

INTRODUCTION

1 BOOK 18 AND THE CHOICE OF ACHILLES¹

Book 18 cannot be fully understood without a wider knowledge of the *Iliad*. Nevertheless, some of the book's qualities may be outlined in general terms before considering the characters and themes in a wider context. Those who originally divided the poem into books or 'rhapsodies' were not without some aesthetic perception, in particular of the design of the plot and the pace of the action.² The book opens with a change of scene: after a long narrative of noisy and crowded battle over the body of Patroclus we turn to the solitary figure of Achilles, sitting by the ships and unaware of the recent events. It ends with another change of scene, from Olympus to the Greek camp; the transition from book 18 to book 19 also coincides with the dawning of the last great day of combat in the poem.

Book 18 itself may be divided into three parts. Part 1 (lines 1–242) concerns the reaction of Achilles when he receives the news of Patroclus' death: it includes his decision to die by re-entering the war, and he takes the first step towards that outcome by appearing on the ramparts, a terrifying figure, bringing panic to the Trojan armies. The coming of night brings relief to the Greeks. Part 2 (243–368) deals with the events of the night: we witness the Trojans in council and the dispute on tactics between Poulydamas and Hector, prudent counsellor and rash warrior; we hear Achilles grieving over the body of his friend; the gods' reactions to events are glimpsed through a brief sparring exchange between Zeus and Hera. In each scene the setting contributes to the atmosphere: Hector and Poulydamas face each other in open debate, surrounded by Trojan soldiers; Achilles mourns Patroclus in the much smaller gathering of his own followers, the Myrmidons, the rest of the Greek army being forgotten; the final scene, between Zeus and Hera, strikes a more austere note, as the two deities voice their antagonism with chilly dignity. Part 3 (369–617) begins with the arrival of Thetis at the home of Hephaestus, fulfilling her promise to obtain fresh armour for her son. It continues with a conversation between the two divinities, after which Hephaestus sets to work on a task which occupies him throughout the night, the forging of armour worthy of a great hero. The rest of Achilles' equipment is mentioned only in passing; the focus is on the creation of the magnificent shield and the description of its intricate design.

¹ For a survey of the book aimed at the general reader or student, see Edwards 1987: 267–86.

² It is unlikely that the book-divisions go back to the original poet (see p. 90), but that does not make them random or incidental.

The book thus highlights the transition from the long phase of Achilles' inactivity, during which Hector has enjoyed his greatest successes, to the subsequent day on which Achilles will fight his hardest and show himself at his most ruthless. Achilles' return to battle means Hector's certain defeat and death. The book dramatises two major decisions by these central figures: both decisions determine the remaining action of the poem, at least as far as book 22. Achilles decides to accept his fate, avenge his friend, and die at Troy; Hector decides to remain outside Troy and do battle next day, confronting Achilles, which will in fact mean his own death. The second of these decisions is strongly marked as misguided by the narrator's comment (p. 12 below). How we are to evaluate Achilles' great choice is harder to judge, and is left to the audience to decide. At an early stage of the book it is made clear that the hero cannot re-enter the combat unless he is provided with fresh armour; the closing section of the book ensures that when dawn arrives that condition is satisfied. The first scene of book 19 shows Achilles receiving and putting on the new armour; we then expect battle to commence, though in fact the poet finds further means to keep us in suspense, through the insistence of Agamemnon and the rest of the Greeks on a process of formal reconciliation. These scenes chiefly serve to stress Achilles' ferocious impatience to re-enter the fray: the audience shares his eagerness while also anticipating with some trepidation the violence which will follow once his wrath is unleashed.

The anger of the hero is announced in the opening lines as the central theme of the *Iliad*.³ The reference there is to the anger arising from Agamemnon's insult to his honour; it is this conflict, specified a few lines later, which is central to book 1 and drives the main plot for many books thereafter. But in book 16 Achilles' closest friend, Patroclus, is killed in battle by Hector, and when this news reaches Achilles, the situation is radically altered. His grief and fury lead to a passionate desire for revenge; his emotional turmoil is further complicated by the sense of guilt and responsibility which he feels, having allowed Patroclus to enter the battle in his place. From this point on the audience will be anticipating a deadly confrontation between Achilles and Hector.

