DREAM OF A CHASE: AN ICONIC ILIADIC MOMENT AND ITS ATHENIAN COUNTERPARTS

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The paper explores a system of references generated by two similes in the scene of Achilles' chase of Hector in *Iliad* 22, of a chariot race and of two people in a dream, frozen in the attitudes of flight and pursuit. It is argued that the two similes connect the scene of chase with the episodes of the dream apparition of Patroclus to Achilles and the funeral of Patroclus; they further evoke the Panathenaic athletic contests and particularly the apobatic race, alluding to the Athenian epichoric tradition of the apobatic race of Achilles at the grave mound of Patroclus.

Keywords: simile: dream; pursuit: freeze-frame: Iliad: Homer; apobatic race; athletics; Panathenaic festival; epichoric.

The pursuit of Hector by Achilles in the *Iliad* is devoid of suspense. Everybody knows the outcome of the chase—even if Zeus momentarily considers an option of saving Hector (22.168–176). That possibility remains firmly in the realm of the counterfactual after Athena confronts her father and reasserts that Hector has long been doomed to die (22.178–181). Perhaps the hesitation of Zeus about Hector's fate can be perceived as a part of a centripetal flow that draws space, time, and even alternative versions of reality into a scene that has aptly been described as a vortex.[1]

The space expands in an aerial shot of Troy as the gods watch Achilles and Hector circling around the city wall. The temporal frame of the narrative also extends: the past and the future are made present at the life-and-death race. We momentarily go back to the times of peace, to the way of life as it was before the coming of the Achaeans, when the Trojan women and girls used to wash clothes in stone troughs outside of the city (22.153–156). At the same time a reference to the wild fig-tree (22.145) implicitly ushers in the future: the tree marks the most vulnerable spot in the fortifications of Troy, where the wall can be most easily mounted, as Andromache tells Hector, lamenting her future widowhood (6.433–434). Another fantastically expansive feature of the long chase scene is its cascade of similes. In this analysis, I concentrate on just two connected similes. I argue that

I am grateful to Gregory Nagy, Leonard Muellner, and Olga Levaniouk for inspiring discussion of my argument.

[1] Purves 2011:532.

the vision of the future that they import into the narrative goes far beyond the destruction of Troy, reaching the present of the Athenian performances of the epic.

Let us start by examining the first simile in its context:

τῇ ῥα παραδραμέτην φεύγων ὃ δ᾽ ὄπισθε διώκων:
πρόσθε μὲν ἐσθλὸς ἔφευγε, δίωκε δέ μιν μέγ᾽ ἀμείνων
καρπαλίμως, ἐπεὶ οὐχ ἱερήϊον οὐδὲ βοείην
ἀρνύσθην, ἅ τε ποσσὶν ἀέθλια γίγνεται ἀνδρῶν,
ἀλλὰ περὶ ψυχῆς θέον Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.
ὡς δ᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἀεθλοφόροι περὶ τέρματα μώνυχες ἵπποι
ῥίμφα μάλα τρωχῶσι: τὸ δὲ μέγα κεῖται ἄεθλον
ἢ τρίπος ἠὲ γυνὴ ἀνδρὸς κατατεθνηῶτος:
ὣς τὼ τρὶς Πριάμοιο πόλιν πέρι δινηθήτην
καρπαλίμοισι πόδεσσι: θεοὶ δ᾽ ἐς πάντες ὁρῶντο:

They ran past there, one fleeing, another pursuing at his back;
A good man fled in front, but a much better one pursued him
swiftly, since it was not a sacrificial victim or an ox-hide
that they strove to win—things that are awarded to men at foot races—
but they ran for the *psūkhē* of horse-taming Hector.
As when prize-winning single-hoofed horses
gallop very rapidly around the turning-posts, for a great prize is set up—
a tripod or a woman—at the games in honor of a man who has died,
so these two whirled thrice around the city of Priam
on swift feet. And all the gods looked upon them…[2]

