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# A KING'S RANSOM

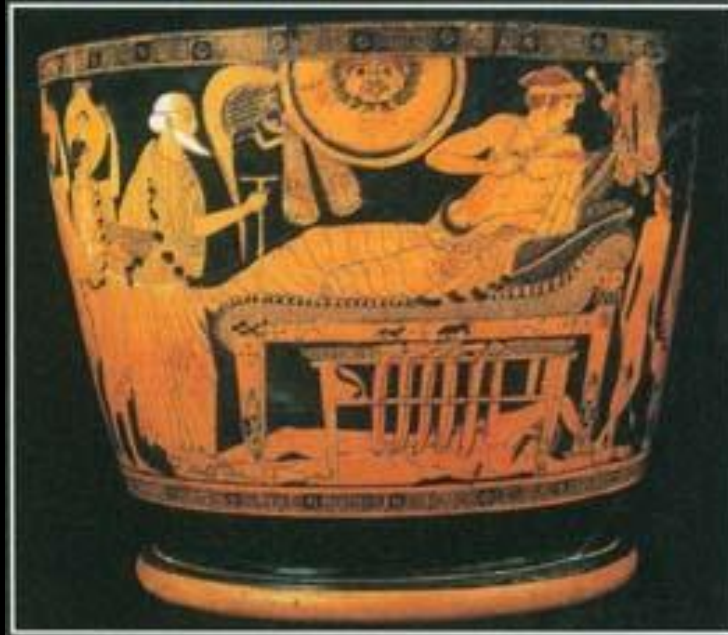


Image: Skyphos with Priam Begging Achilles for the Body of Hector; 490 BCE, Attica; [Artstor 10-03-02/28](#).

## Priam and Achilles

Chris Mackie



## *ILIAD 24*

- Achilles: the hero as outsider
- Hermes: the god of movement and reciprocity
- Priam's quest for the body of Hector



## *ILIAD 24*

- In the wake of the killing of Hector by Achilles in *Iliad 22*, and the mutilation of his body, Zeus sends out two gods to Troy (Iris and Thetis), with a third god to follow later (Hermes).
- Their initial task is call upon Priam to ransom the body, and Achilles to give it over when the ransom arrives.
- Priam agrees to conduct the mission (to the goddess Iris), and Achilles agrees (to Thetis) to give over the body when someone comes to get it (note- he doesn't expect the king himself to come and get it!)

Chris Mackie



## *ILIAD 24*

- The holding on of the body is really a metaphor for the suffering that Achilles and the Trojans are enduring
- With the letting go of the body comes the release from suffering. The Trojans can come together for a funeral, and Achilles can prepare for his death
- Many Greek literary works end with a sense of calm and reconciliation



## *ILIAD 24*

- Priam has to go out of the city, on to the plain, through an outer wall, into the compound of Achilles and not get himself killed. His family think he is crazy or senile (note esp. his wife Hecuba at 24.201ff.).
- As a king, Priam rides horses and a chariot, whereas the old man accompanying him, called Idaeus, takes mules with the precious gifts to ransom the body
- The sun is setting when they leave, and so it is a trip in the darkness.
- The gods look kindly on them, but they are still terrified when Hermes appears as a very young man. Notice the emphasis on the youth of Hermes here.

Chris Mackie



# HERMES: THE KEY GOD OF BOOK 24

A diverse god of:

- Exchange and commerce (cf. Mercury at Rome, and the associated words 'commerce' and 'merchant').
- Boundaries and borders (contrast Dionysus)
- Guide and 'psychopomp' (guide of souls to the Underworld)
- Darkness
- Puts people to sleep (hypnagogic)
- Theft
- Trickery, banter, hermeneutics
- Youth
- Kindliness (to mortals especially). Culture god

Chris Mackie

# HERMES: THE KEY GOD OF BOOK 24



## Hermes as psychopomp

[Hermes directs as Death and Sleep transport Sarpedon's corpse.](#) By Euphronius, ca.515 BCE, Image: ARTstor MMA\_.1972.11.10



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## *ILIAD 24:*

# THE QUEST FOR HECTOR'S BODY



- Notice the way that the journey to Achilles' camp to get the body is described like a journey to the Underworld (darkness, river, guide, gates)
- Priam expects to meet a 'monster' who has been mutilating his son's body; but when he gets there he is treated with kindness and compassion (even altruism).



Image: Skyphos with Priam Begging Achilles for the Body of Hector; 490 BCE, Attica; [Artstor 10-03-02/28](https://www.artstor.org/10-03-02/28).



# *ILIAD 24:* THE QUEST FOR HECTOR'S BODY

- The gods have told Achilles to hand over the body. But they don't tell him how to do so.
- The meeting between Achilles and Priam takes place just before the death of Achilles and the fall of Troy. They have a basic humanity and personal grief in common

[Click on link to access image]

John Flaxman's 18<sup>th</sup> c. sculpture of the scene, Image source:

<http://faculty.saintleo.edu/reynolds/HON150-F03/Lectures/flaxman.htm>

# ACHILLES AND PRIAM

- Note that the two of them eat together. This signifies the restoration of life and proper ritual, rather than a need to eat as such. The sleep that they both have (Achilles with Briseis) has the same sort of function.
- The ransom takes place.
- The return journey. They emerge back from their quest as the sun comes up
- Cassandra calls to the Trojans who all come out to meet them.

# RESTITUTION OF PROPER RITUAL

- The Trojans gather wood from Mount Ida for the cremation of Hector. Mount Ida is where it all began with the Judgement of Paris
- The emphasis in the Greek is on the reunion and coming together of the whole Trojan community to honour their greatest warrior.
- The funeral of Hector is the very final scene of the Iliad. Hector almost=Troy, so his cremation anticipates the 'cremation' of Troy, just as Patroclus' funeral anticipates the death and cremation of Achilles



## *ILIAD* 24: THE QUEST FOR HECTOR'S BODY

- By going on his quest Priam has a kind of 'shamanic' role in helping to heal the grief of his community
- Priam takes the body back up to Troy, and it is almost as if he emerges from the earth itself
- There is the question of whether the journey of Priam is a kind of symbolic 'catabasis' (ie journey to the Underworld. Note some of the main motifs: the supportive role of the gods (esp. Hermes), fear, darkness, sleep, river, gates, downward and upward motion.

Chris Mackie



## ILIAD 24: SOME FINAL COMMENTS

- Note that the poem ends without the death of Achilles or the fall of Troy.
- Note also that the poem is called the '*Iliad*' (Ilios=Troy), not the '*Achilleid*'. The final book anticipates very strongly the horrors about to be brought to Troy. The kindness and compassion of Achilles for Priam is a kind of last gasp for the city.

[Click on link to access image]

[Neoptolemus slaying Priam, who holds the corpse of Astyanax, on an altar of Zeus.](#) Attic Red-figure hydria by the Kleophrades Painter, c. 480-475 BCE. Museo Nazionale, Naples.

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