



HOW DID HOMER'S TROILUS DIE?*

ABSTRACT

This article examines ancient depictions of the death of Troilus in art and literature and challenges the widespread belief that the Iliad implies an alternative version of the myth in which Troilus dies in battle. In particular, it argues that the death-in-battle interpretation is both insufficiently supported by the internal evidence and incompatible with the external evidence. Given the evident popularity of the story of Achilles' ambush of Troilus in the Archaic period, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the poet of the Iliad knew the story of Troilus' death by ambush. That the poem's only reference to Troilus does not contradict this story, and possibly even alludes to it, should persuade critics of the strong likelihood that the popular story of Troilus' ambush at the fountain was also the one in the poet's mind.

Keywords: Troilus; Achilles; Homer; *Iliad*; Trojan War; ambush; myth; Mestor; Virgil; *Aeneid*

INTRODUCTION

As Priam prepares to ransom Hector's corpse in the final book of the *Iliad*, he reflects on the many good sons he has lost in the war and berates those who remain (24.255–62):

ὦ μοι ἐγὼ πανάποτμος, ἐπεὶ τέκον υἱὰς ἀρίστους
Τροίην ἐν εὐρείῃ, τῶν δ' οὐ τινὰ φημι λελείφθαι,
Μήστορά τ' ἀντίθεον καὶ Τρωΐλον ἵππιοχάρμην
Ἴκτορά θ', ὃς θεὸς ἔσκε μετ' ἀνδράσιν, οὐδὲ ἔφκει
ἀνδρός γε θνητοῦ πάϊς ἔμμεναί, ἀλλὰ θεοῖο.
τούς μὲν ἀπόλεσ' ἄρης, τὰ δ' ἐλέγχεα πάντα λέλειπται,
ψεῦσταί τ' ὄρχησται τε χοροτυπησιν ἄριστοι,
ἀρνῶν ἢ δ' ἐρίφων ἐπιδήμιοι ἀρπακτῆρες.

Alas, I am utterly unfortunate, since I fathered the best sons
in broad Troy, but none of them is left—
godlike Mestor and Troilus the horseman¹
and Hector, who was a god among men and seemed
to be the son not of a mortal man, but of a god.
Ares has destroyed them, but all these disgraces are left—
liars, dancers, the best on the dance-floor,
thieves of their own people's lambs and kids.²

* My thanks to Kenny Draper for his clarifying remarks on my discussion of Verg. *Aen.* 1.474–8, and also to *CQ*'s editor and anonymous reader.

¹ On the interpretation of ἵππιοχάρμην, see section 2.1 below. In view of the word's equivocal nature, I render it as neutrally as possible so as not to sway the reader.

² Uncredited translations are mine. The following editions are used: Homer's *Iliad*, M.L. West (ed.), *Homeri Ilias*, 2 vols. (Munich and Leipzig, 1998 [2006²–2000]); *Iliad* scholia, H. Erbse (ed.), *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem (scholia vetera)*, 7 vols. (Berlin, 1969–88); Virgil's *Aeneid*, R.A.B. Mynors (ed.), *P. Vergili Maronis opera* (Oxford, 1969).

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As pictorial and literary sources of the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods make clear, Troilus was popularly understood to have been killed outside the context of battle, when Achilles ambushed him at an extramural fountain, chased him down and killed him at an altar in the sanctuary of Apollo. According to a growing consensus of scholars, however, this was not the version of the myth that the poet of the *Iliad* had in mind when composing Priam's speech. Rather, they argue, the poet presents Troilus as a warrior who died in the course of pitched battle, doing so either in conformity with a pre-existing tradition (according to which Troilus was a grown man and a valiant warrior)³ or in an attempt to suppress the traditional story of Achilles' brutal murder of an unarmed boy.⁴ Lesky, for example, considers it 'a high probability that Homer is referring to a story that knew of Troilus' death in battle'.⁵ Similarly, Robertson notes that Priam's reference to Troilus' death gives 'a clear impression ... of a warrior killed in combat',⁶ and Jenner remarks that Homer's Troilus 'was definitely killed on the field of battle'.⁷ More recently, González González has written that the *Iliad* portrays Troilus as 'a warrior who dies in combat against the Achaeans just like his brothers',⁸ and Lambrou has argued that the *Iliad* 'invite[s] us to imagine that the Trojan prince fought and died as a warrior on the battlefield'.⁹

This article challenges the widespread belief that *Il.* 24.255–62 implies a version of the story in which Troilus dies in battle, a belief both insufficiently supported by the internal evidence and incompatible with the external evidence. This article has two parts. Part one provides a survey of ancient depictions of Troilus' death outside of Homeric poetry, first in pictorial art (1.1) and then in literature (1.2). Part two examines the *Iliad*'s lone reference to Troilus and critiques the arguments invoked to justify the death-in-battle interpretation.

³ A. Lesky, 'Troilos 2', *RE* VII.A 1 (1939), 602–15, at 612; E.A.B. Jenner, 'Troilus and Polyxena in archaic Greek lyric: Ibycus fr. S224 Dav.', *Prudentia* 30 (1998), 1–15, at 4.

⁴ A.H. Sommerstein, D.G. Fitzpatrick and T.H. Talbot, *Sophocles: Selected Fragmentary Plays* (Oxford, 2006), at 1.197; I.L. Lambrou, 'Homer and Achilles' ambush of Troilus: confronting the elephant in the room', *G&R* 65 (2018), 75–85, at 76.

⁵ Lesky (n. 3), 612.

⁶ M. Robertson, 'Troilus and Polyxena: notes on a changing legend', in J.-P. Descœudres (ed.), *ΕΥΜΟΥΣΙΑ: Ceramic and Iconographic Studies in Honour of Alexander Cambitoglou* (Sydney, 1990), 63–70, at 64.

⁷ Jenner (n. 3), 4.

⁸ M. González González, 'Emboscada a Troilo: aspectos sacrificiales en la muerte del príncipe Troyano', *LEC* 82 (2014), 229–46, at 229. This position was subsequently modified: 'The Homeric version is so brief that it is difficult to see any contradiction with the most widespread version of the myth, in which Achilles ambushed and slew Troilus' (M. González González, *Achilles* [Abingdon and New York, 2018], 47).

