

Trojan Phthia: Achilles as Exile in the *Iliad*  
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As Schlunk notes, the theme of the exiled criminal who has been accepted into Peleus' home recurs in the biographies of the heroes who come from Phthia to Troy with Achilles. Phoenix, Epeigeus, and Patroclus all share the same basic back story: conflict at home with a friend or family member, exile, acceptance by Peleus and integration into Phthian society.

This motif extends to Peleus, who, according to Apollodorus, was exiled for the murder of his half brother Phokos, accepted into the house of Eurytion in Phthia before assuming power there and himself playing host to fugitive criminals. Heiden suggests that this account was likely known to the Homeric poet.

Thus Achilles comes from a society controlled by a former exiled criminal, populated by them, and accepting of them. In my paper I will argue that in the *Iliad* Achilles is repeatedly presented as emulating the behavior of the Phthian former exiles, and ultimately recreates his father in himself and a new Phthia on the beaches of Troy.

At the opening of the *Iliad*, Achilles, like Phoenix, Epeigeus and Patroclus have done before, comes into conflict with someone close to him—nearly killing him—withdraws from his society, and decides to go to Phthia. Until the embassy scene, Achilles has clearly adhered to the exiled criminal motif; however, after the embassy, Achilles has been convinced that leaving for Phthia is not a viable option.<sup>1</sup> Since he cannot return home, and therefore cannot be accepted by Peleus or enter Phthian society, Achilles begins to diverge from the standard motif, and instead makes himself into a sort of Peleus in a Phthia of his own.

Once Patroclus has died as Achilles' substitute and Achilles has killed Hector, thus sealing his own imminent fate, Achilles is essentially dead himself. The funeral games in book 23, which are as much for Achilles as they are for Patroclus, further point to Achilles as a dead man among the living. Nagy has connected the name *Phthia* to the root *phthi-*, meaning to perish, and Steinhart notes that there is evidence that an ancient author recognized and punned on this verbal connection. Further, several scholars have recognized Priam's journey to Achilles' tent as a *katabasis*, led by Hermes, to the king of the dead. Thus Achilles, by acceding to Priam's supplication, finally becomes the Peleus of the Phthia which he established at Troy. This transformation is made still more explicit in the final extended simile of the epic in which Achilles is said to have looked at Priam as those at the house of a wealthy man looks at a murderer seeking refuge, an act Peleus did so many times.

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<sup>1</sup> Scodel argues that his change of heart was brought about chiefly by the autobiographical portion of Phoenix's speech, which she sees as a parody of the exile murderer theme, intended to make flight seem a ridiculous option to Achilles. Achilles is persuaded by the embassy, unlike Meleager.