Iliad 22.157–166

The comment that Achilles and Hector did not compete for prizes usually awarded at foot races activates the cognitive frame of athletic contest by negating it.[3] The succeeding statement that the two heroes ran for the *psūkhē* of Hector affirms the athletic contest frame, while emphasizing its extraordinary nature. At that point a new motif is introduced, that of a chariot race. The pivot from the foot race to the chariot race is initiated by Hector's epithet ἱπποδάμοιο, 'horse-taming'.[4] The next moment the simile brings in a team of racehorses galloping around a turning post at games in honor of a dead hero, and the athletic contest frame is reaffirmed.

[2] My translations throughout.
[3] 'When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame', Lakoff 2004:3.
[4] On the connection between Hector and a motif of a racehorse, see Bakker 2017.

The combination of references to a foot race and a chariot race in close sequence creates a mental overlap of two images. I submit that this pair of images evokes a third kind of athletic event, combining the chariots and the foot race: the apobatic contest. We will come back to the motif of the apobatic contest later in this inquiry.[5]

The identity of the nameless dead hero is only thinly veiled. The perfect genitive singular participle κατατεθνηῶτος is used in the *Iliad* three times (always at the end of the verse). It features in Hector's visualization of a tumulus by the Hellespont where the best of the Achaeans, killed by Hector, would be buried (at 7.89). Hector's vision would not come to pass; the tumulus by the Hellespont would contain the bones of Patroclus, killed by Hector, and of Achilles, the best of the Achaeans and Hector's slayer. The participle also appears in Nestor's description of a turning post for the chariot races at the funeral of Patroclus, which is, perhaps, a σῆμα ('tomb') of a mysterious man who died long ago (at 23.331). In the overall logic of the Iliadic narrative, this σῆμα is equated with the tomb of Patroclus and Achilles.[6] In addition, κατατεθνηῶτι at the end of the verse is explicitly applied to the dead Patroclus at 17.369. Further, the funeral of Patroclus features a chariot race, and the first prize in that competition is precisely a woman and a tripod (23.263–264).[7] Thus, it seems that the *Iliad* gives us multiple indications that the dead hero in honor of whom the chariot race of the simile takes place should be identified as Patroclus.[8]

Next the narrative moves to the gathering of the gods who watch the pursuit, with Zeus musing about the possibility of saving Hector. Athena censures that idea, Zeus recants, and Athena darts down to aid Achilles (22.167–187). The story flies forward. Meanwhile, Achilles continues to chase Hector around the wall of Troy, and a notoriously strange simile describes the chase:

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[5] On Hector's prominence as an apobatic chariot fighter in the *Iliad*, see Nagy 2013:221–223, 7C§9, 7D§5.

[6] Nagy 1983; 1990:215–222; 2013:169–172, 7§1–6.

[7] Purves 2010:58.

[8] It is said in the tenor of the chariot race simile that Achilles and Hector circled Troy three times (22.165). This detail further intensifies the connection between the simile of the chariot race and the funeral rites of Patroclus. The motif of a chariot driving in a circle three times recurs at 23.13, when the Myrmidons thrice circle the body of Patroclus in their chariots, and at 24.16, where it is narrated that whenever Achilles drags Hector's body around the tomb of Patroclus, he circles the tomb three times.

ὡς δ' ἐν ὀνείρῳ οὐ δύναται φεύγοντα διώκειν·
οὔτ' ἄρ' ὃ τὸν δύναται ὑποφεύγειν οὔθ' ὃ διώκειν·
ὣς ὃ τὸν οὐ δύνατο μάρψαι ποσίν, οὐδ' ὃς ἀλύξαι.

