

Homer

# The Iliad



Translated by  
Ian Johnston

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Ian Johnston  
Malaspina University-College  
Nanaimo, BC  
Canada

Front Cover Illustration  
by Ian Crowe

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*This translation is dedicated to my son  
Geoffrey (1974 - 1997)  
and to my grandson Fabian (b.1992)*

Generations of men are like the leaves.  
In winter, winds blow them down to earth,  
but then, when spring season comes again,  
budding wood grows more. And so with men—  
one generation grows, another dies away.

*(Iliad 6.181-5)*

## Translator's Note

This text uses the traditional Latinized spellings and common English equivalents for the Greek names, e.g., Achilles, Clytemnestra, Achaeans, Menelaus, Hecuba, rather than modern renditions which strive to stay more closely to the Greek: Akhilleus, Klytemnestra, Akhaians, Menelaos, Hekabe, and so on, with the exception of a very few names of gods—Cronos, Ouranos—and a few others (e.g., Idaios). And where there is a common English rendition of the name (e.g., Ajax, Troy, Teucer), I have used that. A dieresis over a vowel indicates that it is pronounced by itself (e.g., Coön rhymes with “go on” not with “goon,” Deïphobus is pronounced “Day-ee-phobus” not “Day-phobus” or “Dee-phobus”).

In numbering the lines, the translator has usually included a short, indented line with the line above it, so that what looks like two partial lines counts as a single one. These numbers are approximately twenty-five to thirty percent higher than the numbers in the Greek text.

The numbers inserted in the text indicate an explanatory note at the bottom of the page. These have been provided by the translator.

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## Book One

# The Quarrel by the Ships

*[The invocation to the Muse; Agamemnon insults Apollo; Apollo sends the plague onto the army; Achilles and Agamemnon quarrel; Calchas indicates what must be done to appease Apollo; Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles; Achilles prays to Thetis for revenge; Achilles meets Thetis; Chryseis is returned to her father; Thetis visits Zeus; the gods converse about the matter on Olympus; the banquet of the gods]*

**S**ing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus—  
that murderous anger which condemned Achaeans  
to countless agonies and threw many warrior souls  
deep into Hades, leaving their dead bodies  
carrion food for dogs and birds—  
all in fulfillment of the will of Zeus.

Start at the point where Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
that king of men, quarreled with noble Achilles.  
Which of the gods incited these two men to fight?

That god was Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto. 10  
Angry with Agamemnon, he cast plague down  
onto the troops—deadly infectious evil.  
For Agamemnon had dishonoured the god's priest,  
Chryses, who'd come to the ships to find his daughter,  
Chryseis, bringing with him a huge ransom.  
In his hand he held up on a golden staff  
the scarf sacred to archer god Apollo.  
He begged Achaeans, above all the army's leaders,  
the two sons of Atreus:

“Menelaus, Agamemnon, sons of Atreus, 20  
all you well-armed Achaeans, may the gods  
on Olympus grant you wipe out Priam's city,

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and then return home safe and sound.  
Release my dear child to me. Take this ransom.  
Honour Apollo, far-shooting son of Zeus.”

All the Achaeans roared out their support:

“Respect the priest. Take the generous ransom.”

Displeased, Agamemnon dismissed Chryses roughly:

“Old man,  
don't let me catch you by our hollow ships,  
sneaking back here today or later on. 30  
Who cares about Apollo's scarf and staff?  
I'll not release the girl to you, no, not before  
she's grown old with me in Argos, far from home,  
working the loom, sharing my bed. Go away.  
If you want to get home safely, don't anger me.”

The old man, afraid, obeyed his words, walked off in silence,  
along the shore by the tumbling, crashing surf.  
Some distance off, he prayed to lord Apollo,  
Leto's fair-haired child:

“God with the silver bow,  
protector of Chryse, sacred Gilla, 40  
mighty lord of Tenedos, Sminthean Apollo,<sup>1</sup>  
hear my prayer: If I've ever pleased you  
with a holy shrine, or burned bones for you—  
bulls and goats well wrapped in fat—  
grant me my prayer. Force the Danaans  
to pay full price for my tears with your arrows.”

So Chryses prayed. Phoebus Apollo heard him.

<sup>1</sup> *Sminthean* is a special epithet given to Apollo. It seems to mean something like “killer of field mice.” *Chryse* is a small coastal town near Troy, where *Chryses*, the father of *Chryseis*, is a priest of Apollo.

He came down from Olympus top enraged,  
carrying on his shoulders bow and covered quiver,  
his arrows rattling in anger against his arm. 50  
So the god swooped down, descending like the night.  
He sat some distance from the ships, shot off an arrow—  
the silver bow reverberating ominously.  
First, the god massacred mules and swift-running dogs,  
then loosed sharp arrows in among the troops themselves.  
Thick fires burned the corpses ceaselessly.

For nine days Apollo rained death down upon the troops.  
On the tenth, Achilles summoned an assembly.  
White-armed Hera put that thought into his mind,  
concerned for the Danaans, seeing them die. 60  
The men gathered. The meeting came to order.  
Swift-footed Achilles rose to speak:

“Son of Atreus,  
I fear we're being beaten back, forced home,  
if we aren't all going to be destroyed right here,  
with war and plague killing off Achaeans.  
Come now, let's ask some prophet, priest,  
interpreter of dreams—for dreams, too, come from Zeus—  
a man who might say why Apollo is so angry,  
whether he faults our prayers and offerings,  
whether somehow he'll welcome sacrificial smoke 70  
from perfect lambs and goats, then rouse himself  
and release us from this plague.”

Achilles spoke and took his seat.  
Then Calchas, Thestor's son, stood up before them all,  
the most astute interpreter of birds, who understood  
present, future, past. His skill in prophecy,  
Apollo's gift, had led Achaean ships to Troy.  
He addressed the troops, thinking of their common good:

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“Achilles, friend of Zeus, you ask me to explain  
Apollo's anger, the god who shoots from far.  
And I will speak. But first you listen to me.  
Swear an oath that you will freely help me  
in word and deed. I think I may provoke  
someone who wields great power over Argives,  
a man who is obeyed by everyone.  
An angry king overpowers lesser men.  
Even if that day his anger is suppressed,  
resentment lingers in his chest, until one day  
he acts on it. So speak. Will you protect me?”

80

In response to Calchas, swift-footed Achilles said:

“Take courage. State what your powers tell you.  
By Apollo, whom Zeus loves, to whom you, Calchas,  
pray in prophesy to the Danaans, I swear this—  
while I live to look upon the light of day,  
no Achaean will raise violent hands against you,  
no, not even if you name Agamemnon,  
who claims he's by far the best Achaean.”

90

Encouraged, the wise prophet then declared:

“Apollo does not fault us for prayers or offerings,  
but for his priest, disgraced by Agamemnon,  
who did not free his daughter and take ransom.  
That's why the archer god has brought disaster,  
and will bring still more. He won't remove  
this wretched plague from the Danaans,  
until we hand back bright-eyed Chryseis,  
give her to her beloved father, freely,  
without ransom, and offer holy sacrifice  
at Chryse. If we will carry out all that,  
we may change Apollo's mind, appease him.”

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So he spoke and sat back down. Then, Atreus' son,  
wide-ruling, mighty Agamemnon, stood up before them, 110  
incensed, spirit filled with huge black rage.  
Eyes blazing fire, he rounded first on Calchas:

“Prophet of evil, when have you ever said  
good things to me? You love to predict the worst,  
always the worst! You never show good news.  
Now, in prophecy to the Danaans,  
you say archer Apollo brings us pain  
because I was unwilling to accept  
fine ransom for Chryses' daughter, Chryseis.  
But I have a great desire to take her home. 120  
In fact, I want her more than Clytaemnestra,  
the wife I married. Chryseis is just as good  
in her shape, physique, intelligence, or work.  
Still, I'm prepared to give her back, if that's best.  
I want the people safe, not all killed off.  
But then you'll owe me another prize.  
I won't be the only Argive left without a gift.  
That would be entirely unfair to me.  
You all can see my spoils are going elsewhere.”

At that point, swift-footed Achilles answered the king: 130

“Noble son of Atreus, most acquisitive of men,  
how can brave Achaeans give you a prize now?  
There are none left for us to pass around.  
We've divided up what we allotted,  
loot from captured towns we devastated.  
For men to make a common pile again  
would be most unfair. Send the girl back now,  
as the god demands. Should Zeus ever grant  
we pillage Troy, a city rich in goods,  
we'll give you three or four times as much.” 140

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Mighty Agamemnon then said in reply:

“Achilles, you're a fine man, like a god.  
But don't conceal what's in your heart.  
You'll not trick me or win me with your words.  
You intend to keep your prizes for yourself,  
while the army takes my trophy from me.  
That's why you tell me to give Chryseis back.  
Let Achaeans give me another prize,  
equal in value, something I'll enjoy.  
If not, then I'll take a prize myself by force, 150  
something from you or Ajax or Odysseus.  
The man I visit is going to be enraged.  
But let's postpone discussion of all this.  
Let's drag a black ship to the sacred sea,  
select a crew, load oxen on for sacrifice,  
and Chryseis, that fair-complexioned girl.  
Let's have as leader some wise counselor—  
Idomeneus, Ajax, godlike Odysseus,  
or you, Peleus's son, most eminent of all,  
so with a sacrifice we may appease 160  
the god who shoots from far away.”

Scowling grimly, swift-footed Achilles interposed:

“You insatiable creature, quite shameless.  
How can any Achaean obey you willingly—  
join a raiding party or keep fighting  
with full force against an enemy?  
I didn't come to battle over here  
because of Trojans. I have no fight with them.  
They never stole my bulls or horses  
or razed my crops in fertile Phthia, 170  
where heroes grow. Many shady mountains  
and the roaring sea stand there between us.  
But you, great shameless man, we came with you,

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to please you, to win honour from the Trojans—  
for you, dog face, and for Menelaus.  
You don't consider this, don't think at all.  
You threaten now to confiscate the prize  
I worked so hard for, gift from Achaea's sons.  
When we Achaeans loot some well-built Trojan town,  
my prizes never match the ones you get. 180  
The major share of war's fury rests on me.  
But when we hand around the battle spoils,  
you get much larger trophies. Worn out in war,  
I reach my ships with something fine but small.  
So I'll return home now to Phthia.  
It's far better to sail back in my curved ships.  
I don't fancy staying here unvalued,  
to pile up riches, treasures just for you.”

To that, Agamemnon, king of men, shot back:

“Fly off home then, if that's your heart's desire. 190  
I'll not beg you to stay on my account.  
I have others around to honour me,  
especially all-wise Zeus himself.  
Of all the kings Zeus cherishes, it's you  
I hate the most. You love constant strife—  
war and combat. So what if you're strong?  
Some god gave you that. So scurry off home.  
Take ships and friends. Go rule your Myrmidons.  
I don't like you or care about your rage.  
But I'll make this threat: I'll take your prize, 200  
fair-cheeked Briseis. I'll fetch her in person.  
You'll see just how much I'm the better man.  
And others will hate to speak to me as peers,  
in public claiming full equality with me.”

As Agamemnon spoke, Peleus' son, Achilles,  
was overwhelmed with anguish, heart torn two ways,

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debating in his shaggy chest what he should do:  
Should he draw out the sharp sword on his thigh,  
incite the crowd, kill Atreus' son, or suppress his rage,  
control his fury? As he argued in his mind and heart,  
he slid his huge sword part way from its sheath.  
At that moment, Athena came down from heaven.  
White-armed Hera sent her. She cherished both men,  
cared for them equally. Athena stood behind Achilles,  
grabbed him by his golden hair, invisible to all  
except Achilles. In astonishment he turned.  
At once he recognized Pallas Athena,  
the dreadful glitter in her eyes. Achilles spoke—  
his words had wings.

210

“Child of aegis-bearing Zeus,<sup>1</sup>  
why have you come now? Do you wish to see  
how overbearing Agamemnon is?  
I'll tell you where all this is going to lead—  
that arrogance will soon cost him his life.”

220

Glittery-eyed Athena then spoke in reply:

“I came down from heaven to curb your passion,  
if you obey. White-armed Hera sent me.  
She loves you both alike, cares equally.  
Give up this quarrel. Don't draw your sword.  
Fight him with words, so he becomes disgraced.  
For I say to you, and this will happen,  
because of Agamemnon's arrogance  
some day gifts three times greater than this girl  
will be set down before you. Control yourself.  
Obey.”

230

Swift-footed Achilles answered Athena:

<sup>1</sup>The *aegis* is Zeus' special shield, the sight of which has the power to terrify men and make them run away. Zeus sometimes lends it to other gods.

“Goddess, men should follow your instructions,  
though angry in their hearts. It's better so.  
The person who's obedient to the gods,  
the gods attend to all the more.”

Obeying Athena's words,  
Achilles relaxed his huge fist on the silver hilt  
and pushed the massive sword back in its scabbard. 240  
Athena then returned to heaven, home of Zeus,  
who bears the aegis, and the other gods.

Achilles turned again on Agamemnon, Atreus' son,  
with harsh abuse, his anger still unabated:

“You drunken sot, dog-eyed, deer-timid coward,  
you're never strong enough within yourself  
to arm for war alongside other comrades,  
or venture with Achaea's bravest on a raid.  
To you that smells too much like death.  
No. You'd much prefer to stroll around 250  
throughout the wide Achaean army,  
to grab gifts from a man who speaks against you.  
A king who gorges on his own people!  
You lord it over worthless men. If not,  
son of Atreus, this would be your last offence.  
I'll tell you, swear a great oath on this point,  
by this sceptre, which will never sprout  
leaves and shoots again, since first ripped away  
from its mountain stump, nor bloom any more, 260  
now that bronze has sliced off leaf and bark.  
This sceptre Achaea's sons take in hand  
whenever they do justice in Zeus' name.  
An oath on this has power. On this I swear—  
the time will come when Achaea's sons  
all miss Achilles, a time when, in distress,  
you'll lack my help, a time when Hector,

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that man killer, destroys many warriors.  
Then grief will tear your hearts apart,  
because you shamed Achaea's finest man.”

So the son of Peleus spoke, throwing to the ground  
the sceptre with the golden studs. Then he sat down,  
directly facing furious Agamemnon.

270

Then Nestor stood up, clear, sweet orator from Pylos.  
Sweeter than honey the words flowed from his tongue.  
In his own lifetime two generations of mortal men  
had come and passed away, all those born and raised  
with him so long ago in sacred Pylos.  
Now he ruled a third generation of his people.  
Concerned about their common good, he said:

“Alas, this is great sorrow for Achaeans.  
Priam and Priam's children will be glad,  
the hearts of other Trojans swell with joy,  
should they find out about such quarreling,  
a fight between you two, among Danaans  
the very best for counsel or combat.  
But listen. You are both younger men than I.  
And I've been colleague of better men than you,  
men who never showed me any disrespect,  
men whose like I have not seen again,  
and never will—like Peirithous, Dryas,  
a shepherd to his people, Caeneus,  
Exadios, god-like Polyphemus,  
Theseus, son of Aegeus, all god-like men—  
the mightiest earthborn men, the strongest.  
And the enemies they fought against were strong,  
the most powerful of mountain centaurs.<sup>1</sup>

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290

<sup>1</sup>*Centaurs* are creatures with the head and torso of a man and the body of a horse.

But they destroyed those creatures totally.  
Associate of theirs, I came from Pylos,  
a long way from that land, summoned personally.  
I fought on my own behalf, by myself. 300  
No man alive on earth could now fight them.  
Yet they heard me and followed my advice.  
So listen, both of you. That's what's best now.  
Agamemnon, you're an excellent man,  
but do not take Briseis from Achilles.  
Let that pass. Achaea's sons gave her to him first.  
And you, Peleus' son, don't seek to fight the king,  
not as your enemy. The sceptre-bearing king,  
whose powerful authority comes from Zeus,  
never shares honours equally. Achilles, 310  
you may be stronger, since your mother was divine,  
but he's more powerful, for he rules more men.  
But you, son of Atreus, check your anger.  
Set aside, I urge you, your rage against Achilles,  
who provides, in the middle of war's evils,  
a powerful defence for all Achaeans.”

