



BOOK 22. *The Killing of Hector*

So throughout the city, huddled like fawns, they cooled off
their sweat and they drank and quenched their thirst, leaning against
the beautiful battlements. But then the Achaeans came close
to the wall, propping their shields on their shoulders,^o and
5 a dreadful fate bound Hector to remain where he was, there
in front of Ilion and the Scaean Gates.

And then Phoibos

Apollo spoke to Achilles the son of Peleus: “Why, O son
of Peleus, do you pursue me on your swift feet when you are
but a mortal and I a deathless god? Haven’t you yet recognized
10 that I am a god? And still you rage incessantly. Are you indifferent
to all the trouble you went through, routing the Trojans,
and now they are safe inside the city while you are stuck out here!
You will never kill me—I am immortal!”

With a flash of deep

anger the fast runner Achilles said: “You have fooled me,
15 you most destructive of gods, you who shoot from afar!
You have turned me away from the wall. Otherwise, many Trojans
would have bitten the earth with their teeth before they got
into Troy. As it is you have robbed me of great glory,
while you have saved them easily. You had no fear that
20 I would take revenge for your actions in the future, for truly
I *would* take revenge upon you if it were in my power!”
So speaking, Achilles went off toward the city with grand ambition,
running like a race horse, a prize-winner who pulls a chariot,
who easily runs full-out over the plain—even so Achilles
25 swiftly moved his feet and his knees.

Then old man Priam

first saw him as he sped all-gleaming over the plain, like the star
that appears at harvest time, when its rays shine in the midst

4 *shoulders*: Apparently holding out their shields horizontally and propping one end on their shoulders, to create a protection against missiles thrown from the walls.

of many stars in the murk of the night, the star called the dog
of Orion.^o It is most brilliant, but a sign of evil, bringing
much fever to wretched mortals—just so, the bronze shone
around Achilles' chest as he ran. The old man groaned,
and he beat his head with his hands, raising them up high,
and moaning mightily he called out, begging, to his dear son,
who stood motionless before the gates, eager to do battle with
Achilles. The old man spoke pitiful words, stretching out his arms:
"Hector, do not wait for this man, my dear son, alone
without others, or you may quickly meet your doom,
killed by this son of Peleus! He is much more powerful—
a cruel man! I wish that the gods loved him just as I do!
Then the dogs and vultures would quickly devour him as he lay
unburied, and this terrible sorrow would leave my breast.
For he has taken away many of my noble sons,
killing them or selling them off to islands that lie far away.
And now I do not see two of my sons Lykaon and Polydoros—
whom Laothoê, princess among women bore me—gathered
into the city of the Trojans. But if they are still alive and in the
Achaean camp, then we will ransom them for bronze and gold.
We have it! For the famous old man Altes gave away much wealth
at the wedding of his daughter. If they are dead and in the house
of Hades, there will be agony in my heart and in that of their mother,
she who bore them. But there will be less suffering to others
if you do not also die, Hector, overcome by Achilles!
"So come inside the wall, my son, so that you might save
the Trojan men and women, and so that you do not give
abundant glory to the son of Peleus, and you yourself lose your life.
Take pity on me, who yet can feel! O how wretched
I am, how ill-fated I am—I whom the father, the son
of Kronos, will destroy in a pitiful fate at the threshold
of old age, I who have seen many evils—the death of my sons,
my daughters hauled away, treasure-chambers looted,
little children thrown to the earth in the horrid war, my sons'
wives taken away at the hands of the deadly Achaeans.
And now, *now* the savage dogs will rip me to pieces at the doors
of my own house after someone has taken the life from my limbs
with a blow, or a cast from some sharp bronze. And my

29 *of Orion*: Sirius, the brightest of the fixed stars, called the dog-star. It appears at the same time as the rising of the sun in July, and henceforth until mid-September it brings excessive heat in Greece and Asia Minor. These are the "dog days," when the dog-star is in the ascendant. Throughout antiquity the rising of the dog-star was considered to bring disease and pestilence.

own dogs, those that I raised in my halls at my own table—
after drinking my blood in the madness of their hearts, they will
then lie down in the forecourt!