⁹ Lambrou (n. 4), 76. In addition to those cited above, the death-in-battle interpretation is also endorsed by J. Conington and H. Nettleship, *P. Vergili Maronis opera: The Works of Virgil with a Commentary* (London, 1884⁴), 2.55; L. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, rev. C. Robert (Berlin, 1894⁴), 1125; E. Bethe, *Homer: Dichtung und Sage* (Leipzig, 1929²), 2.244; R.S. Conway, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber primus* (Cambridge, 1935), 90; M. Heidenreich, 'Zu den frühen Troilos-Darstellungen', *MDAI(A)* 4 (1951), 103–19, at 103; M. Benedetti, 'Il composito omerico ἱπποχάρμης', *RAL* 34 (1979), 169–85, at 179; G. Ahlberg-Cornell, *Myth and Epos in Early Greek Art: Representation and Interpretation* (Jonsered, 1992), 55; B. Gollan, 'Personnages du passé héroïque de la Grèce et de la guerre de Troie,' in J. Chamay and J.-P. Cottier (edd.), *Homère chez Calvin: figures de l'Hellenisme à Genève* (Geneva, 2000), 183–94, at 148; A. Aloni, 'Due note virgiliane', in A. Balbo, F. Bessone and E. Malaspina (edd.), *Tanti affetti in tal momento': studi in onore di Giovanna Garbarino* (Alessandria, 2011), 1–10, at 3; C.L. Wilkinson, *The Lyric of Ibycus* (Berlin, 2013), 198; E. Lelli, *Ditti di Creta: l'altra Iliade* (Milan, 2015), 32.

1. THE DEATH OF TROILUS OUTSIDE THE *ILIAD*

Before considering the implications of the *Iliad*'s presentation of Troilus' death, it will be useful first to survey the extant depictions of Troilus' death outside the *Iliad* and thereby establish the version(s) of the myth that are likely to have been in circulation at the time of the *Iliad*'s composition.

1.1 *The Death of Troilus in Pictorial Art*

Troilus' fatal encounter with Achilles is, as Georg Danek observes, 'one of the best attested myths of archaic pictorial art'.¹⁰ Indeed, Achilles' ambush, pursuit and murder of Troilus in fact 'constitute some of the most popular and also the earliest known depictions of the Epic Cycle'.¹¹ Artists focussed on four scenes: the ambush, the pursuit, the murder and the ensuing confrontation with Troilus' defenders.¹² Collectively, pictorial representations of Troilus' death tell a clear and consistent story, which can be summarized briefly. Achilles crouches in ambush behind a fountain and/or tree in the Trojan countryside. Troilus and his sister Polyxena approach, with or without attendants, to fill water jugs and to water Troilus' horse(s).¹³ When Achilles emerges from his hiding place, Polyxena drops her water jug and runs away. Troilus rides away on horseback, as Achilles pursues on foot.¹⁴ Achilles eventually catches up with him at a sanctuary of Apollo, where he cuts off his head. When several Trojan warriors arrive to confront Achilles, he throws Troilus' severed head at them.¹⁵ Given both the popularity of the myth in archaic and classical visual art and the consistency with which the myth was depicted across time and space, there can be 'no doubt', as Danek writes, 'that the painters of the images were referring to a narrative that was largely fixed in its course [...]. In other words, what the painters referred to and assumed to be known to viewers of the paintings was a single, almost canonical, version of the myth.'¹⁶

Troilus' encounter with Achilles was depicted in pictorial art at least as early as the beginning of the seventh century B.C.E. Among the earliest depictions are three Protocorinthian aryballois, two of which show Achilles pursuing Troilus as the latter tries to escape on horseback;¹⁷ the other shows Achilles crouching in ambush before Troilus, who reins in his horse at the sight of him.¹⁸ Other seventh-century representations of the myth include two bronze reliefs from Olympia, each showing an armed

¹⁰ G. Danek, 'Troilos und Lykaon: ein Beitrag zur Intertextualität Homers', *GSKA* 151 (2016), 5–54, at 21.

¹¹ S. Lowenstam, *As Witnessed by Images: The Trojan War Tradition in Greek and Etruscan Art* (Baltimore, 2008), 139.

¹² For an overview of the common elements found in each scene-type, see E.A. Mackay, 'Visions of tragedy: tragic restructuring in Attic black-figure representations of the story of Troilos', *Akroterion* 41 (1996), 31–43, at 34–5. For an itemization of the subtypes found within each scene-type, see Danek (n. 10), 22–3.

¹³ For visual representations of the ambush, see A. Kossatz-Deissmann, in *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', 1.1, 37–200, at §§206–81; A. Kossatz-Deissmann, in *LIMC* s.v. 'Troilos', 8.1, 91–4, at §§3–6; G. Camporeale, in *LIMC* s.v. 'Achle', 1.1, 200–14, at §§11–16.

¹⁴ For visual representations of the pursuit, see *LIMC* s.vv. 'Achilleus', §§282–358, 'Achle', §§17–66, 'Troilos', §§7, 10–11, 15 and add. §§2–3.

¹⁵ For visual representations of the murder and ensuing confrontation, see *LIMC* s.vv. 'Achilleus', §§359–77, 'Achle', §§67–84, and 'Troilos', §§8–9, 13–14 and 16.

¹⁶ Danek (n. 10), 23.

¹⁷ *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', §§332a (c. 700 B.C.E.) and 331 (c. 650–625 B.C.E.).

¹⁸ *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', §253 (c. 620 B.C.E.).