Mighty Agamemnon then replied to Nestor:

“Old man, everything you say is true enough.  
But this man wants to put the rest to shame,  
rule all of us, lord it over everyone. 320  
But some, I think, will not obey him.  
So what if the gods, who live forever,  
made him a spearman? Is that some reason  
we should let him say such shameful things?”

Achilles, interrupting Agamemnon, shouted:

“I'd be called a coward, a nobody,  
if I held back from any action  
because of something you might say.

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Order other men about. Don't tell me  
what I should do. I'll not obey you any more. 330  
But I will tell you this—remember it well—  
I'll not raise my hand to fight about that girl,  
no, not against you or any other man.  
You Achaeans gave her to me, and now,  
you seize her back again. But you'll not take  
another thing from my swift black ship—  
you'll get nothing else with my consent.  
If you'd like to see what happens, just try.  
My spear will quickly drip with your dark blood.”

Thus the pair of them continued arguing. 340  
Then they stood up, dissolving the assembly by the ships.  
Peleus's son went back to his well-balanced ships and huts,  
along with Patroclus, Menoetius' son, and friends.

Agamemnon dragged a swift ship down the shore,  
chose twenty sailors, loaded on the oxen,  
offerings for the god, and led on fair-cheeked Chryseis.  
Shrewd Odysseus shipped on as leader. All aboard,  
they set off, carving a pathway through the sea.

Atreus' son ordered troops to cleanse themselves.  
The men bathed in the sea, washed off impurities. 350  
They then made sacrificial offerings to Apollo—  
hundreds of perfect bulls and goats—beside the restless sea.  
Savory smells curled up amid the smoke high into heaven.

The men thus occupied, Agamemnon did not forget  
the challenge he'd made earlier to Achilles.  
He called his heralds, Talthylus and Eurybates:

“Go to Achilles' tent, Peleus's son,  
take fair-complexioned Briseis by the hand.

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Bring her to me. If he won't surrender her,  
I'll come myself in force and take her.  
For him that will be a worse disaster.”

360

With these firm orders, he dismissed the men, who moved off,  
heavy hearted, along the shore of the restless sea.  
They reached the huts and ships of the Myrmidons.  
There they found Achilles seated by his hut  
and his black ship. As he saw them approach,  
Achilles felt no joy. The two heralds, afraid,  
just stood in silence, out of deference to the king.  
In his heart Achilles sensed their purpose. He called them.

“Cheer up, heralds, messengers for gods and men.  
Come here. I don't blame you, but Agamemnon.  
He sends you both here for the girl Briseis.  
Come, Patroclus, born from Zeus, fetch the girl.  
Give her to these two to take away.  
Let them both witness, before blessed gods,  
mortal men, and that unfeeling king,  
if ever there's a need for me again  
to defend others from a shameful death.  
That man's wits are foolish, disastrously so—  
he's not thinking about past or future,  
how Achaeans may fight safely by their ships.”

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Patroclus did as his dear comrade had requested.  
He led out fair-cheeked Briseis from the hut  
and gave her up to be led off. The heralds went back,  
returning to Achaean ships, Briseis with them,  
but against her will.

Achilles then, in tears,  
withdrew from his companions, sat by the shore,  
staring at the wide gray seas. Stretching out his hands,

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he cried aloud, praying repeatedly to Thetis,  
his beloved mother.

“Mother, since you gave me life— 390  
if only for a while—Olympian Zeus,  
high thunderer, should give me due honour.  
But he doesn't grant me even slight respect.  
For wide-ruling Agamemnon, Atreus' son,  
has shamed me, has taken away my prize,  
appropriated it for his own use.”

As he said this, he wept.  
His noble mother heard him from deep within the sea,  
where she sat by her old father. Quickly she rose up,  
moving above gray waters, like an ocean mist,  
and settled down before him, as he wept. She stroked him, 400  
then said:

“My child, why these tears? What sorrows  
weigh down your heart? Tell me, so we'll both know.  
Don't hide from me what's on your mind.”

With a deep groan, swift-footed Achilles then replied.

“You know. Why should I tell you what you know?  
We came to Thebe, Eëtion's sacred city,  
sacked it, taking everything the city had.  
Achaea's sons apportioned it all fairly  
amongst themselves. Agamemnon's share  
was fair-skinned Chryseis. Then Chryses arrived 410  
at the swift ships of bronze-armed Achaeans.  
Archer god Apollo's priest sought out his daughter.  
He brought with him an enormous ransom,  
carried in his hands the sacred golden staff  
with the shawl of archer god Apollo.

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He begged Achaeans, above all Atreus' two sons,  
the people's leaders. All Achaeans called on them  
to respect the priest, accept the splendid ransom.  
But that didn't please Agamemnon in his heart.  
He sent him roughly off with harsh abusive orders 420  
The old man went away again, enraged.  
He prayed to Apollo, who loved him well.  
The god heard him and sent his deadly arrows  
against the Argives. The troops kept dying,  
one by one, as the god rained arrows down  
throughout the wide Achaean army.  
The prophet Calchas, understanding all,  
told us Apollo's will. At once I was the first  
to recommend we all appease the god.  
But anger got control of Agamemnon. 430  
He stood up on the spot and made that threat  
which he's just carried out. So quick-eyed Achaeans  
are sending Chryseis in fast ships back to Chryse,  
transporting gifts for lord Apollo, and heralds came  
to take away Briseis from my huts,  
the girl who is my gift from Achaea's sons.  
So now, if you can, protect your son.  
Go to Mount Olympus, implore Zeus,  
if ever you in word or deed have pleased him.  
For often I have heard you boast in father's house 440  
that you alone of all the deathless gods  
saved Zeus of the dark clouds from disgraceful ruin,  
when other Olympians came to tie him up,  
Hera, Pallas Athena, and Poseidon.  
But you, goddess, came and set him free,  
by quickly calling up to high Olympus  
that hundred-handed monster gods call Briareos,  
and men all name Aigaion, a creature  
whose strength was greater than his father's.  
He sat down beside the son of Cronos, 450

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exulting in his glory. The sacred gods, afraid,  
stopped tying up Zeus. So sit down right by Zeus,  
clasp his knee, remind him of all that,  
so he'll want to help the Trojans somehow,  
corner Achaeans by the sea, by their ships' prows,  
have them destroyed, so they all enjoy their king,  
so the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon,  
himself may see his foolishness, dishonouring  
Achilles, the best of the Achaeans.”

Thetis, shedding tears, answered her son, Achilles:

460

“Oh my child, why did I rear you,  
since I brought you up to so much pain?  
Would you were safely by your ships dry-eyed.  
Your life is fated to be short—you'll not live long.  
Now, faced with a quick doom, you're in distress,  
more so than any other man. At home,  
I gave you life marked by an evil fate.  
But I'll tell these things to thunder-loving Zeus.  
I'll go myself to snow-topped Mount Olympus,  
to see if he will undertake all this.  
Meanwhile, you should sit by your swift ships,  
angry at Achaeans. Take no part in war.  
For yesterday Zeus went to Oceanus,  
to banquet with the worthy Ethiopians.  
The gods all journeyed with him. In twelve days,  
when he returns and comes home to Olympus,  
I'll go to Zeus' bronze-floored house, clasp his knee.  
I think I'll get him to consent.”

470

Thetis spoke.

Then she went away, leaving Achilles there,  
angry at heart for lovely girdled Briseis,  
taken from him by force against his will.

480

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Odysseus sailed to Chryse, bringing with him  
the sacrificial animals as sacred offerings.  
When they had sailed into deep anchorage,  
they took in the sails and stowed them in the ship.  
With forestays they soon set the mast down in its notch,  
then rowed the ship in to its mooring place.  
They threw out anchor stones, lashed stern cables,  
and clambered out into the ocean surf.  
They brought off the offerings to archer god Apollo.  
Then Chryseis disembarked from the ocean ship.  
Resourceful Odysseus led her to the altar,  
placed her in her beloved father's hands, then said:

490

“Chryses, I have been sent by Agamemnon,  
ruler of men, to bring your daughter to you,  
and then, on behalf of the Danaans,  
to make an offering to lord Apollo—  
all these sacrificial beasts—to placate the god,  
who now inflicts such dismal evil on us.”

After saying this, he handed the girl over.  
Chryses gave his daughter a joyful welcome back.  
And then around the well-built altar, they arranged  
the splendid sacrifice. They washed their hands,  
and picked up the barley grain for sprinkling.  
Raising his arms, Chryses prayed out loud on their behalf:

500

“Hear me, god of the silver bow, protector  
of Chryse, mighty lord of holy Cilla,  
sacred Tenedos. You heard me earlier,  
when I prayed to you. Just as you honoured me,  
striking hard against Achaeans then, so now,  
grant me what I pray for—remove disaster,  
this wretched evil, from the Danaans.”

510

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So Chryses spoke. Phoebus Apollo heard him.  
Once they had prayed and scattered barley grain,  
they pulled back the heads of sacrificial beasts,  
slit their throats, flayed them, sliced the thigh bones out,  
and hid them in twin layers of fat, with raw meat on top.  
Old Chryses burned them on split wood, poured wine on them.  
Young men beside him held out five-pronged forks.  
Once the thighs were well burned, they sampled entrails, 520  
then sliced up all the rest, skewered the meat on spits,  
roasted it carefully, and drew off every piece.  
That work complete, they then prepared a meal and ate.  
No heart was left unsatisfied. All feasted equally.  
And when the men had had their fill of food and drink,  
young boys filled the mixing bowl with wine up to the brim,  
and served it, pouring libations into every cup.  
Then all day long young Achaean lads played music,  
singing to the god a lovely hymn of praise,  
honouring in dance and song the god who shoots from far. 530  
Hearing them, Apollo felt joy fill his heart. At sunset,  
as dusk came on, by the ship's stern they went to sleep.  
But when early born, rose-fingered Dawn appeared,  
they set off, once more back to the wide Achaean camp.  
Far-shooting Apollo sent them favourable winds.  
They raised the mast and then the sails. The wind blew,  
filling out the body of the sail—on both sides of the prow  
the purple waves hissed loudly as the ship sped on its way,  
its motion carving a path through the ocean swell.  
When they reached the broad Achaean army, 540  
they hauled the black ship high up on the sand,  
pushed long props tight beneath it, then dispersed,  
each man returning to his own huts and ships.

Meanwhile, Achilles, divinely born son of Peleus,  
sat down in anger alongside his swift ships. Not once  
did he attend assembly where men win glory

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or go out to fight. But he pined away at heart,  
remaining idle by his ships, yearning  
for the hue and cry and clash of battle.

Twelve days later, the company of gods came back  
together to Olympus, with Zeus in the lead. 550  
Thetis did not forget the promise to her son.  
She rose up through the ocean waves at daybreak,  
then moved high up to great Olympus. She found Zeus,  
wide-seeing son of Cronos, some distance from the rest,  
seated on the highest peak of many-ridged Olympus.  
She sat down right in front of him. With her left hand,  
she clutched his knees, with her right she cupped his chin,  
in supplication to lord Zeus, son of Cronos:

“Father Zeus, if, among the deathless gods, 560  
I’ve ever served you well in word or deed,  
then grant my prayer will be fulfilled.  
Bring honour to my son, who, of all men  
will be fate’s quickest victim. For just now,  
Agamemnon, king of men, has shamed him.  
He seized his prize, robbing him in person,  
and kept it for himself. But honour him,  
Zeus, all-wise Olympian. Give the Trojans  
the upper hand, until Achaeans respect my son,  
until they multiply his honours.” 570

Thetis finished. Cloud gatherer Zeus did not respond.  
He sat a long time silent. Thetis held his knees,  
clinging close, repeating her request once more:

“Promise me truly, nod your head, or deny me—  
since there’s nothing here for you to fear—  
so I’ll clearly see how among all gods  
I enjoy the least respect.”

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Cloud gatherer Zeus, greatly troubled, said:

“A nasty business.

What you say will set Hera against me.

She provokes me so with her abuse. Even now, 580  
in the assembly of immortal gods,  
she's always insulting me, accusing me  
of favouring the Trojans in the war.

But go away for now, in case Hera catches on.

I'll take care of this, make sure it comes to pass.

Come, to convince you, I'll nod my head.

Among gods that's the strongest pledge I make.

Once I nod my assent, nothing I say  
can be revoked, denied, or unfulfilled.”

Zeus, son of Cronos, nodded his dark brows. 590

The divine hair on the king of gods fell forward,  
down over his immortal head, shaking Olympus  
to its very base. The conference over, the two parted.  
Thetis plunged from bright Olympus back into the sea.

Zeus went inside his house. Their father present,

all the gods at once stood up from their seats.

No one dared stay put as he came in—all rose together.

Zeus seated himself upon his throne. Looking at him,

Hera sensed he'd made some deal with Thetis,  
silver-footed daughter of the Old Man of the Sea. 600

At once she spoke up accusingly:

“Which god has been scheming with you, you crafty one?

You always love to work on things in secret,

without involving me. You never want

to tell me openly what you intend.”

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The father of gods and men replied:

“Hera,  
don't hope to understand my every plan.  
Even for my own wife that's dangerous.  
What's appropriate for you to hear about,  
no one, god or man, will know before you. 610  
But when I wish to hide my thoughts from gods,  
don't you go digging after them,  
or pestering me for every detail.”

Ox-eyed queen Hera then replied to Zeus:

“Most dread son of Cronos, what are you saying?  
I have not been overzealous before now,  
in questioning you or seeking answers.  
Surely you're quite at liberty to plan  
anything you wish. But now, in my mind, 620  
I've got this dreadful fear that Thetis,  
silver-footed daughter of the Old Man of the Sea,  
has won you over, for this morning early,  
she sat down beside you, held your knees.  
I think you surely nodded your agreement  
to honour Achilles, killing many soldiers,  
slaughtering them by the Achaean ships.”

Zeus, the cloud gatherer, spoke out in response:

“My dear lady, you're always fancying things.  
Your attention picks up every detail.  
But you can't do anything about it, 630  
except push yourself still further from my heart,  
making matters so much worse for you.  
If things are as they are, then that's the way  
I want them. So sit down quietly.

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Do as I say. If not, then all the gods  
here on Olympus won't be any help,  
when I reach out to set my hands on you,  
for they're invincible.”

Zeus finished speaking. Ox-eyed queen Hera sat down,  
in fear, silently suppressing what her heart desired.  
In Zeus' home the Olympian gods began to quarrel.  
Then that famous artisan, Hephaestus, concerned  
about his mother, white-armed Hera, spoke to them:

640

“A troublesome matter this will prove—  
unendurable—if you two start fighting  
over mortal men like this, inciting gods to quarrel.  
If we start bickering, we can't enjoy the meal,  
our excellent banquet. So I'm urging mother,  
though she's more than willing, to humour Zeus,  
our dear father, so he won't get angry once again,  
disturb the feast for us. For if Zeus,  
the Olympian lord of lightning, was of a mind  
to hurl us from our seats, his strength's too great.  
But if you talk to him with soothing words,  
at once Olympian Zeus will treat us well.”

650

Hephaestus spoke, then stood up, passed a double goblet  
across to his dear mother, saying:

“Stay calm, mother, even though you are upset.  
If not, then, as beloved as you are,  
I may see you beaten up before my eyes,  
with me incapable of helping out,  
though the sight would make me most unhappy.  
It's hard to take a stand opposing Zeus.  
Once, when I was eager to assist you,  
Zeus seized me by the feet and threw me out,

660

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down from heaven's heights. The entire day  
I fell and then, right at sunset, dropped  
on Lemnos, almost dead. After that fall,  
men of Sintes helped me to recover.”