“Certainly, all looks good when
a young man dies in war, slashed by the sharp bronze, and there he lies—
70 everything is lovely that shows, though he is dead. But when dogs
put to shame a gray head and a gray beard and the shameful parts^o
of a dead old man—this is the most pitiful thing for wretched mortals.”

So spoke the old man and with his hands he plucked
the gray hairs from his head. Still, he did not persuade Hector.
75 Then his mother Hekabè, standing beside Priam, wailed and shed tears,
exposing her chest, and with one hand she held her breasts
and poured forth tears, speaking words that went like arrows:
“Hector, my child, honor these breasts! Take pity on me!
If ever I gave you suck to ease your pain—remember these,
80 my son, and ward off that savage man from within the wall.
Do not stand forth to face him, stubborn boy! If he kills you,
I shall never bewail you on your bier, my dear child, whom I bore
from my own body. Nor will your wife, with her rich dowry,
but far away, beside the ships, the swift dogs will devour you!”

85 Thus importuning, they spoke to their son, begging him.
But they could not persuade Hector. He awaited Achilles
as he came ever closer in his might. As a serpent in the mountains
waits in his hole for a man to come along after eating
noxious herbs,^o and a terrible rage has gone into him,
90 and he glares ferociously as he coils about in his hole,
even so Hector in his voracious might did not retreat
but leaned his shining shield against the projecting wall.

Grieving, Hector spoke to his great-hearted spirit:
“Oh no! If I go through the gate and behind the walls, Poulydamas
95 will be the first to criticize me. For he encouraged me to lead
the Trojans to the city during this deadly night, when godlike Achilles
rose up.^o But I wouldn’t listen. It would have been a lot better if I had!
And now, after I have destroyed many through my own stupidity,

71 *shameful parts*: In general Homeric decorum prevents all reference to the genitals, except here and in Book 2 when Odysseus threatens to expose Thersites’ private parts. Also, decorum prevents any reference to excretion or urination.

89 *noxious herbs*: Evidently snakes were thought to acquire their poison through the food they ate.

97 *rose up*: Poulydamas urged retreat behind the city wall in Book 18, advice rejected by Hector.

I am ashamed before the Trojans and the Trojan women with their fine robes. I fear that someone, some lower-class type, will say, 'Hector, trusting in his own strength, has destroyed the army!' They will say that. It would be much better for me to meet Achilles in the hand-to-hand, then return home after killing him, or myself perish in glory for the land of my fathers. 100

“Or what if I set my bossed shield aside and my powerful helmet, and lean my spear against the wall and myself go up to the relentless Achilles and promise that we will give up Helen and with her all the treasure that Alexandros took to Troy in the hollow ships for the sons of Atreus to take away—the beginning of this dread conflict ... And in addition, what if we were to divest ourselves of half of all the things that the city contains? I will take from the Trojans an oath sworn by the elders on behalf of the Trojan people that they will not conceal *anything*, but will divide in half all the wealth that our lovely city holds within ...° 110

“But why am I having this conversation with myself? I must not go to him! He will not pity me nor have any regard. He will kill me right there, all unarmed, as if I were a woman, once I have taken off my armor. There is no way, as if from an oak or a rock, I may exchange pleasantries with him, such as when a young girl chats with a youth—a young girl! a youth!° Better to fight this out, and the sooner the better. Then we will know to which man Zeus the Olympian gives glory.” 115 120

So he pondered as he waited. But Achilles was already upon him, like Enyalios, warrior of the waving helmet, brandishing over his right shoulder his terrifying spear of Pelian ash. Around him the bronze flashed like the flames of a blazing fire or the rays of the sun as it rises. 125

A trembling came over Hector when he saw Achilles, and he did not dare to stay there any longer, but he left the gates behind him and ran in fear. The son of Peleus rushed after him, trusting in his powerful feet. As a falcon in the mountains, the fastest of all birds swoops down on a trembling dove who flees before him, but he darts in right 130

114 *within*: This same proposal was made by the besieged city on the Shield of Achilles in Book 18.