Achilles preparing to kill a naked Troilus at the altar of Apollo,¹⁹ and a fragment of a relief pithos from Tinos which appears to show an armed Achilles waiting in ambush as Polyxena flees from him.²⁰ All known representations of the myth from the seventh century depict Troilus' death as a murder resulting from an ambush. The fact that these early depictions of the myth were spread over a broad geographical area and represent the same series of scenes in similar ways—and that seventh-century artists could expect viewers to recognize the myth on the basis of sparse visual clues—²¹ suggests that the story of Troilus' ambush was already well established by the Early Archaic period.²²

We are particularly well informed about how visual artists in the next century conceived of Troilus' death.²³ From the first three quarters of the sixth century, we have eighty-eight depictions of the myth, all of which present Troilus' death as an ambush: thirty-nine develop a moment from the ambush itself, another thirty-nine highlight the pursuit and ten others show the killing and/or subsequent confrontation in Apollo's sanctuary. The final quarter of the sixth century yields fourteen depictions of Troilus' fatal encounter with Achilles, including thirteen images that clearly represent the encounter as an ambush and one apparent outlier, an Attic red-figure kylix, attributed to Oltos, showing an unnamed warrior spearing a beardless, partially armed Troilus (named), who has fallen to a knee as he attempts to unsheathe his sword. Behind him, a fully armed Aeneas (also named) threatens Troilus' attacker with a spear.²⁴ Given the presence of a four-horse chariot on the other side of the vessel and the depiction of Troilus with military equipment (a shield, a sheathed sword and a helmet pushed up over his eyes), several scholars have reasonably interpreted the painting as a depiction of a battlefield encounter.²⁵

While the popularity of the myth declined steadily after the Archaic period, all seventy-two pictorial depictions of the myth from the fifth and fourth centuries present Troilus' death as an ambush occurring outside the context of battle. Thereafter, the myth all but disappears from the material record until the second century B.C.E., when Achilles' ambush of Troilus became a popular subject for Etruscan visual artists.²⁶

¹⁹ *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', §§375 (c. 625–600 B.C.E.) and 376 (c. 600 B.C.E.); cf. §377 (c. 590–580 B.C.E.).

²⁰ *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', §280 (c. 680–670 B.C.E.). In addition to those mentioned above, see also *LIMC* s.v. 'Troilos', §7.

²¹ On this point, see C. Zindel, *Drei vorhomerische Sagenversionen in der griechischen Kunst* (Basel, 1974), 30.

²² See C. Brügger, *Homer's Iliad. The Basel Commentary, Book XXIV*, translated by B.W. Millis and S. Strack, and edited by S.D. Olson (Berlin, 2017), 106, with references.

²³ *LIMC* dates ninety-nine depictions of the myth to the sixth century B.C.E. To this figure we may add three vases not included there: a bucchero amphora from Caere showing Achilles' pursuit of Troilus at the fountain (Museo Gregoriano Etrusco 20255, c. 570–550 B.C.E.); a Corinthian pyx that shows Troilus' murder at the altar (Hermitage Museum B2397, c. 600–550 B.C.E.); and an amphora that shows Achilles waiting to ambush a mounted Troilus (NFA Classical Auctions [1991] §103, c. 530 B.C.E.). Several vases without precise dates in *LIMC* likely also belong to the sixth century, namely *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', §§289, 305, 327, 330 and 335, all of which depict Achilles' pursuit of Troilus.

²⁴ *LIMC* s.v. 'Achilleus', §369.

²⁵ O. Jahn, *Telephos und Troilos und kein Ende* (Leipzig, 1859), 7–9; Kossatz-Deissmann (n. 13), 198. K. Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, 1969), 18, however, regards the image as a development of the ambush story, and Robertson (n. 6), 68 suggests that the names 'Troilus' and 'Aeneas' 'may mean no more than that the painter wished to indicate a Trojan setting for this conventional battle-design'.

²⁶ See Camporeale (n. 13), 202–5, 210–11. On the popularity of the Troilus myth in Etruria, see Lowenstam (n. 11), 139–48.

Though Etruscan artists put their own unique stamp on the myth, its structural core remained unchanged.²⁷

1.2 *The Death of Troilus in Post-Homeric Literature*

The earliest known literary depiction of Troilus' death is in the *Cypria*, which, though only fragmentarily preserved, clearly presented it as an event occurring outside the context of pitched battle. Proclus' summary makes clear that Achilles killed Troilus during the long period when the inhabitants of Ilios refused to engage the Achaeans in pitched battle, prompting Achilles to conduct raids and ambushes throughout the Troad (*Cypria* arg. lines 55–64 Bernabé):

And they [*sc.* the Achaeans] send negotiators to the Trojans to demand the return of Helen and the property. When they did not agree to the demands, they began a siege. Next, they go out over the country and destroy the surrounding settlements. After this, Achilles has a desire to look upon Helen, and Aphrodite and Thetis bring the two of them together. Then, when the Achaeans are eager to return home, Achilles holds them back. Then he drives off Aeneas' cattle. He sacks Lymnessos and Pedasos and many of the surrounding settlements, and **he slays Troilus** [Τρωΐλον φονεύει]. Patroclus takes Lykaon to Lemnos and sells him into slavery.²⁸

That the *Cypria* presented Troilus' murder as part of 'a sequence of narrative incidents which take place off the battlefield and in a context of siege' clearly suggests, as Lambrou points out, 'that Achilles ambushes the Trojan prince while the latter is carrying out some non-military business, just as he ambushes both Aeneas and Lycaon'.²⁹

Another early depiction of Troilus' death is Ibycus fr. S224.7–8 *PMGF*, preserved in a second-century C.E. papyrus commentary (*P.Oxy.* 2637) in which Ibycus' description of Troilus' death at Apollo's altar is quoted and elucidated. While the quotation from Ibycus' poem itself indicates only that an unnamed 'boy like the gods' (παῖδα] θεοῖς ἴκ[ελον) was 'killed outside the citadel of Ilios' (τὸν περιγὰμων ἔκτοσθεν Ἴλιου κτάνε), the commentator's paraphrase—'He killed Troilus outside the city in the sanctuary of Apollo Thymbraeus' (ἀνεῖλεν τὸν Τρωΐλον ἐκτ[ὸς τῆς πό]λεως ἐν τῷ τοῦ Θυμβραεῖου ἱερῷ)—suggests that Ibycus' poem depicted Achilles' ambush and murder of Troilus somewhere outside Ilios, perhaps specifically in the sanctuary of Apollo Thymbraeus, if the commentator's paraphrase reflects details expressed elsewhere in the poem.³⁰