As in a dream a man cannot pursue a fleeing one,
Neither that one can flee away from him, nor that one pursue,
So neither that one could catch up with him, nor that one escape.
Iliad 22.199–201

This passage was athetized by Aristarchus, according to the scholia (scholia A *ad loc.*), which note that it contradicts the impression of swiftness produced by the simile of the chariot race. The scholia also criticize the style.[9] A recent modern appraisal has described this simile as 'one of the most incompetent pieces of poetic craftsmanship in the entire Homeric corpus'.[10] Indeed, the verbal repetitions and the profusion of pronouns create a certain disorientation. Achilles and Hector, stripped of their abilities to flee and to pursue, appear suddenly out-of-focus, and we wonder: who are these running figures?[11]

I submit that the disorientation and the opacity are intentional: they constitute a device that invites interpretation.[12] Indeed, when we follow the echoes and the likenesses of the dream chase simile in the *Iliad*, a network of meaning-generating connections emerges.

First, the double repetition of verbs (ὑπο)φεύγω and διώκω connects this simile with the description of Achilles and Hector that we have just analyzed:

τῇ ῥα παραδραμέτην φεύγων ὃ δ' ὄπισθε διώκων:
πρόσθε μὲν ἐσθλὸς ἔφευγε, δίωκε δέ μιν μέγ' ἀμείνων

They ran past there, one fleeing, another pursuing at his back;
A good man fled in front, but a much better one pursued him…
Iliad 22.157–158

I will show that these passages are not only lexically but also thematically connected; however, that connection is not immediately obvious. What is

[9] See also a very interesting analysis of this passage by Eustathius, discussed in Hunter 2017:12–13.
[10] Finkelberg 2020:184.
[11] Compare the description of the dream chase simile by Tsagalis 2008:284: 'The image of the dream creatively unravels the theme of the endless chase and, by blurring the roles and significance of the characters, converges the two heroes' fates, as they are both found in a dramatic deadlock.'
[12] The simile of the dream chase will emerge as a partial (and miniature) parallel of the shield of Achilles, as analyzed in Nagy 1997.

conspicuous at this point is that the rapid movement of the chase grinds to a halt in the simile: neither fleeing nor pursuing is possible—as indeed happens in dreams. The impression of a standstill is intensified by the repetitions δύναται —δύναται — δύνατο, φεύγοντα διώκειν — ὑποφεύγειν … διώκειν.[13] The sense of arrested motion, as we will see, is key for understanding the function of the simile.

The next question is, who are the men in the simile? Modern researchers tend to view them as generic, perhaps because it is so common to dream of being unable to run. But what if the simile has a specific referent in the *Iliad*, in the same way that 'the man who has died' (ἀνδρὸς κατατεθνηῶτος) in the simile of the chariot race apparently has Patroclus as a referent? Indeed, there is a situation in the macro narrative that the dream resembles.

That situation is also a dream; more precisely, it is a dream apparition. At the beginning of *Iliad* 23, an exhausted Achilles falls asleep. The expression is τὸν ὕπνος ἔμαρπτε, 'sleep caught him' (23.62). It echoes μάρψαι 'catch up' at 22.201, which refers to Achilles' pursuit of Hector in the tenor of the dream simile. In fact, the pursuit is mentioned in the very next line: the dream caught Achilles because he was exceedingly tired after chasing Hector (23.63–64). It is as if Achilles runs a race again, this time against a dream, and the dream overtakes him. Thus, both the motif of an athletic race and the episode of the pursuit of Hector are activated at the beginning of the scene.

In his sleep Achilles is visited by the *psūkhē* of Patroclus, who asks for burial rites in order to be able to enter Hades. The *psūkhē* also asks for the cremated bones of Achilles and Patroclus to be enclosed in a single burial vessel, in the same way that their lives merged (23.70–92). In time, Patroclus and Achilles will arrive at an immortal sadness by sharing the same tomb and the same hero cult.[14] However, at this moment the sorrow is of a different kind: the connection between Achilles and Patroclus is devastatingly limited. The *psūkhē* of Patroclus only comes to Achilles because without cremation it cannot fully depart; once Patroclus is buried, his *psūkhē* will not ever come back (23.75–76). When Achilles asks the *psūkhē* to come closer so that they can embrace and cry, the *psūkhē* vanishes:

> ὣς ἄρα φωνήσας ὠρέξατο χερσὶ φίλῃσιν
> οὐδ' ἔλαβε: ψυχὴ δὲ κατὰ χθονὸς ἠΰτε καπνὸς
> ᾤχετο τετριγυῖα: ταφὼν δ' ἀνόρουσεν Ἀχιλλεὺς
>
> Having said so, he stretched forth his hands,
> but failed to grasp him. The *psūkhē*, like smoke,

[13] Purves 2011:532.
[14] Nagy 2013:238–240, 8§7–13.

went under the earth, squeaking, and Achilles started up in amazement…
Iliad 23.99–101]

I submit that the simile of the dream chase, with its two figures in a perpetual standstill of pursuit and flight, may be interpreted as a vignette—or perhaps a blurry snapshot—conveying the pathos of Patroclus' apparition. Achilles is unable to get hold of Patroclus' *psūkhē*, but the *psūkhē* also cannot flee far away without its burial rites.

This interpretation may appear too fanciful. Indeed, the interchange between Achilles and the *psūkhē* of Patroclus in *Iliad* 23 is so complex and vivid that it is hard to connect the two heroes with the little profile figures of the dream simile. And yet, Achilles and the *psūkhē* of Patroclus appear precisely in the attitudes of the dream chase on some Archaic vases depicting Achilles running alongside his chariot after performing the apobatic leap, as the chariot keeps dragging the corpse of Hector while the *psūkhē* of Patroclus races through the air.[15] As Gregory Nagy has observed, on these vases Achilles and the *psūkhē* of Patroclus look like body doubles, and the miniature figure of the running *psūkhē* seems to serve as a model for the apobatic sprint of Achilles.[16] Nagy argues that the apobatic vases are linked with the epichoric Athenian versions of the *Iliad*, which probably featured Achilles' apobatic leap from the chariot behind which he dragged Hector; that leap constituted an *aition* for the apobatic race at the Panathenaic festival.[17]

I propose that the simile of the dream chase, as well as the simile of the chariot race at the games in honor of a dead hero, taken together with the reference to a foot race (22.159–164), all allude to this Athenian version of the *Iliad*. That is to say, our *Iliad* makes the epichoric version 'play in the background': as Achilles chases Hector in the main narrative, the similes jointly activate a vision of the horses of Achilles galloping around the tomb of Patroclus and of Achilles leaping from his chariot to dash in the wake of Patroclus' *psūkhē.*

The vision of Achilles running after the apparition of Patroclus, generated by the simile of the dream chase, also casts Achilles' chase of Hector as a twisted 'proactment' of his pursuit of Patroclus' *psūkhē*, in which Hector—who is wearing the armor of Achilles and is looking as Patroclus did at the moment of his death—

[15] See Images A1, D in Nagy 2013:178, 192; in Images E, F, G and I (Nagy 2013:195–196) the poses of Achilles and Patroclus' *psūkhē* show minor differences.
[16] Nagy 2013:272, 8D§1.
[17] Nagy 2005; 2009; 2013:226–234, 7E§10–7G§5; 240–241, 8§13–17.

plays the role of the dead Patroclus.[18] The eeriness is intensified by the statement that the race between Achilles and Hector was for Hector's *psūkhē* (22.161).[19]