121 *a youth*: Hector seems to fix on the pastoral scene of peaceful flirtation by repeating these words. In spite of speculation ancient and modern, no one has been able to explain what is meant by “from an oak or a rock,” a figure of speech that occurs only here in the *Iliad*. In any event, Hector realizes that he will be unable to chat in a friendly way with Achilles.

on top of her, crying shrilly, close, for his falcon spirit urges him on to devour the dove—even so Achilles in his fury sped straight on.

135 Hector fled in terror beneath the wall of the Trojans,
swiftly plying his limbs. He ran beneath the place of watching,^o
past the wind-tossed fig—always out from under the walls,
along the wagon track. He ran to the two fair-flowing
fountains where the two springs of the eddying Skamandros rise.
140 One flows with warm water, and around it much smoke rises
as if from a blazing fire. The other flows cold even in the summer,
like hail, or cold snow or ice formed from water.
There, close to the springs are broad-flowing washing-tanks—
beautiful stone tubs—where the lovely Trojan women
145 and their daughters used to wash their shining clothes in the old
days of peace, before the coming of the sons of the Achaeans.^o

They ran past that place, one fleeing, the other close behind.
A man of worth fled in front, and behind him a man far greater
in strength swiftly pursued. It was not for a sacrificial beast
150 or for a bull's hide, which are prizes in a foot-race, that they competed,
but they ran for the very life of Hector, tamer of horses.
As when single-hoofed prize-winning horses turn swiftly around
the turning-posts, a great prize is at stake, a tripod or a woman
in games celebrated for a dead man—even so three times
155 they ran around city of Priam on their fast feet.^o

And all the gods looked on. The father of men and gods
was first to speak: “Look now, I see with my own eye an esteemed
man pursued around the wall. My heart goes out to Hector,
who has burned the thigh-bones of many oxen on the crests of Ida
160 with its many ridges,^o and at other times made sacrifice in the upper
parts of the city. And now godlike Achilles is chasing Hector
around the city of Priam on his quick feet. But come, contemplate
and decide, my fellow gods, whether we will save Hector
from death, or whether we will deliver him to destruction at the hands
165 of Achilles, the son of Peleus, although he is a fine man.”

136 *place of watching*: Not clear where this would be, but the fig is near the city walls (Book 6).

146 *of the Achaeans*: No such springs have ever been found in the vicinity of Troy, but Homer wants to emphasize the contrast between the days of peace and the time of war.

155 *fast feet*: In fact you cannot run around Troy, located on a headland that projects into the plain.

160 *many ridges*: In Book 8 Zeus has a precinct on Gargaros, a peak of Ida.

Flashing-eyed Athena then answered him: "O father of the white lightning, gatherer of the dark clouds, what words you have spoken! Again you want to pull back from evil death a mortal man who has long ago been doomed by fate? Well, go ahead and try it. But none of the other gods will agree." 170

Zeus the cloud-gatherer then said in reply: "Ease up, Tritogeneia, my dear daughter, I am not so set on what I have been saying! I want you to be pleased—do whatever is your pleasure. Don't hold back!"

So speaking, he urged on Athena, who was clearly anxious. She went dashing from the peaks of Olympus while swift Achilles was unrelenting in pursuit of Hector. As when a dog has roused the fawn of a deer from its lair and chases it through valleys and woods, and although the fawn evades it for a while, hiding in a thicket, still the hound tracks him down, running ever on until he finds him—even so Hector could not escape the son of Peleus, the fast runner. 175 180

As often as Hector rushed toward the Dardanian Gates^o to gain shelter beneath the well-built walls, in hopes that the Trojans could defend him with missiles from above, just so often Achilles would anticipate his movements and move in front and turn him back, toward the plain, while he himself sped on beside the city's walls. As in a dream where you cannot snare someone fleeing from you—the one cannot evade and the other cannot capture—even so Achilles could not overtake Hector with his fleetness, nor could Hector get away. 185 190

How could Hector then have escaped from the fates of death were it not that Apollo came close to him for the last time, to rouse his strength and quicken his knees? Godlike Achilles nodded with his head to his followers—he did not want anyone shooting deadly arrows or javelins at Hector so that someone else might gain the glory with a cast and he lose out. 195

When Achilles and Hector came for a fourth time to the springs, then the father lifted the golden scales. He placed in the pans two fates of bitter death,

182 *Dardanian Gates*: It is not certain whether these are same as the Scaean Gates or different.