Sophocles also depicted Troilus' death as the result of an ambush by Achilles, as is clear from the exegetical T-scholium to *Il.* 24.257, which notes that 'Sophocles in *Troilus* says that he [*sc.* Troilus] was ambushed by Achilles while exercising his horses by the Thymbraeum and died.' Based on the available evidence, Sommerstein reconstructs Sophocles' version of Troilus' death as follows: After taking their horses out

²⁷ See E. Brunn, *I rilievi delle urne etrusche* (Rome, 1870), 1.52–69; G. Camporeale, 'Banalizzazioni etrusche di miti greci III', *Studi Etruschi* 37 (1969), 59–76; F. Prayon 'Todesdämonen und die Troilossage in der frühetruskischen Kunst', *MDAI(R)* 84 (1977), 181–97; Lowenstam (n. 11), 139–48; González González (n. 8 [2014]), 239–40.

²⁸ The translation is adapted from M.L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries B.C.* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 79.

²⁹ Lambrou (n. 4), 77.

³⁰ See Wilkinson (n. 9), 198: 'The fact that the commentator specifies the location may mean that the poet was not so specific and that the commentator is supplying this information. However, it is also possible that the sanctuary was mentioned in part of the poem not quoted in this section.'

for a ride, Troilus and his tutor stop at a fountain near the sanctuary of Apollo Thymbraeus, where they are ambushed by Achilles. Troilus flees on horseback in the direction of the Thymbraeum. Achilles catches up with Troilus at the sanctuary, kills him and mutilates his corpse.³¹ This reconstruction is corroborated by Aristonicus' remark that 'the post-Homeric poets'—including, presumably, Sophocles—'depicted Troilus as being chased while mounted on horseback' (Σ A [*Ariston.*] *Il.* 24.257b).

The next extant reference to the death of Troilus occurs in Lycophron's *Alexandra*, where Cassandra foresees 'a savage serpent' (i.e. Achilles) beheading 'your well-nourished scion ... sweet delight of your family' (i.e. Troilus) on the altar of his 'father' (i.e. Apollo) (*Alex.* 307–13). A scholiast elucidates Cassandra's cryptic speech as follows (Σ Lycoph. 307a Leone):

Achilles fell in love with Troilus, son of Priam. He chased him and was about to catch him, but Troilus took refuge in the temple of Apollo Thymbraeus. Achilles tried to force him to come out. When he refused to comply, he went in and killed him on the altar. Avenging him, they say, Apollo then and there assured that Achilles would be killed. Troilus was said to be Apollo's son by nature and Priam's by adoption.

As this explanation makes clear, Cassandra's prophecy implies that Troilus' death will occur at the sanctuary of Apollo, not on the battlefield.

Following their predecessors, Apollodorus and Dio Chrysostom also present Troilus' death as the result of an ambush. Apollodorus' *Epitome* states that 'Achilles ambushed Troilus and murdered him in the sanctuary of Thymbraean Apollo' (3.32). Similarly, in the *Trojan Oration*, Dio Chrysostom makes clear that Achilles killed Troilus outside the context of battle (*Or.* 11.77):

There were skirmishes and plundering on the part of the Greeks. This, in fact, is how Troilus died, still a boy, along with Mestor and many others. For Achilles was exceptionally good at laying ambushes and attacking by night.

The earliest work of literature that could plausibly be said to depict Troilus' demise as a battlefield encounter is Virgil's *Aeneid*. Among the scenes that Aeneas sees depicted on the temple of Juno in Carthage is the death of Troilus, which the narrator describes as follows (1.474–8):

parte alia fugiens amissis Troilus armis,
infelix puer atque impar congressus Achilli,
fertur equis, curruque haeret resupinus inani,
lora tenens tamen; huic ceruixque comaeque trahuntur
per terram, et uersa puluis inscribitur hasta.

In another section, Troilus in flight, his weapons lost—unfortunate boy, and an unequal match for Achilles—is carried along by his horses, and, on his back, clings to his empty chariot, still holding the reins. His neck and hair are dragged along the ground, and the dust is inscribed by the overturned spear.

Virgil takes elements familiar from the popular ambush story, wherein Troilus uses the speed of a horse to flee Achilles' attack, but adds details that seem to reflect a martial context, namely the presence of a chariot and a spear and the indication that Troilus had been equipped with additional military equipment before his encounter with Achilles.

³¹ Sommerstein et al. (n. 4), 210–11.

While these details have reasonably been taken to suggest that Troilus initially tried to stand his ground, or even that he and Achilles met in the course of pitched battle,³² the circumstances under which Troilus and Achilles encountered one another are difficult to piece together.³³ If Virgil intended to imply a battle context, in what scenario are we to imagine that a mere boy (*puer*) has entered battle? Under what circumstances has Troilus lost his *arma*, and what exactly does *arma* refer to? If Troilus had been equipped for pitched battle, he should have had a helmet, a breastplate, a shield, a sword, a spear and greaves.³⁴ Are we to imagine that Troilus has voluntarily discarded some or all of his defensive gear, including his helmet (1.477–8)?³⁵ Or has Achilles violently disarmed him of everything but a spear? Does the spear in question even belong to Troilus, or does it in fact belong to Achilles, as Servius thought?³⁶ Finally, what has made Troilus fall backwards? Did he receive a frontal blow that launched him backwards off his car, after which point his horses turned and fled? Or has Achilles chased him down and dragged him to the ground as he attempts to flee, as in the ambush story? In fact, while Virgil's version of Troilus' death is most commonly taken as a depiction of a battlefield encounter, several prominent critics have emphasized its compatibility with the ambush story.³⁷ Williams argues this point at length,³⁸ and Austin reconstructs the scene as an ambush in which Troilus happens to have been armed 'when Achilles surprised him'.³⁹

However we interpret Virgil's idiosyncratic presentation of Troilus' death, there is little reason to assume that the elements that make his version unique owe their origin to a pre-existing tradition, stretching back to Homer, in which the young Trojan prince died in battle.⁴⁰ To the contrary, it seems more plausible to regard Virgil as an innovator than as a follower of a mythological tradition for which we have no compelling