The beginning of this new and greater wrath is narrated in a way that plainly recalls the start of the earlier quarrel. In particular Achilles is separated from his fellow Greeks, near his camp by the sea, and in his grief he is visited by his divine mother Thetis, who last appeared in book 1.

³ Any study of the poem will provide discussion of Achilles. See the entry in *HE* s.v.; also (e.g.) Schein 1984: chs 4–5. For a book-length study see Zanker 1994; on the mythological variants, Gantz 228–31, 580–630; for the history of the figure of Achilles in literature, King 1987; for representation in ancient art, *LIMC* 1.1: 37–200 (selective treatment in Shapiro 1994: 11–44, Carpenter 1991: 199–206).

Verbal parallels bring out the similarity between the scenes: in both, Thetis asks him why he is weeping and begs him to speak out (1.362–3a = 18.73–4a). But in the later episode, by a common Homeric pattern, the emotional intensity is greater. Thetis laments even before she joins her son; instead of coming alone, she is accompanied by an entourage of Nereids; rather than simply caressing Achilles, she cradles his head in her hands, uttering a wail of sorrow. The gestures and the situation as a whole evidently anticipate a funeral scene (cf. 15–69 introductory n. and *Od.* 24.36–94). In book 18 Thetis reminds her son that Olympian Zeus has fulfilled the promise that she extracted from him in book 1: the Achaeans are humbled, Agamemnon humiliated, their need of Achilles is patent. Her comment enables the audience to relish the irony of Achilles' 'success': his triumph over Agamemnon has resulted in a far greater misfortune than his earlier loss of face. A further analogy between the books is that here too Thetis proceeds to Olympus to seek a favour for her son: in book 1 it was Zeus's promise of support, here the divine armour which Hephaestus will prepare, so that Achilles may re-enter battle and slay Hector.

The contrast between the earlier wrath against Agamemnon and the new situation needs further comment. In book 1 Agamemnon is presented in a highly negative light from the start (his rejection of the suppliant Chryses despite the army's murmurings; his vindictiveness feared by Calchas; his disparaging comment in public about his wife Clytemnestra). Although Achilles too is quick-tempered and may be seen as over-reacting to Agamemnon's provocation, there can be little doubt that Agamemnon puts himself in the wrong. Achilles is assured by Athena that he will in due course receive ample compensation; later, in book 9, Phoenix assures him that 'up to now there was no way that anyone could find fault with your anger' (523). In short, Achilles' aggression is plainly and comprehensibly directed at a personal enemy, and he receives considerable sympathy from other leaders. The position in book 18 is more complex than in book 1 or book 9. Whereas Phoenix and the others envisaged Achilles rejoining the battle in person, Patroclus in book 16 entreated Achilles to send him instead, so as to aid the Greeks and save the ships from destruction. Achilles agreed to this plan, though warning him not to overreach himself (16.83–96). Consequently Achilles' reaction to the clamour at the start of book 18 is first misgiving on Patroclus' behalf, then vexation at his friend's disobedience; when he hears the news his overwhelming grief is combined with fury at Hector but also with self-reproach; he is responsible for Patroclus' death. If he had relented in response to the embassy in book 9, or if he had not yielded to Patroclus' entreaties in book 16, his friend would still be alive. The new wrath is partly self-directed; in the first onset of despair he no longer desires to live. The Greek messenger Antilochus is

filled with alarm that Achilles may actually take his own life on the spot (34, with n.).

The earlier wrath arose because Agamemnon high-handedly threatened to take away the slave-girl Briseis, whom Achilles had received as part of the spoils of war. Erotic desire or affection mattered less here than the offence to his honour, although it is true that later, in a speech rejecting the appeal of the Greek embassy, he claims to ‘love’ the girl and even draws an analogy between his loss of her and Menelaus’ loss of Helen (9.340–1, ‘Are the sons of Atreus the only men who love their wives?’). But Patroclus means more to Achilles than any concubine. The intensity of the relationship was taken by many later Greek readers to imply that the two were lovers, and they were so presented in a famous tragic trilogy by Aeschylus (see esp. *Myrmidons* F 135–7 Radt). Yet not all were convinced: although the orator Aeschines treated Homer’s reticence as a sign of civilised discretion, the Xenophontic Socrates denied the erotic element and cited other pairs of comrades in myth where no such factor seems to be in play (Theseus and Peirithous, Orestes and Pylades).⁴ At all events, Homer is never explicit: there is no hint of a physical bond between the two men, and indeed they each go to bed separately with slave-girls at the end of book 9 (664–7). Homoerotic relations are mentioned nowhere else in Homer: even the abduction of Ganymede by Zeus is treated in asexual terms, and we are told only that the boy was to become Zeus’s cup-bearer, not his companion in bed (5.266, 20.232–5). It is possible that the erotic link between Achilles and Patroclus did indeed pre-date Homer and underlies the Iliadic version (this might be a case of Homeric ‘censorship’), but that remains unproven; it is equally possible that later readers found the passionate intensity of Achilles’ grief inexplicable if the two men were not lovers. That extreme reaction is indeed characteristic of Achilles as presented in the *Iliad*: he is swift, violent, demanding, intensely emotional in all matters.