200 the one for Achilles, the other for Hector, tamer of horses.
Zeus took the scales by the balance and held it up.
Down plunged the fateful day for Hector. He went toward
the house of Hades, and Phoibos Apollo deserted him.

Flashing-eyed Athena then came up to the son of Peleus.
205 She stood near him and spoke words that went like arrows:
“Now I hope that the two of us, O glorious Achilles, beloved
of Zeus, will be able to carry off to the ships great glory
for the Achaeans, once we have killed war-crazed Hector
in the hand-to-hand. Now he can no longer escape us,
210 not even if Apollo, who works from a long way off,
should suffer a great deal, thrashing around before father Zeus
who carries the goatskin fetish! Take your stand now—
catch your breath, while I will go and persuade that man
over there to fight in the hand-to-hand.”

So spoke Athena,
215 and Achilles obeyed, glad in his heart, and he stood leaning
on the ashen spear with barbs of bronze. Athena left him
and went up to the majestic Hector in the likeness of Deïphobos°
both in shape and familiar voice. Standing next to him
she spoke words that went like arrows: “My dear brother,
220 surely Achilles is doing you awful harm, pursuing you
with his swift feet around the city of Troy. But come,
let us take our stand, and staying here let us repel his attack.”

And big Hector, whose helmet flashed, said to her:
“Deïphobos, of all the brothers whom Hekabê and Priam bore,
225 you were in the past always to me the most beloved!
And now I think that I will honor you still more in my heart,
because you have dared to come out from the wall on my account
when you saw me, while the others remained within.”

Then the goddess flashing-eyed Athena said to him:
230 “My dear brother, truly my father and my revered mother,
and our comrades around me, begged me in turn—pleaded mightily—
that I stay. For they all tremble before Achilles. But my head
was troubled with bitter grief. Now let us charge straight at him

217 *Deïphobos*: Hector's brother, first mentioned in Book 12. He has a strong presence in Book 13, where he is wounded by Meriones, Idomeneus' aide. According to postHomeric tradition, Deïphobos took up with Helen after Paris' death (probably implied in *Odyssey* Book 4).

and fight, and let there be no sparing our use of the spears,
so that we might learn whether he will kill us and carry away
the bloody armor to the hollow ships, or whether you will kill
him with your spear.” 235

So speaking and with such cunning
Athena led him on. When they came near Achilles, as each
advanced against the other, Hector, whose helmet flashed,
spoke first, saying to Achilles: “I will flee from you 240
no more, O son of Peleus, as before I ran three times
around the great and shining city of Priam, when I did
not dare to await you as you came on. But now
my heart urges me to take my stand against you,
to see if I will kill you or you kill me. And let us take 245
the gods to witness—they will be the best witnesses
and guardians of our covenant! For I will do nothing unseemly
to you, if Zeus grant me to outlast you and I take your life.
After I have taken the famous armor of Achilles, I will give back
your dead body to the Achaeans. And you do the same ...” 250

Then Achilles, the fast runner, glaring angrily from beneath
his brows, said: “Hector, you are mad! Don’t talk to me of covenants!
As there are no trusted oaths between lions and men, nor do
wolves have a friendly heart toward lambs but always they
think evil toward one another—even so there is no way 255
that you and I can be friends. Nor will there be oaths
between us before one or the other shall fall and glut
Ares with blood, the warrior with a tough hide shield.
So think now of all your fancy valor. Now you must be
a spearman and a bold fighter. There is no more escape. 260
Pallas Athena will kill you by my spear. Now you
will pay full price for the sorrow of my companions
whom you killed, raging with your spear!”

Thus Achilles spoke,
and brandishing his long-shadowing spear he cast. But the bold
Hector saw it coming and ducked, crouching in anticipation. 265
So the bronze spear flew over him and stuck fixed in the earth.
But up leaped Pallas Athena and gave it back to Achilles,
unseen by Hector, shepherd of the people.