³² For this interpretation see Jahn (n. 25), 9–10; Preller (n. 9), 1125; A.C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* (Cambridge, 1917), 2.254; Conway (n. 9), 90–1; Lesky (n. 3), 612; G.P. Oikonomos, 'Miroir grec de la collection Hélène A. Stathatos d'Athènes', *RA* 31–2 (1948), 770–86, at 774; Robertson (n. 6), 68; Sommerstein et al. (n. 4), 198; Aloni (n. 9), 1; Wilkinson (n. 9), 198; Lelli (n. 9), 32; and M. Gioseffì, 'Puer, iuvenis, vir: morte di giovani eroi nell'*Eneide*', *AOQU (Achilles Orlando Quixote Ulysses). Rivista Di Epica*. 2.2 (2021), 43–73, at 47.

³³ On the scene's lack of clarity, see M. Mayer, 'Troilus 2', in Roscher, *Lex.*, vol. 5 (Leipzig, 1924), 1215–30, at 1218; R.D. Williams, 'The pictures on Dido's temple (*Aeneid* 1.450–93)', *CQ* 10 (1960), 145–51, at 145–6; R.G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber primus* (Oxford, 1971), 160–1; K. MacLennan, *Virgil. Aeneid I* (London, 2010), 132; Aloni (n. 9), 3.

³⁴ See R. Heinze (transl. H. Harvey, D. Harvey and F. Robertson), *Virgil's Epic Technique* (Berkeley, 1994), 160–3.

³⁵ See W. Clausen, *Virgil's Aeneid: Decorum, Allusion, and Ideology* (Munich and Leipzig, 2002), 31 n. 13: 'he has thrown away his helmet and shield but kept his spear.'

³⁶ See Serv. on *Aen.* 1.476. Servius' interpretation, generally dismissed by modern interpreters, has recently received support from Aloni (n. 9), 3.

³⁷ For explicit rejections of the argument that Virgil depicts a battlefield encounter, see Mayer (n. 33), 1218; O. Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1906), 672 n. 1; Williams (n. 33), 147–8. See also Austin (n. 33), 160; D. Clay, 'The archaeology of the temple to Juno in Carthage (*Aen.* 1. 446–93)', *CPh* 83 (1988), 195–205, at 205; M.C.J. Putnam, 'Dido's murals and Virgilian ekphrasis', *HSPH* 98 (1998), 243–75, at 257; A. Barchiesi, 'Representations of suffering and interpretation in the *Aeneid*', in P. Hardie (ed.), *Virgil: Critical Assessments of Classical Authors* (London, 1999), 324–44, at 335; N.M. Horsfall, *Fifty Years at the Sibyl's Heels: Selected Papers on Virgil and Rome* (Oxford, 2020), 20.

³⁸ Williams (n. 33), 148.

³⁹ Austin (n. 33), 160.

⁴⁰ For this view, see Oikonomos (n. 32), 774; Robertson (n. 6), 68; Jenner (n. 3), 4; Sommerstein et al. (n. 4), 198; and Aloni (n. 9), 3–4.

evidence.⁴¹ Servius, for one, clearly viewed Virgil's treatment of the myth as an innovation, remarking (on *Aen.* 1.474) that Virgil changed (*mutauit*) the popular story from one in which Achilles lures Troilus into a trap and kills him to one in which (on Servius' reading) Achilles skewers Troilus with a spear through the chest, knocking him off his chariot as he tries to flee. Indeed, Virgil's idiosyncratic treatment of the Troilus myth would accord with his innovative and un-Homeric depiction of Achilles' abuse of Hector's body later in the same passage (*Aen.* 1.483–4); whereas Homer shows Achilles dragging Hector's corpse around the tomb of Patroclus (*Il.* 24.14–16, 50–2, 416–17, 755–6), Virgil has him do so around the walls of Troy.⁴²

While it seems unwarranted to deduce from the *Aeneid* that two distinct versions of the Troilus myth had coexisted since the Archaic period, it is clear that by the second century C.E., Troilus' death could be depicted either as the result of an ambush or as a casualty of battle. Thus, while Apollodorus (*Epit.* 3.32), Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 11.77), Libanius (*Decl.* 5.12), Servius (on *Aen.* 1.474), the First Vatican Mythographer (1.207) and Eustathius (*Il.* 24.251 [van der Valk 4.897.28–898.1]) all present Troilus' fatal encounter with Achilles as an ambush, Dictys of Crete (*P.Teb.* 628.1–18 \approx Septimius 4.9), Ausonius (12.18), Quintus of Smyrna (4.418–35) and Dares Phrygius (33) all represent Troilus as dying in battle.⁴³ If we leave aside accounts that are strongly anti-Homeric (i.e. Dictys and Dares),⁴⁴ as well as those that are obvious reworkings of Virgil (i.e. Ausonius),⁴⁵ we are left only with Quintus of Smyrna, whose familiarity with the *Aeneid*, whether in the original or in translation,⁴⁶ has gained increasingly wide acceptance in recent decades.⁴⁷ The possibility that Quintus was influenced by Virgil's treatment of Troilus' death in particular gains plausibility from

⁴¹ On this point, see N.M. Horsfall, 'Aeneid', in N.M. Horsfall (ed.), *A Companion to the Study of Virgil* (Leiden, 1995), 101–216, at 107; G.C. Polk, 'The helmsman and the charioteer in the *Aeneid*: emblems of power' (Diss., University of Georgia, 2013), 174; K. Freudenburg, *Virgil's Cinematic Art: Vision as Narrative in the Aeneid* (Oxford, 2023), 89–90.

⁴² See Williams (n. 33), 150; Austin (n. 33), 162; Putnam (n. 37), 257.