As he spoke, the white-armed goddess Hera smiled.  
She reached for her son's goblet. He poured the drink,  
going from right to left, for all the other gods,  
drawing off sweet nectar from the mixing bowl.  
Then their laughter broke out irrepressibly,  
as the sacred gods saw Hephaestus bustling around,  
concerned about the feast. All that day they dined,  
until sunset. No one's heart went unsatisfied.  
All feasted equally. They heard exquisite music,  
from Apollo's lyre and the Muses' beautiful song  
and counter-song. When the sun's bright light had set,  
the gods all went to their own homes. Hephaestus,  
the famous lame god, with his resourceful skill,  
had made each god a place to live. Olympian Zeus,  
god of lightning, went home to his own bed,  
where he usually reclined whenever sweet sleep  
came over him. He went inside and lay down there,  
with Hera of the golden throne stretched out beside him.

670

680

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## Book Two

# Agamemnon's Dream and The Catalogue of Ships

*[Zeus sends a false dream to Agamemnon; Agamemnon reports the dream to his advisors and outlines a test of the army; Agamemnon urges his troops to go home; Odysseus restores order; Thersites insults Agamemnon; Odysseus deals with Thersites, reminds the men of Calchas' original prophecy; Nestor suggests a display of the troops; the Catalogue of Ships (list of the Achaean, Trojan, and allied forces)]*

Gods and warriors slept through the entire night.  
But sweet Sleep did not visit Zeus, tossing and turning  
over in his mind some way to honour Achilles,  
by slaughtering many soldiers by the Achaean ships.  
In Zeus' heart the best idea seemed to be  
to send out a wicked Dream to Agamemnon.  
Calling the Dream, Zeus said these winged words to him:

“Evil Dream, fly quickly to Achaea's men,  
by their swift ships. Go to Agamemnon's hut,  
Atreus' son. Report my words precisely. 10  
Bid him quickly arm long-haired Achaean troops,  
for now they'll capture Troy, city of wide streets.  
Immortal gods who dwell on Mount Olympus  
no longer disagree about all this.  
Hera's entreaties have persuaded them.  
Trojans can expect more sorrows, more disasters.”

Zeus spoke. With these instructions, Dream set off,  
quickly reaching Achaea's fast ships and Atreus's son.  
He found Agamemnon resting in his hut,  
wrapped up in the sweet divinity of Sleep. 20

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Dream stood above his head, looking just like Nestor,  
son of Neleus, of all the more senior men  
the one Agamemnon held in special honour.  
In that shape, divine Dream spoke to Agamemnon:

“You are sleeping, son of fiery Atreus,  
tamer of horses. But a prudent man,  
one to whom people have given their trust,  
who has so many things to think about,  
shouldn't sleep all night. So pay attention.  
Hear what I have to say. I come to you  
as Zeus' messenger, with his orders. 30  
He's far off, but pities and cares for you.  
He bids you quickly arm long-haired Achaeans,  
for now you can take Troy, city of wide streets.  
The immortal gods who dwell on Mount Olympus  
no longer disagree about all this.  
Hera's entreaties have persuaded them.  
Trojans can expect from Zeus more sorrows,  
more disasters. Remember what I've said.  
Don't let forgetfulness seize your mind, 40  
when honey Sleep has loosed his sweet grip on you.”

This said, Dream went off, leaving the king imagining things  
which would not come to pass. He thought he'd take Troy,  
Priam's city, that very day. Fool! He had no clue  
of what Zeus really meant, his plan to load on them,  
Trojans and Danaans both, still more suffering,  
more cries of sorrow, through war's brutality.

Agamemnon roused himself from sleep, the divine voice  
all round him still. He sat up, pulled on a supple tunic,  
new and finely made. On top he threw a large cloak. 50  
He laced up lovely sandals over his sleek feet  
and slung a silver-studded sword around both shoulders.

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He took with him the royal staff of his ancestors,  
eternal and imperishable. Gripping this,  
he approached the ships of the bronze-armed Achaeans.  
When goddess Dawn rose high up on Olympus,  
bringing light to Zeus and the immortals,  
Agamemnon bid the loud-voiced heralds summon  
all the long-haired Achaeans to assembly.  
Such a call went out. Men answered on the run.  
But first, Agamemnon convened a meeting  
of all his great-hearted senior counselors.  
They met by Nestor's ships, king born on Pylos.  
To the assembled group Agamemnon then sketched out  
a plan he had conceived—a devious one.

60

“My friends, listen.

A divine Dream has just come to me,  
through the sacred night, as I lay asleep,  
in form, size, and voice just like worthy Nestor.  
He stood above my head and spoke these words:

70

'You are sleeping, son of fiery Atreus,  
tamer of horses. But a prudent man,  
one to whom people have given their trust,  
who has so many things to think about,  
shouldn't sleep all night. So pay attention.  
Hear what I have to say. I come to you  
as Zeus' messenger, with his orders.  
He's far off, but pities and cares for you.  
He bids you quickly arm long-haired Achaeans,  
for now you can take Troy, city of wide streets.  
Immortal gods who dwell on Mount Olympus  
no longer disagree about all this.  
Hera's entreaties have persuaded them.  
The Trojans can expect from Zeus more sorrows,  
more disasters. Remember what I've said.'  
With that, Dream flew off, sweet Sleep released me.

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Come, then, let's get long-haired Achaeans  
somehow armed for battle. But first,  
it's only right I test the men, ordering them  
to go home in their ships with many oars.  
You hold them back with your commands,  
each one working from his own position.”

90

Agamemnon finished speaking and sat back down.  
Nestor stood up before them, king of sandy Pylos.  
With a wise sense of their common cause, he addressed them:

“My friends, chiefs and leaders of the Argives,  
if any other Achaean had told us such a dream,  
we would declare it quite false, dismiss it.  
But now the man who has a claim to be  
the greatest of Achaeans has witnessed it.  
So come, let's find a way to arm Achaea's sons.”

100

So Nestor spoke. Then he began to make his way back,  
leaving the council meeting. The others stood up,  
all sceptre-bearing kings, following Nestor's lead,  
his people's shepherd. Troops came streaming out to them.  
Just as dense clouds of bees pour out in endless swarms  
from hollow rocks, in clusters flying to spring flowers,  
charging off in all directions, so from ships and huts  
the many clans rushed out to meet, group after group.  
Among the troops Rumour blazed, Zeus' messenger,  
igniting them. The assembly was in uproar.  
Beneath the men, as they sat amid the din, earth groaned.  
Nine heralds shouted out instructions, attempting  
to control the noise, so men could hear their leaders,  
god's chosen ones. Gradually men settled down,  
kept quiet in their places. The noise subsided.  
King Agamemnon stood up, hands gripping his staff,  
one fashioned by Hephaestus' careful craftsmanship.

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That god had given it to lord Zeus, son of Cronos.  
Later Zeus had presented it to Hermes,  
the guide, killer of Argus.<sup>1</sup> Hermes, in his turn,  
gave it to king Pelops, the chariot racer,  
who passed the staff to Atreus, the people's leader.  
This man, as he lay dying, left it for Thyestes,  
who owned many flocks. Thyestes, in his turn,  
passed it onto Agamemnon, who held it  
as ruler of all Argos and many islands.  
With this staff as his support, Agamemnon spoke:

120

“You Danaan warriors, comrades,  
companions of Ares, god of war,  
Zeus, son of Cronos, has entangled me  
in some really serious foolishness.  
Perverse Zeus! He promised me, he agreed—  
I'd have devastated well-built Troy  
before going home. Now he plans a cruel trick,  
tells me to return to Argos dishonoured,  
after I've lost so many warriors.  
This is apparently what high Zeus desires,  
he who has smashed so many city heights,  
and will destroy still more, such is his power,  
the greatest power of all. This is a great disgrace,  
which people will learn about in years to come—  
how an Achaean force of such quality and size  
vainly sailed off to fight a lesser force,  
and failed to get what they set out to take.  
For if we Achaeans and the Trojans wished,  
in good faith, to draw up a treaty,  
to tally up the numbers on both sides,  
with Trojans counting each inhabitant of Troy,  
and if we Achaeans set ourselves in groups of ten,

130

140

<sup>1</sup>Argus was a monster sent by Hera to guard Io, because she didn't want Zeus to seduce Io. Hermes killed Argus on Zeus' orders.

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then chose, for every group, a Trojan man  
to pour our wine, then of our groups of ten  
many would lack a man to act as steward.  
That, I tell you, indicates just how much  
Achaea's sons outnumber Trojans,  
those who live in Troy. But all their allies,  
warrior spearmen from many cities,  
are a huge problem for me. They thwart my wish  
to smash down those sturdy walls of Troy.  
Nine of great Zeus' years have rolled on past.  
Ships' planks have rotted, their ropes have frayed. 160  
Back home our wives and children wait for us.  
The work for which we came remains undone.  
So come, let's all agree to what I say.  
Let's go back to our own dear country in our ships.  
For we'll not capture Troy with its broad streets."

So Agamemnon spoke. Among the soldiers,  
all those with no idea of what he'd planned,  
men's feelings quickened. The assembly was aroused.  
Just like huge ocean waves on the Icarian Sea,  
when East Wind and South Wind rush down together 170  
from Father Zeus' clouds to whip up the sea,  
the whole assembly rippled, like a large grain field,  
undulating under the fury of the storm,  
as West Wind roars in with force, all ears of corn  
ducking down under the power of the gusts—  
that's how the shouting men stampeded to their ships.  
From underneath their feet a dust cloud rose.  
They yelled orders to each other to grab the ships,  
drag them to the sacred sea, clear out channels  
for launching boats, knock out props from underneath, 180  
frantic to get home. Heaven echoed with the din.  
At that point, the Argives might well have gone back—  
contravening what Fate had proposed for them—

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if Hera had not spoken to Athena:

“Alas, unconquerable child of Zeus,  
who bears the aegis, the Argives will flee,  
go back home to their dear native land,  
cross the wide sea, abandoning Helen,  
an Argive woman, leaving in triumph  
Priam and his Trojans. On her account, 190  
many Achaeans have perished here in Troy,  
far from the homes they love. So now, come on,  
go down to the bronze-clad Achaean troops,  
use your persuasive power to stop the men  
hauling their curved ships down into the sea.”

So Hera spoke. Bright-eyed goddess Athena obeyed.  
She sped off, raced down from Mount Olympus' crest,  
quickly reached Achaea's swift ships, rushing to the spot  
Odysseus, a man as wise as Zeus, was standing.  
He'd laid no hand on his fast, black, well-decked ship. 200  
His stout heart was filled with pain. Standing close to him,  
bright-eyed Athena spoke to him:

“Odysseus,  
divinely bred, Laertes' resourceful son,  
so you are going to fly back home,  
sail off to your own dear country.  
You'll leap into your ships with many oars,  
and leave in triumph Priam and the Trojans,  
abandoning Argive Helen, for whose sake  
so many Achaeans have died here in Troy,  
far from the homes they love. But come now, 210  
move around among Achaean soldiers.  
Don't hesitate. Persuade each man to stop  
dragging the curved ships down into the sea.”

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So Athena spoke. Odysseus knew her from her voice,  
as she talked. Then he ran, shrugging off his cloak—  
Eurybates, the herald, later picked it up,  
a man from Ithaca, aide to Odysseus.  
Odysseus went straight to Agamemnon, Atreus' son,  
took from him his imperishable ancestral staff.  
Grasping this, he ran to the bronze-clad Achaeans' ships.  
When he came across some king or prominent leader,  
he'd confront him, telling him to hold his ground:

220

“Friend, it's not suitable for you to panic,  
as if you're worthless. Take your seat instead.  
Get other soldiers to remain in place.  
You've no clear sense of Agamemnon's plan.  
Right now he's testing all the army.  
Soon enough he'll punish Achaea's sons.  
Didn't we all hear what he said in council?  
In his rage he may harm Achaean troops—  
passions run high in kings whom Zeus supports.  
Their honour comes from Zeus the Counselor,  
who loves them.”

230

By contrast, when Odysseus  
came across some common soldier yelling out,  
he'd beat him with the staff, admonishing him:

“My friend, take your place in silence. Stay put.  
Listen to what others say, your betters,  
you puny coward, useless in war or council.  
Achaeans can't all rule here as kings.  
No good comes from having many leaders.  
Let there be one in charge, one ruler,  
who receives from crooked-minded Cronos  
sceptre and laws, so he may rule his people.”

240

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Odysseus moved throughout the army, calming things.  
From ships and huts, soldiers rushed to reassemble,  
echoing like waves of the roaring sea crashing on shore,  
as Ocean thunders on. Men sat calmly in their places.  
But a single man kept on yelling out abuse—  
scurrilous Thersites, expert in various insults,  
vulgar terms for inappropriate attacks on kings,  
whatever he thought would make the Argives laugh. 250  
Of all the men who came to Troy, he was the ugliest—  
bow legged, one crippled foot, rounded shoulders  
curving in toward his chest. On top, his pointed head  
sprouted thin, scraggly tufts of hair. Achilles hated him,  
as did Odysseus, too, both subject to his taunts.  
But now Agamemnon was the target of his gibes.  
The Achaeans, despising Thersites in their hearts,  
were furious at him. But he kept shouting out,  
aiming noisy insults right at Agamemnon: 260

“Son of Atreus, what's your problem now?  
What do you lack? Your huts are stuffed with bronze,  
plenty of choice women, too—all presents  
we Achaeans give you as our leader,  
whenever we ransack some city.  
Or are you in need of still more gold,  
a ransom fetched by some horse-taming Trojan  
for his son tied up and delivered here  
by me or by some other Achaean?  
Or do you want a young girl to stash away, 270  
so you're the only one who gets to screw her?  
It's just not fair that you, our leader,  
have botched things up so badly for us,  
Achaea's sons. But you men, you soldiers,  
cowardly comrades, disgraceful people,  
you're Achaean women, not warriors.  
Let's sail home in our ships, leave this man,

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our king, in Troy here to enjoy his loot.  
That way he might come to recognize  
whether or not we're of some use to him. 280  
Now Agamemnon has even shamed Achilles,  
a much finer warrior than himself,  
stealing a prize, keeping it for his own use.  
Then there's Achilles, no heart's anger there,  
who lets it all just happen. If he didn't,  
this bullying of yours, son of Atreus,  
would be your last.”

Thersites yelled out these insults  
right at Agamemnon, the people's shepherd,  
abusing him. Noble Odysseus stood up quickly,  
confronting Thersites. Scowling, he lashed out sternly: 290

“Shut up, chatterbox. You're a champion talker.  
But don't try to have it out with kings,  
all by yourself. Let me tell you something—  
of all those who came to Troy with Atreus' sons,  
you're the most disgraceful. So shut your mouth.  
No more words from you abusing our kings,  
seeking to sneak back home. How this war will end,  
we've no idea—whether Achaea's sons  
will go back home successful or will fail.  
You sit here, railing at Agamemnon, 300  
Atreus' son, leader of his people,  
because Danaan heroes have given him  
so many gifts—but that's a cheap insult.  
So I'll tell you how things are going to be.  
If I find you being so foolish any more,  
then let Odysseus' head no longer stay  
upon his shoulders, let him no longer  
be called the father of Telemachus,  
if I don't grab you, rip off all your clothes,

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cloak and tunic, down to your cock and balls,  
and beat you back to the fast ships in tears,  
whipping you in shame from our assembly.”