The end of the first wrath does not lead at once to reconciliation or reunion between Achilles and his fellow Greeks. In book 18 he saves them from disaster when he appears on the ramparts, a terrifying figure crowned with flame, and sends the Trojan forces into panic; but in the following scenes he is concerned only with tending and grieving over Patroclus’ body. In this book, after Antilochus has brought him the bad news he speaks only with gods or in lamentation over Patroclus. The next day, which begins with book 19, opens a new phase but sustains our perception of Achilles as a figure set apart from other men. There, acting

⁴ Aeschin. 1.142, Xen. *Symp.* 8.31; Dover 1978: 196–201; Halperin 1990: 75–87. On Achilles and the erotic in tragedy see Michelakis 2002; for later developments of the theme, Fantuzzi 2012.

on instructions from his mother, he summons the Greek army to an assembly and declares his anger with Agamemnon at an end; his present concern is to avenge Patroclus. An awkward scene ensues, which serves chiefly to show the continuing difficulty Agamemnon has in dealing with a subordinate who far surpasses his own prowess, and the difficulty the Greeks in general have in understanding Achilles. Agamemnon wants to save face and secure Achilles' acceptance of his gifts; Odysseus wants Achilles to eat and to allow the rest of the army to do so (a long day of fighting lies ahead, and an army marches on its stomach). Both want to integrate the headstrong Achilles through the customary courtesies and rituals, to ensure his renewed loyalty to the Greek cause. Neither truly understands that Achilles is beyond caring for gifts and that his grief impels him to reject food and drink (esp. 19.209–14). Nevertheless, the gods take steps to build up his strength for combat by providing him with divine sustenance of nectar and ambrosia, food which no other mortal in the *Iliad* is permitted to eat (19.347–54).⁵

Achilles' special status in the poem depends on two crucial points which are closely related. On the one hand, as the son of a goddess and the greatest of heroes he is close to the gods (they are even said to have attended his parents' wedding, 24.61–3). On the other, he is doomed to an early death, a prospect he has foreseen since the start of the poem, and in book 18 he takes a decision that brings it suddenly closer. Other demigods do figure in the *Iliad*, but they play subordinate roles and are differentiated markedly from Achilles. The most conspicuous are Sarpedon and Aeneas. The former, a son of Zeus, is slain in battle but miraculously transported to his native Lycia, where he is given honorific burial and a tomb worthy of a hero (cult after death is probably implied). The latter, son of Aphrodite, is also a figure with a destined future, but a positive one: he is fated to survive the Trojan War, and he and his descendants will rule in the Troad thereafter; for this reason he is rescued from a confrontation with Achilles which would surely have been fatal. In neither case does the hero himself seem to have foreknowledge of his destiny;⁶ and neither is built up as a tragic figure comparable with Achilles.

The hero of the *Iliad* thus stands near the boundary between mortality and divinity but cannot cross it; it is part of the poet's vision that this gulf is never crossed. Even Heracles, or Castor and Polydeuces, dwell in the land of the shades after death; there are no special privileges or apotheoses. The test of a hero's quality is how he confronts death.

⁵ On the importance of food and fasting see Griffin 1980: 15–17. On the differentiated diet of men and gods see e.g. Vidal-Naquet 1970.

⁶ In the *Homeric hymn to Aphrodite* Anchises is told by Aphrodite what is in store for their offspring (191–290), but that need not imply anything about the *Iliad*.