⁴³ I omit Statius' two references to Troilus' death (*Silv.* 2.6.32–3 and 5.2.121–2), which, while clearly indebted to Virgil, can plausibly be interpreted either as an ambush or as a battlefield encounter; see discussion in C.E. Newlands, *Statius: Silvae, Book II* (Cambridge, 2011), 209. I also omit Malalas' *Chronographia* (5.27), whose depiction of Troilus' death is based on that of Dictys, and Tzetzes' *Carmina Iliaca* (3.382–4), which draws on the accounts of Dictys, Quintus and Malalas. On the use of Dictys by later authors, see P. Gainsford, 'Dictys of Crete', *CCJ* 58 (2012), 58–87, at 67–74.

⁴⁴ See R.M. Frazer, *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian* (Bloomington, IN, 1966), 5–7; S. Kaczko, 'Rewriting Homer: Dictys, Septimius and the (re-)shaping of the Trojan War material', *ΦΑΙΔΙΜΟΣ ΕΚΤΩΠ. Studi in onore di Willy Cingano per il suo 70° compleanno* (Venice 2021), 427–43.

⁴⁵ On Ausonius' close engagement with Virgil in this poem, see B.P. Sowers, 'Ausonius epitomizer: Encyclopaedism and ordering knowledge in late antique Gaul', in P.F. Sacchi and M. Formisano (edd.), *Epitomic Writing in Late Antiquity and Beyond: Forms of Unabridged Writing* (London, 2023), 34–54, at 43–4.

⁴⁶ Ancient Greek translations of the *Aeneid* existed as early as the first century C.E.; see M. Paschalis, 'Translations of Virgil into Ancient Greek', in S. Braund and Z.M. Torlonie (edd.), *Virgil and his Translators* (Oxford, 2018), 136.

⁴⁷ See U. Gärtner, *Quintus Smyrnaeus und die Aeneis* (Munich, 2005); A.W. James, 'Quintus of Smyrna and Virgil: a matter of prejudice', in M. Baumbach and S. Bär (edd.), *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic* (Berlin, 2007), 145–58; F. Hadjittofi, 'Res Romanae: Cultural politics in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica* and Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*', *ibid.* 357–78, at 358–70; S. Bär, 'Sinon and Laocoon in Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*: A Rewriting and De-Romanisation of Vergil's *Aeneid*?' in K. Carvounis, S. Papaioannou and G. Scafoglio (edd.), *Later Greek Epic and the Latin Literary Tradition* (Berlin, 2023), 55–74; E. Greensmith, 'Odysseus the Roman: Imperial Temporality and the *Posthomerica*', *ibid.* 75–99.

the fact that the simile that Quintus uses to describe Achilles' slaying of Troilus (Quint. Smyrn. 4.423–9) appears to be an adaptation of Virgil's reworking of a Homeric simile (*Aen.* 9.434–7; *Il.* 8.306–7).⁴⁸ Ultimately, then, most, if not all, literary depictions of Troilus' death as a battlefield encounter can plausibly be traced back either to Virgil's *Aeneid* or to one of two pseudographical works of Homeric revisionism, which sought to provide alternatives to Homer's account of the Trojan War.

In any case, between the composition of the *Iliad* in the late eighth or early seventh century B.C.E. and the composition of the *Aeneid* in the latter half of the first century B.C.E., all but one of more than two hundred pictorial and literary depictions of Troilus' fatal encounter with Achilles portray that event as an ambush located off the battlefield. Given that the story of Troilus' ambush seems to have been well established by the time of the *Iliad*'s composition, strong internal evidence would be required to show that the poet of the *Iliad* conceived of Troilus' death as a battlefield casualty rather than as an ambush.

2. THE DEATH OF TROILUS IN THE *ILLIAD*

Having traced the development of the Troilus myth in visual art and literature from the early Archaic period through the end of Late Antiquity, we may now return to the portrayal of Troilus' death in the *Iliad*. In this section, I argue that the case for the death-in-battle interpretation is not only unconvincing on its own but also insufficient to outweigh its implausibility, given the overwhelming popularity of the death-by-ambush story in the Archaic period.

2.1 *The Case for the Death-in-Battle Interpretation*

The case for the death-in-battle interpretation of *Il.* 24.255–62 rests on three arguments. The first is that Priam's statement that 'Ares has destroyed' (ἀπόλεσ' ἄρης) all his best sons, including Mestor, Troilus and Hector, implies that Troilus died fighting in pitched battle.⁴⁹ Whether Troilus was ambushed and decapitated by a hostile invader in the Trojan countryside or cut down in the course of battle, Priam's inclusion of Troilus among those of his sons whom 'Ares has destroyed' is sensible and appropriate. In either case, Troilus can reasonably be described as a victim of war—and, by metonymy, of Ares.

Another argument offered by proponents of the death-in-battle interpretation is that Priam's inclusion of Troilus among his 'best sons' (υἱᾶς ἀρίστους) implies that he was an accomplished warrior on par with Hector and, consequently, that he must have died in battle. Zindel, for example, notes that 'The superlative ἀριστος can hardly refer to anything other than the courage and bravery of the three sons.'⁵⁰ Similarly, Gioseffi ascribes to Priam the belief that Troilus, Mestor and Hector were 'most effective in the defence of the city'.⁵¹ While it is true that the adjective ἀριστος is often applied

For an overview of Greek speakers' engagement with Virgil during the first four centuries C.E., see D. Jolowicz, *Latin Poetry in the Ancient Greek Novels* (Oxford, 2021), 16–18.

⁴⁸ See James (n. 47), 152.

⁴⁹ While this point is often implicit, see in particular Lesky (n. 3), 612, Jenner (n. 3), 4 and Lambrou (n. 4), 76.

⁵⁰ Zindel (n. 21), 30.