310

Saying this, Odysseus lashed out with the sceptre,  
hitting Thersites hard across his back and shoulders.  
He doubled up in pain, shedding many tears.  
In the middle of Thersites' back sprang up  
bloody welts beneath the golden sceptre.  
He sat down, afraid and hurt, peering around,  
like an idiot, and rubbing away his tears.  
The soldiers, though discontent, laughed uproariously,  
saying to one another:

320

“Comrades,  
before now Odysseus has done good things,  
thinking up fine plans and leading us in war.  
But that's the best thing he's done by far  
to help the Argives, shutting up that rabble-rouser.  
Thersites' bold spirit won't urge him on  
to trash our kings again with his abuse.”

That's how the soldiers talked together. Then Odysseus,  
destroyer of cities, rose up, grasping the sceptre.  
At his side, bright-eyed Athena, looking like a herald,  
silenced troops, so Achaeans close by and far away  
could hear him and follow his advice. Odysseus,  
bearing in mind their common good, spoke out:

330

“Son of Atreus,  
now the Achaeans wish to disgrace you,  
their king, shame you before all mortal men.  
They're refusing now to keep their promise,  
the one they all swore to while sailing here,  
still on their way from horse-breeding Argos,

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that oath that they'd return after we'd destroyed  
Troy's strong walls. Like widows or small children, 340  
they're whining to each other to go home.  
But going back demoralized is bad.  
A man who spends one month aboard his ship,  
away from his wife, becomes downhearted  
when winter gusts and stormy seas confine him.  
This is now the ninth revolving year  
we've been waiting here, on this very spot.  
So I don't think that badly of Achaeans  
in their frustration here by their curved ships.  
Still, it's shameful to go home with nothing. 350  
My friends, be patient, give us all more time,  
until Calchas' prophecy comes true or not.  
We all have kept in mind what he foretold.  
You all are witnesses, the ones whom Fate  
has not yet visited to carry off in death.  
Not long ago, when our Achaean ships  
gathered at Aulis, bringing disaster  
for Priam and his Trojans, we sacrificed  
on holy altars placed around a spring  
hundreds of perfect creatures to the gods, 360  
the immortals—underneath that tree,  
a lovely plane tree, where bright water flowed.  
And then a great omen appeared, a snake,  
blood-red along its back, a dreadful sight,  
a thing sent out by Zeus into the daylight.  
Out from under the altar that snake slithered,  
darting for the plane tree, where there lay  
tiny, new-born sparrows, eight fledglings,  
huddled under foliage at the very top.  
The ninth one was the mother of the batch. 370  
The serpent ate the infants, who screamed with fear.  
The mother fluttered around here and there,  
lamenting her dear chicks. The coiled serpent

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snatched the crying mother by the wing.  
Once the beast had gobbled up the sparrow  
and her chicks, the god who'd made the snake appear  
did something to it there for all to see.  
Crooked Cronos' son changed that snake to stone!  
We stood there astounded at what we'd seen—  
a horror desecrating the gods' sacrifice. 380  
Calchas at once spoke out in prophecy:  
'Long-haired Achaeans, why stand there so mute?  
Counselor Zeus has made manifest to us  
a tremendous omen. It has come late,  
and will take many years to be fulfilled,  
but its fame will never die. Just as that snake  
swallowed the sparrow's brood, eight in all,  
with the mother who bore them the ninth one killed,  
so that's how long we'll fight them over there.  
In the tenth year we'll take Troy, wide streets and all.' 390  
That's what Calchas said. Now it's coming true.  
So come on, all you well-armed Achaeans,  
let's stay, until we seize Priam's great city.'"

At this speech Argives gave out an enormous cheer.  
The ships on all sides resounded ominously,  
as Achaeans roared out their endorsement of his words.  
Then Nestor, the Geranian horseman, cried out:

"Alas! In our assembly you're all infants,  
silly children, with no sense of war's events.  
What will happen to our agreements,  
the oaths we made? Let fire consume 400  
our strategies, men's plans, our treaties,  
ratified with wine and handshakes, those things  
we used to trust. For now we fight ourselves,  
arguing like this. We can't find any remedy,  
though we've been sitting here for years.

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Son of Atreus, you must maintain with force  
your previous plan to lead the Argive troops  
directly to the harsh demands of war.  
And let those one or two be damned, 410  
the men who don't think like Achaeans,  
the few of them who yearn to go back home—  
something they'll find impossible to do—  
before we learn the truth or falsehood  
of what was promised by aegis-bearing Zeus.  
For I assure you mighty Zeus nodded assent  
on that very day the Argives put to sea,  
bearing Troy's destructive fate in their swift ships.  
On our right hand, Zeus hurled down lightning bolts,  
signs manifesting his good will to us. 420  
So let no man run off to get back home—  
not before he's had sex with some Trojan's wife,  
payment for Helen's miseries, her cries of pain.  
If any man is really keen to get back home,  
let him just set hand to his well-benched ship,  
he'll come face to face, in plain view of all,  
with death, his fate. You, my lord, think carefully—  
think about what someone else suggests.  
Don't simply throw out what I say to you.  
Agamemnon, set men in groups by tribes and clans, 430  
so clans encourage clans, tribes bolster tribes.  
If you do that, if Achaeans all obey,  
you'll then recognize who's good and bad  
among your leaders and your men. Ranged like that,  
the two groups will stand against each other.  
You'll then know whether failure to take Troy  
stems from divine will or craven soldiers  
or ineptitude in managing the war.”

Mighty Agamemnon then answered Nestor:

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“Old man, in our assembly once again 440  
you win out over all Achaea's sons.  
O Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo—  
if I only had ten such counselors  
among Achaeans, king Priam's city  
would soon fall, be taken, sacked at our hands.  
But aegis-bearing Zeus, son of Cronos,  
keeps showering me with grievous troubles.  
He throws me into pointless bitter fights.  
So Achilles and I fought for that girl,  
yelling at each other. The first offence was mine. 450  
But if we two agreed, were of one mind,  
then Troy's fate would be sealed without delay,  
without a moment's pause. But let's go off to eat,  
so we can resume the fight. Every one of you,  
get your spears and shields prepared for action.  
Feed your swift-footed horses properly.  
Inspect the chariots with a careful eye,  
so we can stand all day and battle Ares,  
hateful god of war. We'll get no respite,  
not even for a moment, except at dusk, 460  
when nightfall separates the frenzied soldiers.  
Chest straps on our protective body shields  
will be soaked through with sweat. Around our spears  
hands will grow numb. Horses, too, will sweat,  
under the strain of hauling polished chariots.  
But if I see a man coming out to fight  
reluctantly, hanging back by our curved ships,  
he'll not escape being food for dogs and birds.”

Argives answered Agamemnon with a mighty roar,  
like waves by a steep cliff crashing on the rock face, 470  
lashed by South Wind's blasts, always foaming on the rock,  
whipped on by every wind gusting here and there.  
The men leapt up, moved off, scattering to ships,

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set fires by their huts, and each man ate his dinner.  
Every man then sacrificed to the immortal gods,  
praying to escape death and war's killing zone.  
Agamemnon, king of men, sacrificed an ox,  
a fat one, five years old, to Zeus, exalted son of Cronos.  
He summoned the best senior men of all Achaeans—  
first, Nestor and Idomeneus, then both Ajaxes,  
then Diomedes, Tydeus' son. Seventh came Odysseus.  
Warrior Menelaus arrived without a summons,  
knowing in his heart all Agamemnon's worries.  
They stood by the ox, with barley grains for sprinkling.  
Then Agamemnon prayed on their behalf:

480

“Most powerful Zeus,  
exalted lord of thunder clouds, Zeus,  
who dwells in heaven, grant my prayer—  
May the sun not go down, nor darkness come,  
before I have cast down Priam's palace,  
covered it with dust, destroyed its doors  
in all-consuming fire, and with my bronze sword  
sliced to shreds the tunic on Hector's chest.  
May many of his comrades lie beside him,  
face down on the ground, teeth grinding dirt.”

490

So he prayed. But Cronos' son did not grant his wish.  
Zeus took the offering but increased their suffering.

Once the men had prayed, scattering barley grain,  
they pulled back the beast's head, slit its throat, flayed it,  
sliced thigh bones out and hid them in twin layers of fat,  
with raw meat on top. They cooked these on split wood,  
then placed the innards on spits in Hephaestus' fire.  
When the wrapped-up thigh bones were completely cooked,  
and they'd tasted samples of the inner organs,  
they chopped up the rest, arranged the meat on spits,

500

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cooked it carefully, then drew it from the fire.  
This work finished, the men prepared a meal and ate.  
Each soldier's appetite was fully satisfied—  
all dined equally. When every man had eaten  
as much food and drink as anyone could wish,  
Geranian horseman Nestor was the first to speak.

510

“Lord Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
king of men, let's end our discussions now  
and not postpone work given by the gods.  
Come, let heralds of bronze-clad Achaeans  
summon all the soldiers to assembly.  
Let's move together across the wide front,  
rouse Achaea's men with blood-lust for war.”

Agamemnon, king of men, agreed with Nestor.  
He ordered clear-voiced heralds immediately  
to sound the battle call to long-haired Achaeans.  
The call went out. Troops assembled on the run.  
Around Agamemnon, kings nurtured by the gods  
rushed to establish order. With them strode Athena,  
her eyes glittering, holding up the aegis—  
her priceless, ageless, eternal aegis,  
its hundred golden tassels quivering,  
each finely woven, valued at a hundred oxen.  
With this, she sped on through Achaean ranks,  
like lightning, firing soldiers' hearts for war.  
As she passed, she roused in men that hot desire  
to fight, to kill. At once she made each man feel war  
far sweeter than returning home, finer than sailing  
in the hollow ships back to his dear native land.  
Just as an all-consuming fire burns through huge forests  
on a mountain top, and men far off can see its light,  
so, as soldiers marched out, their glittering bronze  
blazed through the sky to heaven, an amazing sight.

520

530

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As many birds in flight—geese, cranes, and long-necked swans—  
in an Asian meadow by the flowing river Caystrios,  
fly here and there, proud of their strong wings, and call, 540  
as they settle, the meadow resounding with the noise,  
so the many groups of soldiers moved out then  
from ships and huts onto Scamander's plain.  
Under men's and horses' feet the earth rang ominously.  
Then they stood there, in that flowered meadow,  
by the Scamander, an immense array,  
as numerous as leaves and flowers in springtime.  
Like flies swarming around shepherds' pens in spring,  
when pails fill up with milk, so the Achaeans,  
a huge long-haired host, marched out onto that plain 550  
against the Trojans, eager to destroy them.  
Just as goatherds sort out with ease the wandering beasts,  
all mixed up in the pasture, so through all the army,  
the leaders organized the troops for battle.  
Among them powerful Agamemnon roamed,  
eyes and head like Zeus, who loves the thunder,  
waist like Ares, god of war, chest like Poseidon.  
Just as in cattle herds the bull stands out above the rest,  
by far the most conspicuous amid the cows,  
so on that day Zeus made Agamemnon stand 560  
pre-eminent among the troops, first of heroes.

Now, you Muses living on Olympus, tell me—  
for you are goddesses and know everything,  
while we hear only stories, knowing nothing certain—  
tell me the leaders of Danaans, the rulers.  
It would be impossible for me to tell  
the story of or name those in the common mass,  
not even with ten tongues, ten mouths, an untiring voice,  
a heart of bronze, unless the Olympian Muses,  
daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, could sing of the men, 570  
all those who came to Troy. But I shall list the leaders,

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commanders of the ships, and all the ships in full.

Peneleus, Leitus, and Arcesilaus  
led the Boeotians, with Clonius and Prothoenor.  
Their men came from Hyria, rocky Aulis,  
Schoenus, Scolus, mountainous Eteonus,  
Thespeia, Graia, spacious Mycalassus,  
men holding Harma, Eilesium, Erythrae;  
men holding Eleon, Hyle, Peteon,  
Ocalea, the well-built fortress Medeon, 580  
Copaë, Eutresis, Thisbe, city full of doves;  
men from Coronea, grassy Haliartus;  
men from Plataea, Glisas, those who held  
fortified Lower Thebe and sacred Onchestus,  
with Poseidon's splendid grove; men from Arne,  
land rich in grapes, Midea, sacred Nisa,  
and distant Anthedon. Fifty ships came with these men,  
each with one hundred and twenty young Boeotians.

Men from Aspledon and Minyan Orchomenus  
were led by Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, 590  
Ares' sons. Astyoche bore them in Actor's house,  
Azeus' son, to mighty Ares. She, a modest virgin,  
went upstairs, where the god lay with her in secret.  
These men brought with them a fleet of thirty ships.

Schedius and Epistrophus, sons of Iphitus,  
the son of great-hearted Naubolus,  
commanded Phoceans—men from Cyparissus,  
rocky Pytho, holy Crisa, Daulis, and Panopeus;  
men from Anemorea and Hyampolis;  
from around the sacred river Cephissus, 600  
from Lilaëa, beside Cephissus' springs.  
Forty black ships these two leaders brought with them.  
Moving around, as soldiers armed themselves,

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they set Phocean ranks by the Boeotians, on their left.

The Locrians were led by swift Ajax, son of Oileus,  
the lesser Ajax, not the greater Ajax,  
son of Telamon, but a much smaller man.  
Though he was short and wore cloth armour,  
among all Hellenes and Achaeans he excelled  
in fighting with his spear. Locrians came from Cynus,  
Opous, Calliarus, Bessa, Scarphe,  
lovely Aegeiae, Tarphe, Thronion,  
and from around the river Boagrius.  
Ajax brought forty black ships of Locrians  
living across from sacred Euboea.

610

Elephenor, offspring of Ares, son of Chalcodon,  
great-hearted leader, commanded the Abantes,  
who live to breathe war's fury, soldiers from Euboea,  
Chalcis, Eretria, wine-rich Histiaea, Cerinthus by the sea,  
men from the steep fortress Dium, Carystus, and Styra.  
These swift Abantes came with Elephenor,  
their hair grown long behind, warrior spearmen,  
filled with fierce desire to tear apart their enemies,  
to pierce armed bodies with their long ash spears.  
Forty black ships came with Elephenor.

620

Soldiers came from that well-built fortress Athens,  
land of proud Erechtheus, whom Athena raised,  
after he was born out of the harvest land.  
She placed him in Athens, at her own rich shrine.  
To him Athenian youth make sacrificial offerings,  
with bulls and rams as each year comes around.  
Menestheus, son of Peteos, led these men.  
In tactics no one alive on earth could match him  
in deploying chariots or shield-bearing men.  
Nestor, from a previous age, was his only rival.

630

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Menestheus brought with him fifty black ships.

From Salamis Ajax commanded twelve ships.  
He organized his men in their positions,  
so they stood adjacent to Athenian ranks.

Warriors from Argos, fortified Tiryns, Hermione, 640  
Asine, both with deep bays, Troezen, Eionae,  
vine-rich Epidaurus, Achaean youth from Aegina, Mases—  
all these were led by mighty fighter Diomedes,  
skilled in war cries, and by Sthenelus, dear son  
of famous Capaneus. There was a third leader,  
god-like Euryalus, Mecisteus' son, son of lord Talauus.  
But warlike Diomedes was the main commander.  
These men brought with them eighty black ships.

Troops from the strong fortress Mycenae, rich Corinth, 650  
well-built Cleonae, Orneae, lovely Araethyrea,  
Sicyon, whose first king was Adrestus,  
with men from Hyperesia, lofty Gonoessa,  
Pellene, from Aegium, men from coastal regions  
and wide Helice—of these men Agamemnon,  
son of Atreus, led one hundred ships.  
The most troops came with him, the finest men by far.  
In their midst, Agamemnon put on a proud display,  
dressed in gleaming armour, prominent among all heroes.  
He was the best of all, because he had most men.