Then Hector spoke
to the blameless son of Peleus: “You missed! Nor have you
learned from Zeus—O Achilles like to the gods!—of my fate, 270

though surely you thought so. But you have been glib of tongue
and a thug with words so that you frightened me out of my power.
You made me forget my valor. But you shall not spear me
in the back as I flee. Drive your spear straight through my breast
275 as I charge upon you, if any god grants it! Or avoid *my* spear of bronze—
may you take it entirely in your flesh ... This war would be lighter
for the Trojans, if you were dead, for you are our greatest evil!”

Hector spoke, and brandishing his long-shadowing
spear he cast it, and it hit in the middle of the shield of the son
280 of Peleus—he did not miss. But the spear glanced far away
from the shield. Hector raged that his missile had flown in vain
from his hand, then he stood abashed, for he did not have another
ashen spear. He called aloud for Deïphobos of the white shield,
requesting another long spear. But Deïphobos was nowhere near.

Hector then knew in his heart, and he spoke: “I understand.
The gods have called me to my death. I thought that Deïphobos
the warrior was nearby, but he is behind the walls. Athena has
deceived me. Now wretched death is near, not far away. I cannot
290 avoid it. In the olden times Zeus was more friendly to me,
and the son of Zeus, Apollo who shoots from a long ways off.
He who in times before stood by me with a steady heart.
But now my doom has come upon me. Let me not die without
a struggle, without fame, but having done something great,
something for those in later times to remember.”^o

So speaking

295 Hector drew his sharp sword, large and powerful, which hung
at his side, and pulling himself together he swooped like a
high-flying eagle that goes over the plain and through
the dark clouds to seize a tender sheep or a cowering hare—
even so Hector swooped, brandishing his sharp sword.
300 Achilles rushed to meet him. He filled his heart with wild
strength, and he protected his chest by holding the sturdy
finely crafted shield before him. As he ran he tossed the crest
of his shining four-plated helmet. All around it waved
the beautiful plumes of gold that Hephaistos set thick as the crest.

294 *to remember*: Divine forces are behind it all: Athena, Zeus, Apollo, Fate. But the fame that will last forever depends on the warrior's personal effort.

As the evening star, the most beautiful star in the sky, 305
goes forth among all the other stars in the gloom of night,
just so the sharp spear that Achilles balanced in his right hand
gleamed as he looked at the fair flesh of majestic Hector,
looking to find the place that was most open to a thrust.
Now, bronze armor covered up all the rest of Hector's flesh, 310
the beautiful armor that he had plundered from the body
of Patroklos when he killed him. But there was an opening
where the collarbone joined the neck with the shoulders,
the gullet where the destruction of life comes most quickly.
Achilles drove in his spear right there as he rushed on Hector, 315
and the point of the spear went straight through the tender neck.
But the bronze-heavy ash did not cut the windpipe, so that
Hector was able to speak and make answer to his enemy.

Thus Hector fell in the dust. And then Achilles gloated 320
over him: "Hector, you probably thought that you could despoil
Patroklos and stay safe. You had no thought of me, who remained
a long way off—you fool! Far from Patroklos a far greater helper
was left behind at the ships—me! I, who have just killed you!
Dogs and birds will eat you now, in an unseemly manner. But the 325
Achaeans will bury Patroklos."

Hector, whose helmet flashed, spoke
as his strength drained away: "I beg you by your life and your knees^o
and your parents—do not give me to be devoured by the dogs
beside the ships ... My father and mother will give you bronze
and a lot of gold as gifts if you give back my body to be taken home,
so that the Trojans and the wives of the Trojans can give me my due 330
of fire when I am dead."

Achilles, the fast runner, said to him,
looking with anger from beneath his brows: "Don't beg me,
you dog, by my knees or by my parents. As much as I wish
that my anger and my spirit would drive me on to cut up your flesh
and eat it raw for the things you have done, just as much 335
I know that no one will save the dogs from your skull—
not though your parents should come here and offer ten times
as much, or twenty times, and promise still more. Not if Dardanian
Priam should promise to weigh out your body in gold. Not even so
will your revered mother place you on a bier to bewail 340
her dear son. But dogs and birds will devour you completely!"



