The origins of the two names used by Homer for Paris/Alexandros (henceforth ‘P/A’) have been much discussed by scholars. The purpose of the present article is not to contribute to the debate about the origins of the two names, but to investigate whether there is any difference in their significance either in Homer or in Euripides.

I. J. F. de Jong has argued in a recent issue of this journal that, in the Iliad, Homer consistently uses ‘Paris’ as P/A’s Trojan name and ‘Alexandros’ as his international name. She writes: “the Greeks and the gods call P/A ‘Alexandros’, the Trojans ‘Paris’, except when they are addressing Greeks. In the narrator text, we find ‘Alexandros’ when a Greek or divine point of view, ‘Paris’ when a Trojan point of view is represented. Speaking from his own point of view the narrator mainly uses ‘Alexandros’, but occasionally turns to ‘Paris’ when he wishes to draw attention to some particular aspect of his character: his Trojan nationality, his personal point of view or his position as son of Priamos”.

The facts are as follows. The name ‘Alexandros’ is used 45 times altogether in the Iliad, 19 times in direct speech. ‘Paris’ is used 11 times, twice in direct speech. The compound ‘Dusparis’ is used twice, both times in direct speech. In direct speech, ‘Alexandros’ is used ten times by Greeks, six times by Trojans, and three times by gods. All four uses of ‘Paris’ (including ‘Dusparis’) in direct speech are by Hector (3.39; 6.280; 13.769; 22.359). These figures do nothing to suggest that ‘Paris’ is a name typically used by Trojans in general. Hector is the only person to use this name in direct speech, and even he uses ‘Alexandros’ twice (3.87 and 22.115). De Jong alleges that the Trojans call P/A ‘Paris’ except when they are addressing Greeks, but one of Hector’s two uses of the name is addressed to a Greek (22.359). Conversely, although the Trojans do indeed use ‘Alexandros’ on three occasions when addressing Greeks (3.87; 7.388; 7.389), they also use this name three times when addressing Trojans (3.253; 7.374; 22.115). De Jong offers various explanations of these exceptions to her rule, but it is difficult to believe that the basic distinction between the two names has been securely established. She has equal difficulty in establishing a distinction between the two names in the narrator-text, where the nine uses of ‘Paris’ do not seem to have a consistently Trojan viewpoint or context. Instead of dealing with these cases individually, it might be more constructive to examine three passages in which both names are used within a short space. The most instructive of these passages is the departure of P/A and Hector to battle at the end of...
Book VI. P/A is referred to as ‘Paris’ at 6.503 and 6.512, and de Jong states that “the scene focuses sharply on the portrayal of P/A as a member of the royal family and a Trojan”). Homer does, however, refer to him as ‘Alexandros’ at 6.517 and 7.2, and it is difficult to believe that there has been a significant change in either the narrative viewpoint or the emphasis between 6.512 and 6.517. All four uses of P/A’s names in this passage are in the narrator-text. In two other passages there is a lack of consistency in the use of the two names between direct speech and narrator-text. Hector meets ‘Alexandros’ at 13.766, addresses ‘Dusparis’ (13.769), and ‘Alexandros’ replies (13.774). Similarly, at the beginning of Book III, there is a series of references to ‘Alexandros’ (lines 16, 27, 30, and 37) but Hector addresses ‘Dusparis’ (3.39) and ‘Alexandros’ replies (3.58).

It is thus clear that de Jong’s theory is untenable, and that Kirk is correct to say that “there is no difference in the nuance of the two names”). Any difference that there may once have been between the significance of the two names has already disappeared by the time of Homer.

No other author before Euripides mentions P/A often enough for conclusions to be drawn about any distinction between the two names”). Euripides, however, makes frequent reference to P/A both as ‘Paris’ (23 times) and as ‘Alexandros’ (12 times)). The nationality of the speaker has no bearing on which name is used. Trojans refer four times to ‘Paris’ and twice to ‘Alexandros’, while Greeks refer 18 times to ‘Paris’ and nine times to ‘Alexandros’). In general, the two names are used interchangeably even within a single play. In Helen, for example, P/A is referred to seven times as ‘Paris’ (lines 29, 586, 611, 680, 691, 1120, and 1672) and four times as ‘Alexandros’ (lines 24, 28, 32, and 882) with no apparent difference of nuance.

There are, however, two passages in which attention is drawn to the fact that P/A has two names, both of them in Helen’s speech in Troades. She mentions the fact in passing at 920-22, but more emphatically at 941-42). There must be some significance in P/A’s possession of two names if these passages are to have any point. An interesting attempt to explain the point which Helen is making has been made by T. C. W. Stinton. He suggests that in Greek poetry the Trojans usually refer to P/A as ‘Alexandros’, and that ‘Paris’ was a name of ill-omen to Trojan ears and thus used in close connection with his marriage. “Helen is deliberately needling Hecuba by using the name Paris and then correcting herself in mock apology’)). Stinton’s argument does not, however, seem to be supported by the facts. Hecuba herself refers to P/A as ‘Paris’ at Hec. 387 in connection with the killing of Achilles (the name is used in the same context at Iliad 22.359), and as ‘Alexandros’ at Tro. 1020 in connection with his marriage. He is elsewhere described as ‘Paris’ in contexts other than of his marriage at An. 655 and I.A. 663, and frequently as ‘Alexandros’ in connection with his marriage (e.g. Hel. 28, 882; I.A. 1236).