Men from Lacedaemon, land of ravines, Pharis, 660  
Sparta, Messe, where doves congregate,  
men living in Bryseae, beautiful Augeiae,  
Amyclae, coastal Helos, men from Laäs,  
from around Oetylus—all these in sixty ships  
were led by powerful, warlike Menelaus,  
Agamemnon's brother. Among these warriors,

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as they armed themselves some distance off,  
Menelaus strode—confident, courageous—  
rousing his troops for war, his heart passionate  
to avenge Helen's struggles, her cries of pain.

670

Men came from Pylos, lovely Arene, Thryum,  
by Alpheus ford, well-built Aipy, Cyparisseis,  
Amphigenea, Pteleum, Helos, Dorium,  
where the Muses met the Thracian Thamyris,  
and stopped his singing. He was coming back  
from Oechalia, from the court of Eurytus the king.  
He'd boasted his singing would surpass the Muses,  
daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, should they compete.  
In their anger the Muses mutilated Thamyris,  
taking away his godlike power of song,  
and making him forget his skill in playing the lyre.  
Geranian horseman Nestor led these men  
in a flotilla of ninety hollow ships.

680

Men from Arcadia, from below steep mount Cyllene,  
near Aepytus' tomb, where men excel in combat  
hand to hand, troops from Pheneus, Orchomenus,  
rich in flocks, Rhipe, Stratie, windy Enispe,  
Tegea, lovely Mantinea, Stymphelus,  
Parrhasia—mighty Agapenor led these men,  
Ancaeus' son, in sixty ships. Many Arcadians  
came in every ship, skilled fighters. Agamemnon,  
king of men, had himself provided well-decked ships  
for them to sail across the wine-dark ocean,  
for these men lacked expertise in matters of the sea.

690

Soldiers from Bouprasium, fair Elis, those parts  
bounded by Hyrmine, coastal Myrsinus,  
the rock of Olene, and Alesium—these troops  
had four commanders, each with ten swift ships.

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The many Epeians on board were commanded  
by Amphimachus, son of Cteatus, and Thalpius,  
son of Eurytus, descended both from Actor.  
Third leader was Diores, son of Amarynces.  
Fourth was Polyxeinus, son of Agasthenes, Augeas' son.

700

Men from Doulichium, sacred Echinean islands,  
living across the sea from Elis, were commanded  
by warlike Meges, son of Phyleus, the horseman,  
loved of Zeus. Phyleus, angry with his father,  
moved to Doulichium. Meges brought with him  
forty black ships in his flotilla.

Odysseus led on  
the Cephalenians, soldiers from Ithaca,  
well wooded Neritum, Crocylea,  
rugged Aegilips, from Zacynthus, Samos,  
both those inhabiting the mainland  
and those from cities on the facing shore.  
Odysseus, as wise as Zeus, led these troops,  
who came with him in twelve black ships.

710

Thoas, son of Andraemon, led the Aetolians,  
men from Pleuron, Olenus, Pylene,  
coastal Chalchis, and rocky Calydon.  
Proud king Oeneus had no living sons,  
and he himself was dead, as was fair-haired Meleager.  
Thus, Thoas ruled alone. He brought forty black ships.

720

Famous spearman Idomeneus led the Cretans  
from Cnossus, fortified Gortyn, Lyctus, Miletus,  
chalky Lycastus, Phaestus, Rhytium,  
both populous towns, with other warriors  
from Crete's one hundred cities. Idomeneus,  
famous for fighting with a spear, led these troops,

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along with Meriones, as skilled at killing men  
as Ares, god of war. They brought eighty black ships.

730

Tlepolemus, son of Hercules, a huge brave man,  
led nine ships of courageous troops, men from Rhodes,  
split into three divisions—from Lindus, Ialysus,  
and chalky Cameirus—all led by Tlepolemus,  
famous spearman, born to Astyocheia  
and mighty Hercules, who'd taken her from Ephyra,  
by the river Selleis, after razing many towns  
full of vital warriors. Once he'd grown up  
in their well-furnished home, Tlepolemus killed  
his father's uncle, Licymnius, a well-loved old man,  
a great fighter, too. At once Tlepolemus built a fleet,  
assembled many men, and fled away. Other sons  
and grandsons of great Hercules had threatened him.  
He suffered badly, until he came to Rhodes,  
whose people live in three groups split by tribes.  
Zeus, who governs gods and men, loved them,  
and so the son of Cronos blessed them with great wealth.

740

Nireus brought three well-balanced ships from Syme.  
The son of Aglaea and lord Charopus,  
the handsomest of all Danaans who sailed to Troy,  
after Achilles, who had no equal. But he was weak,  
because he had few troops.

750

Men from Nisyros,  
Crapathus, Casus, Cos, Eurypylus' city,  
the Calydnian islands had Pheidippus and Antiphus,  
sons of lord Thessalus, Hercules' son, as leaders.  
With them came thirty hollow ships.

All the troops from Pelasgian Argos, Alos,  
men living in Alope, Trachis, from Phthia,

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and Hellas, where lovely women live, men called  
Myrmidons, Hellenes, Achaeans—these troops  
Achilles led in fifty ships. But their minds weren't set  
on the grim clash of war. They had no one to lead them.  
Godlike Achilles, swift of foot, sat by his ships,  
still angry over fair-complexioned Briseis, seized  
from Lyrnessus after heavy fighting.  
Achilles had laid waste Lyrnessus and Thebe's walls,  
overthrown the spearmen Mynes and Epistrophus,  
sons of lord Euenus, son of king Selepius  
Because of her, Achilles sat still grieving.  
But soon enough he'd rouse himself again.

760

770

Troops from Phylace, flowering Pyrasus,  
shrine of Demeter, Iton, where flocks breed,  
Antrum by the sea, and grassy Pteleum—  
brave Protesilaus had led these men, while still alive.  
Now the black earth held him. In Phylace,  
he left behind a wife to tear her cheeks in grief,  
home half complete. Some Dardanian killed him,  
as he jumped on Trojan soil, the first on shore,  
far ahead of all Achaeans. His soldiers lamented  
the loss of their chief, but didn't lack a leader.  
Warlike Podarces, son of Iphicles, led them—  
the man owned many flocks and was a young blood brother  
to Protesilaus. But that great-hearted warlike soldier  
was an older, better man. So these troops had a leader,  
though they missed the noble one they'd lost.  
Podarces brought forty black ships along with him.

780

Troops from Pherae by Lake Boebea, from Boebeis,  
Glaphyrae, well-built Iolcus—these came  
in eleven ships, commanded by Eumelus,  
Admetus' well-loved son, born to him by Alcestis,  
loveliest of Pelias' daughters.

790

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Troops from Methone, Thaumacia, Meliboea,  
and rugged Olizon, were led by Philoctetes,  
the skilled archer, in seven ships, each with fifty men,  
expert archers. But Philoctetes stayed behind on Lemnos,  
the sacred island, in horrific pain, abandoned.  
Achaes's sons had left him there in agony,  
wounded by a snake bite. He lay there in torment.  
But soon the Argives by their ships would have reason  
to remember him. These soldiers missed their chief,  
but were now led by Medon, Oileus' bastard son,  
whom Rhene bore to Oileus, destroyer of cities.  
So Medon was the one who set their ranks in order.

800

Men from Tricca, rocky Ithome, Oechalia,  
city of Eurytus, the Oechalian,  
were commanded by two sons of Asclepius,  
skilled healers, Podaleirus and Machaon.  
They brought thirty hollow ships with them.  
Troops from Ormenius, from the fount of Hyperea,  
from Asterius, from Titanus with its white hilltops—  
these men were commanded by Eurypylus,  
fine son of Euaemon, in forty black ships.  
Men from Argissa, Gyrtone, Orthe, Elone,  
the white city Oloösön—these troops were led  
by Polypoetes, a steadfast soldier,  
son of Perithous, himself son to immortal Zeus.  
That famous lady Hippodameia bore  
Polypoetes to Perithous on that very day  
he took revenge out on those hairy monsters,  
and beat them from mount Pelion towards the Aithices.  
But Polypoetes was not the sole commander.  
With him was Leonteus, a warlike man,  
son of proud-hearted Coronus, Caeneus' son.  
With them they brought forty black ships.

810

820

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Gouneus brought twenty-two ships from Cyphus.  
With him sailed the Enienes and Peraebians,  
reliable fighting men from cold Dodona,  
who work by the lovely river Titaressus,  
which empties its beautiful, flowing waters  
into the Peneus. These do not intermingle  
with the silver stream of the Peneus,  
but flow along on top of them, like oil.  
For the Titaressus is a branch of the river Styx,  
dread waters by which the most solemn oaths are sealed.

830

Prothous, son of Tenthredon, led the Magnetes,  
from the region round Peneus and mount Pelion,  
where leaves are always trembling in the wind.  
With him swift Prothous brought forty black ships.

These men were leaders, rulers of the Danaans.  
Muse, tell me this—Which of them were the very best  
of those who came over with the sons of Atreus?

840

The best horses were those of Admetus, son of Pheres.  
Eumelus drove them. As fast as birds, they matched  
each other in colour, age, and height along the back.  
Bred by Apollo of the silver bow in Perea,  
both mares, they carried terror with them.  
Of the men, by far the best was Ajax, son of Telamon,  
but only while Achilles didn't join in battle.  
For Achilles was the better man by far.  
The horses carrying Peleus' son, man without equal,  
were much better, too. But he stayed behind,  
by his curved seaworthy ships, still enraged  
at Agamemnon, Atreus' son, the people's shepherd.  
His soldiers amused themselves beside the breaking sea  
by throwing spears and discus or with archery.  
Their horses stood near their chariots, browsing on lotus

850

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and parsley from the marsh. Their masters' chariots,  
fully covered, remained stationed in the huts.  
Missing their warlike leader, these troops strolled  
here and there throughout the camp and did not fight.

860

The soldiers, like a fire consuming all the land,  
moved on out. Earth groaned under them, just as it does  
when Zeus, who loves thunder, in his anger lashes  
the land around Typhoeus, among the Arimi,  
where people say Typhoeus has his lair.  
That's how the earth groaned loudly under marching feet.

Then wind-swift Iris came to Troy as messenger  
from aegis-bearing Zeus carrying grim news.  
Trojans had summoned an assembly by Priam's palace gates.  
There all had gathered, young and old. Standing by Priam,  
swift-footed Iris spoke, sounding like Polites, Priam's son.  
He'd been stationed as a scout—fully confident  
of his skill at running—at old Aesyetes' tomb,<sup>1</sup>  
right at the top, waiting for the moment  
Achaean moved out from their ships.  
Looking just like Polites, swift-footed Iris said:

870

“Priam, old man, you always love to talk  
about irrelevant things, as you did earlier  
in peacetime. But now this war continues  
relentlessly. I've gone to battle many times.  
I've never seen an army like this one, so many men,  
as numerous as leaves or grains of sand,  
coming across the plain to assault our city.  
Hector, I call on you, on you above all, to follow  
my instructions—the numerous allies here

880

<sup>1</sup>*Aesyetes' tomb* is a prominent landmark outside the walls of Troy, a convenient place for a lookout.

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in Priam's great city all speak different languages  
from far-scattered regions. So let each man  
issue orders to the ones he leads,  
let him now organize his countrymen,  
then lead them out to battle.”

890

Iris spoke. Hector understood her words.  
Immediately he ended the assembly.  
Men rushed to arm themselves. They opened up the gates.  
Troops streamed out, infantry and horses. A huge din arose.  
In the plain, some distance off, a high hill stood by itself,  
right before the city. People call it Batieia,  
but the gods know it as the tomb of agile Myrine.  
Here the Trojans and their allies marshaled forces.

Hector of the flashing helmet, Priam's son,  
led out the Trojans. With him marched in arms  
the largest contingent, the finest men by far,  
eager to get working with their spears.

900

Aeneas, Anchises' worthy son, led the Dardanians.  
Goddess Aphrodite had borne him to Anchises.  
She had lain with him on the slopes of Ida.  
But Aeneas was not their sole commander.  
With him were Antenor's two sons, Archelochus  
and Acamas, extremely skilled in every form of war.

Men from Zeleia, on mount Ida's lowest slope,  
wealthy Trojans, men who drink dark waters  
of the river Aesepus were led by Pandarus,  
Lycaon's worthy son, whom Apollo had taught archery.  
Soldiers from Adresteia, Apaesus, Pityeia,  
steep Mount Tereia were commanded by Adrestus  
and Amphius in cloth armour, Merops' sons from Percote,  
who knew more of prophecy than anyone.

910

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He gave his children orders to stay away from war,  
which eats men up. They did not obey him.  
Deadly black fates had called them on to battle.

Troops from Percote, Practius, Sestos, Abydos,  
holy Arisbe—these troops were led by Asius,  
son of Hyrtacus, an important ruler.  
Arius's huge, tawny horses brought him  
from Arisbe, from the river Selleis.

920

Hippothous led tribes of spearmen from Pelasgia,  
fertile Larisa, along with Pylaeus, offshoots of Ares,  
sons of Pelasgian Lethus, Teutamus's son.

Acamas and warlike Peirous led the Thracians,  
those men bounded by the Hellespont's strong flow.

Euphemus, son of god-nurtured Troezenus,  
son of Ceos, led Ciconian spearmen.

930

Pyraechmes led archers from Paeonia,  
from far off Amydon, by the Axius,  
a broad flowing river, whose moving waters  
are the loveliest on earth.

Pylaemenes,  
a brave soldier, commanded Paphlagonians  
from Enetae, where herds of mules run wild,  
men from Cytorus, from around Sesamus,  
those with fine homes by the stream Parthenius,  
from Cromna, Aegialus, high Erithini.  
Odius and Epistrophus led the Halizoni  
from distant Alybe, where men mine silver.  
Chromis and prophet Ennomus led the Mysians.  
But Ennomus' great skill in prophecy

940

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did not allow him to evade his deadly fate.  
Swift Achilles, descendant of Aeacus, killed him  
in the river where he slaughtered other Trojans.  
Phorcys and noble Ascanius led up Phrygians  
from far-off Ascania, men keen for war.

Mesthles and Antiphus commanded the Maeonians.  
Sons of Talaemenes, born to Gygaea,  
a water nymph, they led Maeonians  
from around the foot of Mount Tmolus.

950

Nastes led the Carians, men with a strange language,  
from Miletus, Phthires, with its wooded mountain,  
Maeander's waters and high peaks of Mount Mycale.  
Nastes and Amphimachus, noble sons of Nomion  
were their leaders. Nastes went to war carrying gold,  
like a girl. What a fool! His gold did not spare him  
a wretched death. He died in the river,  
at the hand of swift Achilles, descended from Aeacus.  
Fiery Achilles carried off his gold.

960

Sarpedon and noble Glaucus commanded Lycians,  
from distant Lycia, by the swirling river Xanthus.

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Book Three  
Paris, Menelaus and Helen

*[The armies move together; Paris volunteers to fight Menelaus in single combat; both sides prepare make a truce; Iris visits Helen; Helen goes to the Scaean Gate, looks at the Achaean troops with Priam; Priam leaves Troy to visit the armies and administer the treaty oath; Agamemnon utters the prayer for the treaty; Paris and Menelaus fight in single combat; Aphrodite rescues Paris; Paris and Helen meet back in Troy; Agamemnon demands compensation from the Trojans]*

Once troops had formed in ranks under their own leaders,  
Trojans marched out, clamouring like birds, like cranes  
screeching overhead, when winter's harsh storms drive them off,  
screaming as they move over the flowing Ocean,  
bearing death and destruction to the Pygmies,  
launching their savage attack on them at dawn.  
Achaean came on in silence, breathing ferocity,  
determined to stand by each other in the fight.  
Just as South Wind spreads mist around the mountain peak,  
something shepherds hate, but thieves prefer to night, 10  
for one can see only a stone's throw up ahead,  
so, as men marched, dense dust clouds rose from underfoot.  
They advanced at full speed out across the plain.  
The two armies moved in close towards each other.  
Then godlike Paris stepped out, as Trojan champion,  
on his shoulders a leopard skin. He had bow and sword.  
Brandishing two bronze-tipped spears, he challenged  
the best men in the whole Achaean force to fight—  
a single combat, to the death. War-loving Menelaus  
noticed Alexander striding there,<sup>1</sup> his troops 20  
bunched up in ranks behind him, and he rejoiced,

<sup>1</sup>Alexander is another name for Paris.