FIGURE 22.1 Achilles kills Hector. The figures are labeled. The illustration does not follow Homer’s account very well. Both men are in “heroic nudity.” A beardless Achilles attacks from the left, wearing shinguards, a helmet, and carrying a hoplite shield, sword, and spear. The bearded Hector is similarly armed (but without shinguards). He has already been wounded in the left thigh and in the chest and is about to go down. Blood flows from the wounds. Athena (half-visible) stands behind Achilles wearing the goatskin fetish as a cape. Athenian red-figure wine-mixing bowl by the Berlin Painter, c. 490–460 BC. Found at Cerveteri, Lazio, Italy.

Then, dying, Hector whose helmet flashed answered:
“I know you too well. I knew this would be—that I could not persuade
you. The heart in your breast is of iron. Only think of this —
that I will become the anger of the gods on that day when Paris
and Phoibos Apollo kill you at the Scaean Gates,^o though you
are great ...” 345

Thus Hector spoke. Then death covered him over, and his
breath-soul flew out of his limbs and went to the house of Hades,
bemoaning her fate,^o leaving behind manliness and youth.
Godlike Achilles addressed him, though he was dead: 350
“Die then! I will meet my own fate whenever Zeus and
the other deathless gods want to bring it about.”

So Achilles spoke
and he pulled his bronze spear from the corpse. He laid it aside
and stripped Patroklos’ bloody armor from Hector’s shoulders.
The other sons of the Achaeans ran up to admire the physique 355
and the wonderful handsomeness of Hector. And they all dipped
in their weapons, those who went near. And so one would say,
turning to his neighbor: “Yes, Hector seems more gentle to the
touch now than when he burned the ships with deadly fire!”

Thus someone would speak and plunge his weapon in the corpse, 360
standing nearby. When the good Achilles, the fast runner,
had finished stripping the corpse, he stood up among the Achaeans
and spoke words that went like arrows: “My dear leaders
and rulers of the Argives—because the gods have given it to us
to overcome this man who has done more harm than all the other 365
Trojans combined, let us stand in our might in front of the city,
fully armed, to find out what are the Trojans’ intentions—
whether they will leave their high city now that their man is dead,
or whether they are eager to remain even though Hector is gone.

“But why does my heart have this conversation with itself? 370
Patroklos still lies dead at the ships, unwept and unburied.
I will never forget him, not so long as I am among the living
and my limbs still function. Even if in the house of Hades
men forget their dead, even there I will not forget my dear

346 *Scaean Gates*: Hector foretells the death of Achilles as Patroklos had foretold the death of Hector: Achilles will die by an arrow fired by Paris, guided by Apollo, according to the usual account.

349 *her fate*: “breath-soul” is feminine in Greek.

375 companion. Anyway, let the Achaean youth sing our song
of victory and return to the hollow ships. We will bring
Hector there. We have won great glory. We have killed
the gallant Hector, to whom the Trojans prayed throughout
their city as if he were a god.”

So he spoke, contemplating how he
380 would treat Hector shamefully. He pierced the tendons of both feet
from behind, from the heel to the ankle, and made fast ox-hide
thongs, which he tied to the back of his chariot. He let Hector’s head
drag on the ground. Then he mounted his chariot and loaded
the famous armor. He snapped the whip and drove away,
385 and his two horses gladly sped onward. The dust rose up
from Hector’s head as he was dragged, and his dark hair
spread out on either side, and all in the dust lay the head that
before was so charming. But now Zeus had given him to the enemy
to be treated shamefully in the land of his fathers. And all of
390 his hair was befouled by the dust.

His mother tore at her own hair,
and she flung her shining headscarf far away—Hekabê wailed
aloud when she saw her son. His father Priam piteously bewailed
him too, and the people fell into a howling and shrieking throughout
the city. It was as if all of Ilion with its beetling brows burned utterly
395 with fire.

The people could scarcely hold back the old man,
torn by grief, who wanted to go outside the Dardanian gates.
He prayed to everyone, rolling around in the filth, and he called
each man by name: “Hold off my friends, though you are distressed,
and let me go alone outside the city, to the ships of the Achaeans.
400 I will beseech this wicked man, this doer of evil, if perhaps
he will take shame before his fellows and have pity for my old age.
He has a father like me too—Peleus, who begot him and raised him
to be a curse to the Trojans. He has made sorrow for me above all
other men, so many are my sons that he killed in their prime.