⁵¹ Gioseffi (n. 32), 46; cf. Heidenreich (n. 9), 103; Jenner (n. 3), 4; Lambrou (n. 4), 76.

in the *Iliad* to men who excel in war, especially when it is used substantively, its meaning is by no means restricted to martial valour. That Priam includes Troilus among his best sons does not necessarily imply that Troilus was a talented and experienced warrior, much less that he died in battle; rather, it suggests that Troilus surpassed his brothers in some of the qualities for which sons are valued. Indeed, when Priam criticizes his surviving sons, he focusses not on their cowardice or lack of martial prowess, but rather on their penchant for lying, dancing and thieving (24.261–2). The collective nature of Priam’s speech is also worth emphasizing. Priam’s inclusion of Troilus among his best sons who have been destroyed by Ares is, as Thompson writes, ‘used in the context of Priam mourning the collective group of his sons killed during the Trojan war. It is reasonable to suggest that Troilus is being grouped together with his brothers for the sake of narrative economy, and that the more important point here is to convey that a number of young men have died during the course of the war.’⁵²

Given that Mestor, Troilus and Hector are all killed by Achilles, it also seems likely that Priam is grouping together those of his sons whom Achilles has killed. As a final consideration, it seems that Priam’s speech—the emotional speech of a grief-stricken father—should be read in the context of the deeply rooted cultural convention according to which the living were judged against the exaggerated standards of the dead. As Thucydides’ Pericles warns the sons and brothers of the recently deceased (2.45.1):

To those of you who are sons and brothers of the deceased, I see that the struggle will be tremendous. Everyone likes to praise the dead, and it will be hard for you, however surpassing your excellence, to be deemed, not equal, but only slightly inferior. The living have envy to contend with, but those who are absent are honoured with uncontested goodwill.

While Priam may have counted Troilus among his best sons even while he was alive, Priam’s assessment of his sons’ merits is surely coloured by emotion and convention.

The third and final argument made in support of the death-in-battle interpretation is that Priam’s use of the epithet ἵπποχάρμης suggests that Troilus was a mature warrior and hence that he died in the course of battle.⁵³ This (tenuous) reasoning stems, in turn, from the belief that ἵπποχάρμης refers to a ‘warrior charioteer’,⁵⁴ a common but loose rendering of a word whose etymology and meaning are disputed. Common though this interpretation is, it is not as secure as its widespread acceptance might suggest. The precise meaning of the ἵπποχάρμης eluded ancient critics and lexicographers, who consistently cited both definitions.⁵⁵ Apollonios Sophista, for example, glosses ἵπποχάρμης as ‘either “delighting in horses” or “fighting on horses”’.⁵⁶ Despite the

⁵² B.A. Thompson, ‘Characters and Characterisation in the Epic Cycle’ (Diss., Oxford University, 2021), 113–14; cf. G. Beck, *Die Stellung des 24. Buches der Ilias in der alten Epen-tradition* (Tübingen, 1964), 143–4.

⁵³ For this point, see Preller (n. 9), 1125; Zindel (n. 21), 30–1; Robertson (n. 6), 64; E. Cavallini, ‘Note a Ibcio’, *Eikasmos* 5 (1994), 39–52, at 40; Sommerstein et al. (n. 4), 197; Wilkinson (n. 9), 198; Lambrou (n. 4), 83–4; Gioseffī (n. 32), 46.

⁵⁴ For this interpretation, see Zindel (n. 21), 30–1; A. Heubeck, ‘Books IX–XII’, in A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra (edd.), *A Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey* (Oxford, 1989), 2.3–146, at 93; Robertson (n. 6), 64; Sommerstein et al. (n. 4), 197; Wilkinson (n. 9), 198; Gioseffī (n. 32), 46. The latter interpretation is supported most prominently by R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago and London, 1951), 482, who renders ἵπποχάρμην as ‘whose delight was in horses’.

⁵⁵ On the confusion of ancient critics, see J. Latacz, *Zum Wortfeld ‘Freude’ in der Sprache Homers* (Heidelberg, 1966), 20.

⁵⁶ Ap. Soph. 92.9. Cf. Σ D II. 24.257; Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1.35c Daude et al.; Hsch. ι 808 Latte-Cunningham; *Etym. Magn.* 473.50; [Zonaras] 1115.15 Tittmann.

work of modern linguists, the word remains equivocal still.⁵⁷ While the etymology of the compound is clear (from ἵππος ['horse']⁵⁸ and χαίρω ['take pleasure in']), it is uncertain whether -χάρμης reflects χάρμη ('ardour [for battle]')⁵⁹ or χάρμα ('object of joy', 'joy').⁶⁰ If it derives from χάρμη, then ἵπποχάρμης would be a noun referring to one's 'ardour for battle involving horses'.⁶¹ If, on the other hand, it derives from χάρμα, it would be an adjective describing one who 'delights in horses'. The latter interpretation gains support from Pindar's use of ἵπποχάρμας (*Ol.* 1.23), apparently in reference to Hiero's well-known interest in horses and horse-racing.⁶²

Moreover, even if Priam wished to refer to his son as a 'warrior charioteer', why should this designation be taken to reveal the manner of Troilus' death? Neither Mestor's epithet, 'godlike' (*Il.* 24.257), nor Hector's characterization as a 'god among men' (*Il.* 24.258) contains any indication about the circumstances of their deaths. A reference to Troilus as a warrior might imply that Homer conceived of Troilus as an adult with military experience,⁶³ but neither Troilus' age nor his martial prowess has any bearing on the likelihood that Achilles ambushed him. Indeed, the *Iliad* refers to Achilles' ambushes of Isus, Antiphus, Lycaon and Aeneas, all men of fighting age. Even Hector is said to have died from an ambush by Achilles in post-Homeric depictions of his death.⁶⁴

In short, it is hard to believe that any ancient audience member, for whom Troilus' death by ambush was likely traditional,⁶⁵ would have concluded on the basis of *Il.* 24.255–62 that its author meant to imply a different version of Troilus' death than the one depicted so frequently in archaic and classical art and literature.

2.2 What About Mestor?

If proponents of the death-in-battle interpretation are right to claim that Priam's inclusion of Troilus among his 'best sons' whom 'Ares has destroyed' suggests that Troilus died in the course of battle, then the same reasoning should necessarily apply to the other sons whom Priam names alongside Troilus, namely Mestor and Hector.

