

§14. The Burial of Hector



When they had heaped up the mound, they went back home, and thereafter shortly assembled together, and banqueted well at a splendid feast in the palace of Priam, the Zeus-fostered monarch of Troyland. Thus did they hold the funeral rites of horse-taming Hector.

– *Iliad* 24:8-1-804

Thus ends the Burial of Hector, and all of the *Iliad*, as we now possess it. In the *Shield of Achilles* (Id 18), we had an overlay of peace material on a part of the war narrative. More drastic was the addition of two chapters (Id 23-24) at the end of the *Menis*, to bring the whole story out on a note of reconciliation, with a newly gracious, diplomatic, and sympathetic Achilles as host.

Not all will agree that these chapters were a later supplement to the *Menis*!¹ But there are surely details which suggest a later origin. Some of them are:

- The peace motif itself, on which we chiefly rely
- The utterly changed character of Achilles
- Lack of preparation at the end of Id 22, the death *and mutilation* of Hector
- The baronial setting of Id 23. What goes on in the little huts by the ships has always been implausible, but these chapters imply a palace, with treasures to give away, and fields and meadows providing endless animals for sacrifice. The palace of Odysseus at Ithaka, its treasure room and supporting pastures, some of them on nearby islands, might just cover it²

Both books are long: Id 23 has 897 lines, and would last 90 minutes, which is outside the norm for Homer's work. If the funeral games (requiring 64 minutes) were eliminated, as some propose, that would leave 257 lines (26 minutes), too *short* for a Homeric performance module. Id 24 has 804 lines (80 minutes). With no plausible interpolation to remove; it is incurably out of scale.

¹At most, some are prepared to jettison the funeral games portion (Id 23:258-24:3; West *Iliad* 394, 411). On the whole, the commentators (eg Richardson 6/164f, 272f) feel no pain. Id 24 is the most loved chapter in the *Iliad*, a fact which ought to arouse suspicion (see Brooks **Fisherman** for the general principle). Stawell **Homer** 7f attacks, without naming, those who would deny the originality of Id 23-24. She has in view the theory of Grote, of whom, in her day, Leaf was the chief exponent. These saw 23-24 as part of a large group of equally post-*Menis* books. But that is not the present proposal, which, for all we have been able to discover, may be original with us..

²This objection, raised by Leaf, was unsuccessfully challenged by Stawell 103f. Note that Stawell's book is in large part a defense of the originality of Id 23-24.

What about the stylistics of the last section of the Iliad? Beginning with Achilles' entry in Id 19, the whole-book results are:

<i>Iliad</i>	19	20	21	22	23	24
	3042	3572	4415	3778	6336	5973
19	~	0.59	0.88	0.57	0.84	0.65
20	0.59	~	0.45	0.63	0.77	0.70
21	0.88	0.45	~	0.62	0.67	0.93
22	0.57	0.63	0.62	~	0.97	0.79
23	0.84	0.77	0.67	0.97	~	0.68
24	0.65	0.70	0.93	0.79	0.68	~

The closeness of 20 and 21 (no other consecutive Iliad books are this close) reflects the fact that they are narratively continuous; there is no story break between them. But the transition from 22 to 23 ($D = 0.93$) is nearly prohibitive. We get a sense of a barrier crossed, rather than the feel of a path pursued.

Though the laments at the end of 24 clearly mimic those at the end of 22,³ those books as wholes relate ($D = 0.79$) at the High level. If we are in search of a whole-book lookback, the close relation between Id 1 and 24 ($D = 0.58$), linking both ends of the Iliad,⁴ would be a better possibility – but a possibility equally available to Homer and to someone in charge of the Iliad at a later time.

Taking smaller units, we next compare the laments of Helen in Id 22 and 24. And we notice that her 24:765-766, speaking of herself to no one in particular,

This, I find, even now is the twentieth year that is passing
since I came here from over yonder, and left my own country.

is stunningly similar to this, said by disguised Odysseus to unaware Penelope in Od 19:223-224, as he tries to remember a long-ago meeting with Odysseus, but finds it hard to recall details at that distance:

Lady, to answer is hard, for I never again was anigh him
these long years – and already methinks full twenty they number
since he departed and sailed from the shores of my native country.

One of these clearly has in mind the other, and of them, it is the Odyssey one that is comfortable in its context. To explain Helen's "twenty years," many ingenuities have been offered, but none have found favor with the Homeric community.⁵ This is the mark of an unsolved problem. We think the problem is solved by our proposal, that Id 24 (and 23) were late additions to the Iliad – late additions which knew, and felt free to borrow lines from, the Odyssey.

³For details, see the Andromache chapter, §23.

⁴Whitman **Heroic** 259-260.

⁵Willcock **Commentary** 2/321 gives an overview of the proposals.