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like a famished lion finding a large carcass—  
antlered stag or wild goat—and devouring it at once,  
though fierce young hunters and swift dogs attack.  
So Menelaus was pleased to see Paris there,  
right before his eyes. Menelaus had in mind  
taking revenge on the man who'd injured him.  
At once Menelaus jumped from his chariot,  
down to the ground, his weapons in his fists.  
When godlike Alexander saw Menelaus there, 30  
among the fighters at the front, his heart sank.  
He moved back into the ranks, among his comrades,  
avoiding death. Just as a man stumbles on a snake  
in some mountainous ravine and gives way, jumping back,  
his limbs trembling, his cheeks pale, so godlike Paris,  
afraid of Atreus' son, slid back into proud Trojan ranks.  
Seeing this, Hector went at Alexander, insulting him:

“Despicable Paris, handsomest of men,  
but woman-mad seducer. How I wish  
you never had been born or died unmarried. 40  
That's what I'd prefer, so much better  
than to live in shame, hated by others.  
Now long-haired Achaeans are mocking us,  
saying we've put forward as a champion  
one who looks good, but lacks a strong brave mind.  
Was this what you were like back on that day  
you gathered up your faithful comrades,  
sailed sea-worthy ships across the ocean,  
went out among a foreign people, 50  
and carried back from that far-off land  
a lovely woman linked by marriage  
to warrior spearmen, thus bringing on  
great suffering for your father and your city,  
all your people—joy to your enemies  
and to yourself disgrace? And can you now

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not face Menelaus? If so, you'd learn  
the kind of man he is whose wife you took.  
You'd get no help then from your lyre, long hair,  
good looks—Aphrodite's gifts—once face down,  
lying in the dirt. Trojans must be timid men. 60  
If not, for all the evil things you've done  
by now you'd wear a garment made of stones.”

To Hector godlike Alexander then replied:

“Hector, you're right in what you say against me.  
Those complaints of yours are not unjustified.  
Your heart is tireless, like a wood-chopping axe  
wielded by a craftsman cutting timber for a ship.  
The axe makes his force stronger. Your mind's like that—  
the spirit in your chest is fearless. But don't blame me  
for golden Aphrodite's lovely gifts. 70  
Men can't reject fine presents from the gods,  
those gifts they personally bestow on us,  
though no man would take them of his own free will.  
You want me now to go to battle.  
Get others to sit down—Trojans and Achaeans.  
Put me and war-loving Menelaus  
in their midst to fight it out for Helen,  
all her property. The one who triumphs,  
comes off victorious, the better man,  
let him take all the goods and lead her home, 80  
as his wife. Let others swear a solemn oath,  
as friends, either to live on in fertile Troy  
or to return to horse-breeding Argos,  
land of the lovely women of Achaea.”

So Paris spoke. Hearing those words, Hector felt great joy.  
He went to the middle ground, between the armies,  
halted Trojan troops, grasping the centre of his spear shaft.  
The men sat. But long-haired Achaeans kept on shooting,

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attempting to hit Hector with rocks and arrows.  
Then Agamemnon, king of men, roared out at them:

90

“Argives, Achaean lads, stop hurling things.  
Hector of the flashing helmet wants to talk to us.”

Once Agamemnon spoke, the men stopped fighting,  
quickly falling silent. Hector then addressed both sides:

“You Trojans, you well-armed Achaeans,  
listen now to what Paris has to say,  
the man whose actions brought about our fight.  
He bids the other Trojans, all Achaeans,  
set their weapons on the fertile ground.  
He and war-loving Menelaus here  
will fight it out alone between the armies  
for Helen and for all her property.  
Whichever one comes out victorious,  
the stronger man, let him seize all the goods,  
and take the woman as his wife back home.  
Let others swear a solemn oath as friends.”

100

So Hector spoke. The soldiers all grew silent.  
Then Menelaus, loud in war, answered Hector:

“Listen now to me. More than anyone,  
my heart has suffered pain. So now I think  
Argives and Trojans should part company,  
since you have suffered many hardships,  
thanks to the fight between myself and Paris,  
a fight that he began. Whichever one of us  
death takes, our fate, let that man perish.  
You others quickly go your separate ways.  
So bring two lambs here—white male, black female—  
for earth and sun. We'll bring one more for Zeus.”

110

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Lead out great Priam to administer the oath  
in person, for his sons are over-proud,  
untrustworthy. No man should transgress  
by violence oaths sworn in Zeus' name.  
Young men's minds are fickle. An older man  
who joins them thinks of past and future,  
so for both groups things happen for the best.”

120

Achaeans and Trojans were elated, full of hope  
that wretched war would end. They pulled the chariots back  
into the ranks, climbed out, disarmed, and placed their weapons  
next to each other on the ground, with little room  
between both groups. Hector sent two heralds to the city,  
to fetch the lambs with speed and summon Priam.  
Agamemnon sent Talthibius to the hollow ships,  
instructing him to bring a sacrificial lamb.  
Talthibius obeyed god-like Agamemnon's orders.  
Then Iris came as messenger to white-armed Helen,  
taking on the image of her sister-in-law,  
wife of Antenor's son, fine Helicaon.  
Her name was Laodice, of all Priam's daughters  
the most beautiful. She found Helen in her room,  
weaving a large cloth, a double purple cloak,  
creating pictures of the many battle scenes  
between horse-taming Trojans and bronze-clad Achaeans,  
wars they suffered for her sake at the hands of Ares.  
Standing near by, swift-footed Iris said:

130  
140

“Come here, dear girl.  
Look at the amazing things going on.  
Horse-taming Trojans and bronze-clad Achaeans,  
men who earlier were fighting one another  
in wretched war out there on the plain,  
both keen for war's destruction, are sitting still.  
Alexander and war-loving Menelaus

150

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are going to fight for you with their long spears.  
The man who triumphs will call you his dear wife.”

With these words the goddess set in Helen's heart  
sweet longing for her former husband, city, parents.  
Covering herself with a white shawl, she left the house,  
shedding tears. She did not go alone, but took with her  
two attendants, Aethrae, daughter of Pittheus,  
and ox-eyed Clymene. They soon reached the Scaean Gates.  
Oucalegaon and Antenor, both prudent men,  
elder statesmen, sat at the Scaean Gates, 160  
with Priam and his entourage—Panthous, Thymoetes,  
Lampus, Clytius, and warlike Hicataeon. Old men now,  
their fighting days were finished, but they all spoke well.  
They sat there, on the tower, these Trojan elders,  
like cicadas perched up on a forest branch, chirping  
soft, delicate sounds. Seeing Helen approach the tower,  
they commented softly to each other—their words had wings:

“There's nothing shameful about the fact  
that Trojans and well-armed Achaeans  
have endured great suffering a long time 170  
over such a woman—just like a goddess,  
immortal, awe-inspiring. She's beautiful.  
But nonetheless let her go back with the ships.  
Let her not stay here, a blight on us, our children.”

So they talked. Priam then called out to Helen.

“Come here, dear child. Sit down in front of me,  
so you can see your first husband, your friends,  
your relatives. As far as I'm concerned,  
it's not your fault. For I blame the gods.  
They drove me to wage this wretched war 180  
against Achaeans. Tell me, who's that large man,

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over there, that impressive, strong Achaean?  
Others may be taller by a head than him,  
but I've never seen with my own eyes  
such a striking man, so noble, so like a king.”

Then Helen, goddess among women, said to Priam:

“My dear father-in-law, whom I respect and honour,  
how I wish I'd chosen evil death  
when I came here with your son, leaving behind  
my married home, companions, darling child, 190  
and friends my age. But things didn't work that way.  
So I weep all the time. But to answer you,  
that man is wide-ruling Agamemnon,  
son of Atreus, a good king, fine fighter,  
and once he was my brother-in-law,  
if that life was ever real. I'm such a whore.”

Priam gazed in wonder at Agamemnon, saying:

“Son of Atreus, blessed by the gods, fortune's child,  
divinely favoured, many long-haired Achaeans  
serve under you. Once I went to Phrygia, 200  
that vine-rich land, where I saw Phrygian troops  
with all their horses, thousands of them,  
soldiers of Otreus, godlike Mygdon,  
camped by the banks of the Sangarius river.  
I was their ally, part of their army,  
the day the Amazons, men's peers in war,  
came on against them. But those forces then  
were fewer than these bright-eyed Achaeans.”

The old man then spied Odysseus and asked:

“Dear child, come tell me who this man is, 210

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shorter by a head than Agamemnon,  
son of Atreus. But he looks broader  
in his shoulders and his chest. His armour's stacked  
there on the fertile earth, but he strides on,  
marching through men's ranks just like a ram  
moving through large white multitudes of sheep.  
Yes, a woolly ram, that's what he seems to me.”

Helen, child of Zeus, then answered Priam:

“That man is Laertes' son, crafty Odysseus,  
raised in rocky Ithaca. He's well versed 220  
in all sorts of tricks, deceptive strategies.”

At that point, wise Antenor said to Helen:

“Lady, what you say is true. Once lord Odysseus  
came here with war-loving Menelaus,  
as an ambassador in your affairs.  
I received them both in my residence  
and entertained them. I got to know them—  
from their appearance and their wise advice.  
When they mingled with us Trojans  
in our meeting and Menelaus rose, 230  
his broad shoulders were higher than the other's.  
But once they sat, Odysseus seemed more regal.  
When the time came for them to speak to us,  
setting out their thoughts quite formally,  
Menelaus spoke with fluency—few words,  
but very clear—no chatter, no digressions—  
although he was the younger of the two.  
But when wise Odysseus got up to speak,  
he just stood, eyes downcast, staring at the ground.  
He didn't move the sceptre to and fro, 240  
but gripped it tightly, like some ignoramus—

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a bumpkin or someone idiotic.  
But when that great voice issued from his chest,  
with words like winter snowflakes, no man alive  
could match Odysseus. We were no longer  
disconcerted at witnessing his style.”

Priam, the old man, saw a third figure, Ajax, and asked:

“Who is that other man? He’s over there—  
that huge, burly Achaean—his head and shoulders  
tower over the Achaeans.”

250

Then Helen,  
long-robed goddess among women, answered:

“That’s massive Ajax, Achaea’s bulwark.  
Across from him stands Idomeneus,  
surrounded by his Cretans, like a god.  
Around him there stand the Cretan leaders.  
Often war-loving Menelaus welcomed him  
in our house, whenever he arrived from Crete.  
Now I see all the bright-eyed Achaeans  
whom I know well, whose names I could recite.  
But I can’t see two of the men’s leaders,  
Castor, tamer of horses, and Pollux,  
the fine boxer—they are both my brothers,  
whom my mother bore along with me.  
Either they did not come with the contingent  
from lovely Lacedaemon, or they sailed here  
in their seaworthy ships, but have no wish  
to join men’s battles, fearing the disgrace,  
the many slurs, which are justly mine.”

260

Helen spoke. But the life-nourishing earth  
already held her brothers in Lacedaemon,

270

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in their own dear native land.

Through Troy,  
heralds brought offerings to seal the binding oaths,  
two lambs and in a goatskin sack some sparkling wine,  
fruit of the earth. Idaios, the herald, brought in  
the gleaming mixing bowl and golden cups.  
Standing close by Priam, he encouraged him.

“Son of Laomedon, the leading officers  
among horse-taming Trojans and bronze-clad Achaeans  
are calling you to come down to the plain,  
to administer their binding promises. 280  
Paris and war-loving Menelaus  
are going to fight it out with their long spears  
over the woman. The man who wins,  
who comes off the victor, gets the woman  
and her property. The others will all swear  
an oath of friendship, a binding one—  
we will live in fertile Troy, they in Argos,  
where horses breed, and in Achaea,  
land of lovely women.”

Idaios finished.

The old man trembled, then ordered his attendants 290  
to prepare his chariot. They obeyed at once.  
Priam climbed in and pulled back on the reins.  
Antenor climbed in the fine chariot beside him.  
The two men led swift horses through the Scaean Gate,  
out to the plain. Once they reached the Trojans and Achaeans,  
they climbed out of the chariot onto fertile ground,  
in the space between the Trojan and Achaean troops.  
At once, Agamemnon and crafty Odysseus  
stood up to greet them. Noble heralds fetched the offerings,  
to ratify their solemn oaths pledged to the gods. 300

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They prepared wine in the mixing bowl, then poured water over the kings' hands. Atreus' son drew out the dagger which always hung beside his sword's huge scabbard, then sliced hairs off lambs' heads. Attendants passed these hairs among the leaders of the Trojans and Achaeans. Raising his hands, Agamemnon then intoned a mighty prayer on their behalf:

“Father Zeus,  
ruling from Mount Ida, most glorious,  
most powerful, and you, too, god of the sun,  
who sees everything, hears everything, 310  
you rivers, earth, you gods below the earth,  
who punish the dead when men swear false oaths,  
you gods are witnesses. Keep this oath firm.  
If Alexander slays Menelaus,  
let him keep Helen, all her property.  
Let us return in our sea-worthy ships.  
But if fair-haired Menelaus kills Alexander,  
then let the Trojans hand back Helen,  
with all her property, and compensate  
Achaeans with something suitable, 320  
which future ages will remember.  
If Alexander's killed and Priam  
and Priam's children are unwilling  
to reimburse me, then I'll remain here,  
fight on until I'm fully satisfied,  
until I end this war appropriately.”

So Agamemnon prayed. With his bronze dagger, he slit the lambs' throats, placed them on the ground, gasping in their death throes as their life ebbed out, their spirit sliced away by Agamemnon's knife. 330  
Next from the mixing bowl, they drew off wine in cups, poured out libations to the deathless gods.

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Then Trojans and Achaeans all spoke out this prayer:

“Most powerful, mighty Zeus, and you others,  
you immortal gods, may you make sure  
the men who first violate these oaths  
will have their brains spill out onto the ground,  
just like this wine, they and their children.  
May their wives be carried off by other men.”

So they prayed. But the son of Cronos didn't grant their wish. 340  
Then Priam, descendant of Dardanus, addressed them all:

“Hear me, you Trojans, you well-armed Achaeans.  
I am returning now to windy Troy.  
I have no wish to see with my own eyes  
my dear son fight war-loving Menelaus.  
Zeus and other immortal gods know well  
which of them is fated to end up dead.”

So Priam spoke. He placed the lambs in his chariot.  
The god-like man climbed in, held back the reins.  
Antenor climbed in the fine chariot by Priam. 350  
Then both men set off, moving back toward Troy.