⁵⁷ On the word's equivocal nature, see Lesky (n. 3), 612; W. Kullmann, *Die Quellen der Ilias* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 292 n. 2; D.E. Gerber, *Pindar's Olympian One: A Commentary* (Toronto, 1982), 49; P. Wathelet, *Dictionnaire des Troyens de l'Illiade* (Liège, 1988), 2.1016; González González (n. 8 [2018]), 46–7. Indeed, Lambrou (n. 4), 84 argues that 'the epithet was in fact devised by Homer to be understood in both ways'.

⁵⁸ Linguists generally regard the first element, ἵππο-, as a metrically conditioned form of ἵππο- ('horse') (see R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* [Leiden, 2010], 597), *pace* H. Mühlestein, 'Zur mykenischen Schrift: die Zeichen za, ze, zo', *Museum Helveticum* 12 (1955), 119–31, at 123–4, and Benedetti (n. 9).

⁵⁹ See Latacz (n. 55), 20–38 and 126–7, who demonstrates that Homer captures χάρμη at a transitional stage in which its meaning began to narrow from 'ardour', its original meaning, to 'ardour for battle', its primary meaning in Homeric poetry. As Latacz's analysis makes clear, χάρμη belongs 'to a different conceptual category from words for battle' (p. 28) and accordingly 'should not simply be rendered as "battle"' (p. 38), as is commonly done.

⁶⁰ Latacz (n. 55), 122–5.

⁶¹ See Brügger (n. 22), 106.

⁶² See Σ *Pind. Ol.* 1.35a and 1.35b Daude et al.; W.J. Slater, *Lexicon to Pindar* (Berlin, 1969), s.v. ἵπποχάρμας; Gerber (n. 57), 49.

⁶³ So Σ A (*Ariston.*) *Il.* 24.257b: 'Homer suggests through the epithet that he was a grown man.'

⁶⁴ Σ A (*ex.*) *Il.* 22.188: 'It is significant that Homer is the only one who says that Hector fought one-on-one. All the rest say he was ambushed by Achilles.'

⁶⁵ See Kullmann (n. 57), 292–3; Danek (n. 10), 23; Brügger (n. 22), 106.

As a brave son who died in battle, Hector clearly meets both criteria. But what about Mestor? Named only here in the *Iliad*, Mestor does not make another appearance in the surviving record until Apollodorus' *Epitome*, where he is said to have died in the spurs of Mount Ida when Achilles came to raid the cattle of Aeneas (3.32):

The barbarians showing no courage, Achilles ambushed Troilus and killed him in the sanctuary of Thymbraean Apollo, and coming to the city by night he captured Lycaon. Then, taking some of the leaders with him, Achilles ravaged the countryside, and went to Ida for the cattle of Aeneas. When Aeneas ran away, Achilles killed the cowherds and Mestor, son of Priam, and drove off the cattle.

Dio Chrysostom describes Mestor's fate similarly in his *Trojan Oration*. Describing the first nine years of the Trojan War following the initial battle for the beachhead, he writes (11.77–8):

Few pitched battles occurred, since the Greeks did not have the courage to approach the city, owing to the number and courage of the inhabitants. There were skirmishes and plundering on the part of the Greeks. This, in fact, is how Troilus died, still a boy, along with Mestor and many others. For Achilles was exceptionally good at laying ambushes and attacking by night. Indeed, in this way he attacked and nearly killed Aeneas in Ida and many others throughout the countryside, and he captured the forts that were poorly guarded.

According to the only two sources that describe Mestor's death, then, Mestor and Troilus died in the same way: both were ambushed by Achilles outside the context of battle. Adherents of the death-in-battle interpretation are thus faced with a serious obstacle: two of the three sons named by Priam were traditionally depicted as having died outside of a martial context. It is, in other words, hard to reconcile the death-in-battle interpretation with the later tradition. Why, if the *Iliad* implies that Troilus died in battle, would that version of the story not appear elsewhere before the first century B.C.E.? And why, if the *Iliad* suggests that Mestor was a battlefield casualty, would later sources consistently depict his death as the result of an ambush on the spurs of Mount Ida?

CONCLUSION

What, then, does Priam's speech reveal about Troilus and the manner of his death? Not nearly as much as has been attributed to it. We learn that Priam counted Troilus among his best sons, that Troilus was remembered for his association with horses, that his death preceded Hector's, and that he, like so many of Priam's sons, died as a result of the war. About the circumstances of Troilus' death, we learn nothing.⁶⁶ If ancient audiences independently conceived of Troilus' death as a battlefield casualty, Priam's speech will have given them no reason to adjust their view. Similarly, if audience members were under the impression that Achilles attacked Troilus while he was watering his horses in the Trojan countryside, it is hard to believe that anything in Priam's speech would have led them to suspect otherwise. Indeed, the pairing of Troilus with Mestor, another victim of Achilles' ambushes, and the reference to Troilus'

⁶⁶ See C.J. Mackie, 'Iliad 24 and the judgement of Paris', *CQ* 63 (2013), 1–16, at 8: 'We learn nothing about the first two figures [*sc.* Mestor and Troilus], other than the fact that they are dead, and that they are now much revered by their father.'

horsemanship would surely have brought to mind the story of Troilus' ambush for anyone familiar with the story.⁶⁷

Since the *Iliad* contains no certain information about the circumstances of Troilus' death, we must either remain agnostic on the question of how the poet conceived of Achilles' encounter with Troilus or content ourselves with arguments from probability based on the wealth of information available outside the *Iliad*. Given the evident popularity of the story of Achilles' ambush of Troilus in the Archaic period, with depictions in pictorial art surviving from the beginning of the seventh century B.C.E. and with literary depictions of the myth attested from as early as the second quarter of the sixth century B.C.E.,⁶⁸ it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the poet of the *Iliad* knew the story of Troilus' death by ambush. That the poem's only reference to Troilus does not contradict this story, and possibly even alludes to it, should persuade us of the strong likelihood that the popular story of Troilus' ambush at the fountain was also the one in the poet's mind.

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⁶⁷ On this point see Lambrou (n. 4), 84.

⁶⁸ For the dating of the *Cypria*, see M.L. West, *The Epic Cycle: A Commentary on the Lost Troy Epics* (Oxford, 2013), 63–5; M. Davies, *The Cypria* (Washington, DC, 2019), 6–8.