As I have already noted, the simile of the dream chase operates as a freeze frame: the two running figures are suspended in time. In the same vein, the image on one of the apobatic vases has been famously described by Emily Vermeule as a window into another world, where 'the myth is circling […] in endless motion which is somehow always arrested at the same place whenever we return to the window.'[20] This beautiful description of the eternal return to the same moment becomes less paradoxical when we take into account that multiple apobatic vases focus on a very similar stage in Achilles' dragging of Hector, when Achilles is about to leap from his chariot, or has already leapt from it and runs alongside furiously, while Hector's body continues to be dragged behind the chariot sped up by a chariot driver. Gregory Nagy has shown that this situation is transitional: the apobatic leap of Achilles takes place in response to the appeal of the goddess Iris to stop the abuse of Hector's body.[21] The narrative arc reaches its own resolution, Achilles' furious sprint eventually comes to a close. And yet the vases choose to extend that particular moment forever.[22] The pictorial freeze-frame is isomorphic to the athletic reenactments of Achilles' apobatic leap at the Panathenaia: the ritual perpetually returns to and is powered by the myth's point of the highest emotional charge. In a comparable manner, the similes of the chariot race and of the dream chase create in the verbal medium of the *Iliad* an oblique reference to the everlasting recycling of the myth in the Athenian athletic ritual. Moreover, it is

[18] Compare Image I in Nagy 2013:196, in which Hector's body, a snake, and the *psūkhē* of Patroclus are 'arranged along a vertical axis of vision', Nagy 2013:197, 7§68.

[19] The formula Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο in this line is a marked expression, used only four times in the *Iliad* on extraordinary occasions: when Apollo talks to Hector during the battle, encouraging him to kill Patroclus (16.717); when Zeus balances the fates of Hector and Achilles on his golden scales (22.211); and in the last line of our *Iliad* (24.804), referring to Hector's burial. (At 7.38 where Ἕκτορος…ἱπποδάμοιο is used, it is again Apollo speaking about emboldening Hector). This formula breaches Parry's law of economy, having a more frequent metrical equivalent Ἕκτορος ἀνδροφόνοιο, cf. Bakker 2017:73–74. Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο appears to be employed when Hector's role and fate are in the limelight.

[20] Vermeule 1965:45, quoted in Nagy 2005; 2009; 2013:183, 7§33; 231, 7G§3.

[21] Nagy 2005; 2009; 2013:185–205, 7§37–7§87; especially, 198–199, 7§72–73.

[22] The idea that the running figures of Achilles and Patroclus' *psūkhē* on vases could have been interpreted by the ancient audiences as a pursuit that never comes to an end is paralleled by the argument of Yatromanolakis (2001:165), who has suggested that two figures on a vase, representing Sappho and a young woman, engage in a perpetual flight and pursuit, resembling Sappho's famous verses 'For if she flees now, soon she shall pursue' (fr. 1 Voigt). Purves 2011:533 compares the simile of the dream chase with its arrested motion to ekphrastic descriptions of running.

enticing to consider another layer of interpretation by construing the dream chase simile as a self-referential device: the dream in which the two men are locked in the unending chase is dreamt by the audience of the *Iliad*, who witness the race of Achilles and Hector in the recurrent performances of the epic.

It has been observed by Gregory Nagy that while there are numerous examples of apobatic fighting in the *Iliad*, the epic avoids references to apobatic chariot racing. Apobatic chariot racing was a prominent Athenian civic event and as such was probably perceived as too localized for the Panhellenic tradition of the *Iliad*.[23] However, references to the apobatic events could be obliquely incorporated into the epic. I have shown above how one can catch sight of the locally-inflected Athenian versions of the *Iliad* and the accompanying athletic rituals through the windows of the similes.[24]

According to my interpretation, the complex of the φεύγειν-διώκειν similes (the chariot race, accompanied by the reference to the foot race, and the dream chase) operates by alluding *both* to 1) the apparition of Patroclus in our *Iliad* (which features the motif of dream and the attenuated motif of Achilles' pursuit of Patroclus' *psūkhē*) and to 2) the nexus of apobatic race and pursuit of Patroclus' *psūkhē* by Achilles in the epichoric Athenian versions of the *Iliad* (which do not seem to have contained the motif of dream). Now I will buttress this complicated construction by showing that there is also a link in our *Iliad* between the dream apparition of Patroclus and an apobatic ritual.

