



The final duel between Hector and Achilles. Red-figured volute-krater, attributed to The Berlin Painter, 490BC-460BC (circa)
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great deed for men yet to be born to hear. Not without reason he is the most skilled warrior of all Trojans and Dardanians and Lykians.

His concentration heightened by the challenge, he focuses closely on each posture and movement of his opponent. He is aware of the shouts of the onlookers from the walls, shouts of encouragement or concern, or dismay, and the shrill cry of his mother. None of this can distract him now.

Achilles faces him from a distance. He shouts back a callous refusal to Hector's plea that they both show piety for the body of the vanquished, while hurling his far-shadowing spear. Hector reads the throw correctly and crouches to his right. The spear flows over his left shoulder and fixes itself in the earth. Filled with pride and renewed confidence he praises his decision not to rush and be the first to throw. He moves a few steps forward, noticing how Achilles hesitates, takes a good aim and hurls with all his mighty strength. The weapon strikes the center of the shield. No shield made by man could have withstood the impact without splintering. This shield is not made by man but by Hephaestus, the smith god. The spear bounces back, the bronze tip hideously split and bent.

Hector, angered, knows better than call Deiphobus for another spear. Instead he draws his sharp sword and charges the Thessalian king. It will be an even contest, he reasons. He too wears a divine armor, the one he took from Patroclus, and a divine shield. Sword will fight sword, with no space for cunning gods to do much damage. He has failed to notice that sneaky Maliya has retrieved Achilles' spent spear and laid it in the grass at his feet. He charges full of confidence in his skill with the mighty sword, but Achilles crouches down, grasps the spear in his right hand and at the right moment springs up and thrusts at him, and Maliya performs one more act of cunning.

Hector has still a few steps to go before being able to slash down with the sword, when a well-known voice calling his name in a scream dense with desperation breaks through his concentration. Instinctively he raises his head to the call made for his ears only, the call of the goddess who uses Andromache's loving voice to reach his heart. The movement exposes the narrow opening between the breastplate and the mighty helmet at the base of the neck, where the collarbones part toward the shoulders. The bronze tip buries itself in and passes clean through the throat, where destruction of life comes most speedily. The sword falls from his hand and he crumples in the dust under the eyes of his city, and a vast, piercing wail rises from the walls to the abodes of the gods. Before the light of life leaves his eyes forever Hector dimly sees close by the dark mass of the sacred oak, and two vultures