Then Hector, Priam's son, and lord Odysseus  
first measured out the ground, took lots, and shook them up  
in a bronze helmet, to see who'd throw his bronze spear first.  
Then every Trojan and Achaean held up his hands,  
praying to the gods:

“Father Zeus, ruling from Mount Ida,  
mighty, all-powerful, of these two men,  
let the one who brought this war to both sides  
be killed and then go down to Hades' house.  
And grant our oath of friendship will hold firm.” 360

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So they prayed. Hector of the flashing helmet  
turned his eyes to one side and shook out the lots.  
Alexander's token fell out immediately.  
The troops sat down in their respective places,  
by their high-stepping horses and their inlaid armour.  
Paris, husband to Helen with the lovely hair,  
hoisted his fine armour on his shoulders. On his shins,  
he clipped leg armour fitted with silver ankle clasps.  
Then he put around his chest the body armour  
belonging to his brother Lycaon. It fit him well. 370  
On his shoulder he looped his bronze, silver-studded sword,  
his huge strong shield. On his handsome head he put  
a fine helmet with nodding horse-hair plumes on top,  
full of menace. Then he picked out a brave spear  
which fit his grip. Menelaus prepared himself as well.  
When the two men, standing on each side with their troops,  
had armed themselves, they strode out to the open space  
between the Trojans and Achaeans, staring ferociously.  
As horse-taming Trojans and well-armed Achaeans  
gazed at the two men, they were overcome with wonder. 380  
The two men approached each other over measured ground,  
brandishing their spears in mutual fury.  
Alexander was the first to hurl his spear.  
It struck Menelaus' shield, a perfect circle,  
but the bronze did not break through, the point deflected  
by the powerful shield. Then Menelaus, Atreus' son,  
threw in his turn. First he made this prayer to Zeus:

“Lord Zeus, grant I may be revenged on this man,  
who first committed crimes against me,  
lord Alexander. Let him die at my hands, 390  
so generations of men yet to come  
will dread doing wrong to anyone  
who welcomes them into his home as friends.”

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Menelaus then drew back his long-shadowed spear,  
and hurled it. It hit the son of Priam's shield,  
a perfect circle. The heavy spear pierced through it,  
went straight through the fine body armour, through the shirt  
which covered Alexander's naked flesh.

But Paris twisted to the side, evading a black fate.

Pulling out his silver-studded sword, the son of Atreus  
raised it and struck the crest of Paris' helmet.

400

But the sword shattered into three or four pieces,  
falling from his hand. The son of Atreus, in vexation,  
looked up into wide heaven, crying out:

“Father Zeus,  
what god brings us more trouble than you do?  
I thought I was paying Alexander  
for his wickedness, but now my sword  
has shattered in my fist, while from my hand  
my spear has flown in vain. I haven't hit him.”

As Menelaus said these words, he sprang forward,  
grabbing the horse hair crest on Paris' helmet,  
twisting him around. He began dragging Paris off,  
back in the direction of well-armed Achaeans.

410

The fine leather strap stretched round Paris' soft neck,  
right below his chin, was strangling him to death.  
At that point Menelaus would've hauled back Paris  
and won unending fame, if Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter,  
had not had sharp eyes. Her force broke the ox-hide strap,  
leaving Menelaus clutching in his massive hands  
an empty helmet. Whipping it around, Menelaus  
hurled the helmet in among well-armed Achaeans.

420

His loyal companions retrieved it. He charged back,  
with his bronze spear, intent on killing Alexander.  
But Aphrodite had snatched Paris up—for a god

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an easy feat—concealed him in a heavy mist,  
and placed him in his own sweetly scented bedroom.

Then Aphrodite went to summon Helen.  
She found her on the high tower, in a crowd  
among the Trojan women. She clutched Helen  
by her perfumed dress, twitched it, then addressed her, 430  
in the form of an old woman, a wool carder,  
someone who used to live in Lacedaemon,  
producing fine wool, a woman Helen really liked.  
In this shape, divine Aphrodite spoke to Helen:

“Alexander is asking you to come back home.  
He's in the bedroom, on the carved-out bed,  
his beauty and his garments glistening.  
You wouldn't think he's just come from some fight.  
He looks as if he's going to a dance,  
or if he's sitting down right after dancing.” 440

Aphrodite spoke, stirring emotion in Helen's heart.  
Noticing the goddess' lovely neck, enticing breasts,  
her glittering eyes, Helen was astonished.

“Goddess, why do you wish to deceive me so?  
Are you going to take me still further off,  
to some well-populated city somewhere  
in Phrygia or beautiful Maeonia,  
because you're in love with some mortal man  
and Menelaus has just beaten Paris  
and wants to take me, a despised woman, 450  
back home with him? Is that why you're here,  
you and your devious trickery?  
Why don't you go with Paris by yourself,  
stop walking around here like a goddess,  
stop guiding your feet toward Olympus,

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and lead a miserable life with him,  
caring for him, until he makes you his wife  
or slave. I won't go to him in there—  
that would be shameful, serving him in bed.  
Every Trojan woman would revile me afterwards. 460  
Besides, my heart is hurt enough already.”

Divine Aphrodite, angry at Helen, answered her:

“Don't provoke me, you obstinate girl.  
I might lose my temper, abandon you,  
and hate you just as much as I have loved you.  
I could make Trojans and Danaans hate you, too.  
Then you'd suffer death in misery.”

Aphrodite spoke. Helen, born from Zeus, was too afraid.  
She covered herself in her soft white linen shawl,  
went off in silence, unnoticed by all the Trojan women. 470  
With goddess Aphrodite in the lead,  
they came to Alexander's lovely house.  
There the attendants quickly set about their work.  
Helen, goddess among women, went to her room upstairs,  
where laughter-loving goddess Aphrodite  
picked up a chair and carried it for Helen.  
She placed it facing Paris. Helen, child of Zeus,  
who bears the aegis, sat down. With eyes averted,  
she began to criticize her husband:

“You've come back from the fight. How I wish 480  
you'd died there, killed by that strong warrior  
who was my husband once. You used to boast  
you were stronger than warlike Menelaus,  
more strength in your hands, more power in your spear.  
So go now, challenge war-loving Menelaus  
to fight again in single combat.

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I'd suggest you stay away. Don't fight it out  
man to man with fair-haired Menelaus,  
without further thought. You might well die,  
come to a quick end on his spear.”

490

Replying to Helen, Paris said:

“Wife,  
don't mock my courage with your insults.  
Yes, Menelaus has just defeated me,  
but with Athena's help. Next time I'll beat him.  
For we have gods on our side, too. But come,  
let's enjoy our love together on the bed.  
Never has desire so filled my mind as now,  
not even when I first took you away  
from lovely Lacedaemon, sailing off  
in our sea-worthy ships, or when I lay with you  
in our lover's bed on the isle of Cranae.  
That's how sweet passion has seized hold of me,  
how much I want you now.”

500

Paris finished speaking.

He led the way to bed. His wife went, too.

The two lay down together on the bed.

Atreus' son paced through the crowd, like a wild beast,  
searching for some glimpse of godlike Alexander.

But no Trojan nor any of their famous allies  
could reveal Alexander to warlike Menelaus.

If they'd seen him, they had no desire to hide him.

For they all hated Paris, as they hated gloomy death.

Agamemnon, king of men, addressed them:

510

“Listen to me, Trojans, Dardanians, allies—  
victory clearly falls to war-loving Menelaus.

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So give back Argive Helen and her property,  
compensate us with a suitable amount,  
something future ages will all talk about.”

As he finished speaking, the other Achaeans cheered.

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Book Four  
The Armies Clash

*[The Council of the Gods on Olympus; Zeus sends Athena to break the truce; Athena persuades Pandarus to fire an arrow at Menelaus; Menelaus is wounded; Machaon tends to Menelaus; Agamemnon tours the battlefield rallying his troops; the battle starts again]*

The gods all sat assembled in the golden courtyard, with Zeus there, too. Gracious Hebe went among them, pouring nectar. They toasted each other in golden cups, as they looked out on Troy. Then Zeus, son of Cronos, wishing to irk Hera with a sarcastic speech, addressed them in deviously provoking words:

“Menelaus has two goddesses  
assisting him, Hera of Argos  
and Athena of Alalcomene.  
But they sit far away, looking on, 10  
enjoying themselves, while Aphrodite,  
who loves laughter, helps Paris all the time,  
protecting him from death. Now, for instance,  
she's just rescued him from certain death.  
For war-loving Menelaus was the victor,  
no doubt of that. But why don't we discuss  
how this warfare is going to finish up—  
whether we should re-ignite harsh combat,  
this horrific strife, or make both sides friends.  
If this second option pleases all of us, 20  
if we find it sweet, then king Priam's city  
remains inhabited, and Menelaus  
takes Argive Helen home with him.”

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Athena and Hera sat together muttering,  
plotting trouble for the Trojans. Angry at Zeus,  
her father, Athena sat there silently,  
so enraged she didn't say a word. But Hera,  
unable to contain her anger, burst out:

“Most fearful son of Cronos, what are you saying?  
How can you wish to undermine my efforts,  
prevent them from achieving anything? 30  
What about the sweat which dripped from me,  
as I worked so hard, wearing my horses out,  
gathering men to wipe out Priam and his children.  
Go ahead then. But all we other gods  
do not approve of what you're doing.”

Then cloud-gatherer Zeus, irritated, said to her:

“Dear wife, what sort of crimes have Priam  
or Priam's children committed against you,  
that you should be so vehemently keen 40  
to destroy that well-built city Ilios?  
If you went through its gates or its huge walls,  
you'd gorge on Priam and his children,  
other Trojans, too, swallow their flesh raw.  
That's what you'd do to slake your anger.  
Do as you wish. We shouldn't make this matter  
something you and I later squabble over,  
a source of major disagreements.  
But I'll tell you this—keep it in mind.  
Whenever I get the urge to wipe out 50  
some city whose inhabitants you love,  
don't try to thwart me. Let me have my way.  
I'll give in to you freely, though unwillingly.  
For of all towns inhabited by earth's peoples,  
under the sun, beneath the heavenly stars,

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sacred Ilium, with Priam and his people,  
expert spearmen, stands dearest in my heart.  
My altar there has always shared their feasts,  
with libations and sacrificial smoke,  
offerings we get as honours due to us “

60

Ox-eyed Hera then said in reply to Zeus:

“The three cities I love the best by far  
are Argos, Sparta, and Mycenae,  
city of wide streets. Destroy them utterly,  
if you ever hate them in your heart.  
I won't deny you or get in your way.  
If I tried disagreeing with such destruction,  
my hostile stance would be quite useless.  
For you are far more powerful than me.  
But my own work must not be wasted,  
worth nothing. I'm a god, the same race as you—  
I'm crooked-minded Cronos' eldest daughter.  
Another thing—in addition to my birth—  
I'm called your wife, and you rule all immortals.  
In this matter, then, let's both support  
each other's wishes—you mine, I yours.  
Other gods will follow our example.  
Instruct Athena to go immediately  
where Trojans and Achaeans carry on  
their bitter conflict. There she should try  
to get the Trojans to break their oaths first,  
by harming the glorious Achaeans.”

70

80

Hera spoke. The father of gods and men agreed.  
He spoke up to Athena—his words had wings.

“Go quickly to the Trojan and Achaean troops.  
Try to get the Trojans to break their oaths first,

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by injuring the glorious Achaeans.”

Zeus' words stirred up Athena's earlier desires.  
She darted from Olympus summit, sped off,  
like a comet sent by crooked-minded Cronos' son,  
a beacon for sailors and the wide race of men,  
showering sparks behind her as she flew.  
That's how Pallas Athena shot to earth, then dropped  
right down into the middle of the soldiers.  
Horse-taming Trojans looked on in amazement,  
well-armed Achaeans, too. As they saw her,  
each man said to the person next to him:

90

“There's going to be more war, more wretched combat,  
or else great Zeus, who serves up war to men,  
will make the troops on both sides friends.”

100

That's what troops muttered, both Trojan and Achaean.  
Athena went down into the Trojan crowd,  
looking like Laodocus, Antenor's son,  
a strong spearman, seeking godlike Pandarus.  
She met Pandarus, Lycaon's powerful son,  
a fine man, standing there with his sturdy regiment,  
shield-bearing troops who'd come from the river Aesopus.  
Standing near him, Athena spoke. Her words had wings.

“Fiery hearted son of Lycaon,  
why not do as I suggest? Prepare yourself  
to shoot a swift arrow at Menelaus.  
You'd earn thanks and glory from all Trojans,  
most of all from prince Alexander.  
He'd be the very first to bring fine gifts,  
if he could see warlike Menelaus,  
son of Atreus, mounted on his bier,  
his bitter funeral pyre, killed by your arrow.

110

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So come, then, shoot an arrow at him—  
at splendid Menelaus. Promise Apollo,  
illustrious archer born in Lycia, 120  
you'll make fine sacrifice, some new-born lambs,  
once you get back to your city, holy Zeleia.”

Athena spoke and thus swayed his foolish wits.  
Pandarus took up his bow of polished horn,  
made from a nimble wild goat he himself once shot  
under the chest, as it leapt down from a rock.  
He'd waited in an ambush and hit it in the front.  
The goat fell down onto the rocks, landing on its back.  
Horns on its head were sixteen palm widths long.  
A man skilled in shaping horn had worked on them, 130  
to fit the horns together to create a bow.  
He'd polished it all over, adding gold caps  
snugly fitted on the tips. Pandarus stooped down,  
strung the bow, then set it on the ground.  
His brave companions held their shields before him,  
just in case Achaea's warlike sons attacked them,  
before he could shoot Menelaus, Atreus' warrior son.  
Then, removing the cover from his quiver,  
Pandarus took out an arrow, a fresh-winged courier 140  
bearing dark agony. Next he quickly set  
the keen arrow on the string, swearing an oath  
to the archer god, Lycian-born Apollo,  
that he would make splendid sacrifice, first-born lambs,  
when he got back to his city, holy Zaleia.  
Gripping the arrow notch, the ox-gut bowstring,  
he pulled back, drawing the string right to his nipple,  
iron arrow head against the bow. Once he'd bent  
that great bow into a circle, the bow twanged,  
the string sang out, the sharp-pointed arrow flew away,  
eager to bury itself in crowds of men. 150  
But, Menelaus, the immortal sacred gods

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did not forget you. Athena, Zeus' daughter,  
goddess of war's spoils, was first to stand before you,  
to ward off the piercing arrow—she brushed it from your skin,  
just as a mother brushes a fly off her child  
while he lies sweetly sleeping. Athena led the arrow  
to the spot where the gold buckles on the belt  
rest on the joint in the double body armour.  
The keen arrow dug into the leather strap,  
passed right through the finely decorated belt, 160  
through the richly embossed armour, the body mail,  
his most powerful guard, worn to protect his flesh,  
by blocking spears and arrows. The arrow pierced it,  
going through that mail, and grazed the skin of Menelaus.  
Dark blood at once came flowing from the wound.  
Just as when some woman of Meonia or Caria  
stains white ivory with purple dye, making a cheek piece  
for a horse, and leaves it in her room—an object  
many riders covet for themselves, a king's treasure  
with double value—horse's ornament and rider's glory— 170  
that's how, Menelaus, your strong thighs, shins and ankles  
were stained with your own blood below the wound.  
When Agamemnon saw dark blood flowing from the wound,  
that king of men shuddered. And Menelaus,  
who loved war, shuddered, too. But when he saw  
barbs of the arrow head, its binding, still outside,  
not underneath the skin, his spirits rose, and courage  
flowed back into his chest. Mighty Agamemnon,  
taking Menelaus by the hand, with a bitter groan,  
spoke to his companions, all grieving with him: 180

“Dear brother, that oath I swore to was your death—  
letting you step forward to fight Trojans,  
as Achaea's champion. For now the Trojans  
have shot you, walking roughshod on their oaths,  
that treaty they swore to in good faith. But still,

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the oath, lambs' blood, unmixed libations,  
handshakes, things in which we placed our trust—  
all these will not go in vain. For if Zeus,  
the Olympian, does not fulfill them now,  
later on he will. Trojans will pay much— 190  
with their heads, their wives, their children.  
I know in my mind and heart that day will come  
when holy Troy, Priam, and his people,  
fine spearmen, will be annihilated,  
when high-ruling Zeus, son of Cronos,  
who dwells in the sky, angry at their lies,  
will shake his dark aegis against them all.  
These things will be fulfilled. But, Menelaus,  
I'll be in dreadful pain on your account,  
if you die, if Fate now ends your life, 200  
if I return to arid Argos totally disgraced.  
For Achaeans immediately will think of home,  
leaving Priam and his Trojans here in triumph,  
abandoning Helen, an Argive woman.  
Your bones will lie rotting here in Trojan soil,  
recalling the work we failed to finish.  
Then some arrogant Trojan, leaping up  
onto the tomb of famous Menelaus,  
will shout: 'May Agamemnon's anger  
always end like this. His Achaean army 210  
he brought here in vain. He returned home,  
back to his native land in empty ships,  
abandoning courageous Menelaus.'  
That's what he'll say. Before that day  
I hope the broad earth will lie over me!"