After the *psūkhē* of Patroclus disappears and Achilles wakes up, he immediately sets in motion the process of gathering timber for the funeral pyre of Patroclus. When the timber is collected and brought to the place where the tumulus will be located, Achilles orders the Myrmidons to put on their armor and yoke the horses to the chariots, and the body of Patroclus is transported to the pyre in a funeral procession, which is described in the following way:

> ἂν δ' ἔβαν ἐν δίφροισι παραιβάται ἡνίοχοί τε,
> πρόσθε μὲν ἱππῆες, μετὰ δὲ νέφος εἵπετο πεζῶν
>
> and they stepped up into the chariots, *paraibatai* and charioteers, with the horsemen in front, and after them followed a cloud of foot soldiers.
> *Iliad* 23.132–133

On the surface, the situation is not particularly remarkable. We constantly see warriors riding by the side of their charioteers in the *Iliad*. However, this is the only place in Homer where the word *paraibatēs*, 'one who steps besides the charioteer',

[23] Nagy 2013:224–227, 7E§5–10.
[24] On the epic similes as windows, see Tsagalis 2008:279.

is used. The singularity of the diction is suggestive, signaling that something unusual takes place in the narrative. Another significant feature of the expression παραιβάται ἡνίοχοί τε is its neat straightforwardness: it parallels multiple Iliadic expressions that pair inseparable entities or qualities and roll easily and frequently off the tongue, like μέγα τε στιβαρόν τε, or ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, or Ἀχαιοί τε Τρῶές τε. Could παραιβάται ἡνίοχοί τε perhaps be a hapax only in the world of our *Iliad*, and not at all a hapax in a parallel world of a different epic tradition that does not suppress references to apobatic rituals?

The Iliadic vision of a ritual procession of chariots with chariot-drivers and chariot-riders, accompanying the body of Patroclus to the pyre, is likely to evoke the ritual of the Athenian apobatic contests. Dionysius of Halicarnassus notes in *Roman Antiquities* 7.73.3 that the Athenian word for *para(i)batai* is *apobatai*.[25] This flash-forward to the future ritual comes soon after the *psūkhē* of Patroclus vanishes in response to Achilles' attempt to get hold of it: in this way a nexus of motifs of dream pursuit and apobatic procession is created, comparable to the one in the similes of dream chase and chariot race.

I have attempted to show how the simile of the dream chase functions as a freeze frame, and how that momentary halt provides an opportunity for the epichoric Athenian myths and rituals to 'get on board' our *Iliad*. However, in conclusion I would like to step back from the discussion of allusions to variant epic traditions and rituals and return to the emotional impact of the freeze frame—a barb that draws out the feelings without providing a resolution. The image of two men joined in an endless race, which amalgamates Achilles and Hector, and Achilles and the *psūkhē* of Patroclus, conveys unending fury and unending sorrow, unending hate and unending longing. The stunning artistry of the *Iliad* is that this linchpin image is so mundane. It occurs at one of the grandest Iliadic moments, when time and space expand and the eyes of all the gods are on the center of the universe, the two running figures. Suddenly the simile strips all the grandeur away, leaving only the two figures in a dream, in a familiar dream of inability to move. Through this quick shift to the realm of personal experience the *Iliad* gets even deeper under one's skin. The intimate, separate, idiosyncratic mental image of such a dream becomes a reenactment of the passions of the Iliadic heroes. Paraphrasing Donne, do not ask for whose psyche the race is run; it is run for you.

[25] Suggested by Haubold 2000:189–191, who also believes (190) that Dionysius refers to that particular Homeric passage when he comments that 'the poets' call the chariot-riders *parabatai*. Of course παραιβάται ἡνίοχοί τε evokes also the procession of chariots with their drivers and riders on Geometric vases; on some vases the rider is depicted in the moment of jumping off the chariot, for example on a fragment of a Late Geometric I amphora from Eretria (Museum of Eretria, inv. 16089).

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