Any of the warriors fighting at Troy might anticipate an early death, and in describing individual deaths the poet frequently dwells on the loss of family, children, homecoming. But for most of them the future is uncertain, and so they fight on in hope that they will indeed survive and make it home again (or, in the Trojans' case, preserve their community and live on into better times). Achilles is exceptional because he knows he is doomed to an early death. This is not unique to Achilles: in book 13 we hear of the minor Greek warrior Euchenor, the son of a prophet. His father warned him that he had a choice between dying of a slow, cruel disease at home, or in battle at Troy. He chose death in battle, and we see him slain by Paris in book 13 (660–72). For the hero of the poem the motif is amplified and given much deeper significance. Since the option of a long and painful illness is an easy one to reject, the alternative is made more tempting: if Achilles abandons the war and returns to his homeland, he is guaranteed a long life of prosperity and comfort – but without glory (9.410–16). In book 9 he declares that he prefers this option, that he will return to Greece next day, but in the end he refrains from doing so. The poet powerfully brings out the blend of pride, anger, frustration, desire for glory, desire to see the end result of his wrath; many factors combine to inhibit Achilles from taking the decisive step and setting sail.

There are several complicating elements in the poem's presentation of Achilles' destiny. The theme is repeatedly mentioned, but a consistent picture is elusive. First there is the question how well known it is to others. In the initial quarrel with Agamemnon he makes no reference to it; only when alone by the sea and praying to his mother Thetis does he declare that 'since you bore me to be short-lived indeed, Olympian Zeus ought to confer honour upon me' (1.352–3). When the embassy appeal to Achilles, his long and complex speech in response includes a statement that he faces a choice of lives, and this seems to be news to the ambassadors (although they fail to react). Yet in book 16 Patroclus, who was present in that earlier scene, refers only to the possibility that Thetis may have given him some warning about the future (36–7): was he not listening? Second there is the question how much has actually been foretold. Vague at first, the predictions become more specific as the poem goes on. In book 18 itself Thetis declares that Achilles' death will follow 'straight after Hector' (96); in book 19 the horse Xanthus warns him that he will be slain by 'a god and a man' (19.417); in the battle with the river god Achilles recalls that his mother had warned him that Apollo would slay him (21.277–8); and with his dying breath Hector predicts that Achilles will be slain by Apollo and Paris at the Scaean Gates (22.359–60).⁷ With

⁷ See further e.g. Kullmann 1960: 308–13, 320–5; Griffin 1980: 163.

successive revelations the reader learns more, and in some of these passages we are probably meant to assume that Achilles too is hearing fresh details for the first time. Third, when so much is foreshadowed, does Achilles have a real choice at all? It could be argued that the various references are inconsistent on this point. In book 1 both he and Thetis speak of his 'short life' as if there is no alternative: it is because he has so little time to live that he demands recognition and honour during what time remains. In book 9, however, he speaks as if he still has a choice, and as if departing with his forces next day represents a real escape route. In the end, of course, he does not sail away, and we are left wondering if that was ever a possible outcome: Achilles is not the man to choose safety in obscurity. The problem is bound up with the larger issue of the gods' oversight of human affairs and the nature of fate, which will be considered further below (section 3). Here it is enough to note that the poet is willing to sacrifice total consistency if it enhances the effect of particular scenes or speeches.

At all events, it is clear that from book 18 onwards there is no doubt remaining: Achilles is doomed by his own choice to re-enter battle and seek revenge. He dominates the battle scenes of books 20 onwards; no other Greek warrior slays a Trojan victim; his new ruthlessness is shown by his determining to offer human sacrifice of Trojan captives to the ghost of Patroclus, a resolution fulfilled at the funeral of his friend (336–7n., cf. 23. 175–6). His new mood is unforgettably captured in the confrontation with Lycaon.

ἀλλά, φίλος, θάνε καὶ σὺ· τίη ὀλοφύρεαι οὕτως;
 κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὃ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.
 οὐχ ὀράαις οἶος καὶ ἐγὼ καλὸς τε μέγας τε;
 πατὴρ δ' εἴμ' ἀγαθοῖο, θεὰ δέ με γείνατο μήτηρ·
 ἀλλ' ἔπι τοι καὶ ἐμοὶ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή·
 ἔσσεται ἢ ἠὼς ἢ δεῖλη ἢ μέσον ἡμαρ
 ὅππότε τις καὶ ἐμεῖο ἄρηι ἐκ θυμὸν ἔληται
 ἢ ὃ γε δουρὶ βαλὼν ἢ ἀπὸ νευρῆφιν δῖστῶι. (21.106–13)

Die now yourself, friend; why are you weeping so? Patroclus died too, a better man than you by far. Do you not see what a man I am myself, how handsome and great? My father is a hero, a goddess was the mother who bore me. Yet over me too hang death and mighty fate: there will come a morning or an evening or a middle of the day when someone will take the life from me in battle, striking me down either with a spear or with an arrow shot from his string.

