

**The Dirt on Hector: Homicide Pollution in the *Iliad***  
CAMWS Annual Meeting: Ancient Religion I

**#1. Hector's Unwashed Hands (*Il.* 6.263-8)**

τὴν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα μέγας κορυθαίολος Ἴκτωρ·  
“μή μοι οἶνον ἄειρε μελίφρονα πότνια μήτηρ,  
μή μ' ἀπογυιώσης μένεος, ἀλκῆς τε λάθωμαι· 265  
**χερσὶ δ' ἀνίπτοισιν** Διὶ λείβειν αἴθοπα οἶνον  
**ἄζομαι**· οὐδέ πη ἔστι κελαϊνεφέϊ Κρονίωνι  
**αἵματι καὶ λίθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον** εὐχετάσθαι...”

But then great Hector of the flashing helmet answered her: “Honored mother, draw for me no sweet wine, lest you deprive me of my strength and I forget my fighting vigor. And **I have a scruple** about pouring a libation of glittering wine to Zeus **with unwashed hands**, nor is it in any way permissible to pray to the cloud-darkening son of Cronus when I am **spattered with blood and gore...**” (my translation)

Other relevant passages: *Il.* 1.314 (Achaean cleanse from plague), *Il.* 10.572-9 (*Doloneia*; Odysseus and Diomedes wash after night raid), *Il.* 21.218-22 (river Scamander's revulsion at corpses), *Od.* 22.477-94 (purification of Odysseus' hall after massacre of suitors); see Parker 1983: 130-8 and Eck 2012: 89-129.

**#2. “Dirt” and Matter Out of Place**

“Each morning, to my growing puzzlement, when the boss would step outside after completing his ablutions, he would pick up a handful of soil and rub it over his hands... **‘Inside the house it's dirt; outside, it's earth. You must take it off inside to eat and be with your family. You must put it on outside to work and be with the animals’**” (Smith 1978: 291-2; cf. Douglas 1966: 36-7).

**#3. Washing (νίπτειν) and Bathing/Baths (λούειν/λοετρά)**

- Ritual washing: *Il.* 3.270 (kings wash before prayer to Zeus, sacrifice, and oath) and 24.302-5 (Priam washes hands before libation, prayer to Zeus): cf. 16.225-32 (Achilles rinses cup, washes hands, pours libation, prays to Zeus for Patroclus's safety).
- Bathing type-scenes (male bather and female attendant): *Od.* 3.464 (Telemachus in Pylos), 4.47-51 (Telemachus and Peisistratus in Sparta), 6.545 (Odysseus in Scheria), 17.88 (Telemachus and Theoclymenus in Ithaca), 10.348-67 (Odysseus in Circe's palace) and 24.154 (Odysseus in Ithaca), and 24.366 (Laertes in Ithaca); cf. *Il.* 22.444-6 (Andromache prepares bath for Hector) and *Od.* 4.252-3 (Helen recalls bathing disguised Odysseus in Troy).
- Bathing prior to ritual: *Od.* 3.464-9 (Telemachus bathes before sacrifice), 23.152-8 (Odysseus after slaughtering the suitors; cf. purification of hall in 22.477-94).
- Bathing/washing dead: *Il.* 16.475 & 675 (part of γέρας θανόντων); cf. *Od.* 24.190. Washing: *Il.* 7.421-32, *Od.* 24.189. Bathing: *Il.* 18.348-50 (Patroclus) and 24.582-90 (Hector); cf. 16.669 (Sarpedon).

**#4. Achilles (*Il.* 23.38-47)**

οἱ δ' ὅτε δὴ κλισίην Ἀγαμέμνονος ἴξον ἰόντες,  
αὐτίκα κηρύκεσσι λιγυφθόγοισι κέλευσαν 40  
**ἀμφὶ πυρὶ στήσαι τρίποδα μέγαν, εἰ πεπίθοιεν**  
**Πηλεΐδην λούσασθαι ἄπο βρότον αἱματόεντα.**

αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἤρνεϊτο στερεῶς, ἐπὶ δ' ὄρκον ὄμοσεν·  
οὐ μὰ Ζῆν', ὅς τις τε θεῶν ὑπατος καὶ ἄριστος,  
**οὐ θέμις ἐστὶ λοετρὰ καρήατος ἄσσον ἰκέσθαι**  
πρὶν γ' ἐνὶ Πάτροκλον θέμεναι πυρὶ σῆμά τε χεῦναι 45  
κεύρασθαι τε κόμην, ἐπεὶ οὐ μ' ἔτι δεύτερον ὦδε  
ἴξετ' ἄχος κραδίην ὄφρα ζωῶσι μετείω.

