After Andromache and Hecuba, Helen is the last woman at the end of the *Iliad* to lament Hector. The present note focuses on 24. 763–764, where Helen states that Alexander is her husband and wishes she could have died before he led her to Troy. Modern editors and commentators have discussed the sequence of thought in the opening lines of this lament, focusing on Helen’s change of subject from Hector as her most beloved brother-in-law (762) to her husband Alexander (763). Leaf, for instance, followed by Richardson, understood 24. 763–764 to strengthen Helen’s praise of Hector’s kindness: Paris (not Hector) was her husband and although she need not have expected any kindness from Hector such as she should expect from a husband, he was nevertheless especially kind towards her. 2 Ameis and Hentze took

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1 The text of the *Iliad* cited here and throughout this note is from M. L. West (ed.), *Homeri Ilias I–II* (Stuttgart – Leipzig – Munich 1998–2000). All references to line-numbers are to the Iliad unless otherwise stated.

2 See W. Leaf (ed.), *The Iliad* II (London 1902) 591 and N. J. Richardson (ed.),...
these verses to be separate from the rest of Helen’s praise of Hector and used dashes to mark them as an aside triggered by δεύρων, which awakens her constant remorse at having followed Alexander to Troy. In his critical edition of the Iliad, West brackets 763–764 and explains elsewhere that these verses, which he regards as rhapsodes’ interpolations elucidating why Hector was referred to in 762 as one of Helen’s δεύρων, lead away from Hector as the subject of the lament and interrupt her explanation of why he is dearest from among her brothers-in-law. The present note seeks to contribute to this discussion by examining Helen’s wish for death in 764 before offering a reading of her lament and an interpretation of 763–764 in that context.

Lines 24. 763–764 begin with a strong assertion (η μέν, 763) drawing attention to the fact that Helen’s husband is ‘god-like Alexander’, who brought her to Troy, and leading to her wish for death. The tradition is divided here between ὃς πρὶν ὠφελλὼν ἀπολέσθαι, whereby Helen wishes that Paris had died before he led her to Troy, and the reading ὃς πρὶν ὠφελλὼν ὀλέσθαι, whereby she wishes that she had died before. The former reading would echo the words of the Trojan herald Idaeus in 7. 390 as he relates to the Achaeans Paris’ decision not to return Helen, which runs against the exhortations of the Trojans (7. 393); it would also recall Helen’s earlier wish that Paris had been killed in his duel with Menelaus (ὁς ὠφελλέως αὐτῷ ὀλέσθαι, 3. 428), which, however, has rightly been seen as “a brief outburst of disgust, already softened by what follows in that same speech”. Modern editors print the reading ὃς πρὶν ὠφελλὼν ὀλέσθαι, which is generally attributed to Aristarchus: “ὁφελλὼν ὀλέσθαι’, σύντος <Ἀρισταρχος>, ἵν’ ἡ ἱμων τῶι ὁς μ’ ὠφελ’ ἡματι τῶι


4 West (n. 2) 12 n. 27 and 282–283. For a discussion of earlier scholarly views on the opening lines in Helen’s lament see C. Mutzbauer, Der homerische Gebrauch der Partikel μέν (Berlin 1886) 13.

5 See Mutzbauer (n. 4) and J. D. Denniston, The Greek Particles (Oxford 21954) 389. This assertion immediately after Helen’s opening address to Hector echoes the beginning of 24. 749 in Hecuba’s lament; but whereas Hecuba retains Hector as the subject of this clause, Helen’s subject is now Paris.


7 Cf., e. g., H. van Thiel (ed.), Homeri Ilias (Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1996); T. W. Allen (ed.), Homeri Ilias I–III (Oxford 1931); A. Ludwich (ed.), Homeri Ilias I–II (Leipzig 1902–1907); Leaf (n. 2); A. Rzach (ed.), Homeri Iliadis carmina I–II (Leipzig
Helen and *Iliad* 24. 763–764

This accords with Helen’s previous wishes for death as expressed to Priam in 3. 173–175 and Hector in 6. 345–348. The context of Helen’s final speech in 24. 762–775 is, of course, different from that of her earlier speeches, as this is a public lament over Hector, who was her sole defender in Troy (cf. 24. 774–775). The reading ὀψελλαὶ ἀπολέσθαι would show Helen openly blaming Paris and thus disclaiming all responsibility, which is not consistent with her self-presentation elsewhere in the *Iliad*, as will be shown below, whereas a wish for her own death (ὁψελλὸν ἀλέσθαι) is a feature present in her previous speeches and a ‘typical feature’ in Iliadic personal laments.

