up how both have moved on from the mutual hate provoked by war to a deeper comprehension of human nature. Priam can "admire the godly aspect" of his long-hated enemy Achilles, who for his part is now prepared to "admire the looks and words" of the old man. After looking at the world from the point of view of death, figuratively from Hades, their vision of men and life has changed, and that of Homer's audience has as well. A more human and compassionate type of heroic virtue inaugurates a new paradigm.

On the other hand, appealing to the theme of catabasis gave Homer the possibility to transmit through contrast a very different message from the victory over death that most catabatic poems, especially those of Heracles, carry as the (implicit or explicit) conclusion of the successful journey to Hades.

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[77] The last book of the *Iliad* has been considered the most "Odyssean" of the poem; cf. Richardson 1993: 21–24; Lynn-George 1996.

[78] Cf. Mackie 2008: 59: "the remarkable thing about the *Iliad* is not that the challenges of confronting monsters and of descending to the Underworld have disappeared from the heroic landscape ... The truly remarkable thing is that the *Iliad* incorporates myths of monsters and Underworld journeys into the patterns of action of the poem itself. Narratives of monster-quests and Underworld journeys are given a human appearance."

Poetic competition with other traditions, made explicit by formal parallels, implies deep ideological divergences: Priam's new heroism not only differs from the purely martial virtue, but it also entails a categorical refusal of any possibility of overcoming death. The tragic greatness of Achilles and Priam relies precisely on their conscious confrontation of death as the unavoidable bond that unites former enemies in the solidarity of a common grief. While Heracles' catabasis ended with a return to life, the *Iliad* ends with a funeral for Hector. The heroic acceptance of death is also different from failed quests for immortality or a longer life, like those of Gilgamesh or Orpheus. Priam knows from the beginning that Hector will not come back to life and he makes his trip in order to pay his corpse due honor. The implicit comparison drawn in Priam's journey with other catabasis poems reinforces the idea that the only hope for a hero after death is immortal glory, visualized in solemn mourning, funeral rites, and a visible tomb. The purposeful contrast Homer draws with other catabatic traditions proclaims his own superiority over other poets, and of his heroes over other heroes.

Thus *Iliad* 24 becomes the first preserved instance of a frequent literary phenomenon, the use of the setting of catabasis to make metapoetic reflections on the poet's own genre. In Hades, previous and contemporary heroes and poets can be classified and judged from a timeless perspective.[79] Inextricably linked to such metapoetic judgments are ideological positions: anthropological visions and paradigms of virtue changed with each literary decision. As is well known, the ideological evolution of antiquity may be analyzed, with Werner Jaeger and others, through the different answers given to the question of heroic virtue. It will suffice to say here that when poets and philosophers wanted to shift the concepts of heroism, or construct new images of the hero, the ancient tradition of catabasis turned out to be a particularly useful theme. Heracles turned from brute force to initiation to go down to the Underworld; some Orphic gold leaves describe the soul of the initiate who descends to Hades as "a hero" who goes in "glory" and who "will reign over the other heroes"[80]; and at the end of the *Apology* (41ab), Socrates says that when

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[79] Most 1992 shows that the first *Nekyia* is a metapoetic reflection on epic as a genre that legitimizes Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, a model followed by Vergil (*Aen.* 6), Lucan (*Bell. Civ.* 6), and Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 13). Outside epic, Aristophanes chooses a catabatic setting in the *Frogs* to make his deepest reflections on tragedy and propose a shift of literary and ideological values (Edmonds 2004). The same could be said of Dante or Bulgakov.

[80] *OF* 477.2: μεμνήμενος ἥρως (where the middle or passive voice of the verb plays with the ambiguity of the role of memory in epic [being remembered, *kleos*] and in initiation [remembering]; *OF* 474.16: κλεινοί; *OF* 476.11: καὶ τότ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ἄ[λλοισι μεθ']

he goes to Hades he will join the ancient heroes and poets who dwell there. Aeneas turns from an Iliadic warrior and Odyssean wanderer into a national hero when he learns the future greatness of Rome in the realm of the dead.[81] Finally, many a conversion to Christianity happened after visions of Hell or Heaven.[82] A journey to the Other World became a typical device to propose a new type of hero. As so often happens, Homer had led the way.

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ἡρώεσσιν ἀνάξει[ς]. The last passage (according to Di Benedetto 2004) shows that to be *anax* in the afterlife signified a blessed heroization in certain epic poetry (to which *Od.* 11. 483–91 would be in opposition). These examples show that the gold leaves contain, within the general theme of catabasis, formulae and images deriving from ancient epic poetry concerned with heroization and blessed destiny for some dead. In contrast, prose discourses about a happy afterlife use democratic images like *proedria* (Dem. 60.34, [Plut.] *Consol. ad Apoll.* 120B, [Pl.] *Axi*. 373d. Cf. Herrero de Jáuregui 2011.

[81] Cf. Clark 1979: 195: "that Vergil represents him as a new type of hero is shown, too, by the poet's artful contrasting of Aeneas to these older catabatic figures" (i.e., Heracles, Theseus, Peirithous, whom Vergil depicts as having forced their way into Hades). On Plato, cf. Vegetti 1998 and Segal 1978: 323–24, who (along the suggestion of E. Voegelin) read the beginning of the *Republic* as a catabasis.

[82] Cf. Bremmer forthcoming, with full bibliography.

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