Achilles confronts the prospect of death unflinchingly, but also bitterly. The loss of Patroclus does not mean he no longer recognises any value in

life. At the very least, he still cares about his old father Peleus and grieves that he must leave him bereaved, without an heir. In the remaining part of the poem his moods fluctuate: grief and anger over Patroclus are dominant until he has succeeded in slaying Hector, but in the episodes that follow other, gentler and more generous emotions are allowed to come to the fore. In particular in book 23 he engages with his fellow Greeks during the funeral games. Although tensions are not absent from these scenes, they serve in part to show how skilfully Achilles can deal with others when his own status is not threatened. Finally the episode with Priam in the final book brings the wrath-theme to a fitting conclusion, as passionate desire for revenge is displaced by resignation and pity for a defenceless old man who, like Peleus, has lost his beloved son.

When the *Iliad* ends Achilles still lives, but the audience is left in no doubt that his death is very near.⁸ That expectation hangs over the last part of the poem and especially the final book, colouring all that Achilles says and does. Similarly, the final defeat and the sack of Troy overshadow the ending: they are already anticipated much earlier, particularly in the narrative of Hector's death (esp. 22.410–11). But although the killing of Hector makes the fall of Troy inevitable, Achilles will not play a part in the final victory (it is in fact unlikely that Achilles was integral to the myth of the Trojan War, though Homer's poem has made him inseparable from it).⁹ The *Iliad* gives only very vague indications of the further course of the war. The complications of other versions involving the bow of Philoctetes, the theft of the Palladium, and the Wooden Horse are excluded from the main narrative, though they may well have been known to the poet: Philoctetes' return is anticipated in the Catalogue of Ships (2.724–5), and Zeus is allowed a passing reference to Troy being finally taken 'through the counsels of Athena' (15.71). Nevertheless, the title of the epic is the *Iliad*, not the *Achilleid*.¹⁰ The tale of the wrath of Achilles is made to include not only the exploits of many lesser heroes on both sides, but also episodes that stand for or represent the Trojan War as a whole. Early scenes look back to the beginnings of the war, whereas in the later books there is increasingly ominous anticipation of its end. Achilles, himself the supreme

⁸ On the problems raised by 18.96 in relation to the stories of Penthesilea and Memnon, see n. on that line.

⁹ Achilles was too young to be one of the suitors of Helen who according to later sources swore an oath to support her husband if need be (a motif which the *Iliad* ignores). See further West 2011a: 42–7, for persuasive arguments that Achilles was incorporated in the war-narrative at a relatively late stage in the pre-Iliadic tradition.

¹⁰ It is however unlikely that the title goes back to the original poet. The modern titles *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are not attested earlier than Herodotus; indeed, few if any titles can be traced with certainty before the fifth century, though early tragedies presumably had some designation.

warrior, is in some ways representative of heroic manhood, of human potential developed to its highest point. Needless to say, that does not make him an admirable or even a sympathetic figure at all points; he is criticised within the poem by gods and men alike. Neither is he infallible: indeed, one of the ways in which the *Iliad* resembles tragedy is in the recognition by Achilles of his own folly and the frustration of his expectations.¹¹ In a fragment of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*, Achilles laments the death of Patroclus, comparing himself to the eagle slain by an arrow sped by his own feather.

ᾧδ' ἔστι μύθων τῶν Λιβυστικῶν κλέος,
 πληγέντ' ἀτράκτωι τοξικῶι τὸν αἰετὸν
 εἶπεῖν ἰδόντα μηχανὴν πτερώματος
 “τάδ' οὐχ ὑπ' ἄλλων, ἀλλὰ τοῖς αὐτῶν πτεροῖς
 ἀλισκόμεσθα.”

