

HELEN AND *ILLIAD* 24. 763–764*

τῆσι δ' ἔπειθ' Ἑλένη τριτάτη ἐξῆρχε γόοιο·
 “Ἐκτορ, ἐμῷ θυμῷ δαέρων πολὺ φίλτατε πάντων,
 ἦ μὲν μοι πόσις ἐστὶν Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδής,
 ὅς μ' ἄγαγε Τροίηνδ' ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι·
 ἤδη γὰρ νῦν μοι τόδ' ἐεικοστὸν ἔτος ἐστὶν 765
 ἐξ οὗ κείθεν ἔβην καὶ ἐμῆς ἀπελήλυθα πάτρης,
 ἀλλ' οὐ πῶ σέ' ἄκουσα κακὸν ἔπος οὐδ' ἀσύφηλον,
 ἀλλ' εἴ τις με καὶ ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐνίπτοι
 δαέρων ἢ γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων,
 ἢ ἐκυρή – ἐκυρὸς δὲ πατήρ ὡς ἥπιος αἰεὶ – 770
 ἀλλὰ σὺ τὸν γ' ἐπέεσσι παραιφάμενος κατέρυκες
 σῆ τ' ἀγανοφροσύνη καὶ σοῖς ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσι.
 τῷ σέ θ' ἅμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον ἀχνημένη κῆρ·
 οὐ γὰρ τίς μοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ
 ἥπιος οὐδὲ φίλος, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν”.¹ 775

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 ²1902) 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 δαέρων, which awakens her constant remorse at having followed Alexander to Troy.³ 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 δαέρων, 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.⁴ 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 (ἦ μὲν, 763)⁵ 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 ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλ' ἀπολέσθαι, whereby Helen wishes that Paris had died before he led her to Troy, and the reading ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλον 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 (ὡς ὄφελλες αὐτόθ' ὀλέσθαι, 3. 428), which, however, has rightly been seen as "a brief outburst of disgust, already softened by what follows in that same speech".⁶ Modern editors print the reading ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι,⁷ which is generally attributed to Aristarchus: "ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι", οὕτως <Ἀρίσταρχος>, ἴν' ἦι ὅμοιον τῶι "ὡς μ' ὄφελ' ἦματι τῶι

The Iliad: a Commentary (vol. VI: books 21–24) (Cambridge 1993) 357; *contra* M. L. West, *Studies in the Text and Transmission of the Iliad* (Munich – Leipzig 2001) 282–283.

³ K. F. Ameis, C. Hentze (eds.), *Homers Ilias II. 4: Gesang 22–24* (Leipzig – Berlin 1930) 149: "[D]ie Bezeichnung Hektors als δαίη weckt in Helena sofort die ständige reuevolle Klage, daß sie dem Alexander nach Troja gefolgt ist: ach mein Gemahl ist ja Alexander: vgl. Z 344 ff. Γ 172 ff. Erst 765 folgt die Begründung für φίλτατε".

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 μὲν* (Berlin 1886) 13.

⁵ See Mutzbauer (n. 4) and J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford 1954) 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.

⁶ C. W. Macleod (ed.), *Homer: Iliad book XXIV* (Cambridge 1982) 154.

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

<--- / οἴχεσθαι προφέρουσα κακὴ ἀνέμοιο θύελλα>” [Z 345–346] (Σ^T on 24. 764).⁸ This accords with Helen’s previous wishes for death as expressed to Priam in 3. 173–175 and Hector in 6. 345–348.⁹ 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 ὄφελλ’ 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,¹⁰ whereas a wish for her own death (ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι) is a feature present in her previous speeches and a ‘typical feature’ in Iliadic personal laments.¹¹

Let us now examine more closely Helen’s expression of her wish for death (ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι, 24. 764) alongside her corresponding wishes in her previous speeches to Priam and Hector in *Iliad* 3 and 6 respectively.¹² 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-

1886–1887). This reading is also attested in some important manuscripts (such as Venetus 454).

⁸ H. Erbse (ed.), *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem (scholia vetera)* V (Berlin 1977) 638 follows A. Ludwich, *Aristarchs Homerische Textkritik nach den Fragmenten des Didymos* I (Leipzig 1884) 506 in supplying in this comment Aristarchus’ name, which is accepted by modern scholars (e. g. West [n. 1] 367; Richardson [n. 2] 357; Macleod [n. 6] 154), suggesting Aristonicus as a possible source: “diple ante versum in A; fort. erat sch. Aristonici sive de v. ἄγειν (vide ad A 632 b) sive de v. I. ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι (vide sch. Didymi)”. Eustathius in M. van der Valk (ed.), *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes* IV (Leiden 1987) 983 cites both readings: “ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι”, ἢ “ὄφελλ’ ἀπολέσθαι”, ἐκεῖνος δηλοδῆ.