405 “But of all those I do not rue any so much, though I am rent
with sorrow, as for this one—Hector. Grief for him
will carry me into the house of Hades. How I wish that he had
died in my arms! Then we’d have had our fill of lamentation—
his mother who bore him to her sorrow, and I myself.”

410 So Priam spoke, weeping, and the citizens cried too.
Among the Trojan women Hekabê led the loud lament:

“My child, how wretched I am! How will I live in my bitter anguish with you dead? You who night and day were my boast throughout the city—a help to all the Trojan men and the Trojan women in the town. They greeted you as a god. You were a great glory to them while you were alive. Now death and fate has come upon you.” 415

So she spoke, wailing.

But Hector’s wife Andromachê had not yet heard, for no truthful messenger had come to her to announce that her husband remained outside the gates. She was weaving in a corner of her high room, weaving a double cloth, purple in color. Andromachê was weaving-in a design of multicolored flowers. She called out through the house to her handmaids with lovely hair to set a great tripod on a fire so there would be a hot bath for Hector when he came home from the battle—poor woman! She did not yet know that flashing-eyed Athena had killed him at the hands of Achilles, far from any warm bath. 420 425

Then Andromachê heard the shrieking and shouting from the wall. Her limbs spun around and the weaving comb fell from her hand to the earth. She spoke to her handmaids with the lovely hair: “Come here, the two of you—follow me so that we can see what has happened. I heard the voice of my husband’s mother, and from my breast my heart leaps into my mouth, and beneath me my knees are numb. Some evil is close by for the children of Priam. Would such word be far from my ear, but I fear terribly that stalwart Achilles has cut off Hector alone from the city and pursues him over the plain, that he has put an end to the reckless manhood that possessed him. For Hector would never remain in the mass of men, but always ran ahead, yielding to no one in his power.” 430 435

So speaking Andromachê rushed out of the hall like a mad woman, with throbbing heart. Her handmaids went with her, and when they came to the wall and the crowd of men, she stood gazing over the wall, and she saw Hector dragged before the city. The swift horses dragged him without pity toward the hollow ships of the Achaeans. 440 445

Dark night covered her eyes. Andromachê fell backward and gasped out her breath-soul. She threw the shining bonds far from her head —the frontlet and the cap, and the woven band

