

This passage is describing Hector's funeral in Book 24 of Homer's Iliad, this shows the final stages of the Trojans heroes burial, emphasising the importance of communal mourning, religious ritual, honour and the restoration of social order following the violence of war.¹ Following Priam's successful journey to Achilles to ransom Hector's body, the Trojans are finally able to mourn their dead prince and perform the necessary funeral rites. Through emotive language, repeated references to dawn, ritual imagery and the collective actions of the Trojan people, Homer presents Hector's burial as both a deeply personal expression of grief and a public demonstration of Trojan identity, bringing the epic towards its conclusion through a temporary suspension of hostility between the Greeks and Trojans.

The passage opens with the description, 'so she spoke wailing and the countless throng made moan' which immediately establishes the collective nature of grief within the Trojan society.² The verb 'wailing' shows the intensity of emotional suffering, while the phrase 'countless throng' emphasises that Hector's death affects the entire community rather than his immediate family alone. The movement from an individual woman's mourning to the collective response of the crowd demonstrates how personal sorrow becomes a shared social experience, reinforcing Hector's importance as both a warrior and a protector of Troy. As Margaret Alexiou explains in her study of Greek lamentation, mourning constitutes an important cultural practice through which grief is expressed and communal relationships are affirmed.³ The Trojans collective grief therefore establishes Hector's significance beyond the battlefield as his death represents a loss that extends throughout the city.

Priam's speech introduces a contrasting tone of authority and reassurance, as he commands the Trojans to 'Bring wood now men of Troy to the city' and insists that they should 'Not have any fear at heart of a cunning ambush of the Argives'.⁴ The imperative 'Bring' demonstrates Priam's continuing role as king as he organises the community despite his personal grief, while the reference to the 'cunning ambush' reveals the anxiety created by the Trojan war. Even during preparations for a funeral, the possibility of Greek aggression is shown, suggesting that grief cannot separate the Trojans from the dangers of warfare.⁵ Priam's assurance that Achilles 'Would do us no hurt until the twelfth dawn comes' because Achilles who has previously treated Hector's corpse with extreme cruelty, now his enemies to perform their religious and cultural obligations.⁶ The contrast between earlier violence and the present assurance suggests that shared recognition of morality can temporarily overcome hostility, although the continuing need for Priam to reassure his people demonstrates that this reconciliation remains fragile.

The description of funeral preparations also emphasises the relationship between communal labor and the honorable treatment of the dead. Homer explains that the Trojans 'yoked oxen

¹ Homer, Iliad, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

² Homer, Iliad, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

³ Alexiou, Margaret, Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, and Panagiotis Roilos. n.d. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition. Second Edition. Revised by Dimitrios Yatromanolakis and Panagiotis Roilos.*

⁴ Homer, Iliad, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

⁵ Homer, Iliad, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

⁶ Homer, Iliad, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

and mules to wagons' and spent nine days bringing 'abundant wood' before Hector was carried out on the tenth day.⁷ The practical detail of the animals and wagons ground the heroic narrative in the physical work required to conduct an appropriate burial, while the extended duration of the preparation shows the importance of Hector's funeral to the entire community. The reference to 'nine days' followed by the arrival of the 'tenth dawn' creates a progression towards the funeral pyre, suggesting that the burial is a carefully organised public event rather than an impulsive response to loss.⁸ James M. Redfield's analysis of the relationship between heroic identity and social values is useful for understanding the response from the people, since Hector's status as a warrior is inseparable from his responsibilities and relationships within Trojan society.⁹ Hector's burial restores shows the settlement of Achilles mistreatment of Hector's corpse, Achilles promise allows Hector to receive a proper burial that he had previously been denied.

Homer's repeated references to dawn reinforce the ceremonial aspect of this passage, this is shown particularly through the expression 'giving light to mortals' and the epithet 'the rosy fingered'. Dawn is personified through this famous Homeric description as a recurring epithet used to describe the arrival of mourning.¹⁰ Dawn is personified as a human like figure whose finger spreads a rosy light across the sky, which creates imagery of a gentle and beautiful image of nature which contrasts with the violence and suffering in this passage. The phrase 'giving light to mortals' emphasises humanity's shared experience of life, suffering and death.¹¹ The word 'mortals' reminds the audience that unlike immortal gods, human beings are vulnerable to death and loss.¹² This is especially relevant to Hector whose death devastated his family and the Trojans. The arrival of dawn shows that the Trojans must face another day of grief, but it also allows them to begin the funerary rites that will honour Hector's life.

The cremation itself is described through imagery as the Trojans place Hector 'on the topmost pyre' and 'cast fire on it' before late stopping the flames 'with ruddy wine'.¹³ The phrase 'cast fire on it' shows the cremation is deliberate and a communal act, the fire transforms Hector's physical body which marks the transition from living warrior to the honoured dead.¹⁴ The verb 'cast' creates a sense of decisive action while the fire can symbolise destruction and transformation.¹⁵ Although cremation the fire burns away Hector's body, it also prepares his remains for the coming sacred burial rites. The phrase 'with ruddy wine' describes the Trojans stopping the fire after the cremation.¹⁶ The adjective 'ruddy' creates colour imagery which could show the red flames of the pyre and reinforce the scenes associated with bloodshed and death.¹⁷

⁷ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

⁸ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

⁹ N.d.-g. Jstor.org <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3297098?seq=1>> [accessed October 22, 2026].

¹⁰ "What's in an Epithet? New Thoughts." 2021. Classicalstudiesman, 6 October <<https://classicalstudiesman.com/2021/10/06/whats-in-an-epithet-new-thoughts/>> [accessed October 22, 2026].

¹¹ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

¹² Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

¹³ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

¹⁴ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

¹⁵ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

¹⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

¹⁷ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Lines 776-804.

Homer presents Hector's funeral as a powerful demonstration of communal grief, honour and unity. Through the Trojans mourning and sacred funeral rituals this passage emphasises the importance of respecting the dead and maintaining social traditions even in conflict. The tradition of mourning to the final feast suggests that they gradually return to normal everyday life, despite the continuing threat of war. Therefore Hector's burial shows that there is a significance of remembrance and community in overcoming the suffering that is caused by death.