⁹ M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* II (Leiden 1964) 108–109 has argued in favour of ὄφελλ’ ἀπολέσθαι; he takes ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι to be Aristarchus’ conjecture out of concern for propriety, on the grounds that Helen “need not restrain herself, because she is standing in the midst of the people who abhor Paris. Therefore, she dares to give vent to her real feelings”. However, Helen’s own encounter with Paris at the end of *Iliad* 3 attests to the complex nature of their relationship and the difficulty of talking about her “real feelings” towards him in the *Iliad*: see O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: the Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford 1992) 101.

¹⁰ See Taplin (n. 9) 100 on Helen’s wish for death in response to Priam’s blaming of the gods (3. 164) as a “clear acceptance of her side of any double-determination. She should have chosen death rather than have chosen to desert her marriage-home”.

¹¹ C. C. Tsagalis, *Epic Grief: Personal Laments in Homer’s Iliad* (Berlin–New York 2004) 42–44.

¹² Cf. N. Worman, “This Voice Which is not One: Helen’s Verbal Guises in Homeric Epic”, in: A. Lardinois, L. McClure (eds.), *Making Silence Speak: Women’s Voices in Greek Literature and Society* (Princeton–Oxford 2001) 24–30 for a discussion of Helen’s use of “the *ophelion* phrase” (p. 24) in the *Iliad* from a different perspective.

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): ὡς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀδεῖν κακός, ὅπποτε δεῦρο / υἱεῖ σῶι ἐπόμην, θάλαμον γνωτούς τε λιποῦσα / παῖδά τε τηλυγέτην καὶ ὀμηλικίην ἐρατεινήν. Helen is there the subject of both verbal forms: she was the one who followed Paris (ἐπόμην) and left behind her beloved ones (λιποῦσα). 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: ὡς μ' ὄφελ' ἦματι τῷ ὅτε με πρῶτον τέκε μήτηρ, / οἴχεσθαι προφέρουσα κακὴ ἀνέμοιο θύελλα (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 (αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τάδε γ' ᾠδε θεοὶ κακὰ τεκμήραντο, 6. 349), and through her attribution to Zeus of the doom he placed upon her and upon Paris (εἶνεκ' ἐμεῖο κυνὸς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης, / οἴσιν ἐπι Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν 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' ἄγαγε Τροίηνδ', 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

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 εἶνεκα ῥιγεδανῆς Ἑλένης (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 ἢ τ' ἐπλετο νείκεος ἀρχή (22. 116) that follows is taken to refer to Helen's rape (ἡ ὄρπαγή Ἑλένης, Σ^T 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 δῶερ was there followed by consideration of her own (unworthy) part in this relationship and self-denigration (δῶερ ἐμεῖο κυνὸς κακομηχάνου κρυοέσσης, 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 φίλτατε 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 (πάτρης, 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: Ἔκτορ, ἐμῶι θυμῶι δαέρων πολὺ φίλτατε πάντων (762) ~ Ἔκτορ, ἐμῶι θυμῶι πάντων πολὺ φίλτατε παίδων (748).

¹⁶ L. L. Clader, *Helen: the Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Leiden 1976) 17–19 argues that “[in *Il.* 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 τά γ’ οὐκ ἐγένοντο τὸ καὶ κλαίουσα τέτηκα (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: ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ’ αἰοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισιν (6. 357–358). Helen’s perception of her future role in men’s memory is also preserved in the tapestry she is weaving in *Il.* 3. 125–128.

¹⁸ Cf. Richardson (n. 2) 358 for the difficulties raised by Helen’s reference to the ἐεικοστὸν 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: σῆι τ' ἀγανοφροσύνῃ καὶ σοῖς ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσιν (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' ἄμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον ἀχθυμένη κῆρ (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 (ἡπιος) or friendly (φίλος) towards her, but all abhor her (πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασι, 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 ὄφελον ὀλέσθαι, которое подразумевает, что Елена желает гибели себе, против варианта ὄφελ' ὀπολέσθαι (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 “ἄμμορον” συμφωνόν ἐστι τῷ “ὡς πρὶν ὄφελον ὀλέσθαι”. δύσμορος γὰρ καὶ ὁ, μὴ δέον ὄν ζῆν, ὅμως τῷ βίῳ περιών.