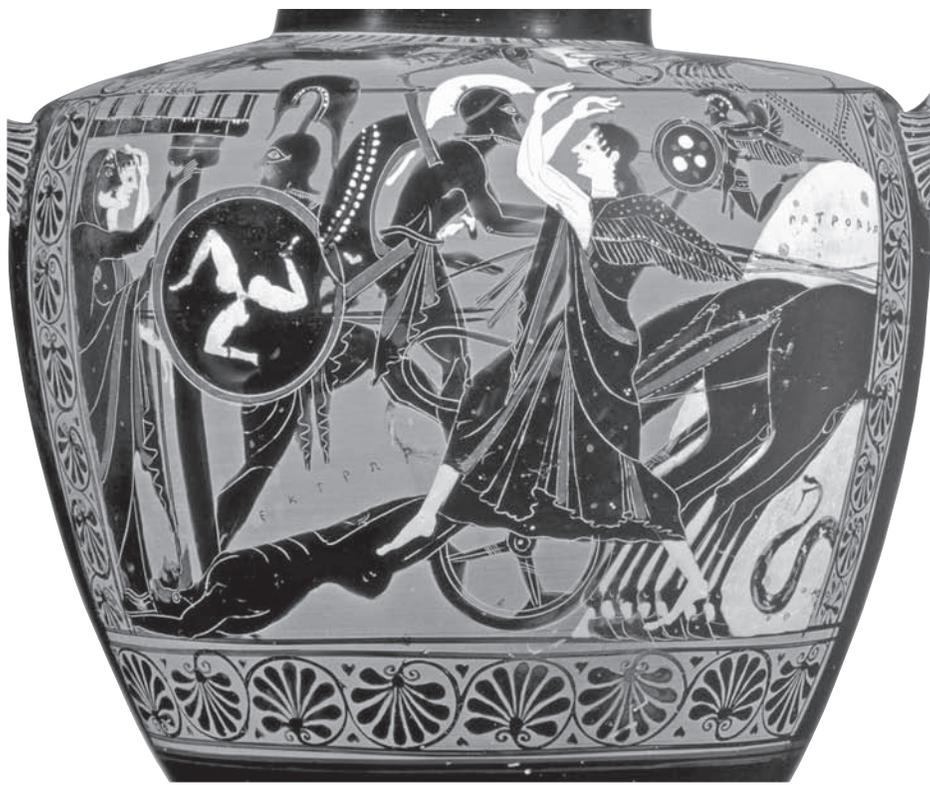


FIGURE 22.2 Achilles drags Hector. Achilles (labeled) has already tied Hector to his car. As he steps up behind his charioteer, he looks behind at Priam and Andromachê lamenting from the wall. His shield bears a triskelis (“three-legged”) design. Iris appears (she is white) to ask him not to treat Hector in this fashion (see Book 23). Behind the horses is the tomb of Patroklos. His breath-soul (*psychê*), shown as a miniature winged armed warrior, hovers above the tomb. Patroklos’ name is inscribed on the tomb. Notice the serpent at the base: The beneficent spirits of the dead were thought to live as friendly snakes in tombs (“good spirit,” *agathos daimon*). Athenian black-figure wine-mixing bowl, c. 510 BC.

and the headscarf^o that golden Aphrodite had given her on that day when Hector, whose helmet flashed, led her from the house of Eëtion after Hector had given countless bridal gifts. Around about her came Hector's sisters and the wives of Hector's brothers and they bore her up, distraught unto death, in their midst. 450

When Andromachê caught her breath and her spirit was gathered in her breast, she spoke to the Trojan women with a deep moan: "Hector, I am wretched. We were born to a single fate, the two of us—you in the house of Priam in Troy, I in THEBES beneath Plakos covered in woods, in the house of Eëtion that nourished me when I was little, an unlucky father to a cruel-fated child. I wish I had never been born! But now you go beneath the depths of earth to the house of Hades. You have left me in dreadful sorrow, a widow in my halls. And our child is still a mere babe, that you fathered and I bore—we who are doomed to a wretched fate! You will be of no use to him, Hector, now that you are dead. Nor he to you. If he escapes the tearful war of the Achaeans, still there will be nothing but labor and sorrow ahead for him. Others will take his fields. The day of orphanhood cuts off a child completely from those his own age. He bows down his head, his cheeks are covered with tears. He goes in need to the companions of his father, plucking one by the cloak, another by the shirt—, and of them who are touched by pity one holds out his cup for a moment. The child wets his lips, but he does not wet the roof of his mouth.^o And one whose father and mother still live pushes him from the feast, striking him with his hands and reproving him with insulting words: 'Get away from here! You have no father to dine with us!' Then in tears the boy comes back to his widowed mother ... 455 460 465 470 475

"O Astyanax! Before he ate only marrow and the rich fat of sheep, sitting on his father's knees. And when sleep came on him and he left off his childish play, he would sleep on his couch in the arms of his nurse, in a soft bed, his heart filled with happy thoughts. But now he will suffer much sorrow because he has lost his dear father—Astyanax, whom the Trojans call by that name because you alone 480

448 *frontlet ... headscarf*: The first three items are named only here in Homer and it is not clear what they are, but the fourth word means "headscarf" (*krêdemnon*). The "headscarf" was the symbol of Andromachê's married state, now brought to nothing.

473 *of his mouth*: That is, he receives only crumbs, but never enough to satisfy his hunger.

485 save their gates and their high walls.^o Now by the beaked ships,
far from your parents, wriggling maggots will eat you after
the dogs have had their fill, as you lie naked ... All the while
that finely woven and lovely garments made by the hands of women
lie in your halls. But I will burn all these things in the blazing fire.
They are no longer of use to you. You shall not lie in them.
490 I'll do it as an honor to you from the men and women of Troy."
So she spoke through her tears, and all the women lamented too.

484 *their high walls*: The name Astyanax means "king of the city," that is, its defender.