This is what is said about a fable they tell in Africa: an eagle was hit with an arrow from the bow, saw the way it was flighted, and said 'In this way we are vanquished, not by others but with our own feathers!' (Aesch. fr. 139, tr. Sommerstein)

As one critic has memorably put it, 'the meaning of the whole *Iliad* is there in *parvo*.'¹² That formulation is doubtless overstated, but the comparison does highlight a central strand in the poem's design.

2 HECTOR

Most interpreters of Homer in classical Greece took it for granted that the *Iliad* is fundamentally a national epic, glorifying the Greek crusade against the Trojan barbarian. Modern scholarship has rightly stressed the importance of the conflicts between Greece and Persia in establishing this patriotic reading of the poem.¹³ That reading is generally rejected as a distortion of the *Iliad*. 'The noblest character is a Trojan,' objected C. S. Lewis, alluding to Hector; and James Redfield subtitled his study of the poem 'The Tragedy of Hector'.¹⁴ Many readers find Hector a more attractive character than Achilles.¹⁵ It is more important to recognise that

¹¹ Plato (e.g. *Rep.* 10.595c, 607a) and Aristotle (e.g. *Poet.* 26) already saw Homer as the pathfinder of tragedy. For more detailed discussion see Rutherford 1982.

¹² Reinhardt 1979: 4.

¹³ See Hall 1989, with the update in Hall 2006: 184–224; Mitchell 2007: xv–xxv.

¹⁴ Lewis 1942, 29; Redfield 1975. For philhellenic references in the scholia, which generally denigrate Hector, see Richardson 1980: 273–4 (= Laird 2006: 189–90)

¹⁵ For further discussion of Hector see e.g. Erbse 1978; Reichel 1994: 156 n. 1 has bibl. up to that date. The most recent study is that of Kozak 2017. For

Hector is not only Achilles' chief opponent but defined in opposition to him. Whereas Achilles is fighting essentially for glory and to show his own prowess, Hector is defending his city and people. Achilles is son of a goddess and through her can even influence the plans of Zeus himself; Hector by contrast is of human birth, with all that this implies: we see the links between him and his community above all in book 6, where he re-enters Troy and meets relatives of those out on the battlefield, before encountering his own mother Hecuba, his sister-in-law Helen (who sees in him the bravery and integrity that Paris lacks), and finally his wife Andromache and their infant child. Achilles in book 9 questions why he is at Troy, why he should go on fighting; but for Hector the reasons are all around him, and the love he feels for his family is reflected in the intensity of mourning after his death. That death is witnessed with horror by both parents; the lamentation on the walls of Troy brings his wife running in panic from their home, only to see Hector's body being dragged in the dust behind Achilles' chariot. The poet leaves us in no doubt how much Hector means to his fellow Trojans.

Achilles, despite the companionship of Patroclus, is an isolated figure, partly because he is far from home, partly because of his withdrawal after the conflict with Agamemnon, but above all because of his foreknowledge of his death. He is not married (that forms part of the alternative future he describes, if he should return home: 9.393–400); and despite his fury at the removal of Briseis, in her absence he makes do with another, who is no more than a name (9.664–5). There is no parallel here to the touching family scene in which Hector parts from Andromache and Astyanax in book 6. In one passage Achilles refers to a son named Neoptolemus, who plays an important part in later versions of the sack of Troy (in Virgil and elsewhere it is he who kills Priam). He seems to be a bastard child by a woman taken as a prize in war; but what Achilles says is that he has no idea whether the boy is still alive (19.326–7).¹⁶ His personal ties are few and fragile. In all this he can be contrasted with Hector.

A further contrast involves their interaction with their fellow heroes. Here the position is less clear-cut. It is obvious that Achilles is a wilful, headstrong figure who does not readily follow orders or heed advice; he

representations in art see *LIMC* IV.1.482–98 (most frequent are scenes of the combat with Achilles).

¹⁶ This passage and its context are deleted by West as a rhapsodic interpolation (also 24.466–7, where Hermes urges Priam to plead with Achilles invoking 'his child' among others). 24.538–9 is naturally read as indicating that Achilles has no offspring. For the sacking of Scyros see 9.668. If the deletion is correct, it would not necessarily mean that the poet knew nothing of Neoptolemus, but the exclusion of all reference to him from the epic would further reinforce Achilles' status as a loner.