They issued instructions at once to the clear-voiced heralds **to set on the fire a great cauldron, hoping they'd persuade Peleus's son to wash himself clean of the clotted gore.** But he adamantly refused them, and swore an oath besides: “No, by Zeus, who's the highest and best of all the gods, **it isn't right that water should come anywhere near my head** till I've burned Patroclus's body, and raised him a burial mound, and have cut my hair—since never again will such grief possess my heart, while I'm numbered among the living! (trans. Green, slightly altered)

### #5. Battlefield Impurity?

#### Historical

- Purification of armies before/after campaigns: Polyb. 23.10.17 (= Suda s.v. ἐναγίζων) and Livy 40.6.1-5 (Macedonia); Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 111.290d (Boetia); *I.Cret.* 4.146 = *LSS* 114 (Crete); see Pritchett 1979: 196-202 and Parker 1983: 22.
- Xen. *Anab.* 5.7.13-35 (army purified after raids and killing ambassadors: see Parker 1983: 22-3 and Eck 2012: 62-4)
- Purification from invading enemy: Plut. *Arist.* 20.4 (Plataea in 479; see Parker 1983: 23)

#### Homeric

- Ares μαιφόνος (“stained with killing”): *Il.* 5.31, 455, 844.
- Suppliants killed in battle: *Il.* 6.37-65 (Menelaus and Agamemnon kill Adrestus), 10.454-9 (Odysseus and Diomedes kill Dolon), and 21.34-119 (Achilles kills Lycaon) (see Parker 1983: 180-2).

### #6. Hector's Bloody *Aristeia* (*Il.* 11.531-7)

ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας ἵμασεν καλλίτριχας ἵππους  
μάστιγι λιγυρῆι· τοὶ δὲ πληγῆς ἄϊοντες  
ρίμφ' ἔφερον θοὸν ἄρμα μετὰ Τρῶας καὶ Ἀχαιοὺς  
στεῖβοντες νέκυάς τε καὶ ἀσπίδας· **αἵματι δ' ἄξων**  
**νέρθεν ἄπας πεπάλακτο** καὶ ἄντυγες αἰ περὶ δίφρον, 535  
ἃς ἄρ' ἄφ' ἰππέων ὀπλέων ῥαθάμιγγες ἔβαλλον  
αἶ τ' ἀπ' ἐπισσώτρων...

So saying, he lashed the fine-maned horses with his whistling whip, and they, in reaction to the stroke, speedily bore the swift chariot among Trojans and Achaeans, trampling corpses and shields: **all the axle beneath was spattered with blood**, and the rails round the chariot, flecked with the flying drops from the horses' hooves and the rims of the wheels (trans. Green, slightly altered; cf. Achilles at *Il.* 20.495-503).

### #7. Hector's Armor (*Il.* 6)

- Hector carries shield into the city (6.117-18); “clad in bronze” (Ἐκτορι χαλκοκορυστῆ, 6.398).

ὥς εἰπὼν οὗ παιδὸς ὀρέξατο φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ·  
ἄψ δ' ὁ πᾶϊς πρὸς κόλπον ἐϋζώνοιο τιθήνης

ἐκλίνθη ἰάχων πατρὸς φίλου ὄψιν ἀτυχθεὶς  
ταρβήσας χαλκὸν τε ἰδὲ λόφον ἵπποχαίτην,  
δεινὸν ἀπ' ἀκροτάτης κόρυθος νεύοντα νοήσας. 470  
ἐκ δ' ἐγέλασσε πατήρ τε φίλος καὶ πότνια μήτηρ·  
αὐτίκ' ἀπὸ κρατὸς κόρυθ' εἴλετο φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ,  
καὶ τὴν μὲν κατέθηκεν ἐπὶ χθονὶ παμφανώσαν...

So saying, illustrious Hector reached out to his son, but the child shrank back, screaming, into his fine-sashed nurse's bosom, distraught at the sight of his dear father, terrified by the bronze, and the horsehair crest he glimpsed nodding scarily from the helmet's top. At this his dear father and lady mother both burst out laughing, and at once illustrious Hector took off the helmet and laid it, bright-gleaming, on the ground... (trans. Green, slightly altered)

#### #8. Hector's Hot Bath (*Il.* 22.443-6)

κέκλετο δ' ἀμφιπόλοισιν εὐπλοκάμοις κατὰ δῶμα  
ἀμφὶ πυρὶ στήσαι τρίποδα μέγαν, ὄφρα πέλοιτο  
Ἴκτορι θερμὰ λοετρὰ μάχης ἐκ νοστήσαντι  
νηπίη, οὐδ' ἐνόησεν ὃ μιν μάλα τῆλε λοετρῶν 445  
χερσὶν Ἀχιλλῆος δάμασε γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.

Now she called out through the house to her neat-tressed handmaids to set on the fire a great cauldron, make sure that there was a hot bath for Hector when he came home from the fighting – unaware, in her folly, that he'd been slain at Achilles' hands by grey-eyed Athena, far from all baths (trans. Green, slightly altered).

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