Let us now examine more closely Helen’s expression of her wish for death (ὁψελλοῦν ὀλέσθαι, 24. 764) alongside her corresponding wishes in her previous speeches to Priam and Hector in *Iliad* 3 and 6 respectively. In all three speeches she wishes that she could have died before what she perceives to be the beginning of troubles; yet her perception of what constitutes this begin-
ning is expressed in different terms on each occasion. When Priam invites Helen to sit with him in Iliad 3 stating that it is the gods—not she—who are to blame, she wishes that she could have died when she followed his son to Troy, leaving behind her marriage chamber, relatives, child, and companions (3. 173–175): οἷς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀδείν κακός, ὁπότε δεῦρο / υἱεὶ σῶ τι ἐπόμην, θάλαμον γνωστοὺς τε λιπώσα / παιδᾶ τε τηλυγήτην καὶ ὀμηλικήν ἐρατεινήν. Helen is there the subject of both verbal forms: she was the one who followed Paris (ἐπόμην) and left behind her beloved ones (λιπώσα). After her encounter with Aphrodite at the end of Iliad 3, Helen is seen again in Paris' chamber when Hector enters Troy in Iliad 6. In addressing her brother-in-law there, she dwells once more upon her shamelessness (6. 344 and 6. 356; cf. 3. 180); but as the beginning of all troubles she pinpoints the day her mother first bore her rather than (as in Iliad 3) the day she followed Paris leaving behind family and friends, thus implying that her existence alone sufficed to cause destruction: ὥς μ’ ὄφελ’ ἠμετ’ τῷ ὄτε μὲ πρῶτον τέκε μῆτηρ, / οἳχεσθαι προφέρουσα κακή ἄνέμοιο θωέλλα (6. 345–346).

The implication that everything was beyond her power is reinforced through her claim that the gods decreed the evils in which she and Paris became involved (κυτόρ ἐπεὶ τάδε γ’ ὧδε τε θεοί κακὰ τεκμήριντο, 6. 349), and through her attribution to Zeus of the doom he placed upon her and upon Paris (ἐινεκ’ ἐμείῳ κυνὸς καὶ Ἀλεξεδνόρου ἐνεκ’ ἂτης, / οἵσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θήκε κακῶν μόρον, 6. 356–357). In Iliad 24, however, Helen’s wish for death follows after her reference to Paris as the man who led her to Troy (ὅς μ’ ἐγέρει Τροϊνδ’, 24. 764) rather than the one she followed, which suggests that it is not something she did that she regrets, and Helen emerges here as a victim.13

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13 It is worth noting briefly how the Greeks and the Trojans view Helen and her role in the Iliad: on the Greek side, the sense that she is at the centre of the dispute is stronger in the earlier books (2. 160–162 ~ 2. 176–178; 2. 356 = 2. 590; 4. 173–174), while Achilles recalls after Patroclus’ death that he is fighting εἰνεκ’ ῥγεδονής Ἐλένης (19. 325). On the Trojan side, references to Helen and her κτήματα abound in Iliad 3, where the issue is expected to be settled in a duel. Antenor later suggests that they be returned to the Achaeans (7. 348–350) but Paris objects. Although the Trojans do not offer Helen and her κτήματα, Diomedes rejects them both (7. 400–401); she remains at the heart of the issue for Menelaus in 13. 623–627, whereas Diomedes and Odysseus counter Agamemnon’s suggestions for flight without mentioning her in 9. 45–49 and 14. 75–81 respectively. Before his fatal duel with Achilles (22. 114–115) Hector fleetingly contemplates returning Helen and the possessions (κτήματα), which Alexander brought to Troy (22. 114–115); the clause ἦ τ’ ἐπέλευσεν νεικεύς ὄρχη (22. 116) that follows is taken to refer to Helen’s rape ἦ ὄρχη Ἐλένης, Στ in Erbse [n. 8] 292; cf. Richardson [supra n. 2] 119), but it may also—perhaps “with some violence” (Leaf [n. 2] 438)– refer to Helen herself.
Within the context of the lament, this expression of Helen’s wish for death follows after her opening address to the dead Hector,\(^{14}\) which invites comparison with her previous address to him in *Iliad* 6 when he was still alive.\(^{15}\) The vocative δὲρ was there followed by consideration of her own (unworthy) part in this relationship and self-denigration (δὲρ ἐμὲ τὸ κυνὸς κακομυχάνον κροὸς, 6. 344; cf. 6. 356);\(^{16}\) whereas in *Iliad* 24 Helen highlights the fact that Hector was her most beloved brother-in-law (δαέρων πολὺ φίλαττε πάντων, 762) not necessarily because she was unworthy but, as she is about to show, because he treated her so kindly in all her time in Troy. Having thus addressed Hector in 762 as her most beloved brother-in-law, Helen turns to her own plight to illustrate what the loss of Hector means for her. She starts from what she perceives to be the beginning of troubles and a wish to have died before that; the fact that she regards her union with Paris who brought her to Troy (763–764) as this beginning indicates, as we saw earlier, a shift in her perspective of her role at the start of the war. Helen then continues by considering the negative consequences this beginning brought upon her and explaining why she wished she had died before while also highlighting Hector’s role as her defender in Troy (765–772).\(^{17}\) She thus mentions her distance from Sparta and dwells on her isolation in Troy: she is a foreigner in Troy, having left her fatherland (πατρίς, 766); yet at the same time, she is also cut off ‘from there’ (κεῖθεν, 766), as it has been ‘twenty years’ since she left.\(^{18}\) In all this time, Hector has not spoken a bad or reckless word to her and has restrained her in-laws in the palace – with the exception of Priam – from hurling abusive words against her (768–772). In illustrating her loneliness and suffering while in Troy, Helen

\(^{14}\) Cf. Mutzbauer (n. 4) on Helen’s address to Hector.

\(^{15}\) Helen’s opening address to Hector echoes that of Hecuba’s in the preceding lament: “Εκτορ, ἐμὼ προσελήφθη τό ἅγιον πολὺ φίλαττε πάντων (762) ~ Έκτορ, ἐμὼ προσελήφθη τό ἅγιον πολὺ φίλαττε παίδακα (748).

\(^{16}\) L. L. Clader, *Helen: the Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Leiden 1976) 17–19 argues that “[in *Ili* 6. 344] the three modifiers Helen uses for herself, then, are all suggestive of danger and even death”.

\(^{17}\) Note that Helen’s wish in *Iliad* 3 to have died when she followed Paris led to an abrupt statement that brought her back to reality: ἀλλὰ τὰ γ’ ὦ σύγγενον τό καὶ κλεισίσσα τέτρα (3. 176); her corresponding wish in *Iliad* 6 was followed by a statement that acknowledged divine will (6. 349 cited above) and her speech to Hector ended there with a reference to the place she and Paris will occupy in men’s future songs: ὁς καὶ ὁπίσω / ὀνδρόταις πελώμεθ’ ἀνάδμιτο ἐπουρόνησαν (6. 357–358). Helen’s perception of her future role in men’s memory is also preserved in the tapestry she is weaving in *Ili* 3. 125–128.

\(^{18}\) Cf. Richardson (n. 2) 358 for the difficulties raised by Helen’s reference to the ἔεικοστὸν ἔτος (765) since she left home. Helen’s use of this number here further underlines her distance from her past: see Tsagalis (n. 11) 100.
shows why Hector was her most beloved brother-in-law and why his loss is so great for her personally; praise for Hector is thus inextricably linked with self-pity in this review of her plight, which culminates in an explicit acknowledgement of his kindness: σή τ’ ἀγαθοφροσύνη καὶ σοῖς ἀγαθοίς ἔπεσσαν (772).¹⁹

Lines 24. 763–764 in the Iliad are thus integral to Helen’s lament, as they express from a victim’s point of view the beginning of her sufferings, during which time Hector treated her most kindly. In returning to the present reality as she concludes this review, Helen thus weeps both for Hector and for herself: τὸ σέ θ' ἀμα κλάω καὶ εἴμ'/ ἀθμορον ἀφυμένη κηρ (773: cf. 764).²⁰ Self-denigration has given way to self-pity and Helen’s closing words are marked by apprehension for the future: as she puts it, there is now nobody who is kind (ἡπίος) or friendly (φίλος) towards her, but all abhor her (πάντες δὲ μὲ πεφρίκωσι, 775).

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В статье обсуждаются две строки из плача Елены по Гектору в заключительной части “Илиады” (24, 763–764). Защищая правильность чтения ὀφέλλον ὀλέσθα, которое подразумевает, что Елена желает гибели себе, против варианта ὀφέλλ’ ὀπολέσθα (пожелание гибели в этом случае адресовано Парису), автор доказывает аутентичность этих строк, которые исключают некоторые издатели. По мнению автора, эти строки служат указанием на начало и причину печальной участи Елены (Парис увез ее в Трою, лучше ей было умереть до того) и подразумевают изменение в оценке ею собственной роли в войне – от самобичевания к жалости к себе. Они, таким образом, подчеркивают значение, которое имеет для нее потеря Гектора, единственного, кто относился к ней с участием в доме Приама.

¹⁹ See Taplin (n. 9) 119–120 on Hector’s kindness towards Helen as cause of his own downfall.
²⁰ Cf. Eustathius in van der Valk (n. 8) 986: τὸ δὲ “ἀθμορόν” συμφωνόν ἐστί τῷ “ὡς πρὶν ὀφέλλον ὀλέσθα”. δόσμορος γὰρ καὶ ὃ, μὴ δέον ὄν ζῆν, ὄμοις τῶν βίων περιών.