Then Menelaus, to cheer up Agamemnon, said:

“Take courage. Don't upset Achaeans.  
This sharp arrow is not a fatal hit.

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My gleaming belt protected me on top,  
as did my body chain mail underneath,  
forged in bronze.”

220

Mighty Agamemnon answered:

“My dear Menelaus, I hope that's true.  
But a healer must inspect your wound,  
apply his medicine to relieve black pain.”

Agamemnon ordered Talthybius, his godlike herald:

“Talthybius, as quickly as you can,  
get Machaon here, son of Asclepius,  
healer without equal, to look over  
warlike Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
shot by someone's arrow, a skilled archer,  
Trojan or Lycian—to his glory and our grief.”

230

Hearing his orders, Talthybius obeyed.  
He set off among bronze-clad Achaeans,  
seeking heroic Machaon. He saw him there,  
standing among the ranks of his strong warriors,  
shield-bearing men who'd come with him from Tricca,  
land where horses breed. Standing close to him,  
Talthybius spoke. His words had wings.

“Son of Asclepius, rouse yourself.  
For mighty Agamemnon calls for you  
to look at warrior Menelaus, Achaea's leader,  
shot by someone's arrow, a skilled archer,  
Trojan or Lycian—to his glory and our grief.”

240

At Talthybius' words Machaon's spirits  
were stirred up in his chest. They set off together,

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through the wide Achaean army's crowded ranks.  
They came where wounded fair-haired Menelaus lay.  
Around him all the noblest men had gathered in a circle.  
Machaon, godlike man, strode into the middle,  
drew the arrow from the belt without delay, 250  
twisting back the sharp barbs as he pulled the arrow out.  
He undid the finely decorated belt and armour,  
then, under that, the chain mail forged in bronze.  
Next, he inspected the wound the keen arrow made,  
sucked out the blood, then skillfully applied his potions,  
soothing medicines which Cheiron gave his father.

While the Achaeans were looking after Menelaus,  
lord of the loud war shout, Trojan ranks advanced,  
shields ready, once more armed with all their weapons,  
fully charged with passionate desire for battle. 260  
Then you'd not have seen lord Agamemnon sleeping,  
hiding, or not keen to fight. Quite the reverse,  
he was moving out to combat, to man-ennobling war.  
He left his horses and ornate bronze chariot  
with his aide Eurymedon, son of Ptolemaeus,  
son of Peiraeus, who held the panting horses at a distance.  
For Agamemnon had ordered him repeatedly  
to keep the horses ready for the time his limbs  
grew tired from moving through so many soldiers.  
He went around on foot, inspecting warrior ranks. 270  
When he saw Danaans coming up with horses,  
he'd approach them, shouting words of encouragement:

“Argives, don't lose your warlike spirit.  
Father Zeus will never help those liars.  
By attacking us, these Trojans were the first  
to violate their oaths. Vultures will gnaw away  
their tender flesh, while we lead off their wives  
and their dear delicate children to our ships,

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when we've destroyed their city.”

But when Agamemnon saw soldiers holding back  
from hateful war, he'd lash out at them in anger

280

“You cowards, disgraceful Argives, aren't you ashamed?  
What are you doing just standing here,  
like dazed fawns exhausted after running  
over a large plain, now motionless,  
hearts drained of spirit—that's how you stand,  
in a trance, not marching up to battle.  
Are you waiting for Trojans to come closer,  
up to the fine sterns of our ships beached here,  
on the gray sea shore, so you can see  
if the hand of Cronos' son will shield you?”

290

In this way, Agamemnon moved around the army,  
exerting his authority throughout the ranks.  
Going past crowds of men, he met the troops from Crete,  
as they armed themselves round Idomeneus,  
their fiery-hearted leader at the front,  
fierce as a wild boar. In the rear, Meriones  
roused the ranks for action. Looking at these two,  
Agamemnon, king of men, rejoiced. He spoke out,  
talking straight to Idomeneus in a friendly tone:

300

“Idomeneus, above all Danaans,  
with their swift horses, I value you in war,  
in all other things, and at banquets,  
when Achaea's finest prepare gleaming wine,  
the kind reserved for kings, in mixing bowls.  
Other long-haired Achaeans drink their portion,  
the amount allotted to them, but your cup  
always stands full of wine, as does mine,  
so you can drink any time your heart desires.

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Set off to battle, then—show you're a man,  
the fine man you claimed to be before.”

310

Idomeneus, Cretan leader, answered Agamemnon:

“Son of Atreus, indeed I'll prove myself  
a loyal comrade to you, as I promised  
that first time long ago. But you should rouse  
other long-haired Achaean men to action,  
so we may fight at once, without delay.  
Since Trojans have broken their sworn promises,  
death and sorrow will come to them at last,  
for they attacked us first, breaking their oaths.”

320

At these words, the son of Atreus felt joy fill his heart.  
Then he moved off. As he continued on his way,  
he met both men called Ajax, arming themselves  
among the hordes of troops, with crowds of men on foot.  
Just as a goatherd high on a lookout sees a cloud  
coming down across the sea, driven by West Wind's force—  
something which at a distance seems pitch black  
as it moves across the sea, driving a huge storm,  
and, shuddering at the sight, he takes his flocks  
into a cave—that's how the dense ranks of young men,  
gods' favourites, marched around both Ajaxes,  
ready for war, all dressed in black, with shields and spears,  
Seeing them, powerful Agamemnon felt great joy—  
he shouted out to them in words with wings:

330

“You two Ajaxes,  
leaders of the Argives armed in bronze,  
for you I have no orders. It's not right  
for me to urge you forward—both of you  
are rousing men to fight with all their force.  
By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,

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I wish such spirit would fill each man's chest.  
Then king Priam's city would soon fall,  
we'd capture it, destroy it utterly.”

340

With these words, he left them there, going on to others.  
He met Nestor, clear-voiced orator from Pylos,  
setting his troops in order, urging them to fight  
under huge Pelagon, Alastor, Chromius,  
Haemon, and mighty Bias, his people's shepherd.  
Nestor set horses, chariots, and charioteers in front.  
In the rear, he placed his many brave foot soldiers,  
a battle wall. In the middle he placed his poorer troops,  
to force them to keep fighting on against their will.  
First, he told the charioteers to control their horses,  
to avoid confusing the entire battle line:

350

“In your eagerness to engage the Trojans,  
don't any of you charge ahead of others,  
trusting in your strength and horsemanship.  
And don't lag behind. That will hurt our charge.  
Any man whose chariot confronts an enemy's  
should thrust with his spear at him from there.  
That's the most effective tactic, the way  
men wiped out city strongholds long ago—  
their chests full of that style and spirit.”

360

Thus that old man, skilled in war's traditions, roused his men.  
Seeing him, mighty Agamemnon was elated.  
He spoke to Nestor. His words had wings.

“Old man,  
how I wish the power in those knees of yours  
could match the spirit in your chest, your strength  
remain unbowed. But old age, our common enemy,  
has worn you down. If only that had happened

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to some other man and left you in place,  
among the ranks of younger warriors.”

370

To these words Geranian horseman Nestor said:

“Son of Atreus, yes, indeed, I wish  
I were the man I used to be back then,  
when I cut down lord Ereuthalion.  
But gods don't give men everything at once.  
Then I was young. Now old age follows me.  
But I'll be with my horsemen, advising them,  
giving them their orders, an old man's right.  
Fighting with spears is for the younger men  
born after me, men who rely on strength.”

380

Nestor spoke. Filled with joy, Atreus' son moved on.  
Next, he came upon Menestheus, Peteos' son,  
a charioteer, standing still among Athenians,  
famous for their battle cries. Close by them,  
resourceful Odysseus stood among his troops,  
Cephalenian soldiers, powerful fighting men.  
These men had not yet heard the call to battle.  
For the armies of horse-taming Trojans  
and Achaeans had only just begun to march  
against each other. So Odysseus' soldiers  
stood waiting for the rest of the Achaeans  
to charge against the Trojans and begin the fight.  
Seeing this, Agamemnon, king of men, spoke out,  
rebuking them. His words had wings.

390

“Son of Peteos, god-given king, and you,  
Odysseus, skilled in sly deception,  
crafty minded, why are you holding back,  
standing apart? Are you waiting for the rest?  
By rights you two should be with those in front,

400

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sharing the heat of battle. At banquets,  
when we Achaeans feast our senior men,  
you hear me call your name out first.  
Then you like to have roast meat and cups of wine,  
honey sweet, to your heart's content.  
But now you'd be quite happy looking on  
if ten Achaean groups were fighting here  
with ruthless bronze before your very eyes.”

Resourceful Odysseus, scowling grimly, then replied:

“Son of Atreus, how can you say such things? 410  
How can you claim I'm hanging back from battle  
each time we Achaeans rouse ourselves for war  
against horse-taming Trojans? If you want,  
if it's of interest to you, then you'll see  
Telemachus' dear father battling  
horse-taming Trojans at the very front.  
What you've been saying is clearly nonsense.”

Mighty Agamemnon saw the anger in Odysseus.  
He smiled at him and took back what he'd just said:

“Odysseus, you resourceful man, 420  
divinely born son of Laertes,  
I'm not finding serious fault with you.  
I'm issuing no orders to you.  
I know that spirit in your loyal chest  
is well disposed. We both are of one mind.  
If I've said something bad we'll make it good.  
May the gods bring all of this to nothing.”

With these words, Agamemnon left Odysseus there,  
moving on to other men. He met Diomedes,  
Tydeus' high-spirited son, standing by his horses 430

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and his well-made chariot. Beside him stood Sthenelus,  
son of Capaneus. Seeing them, Agamemnon  
spoke out in rebuke. His words had wings.

“Alas, Diomedes,  
son of fiery-hearted, horse-taming Tydeus,  
why are you hiding, just watching battle lanes?  
Tydeus was not a man to shirk like this.  
He fought his enemies in front of his companions.  
That's what they say, those who saw him work.  
I never saw him for myself. People claim  
he ranked above the rest. Once he came to Mycenae 440  
as a peaceful guest with godlike Polyneices,  
mustered men to assault the sacred walls of Thebes.  
They begged us to give them worthy comrades.  
Mycenaeans, willing to comply, agreed.  
But then Zeus later changed their minds,  
revealing an unlucky omen to them.  
So Tydeus and Polyneices left.  
On their way, they reached the river Asopus,  
its lush grassy meadows full of reeds.  
Sent by Achaeans as envoy to Thebes, 450  
Tydeus went there. He found Cadmeans<sup>1</sup>  
feasting in large numbers in the palace,  
home of great Eteocles. Though a stranger,  
all by himself in that Cadmean crowd,  
chariot fighter Tydeus was not afraid.  
He challenged them in various contests.  
Athena helped, so he won them all with ease.  
Horse-breaking Cadmeans were upset with him.  
They organized a strong ambush against him  
as he returned—fifty young men, with two leaders, 460  
that godlike hero Maeon, Haemon's son,

<sup>1</sup>Citizens of Thebes were commonly called *Cadmeans* after Cadmus, the founder of the city.

and warlike Polyphontes, son of Autophonus.  
But these men came to fatal shameful ends.  
For Tydeus killed them, all but one.  
He let Maeon go home, sent him away,  
in obedience to an omen from the gods.  
That's the man Aetolian Tydeus was.  
But his son is a lesser man than he,  
though better when it comes to talking.”

Mighty Diomedes did not reply to Agamemnon's words,  
shamed at the rebuke from a king whom he respected.  
But Sthenelus, son of famous Capaneus, answered:

470

“Son of Atreus, don't spread lies. You know the truth.  
We claim we're far better than our fathers.  
We captured Thebes, city of seven gates,  
leading smaller forces over stronger walls,  
trusting signs sent by the gods and Zeus' aid.  
The others died through their own foolishness.  
So don't give our fathers honours high as mine.”

Powerful Diomedes, frowning, spoke to Sthenelus:

480

“My friend. Stay quiet. Follow my advice.  
For I'm not hurt that Agamemnon,  
the army's shepherd, urges armed Achaeans  
on to battle. For he will get the glory,  
if Achaeans annihilate the Trojans  
and capture sacred Ilion. And he'll get  
great sorrow, if Achaeans are wiped out.  
But come, let's get our two minds working  
to rouse our spirits for this coming fight.”

Diomedes spoke. Then with his weapons he jumped  
from his chariot down to the ground. Around his chest

490

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the bronze rang fearfully, as he moved into action,  
a sound to make even brave warriors afraid.

Just as thundering ocean surf crashes on the sand,  
wave after wave, driven by the West Wind's power,  
one wave rising at sea, then booming down on shore,  
arching in crests and crashing down among the rocks,  
spewing salt foam, so then Danaan ranks,  
row after row, moved out, spirits firmly set on war.  
Each leader issued his own orders to his men. 500  
The rest marched on in silence. You'd never think  
such a huge army could move out with its voice  
buried in those chests, in silent fear of their commanders.  
As they marched, the polished armour on them glittered.

As for the Trojans, they were like thousands of ewes  
standing in a rich man's farm, bleating constantly,  
waiting for someone to come and collect white milk,  
as they hear lambs call. Just like that, the din rose up  
throughout the widespread Trojan force. They shared no words—  
they had no common language, but mixtures of tongues, 510  
with men from many lands. Ares urged the Trojans on,  
while bright-eyed Athena kept rousing the Achaeans.  
With them came Terror, Fear, and tireless Strife,  
sister and companion of man-destroying Ares—  
at first small in stature, she later grows enormous,  
head reaching heaven, as she strides across the earth.  
Strife went through crowds of soldiers, casting hatred  
on both sides equally, multiplying human miseries.

When the two armies came to one common ground,  
they smashed into each other—shields, spears, fierce angry men 520  
encased in bronze. Studded shields bashed one another.  
A huge din arose—human cries of grief and triumph,  
those killing and those killed. Earth flowed with blood.

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Just as streams swollen with melting snows pour out,  
flow down the hill into a pool, and meet some torrent  
from a great spring in a hollow gully there,  
and the shepherd in the distant hills hears the roar—  
so the shouts and turmoil resounded then from warriors,  
as they collided.

Antilochus was the first to kill a man—  
a well-armed Trojan warrior, Echepolus, 530  
son of Thalysius, a courageous man,  
who fought in the front ranks. He hit his helmet crest,  
topped with horsehair plumes, spearing his forehead.  
The bronze point smashed straight through the frontal bone.  
Darkness hid his eyes and he collapsed, like a tower,  
falling down into that frenzied battle. As he fell,  
powerful Elephenor, son of Chalcodon,  
courageous leader of the Abantes, seized his feet,  
and started pulling him beyond the range of weapons,  
eager to strip him of his armour quickly. 540  
But Elephenor's attempt did not go on for long.  
Great-hearted Agenor saw him drag the dead man.  
He stabbed Elephenor with his bronze spear,  
right in his exposed side, where his shield left him  
vulnerable as he bent down. His limbs gave way,  
as his spirit left him. Over his dead body,  
Trojans and Achaeans kept fighting grimly on,  
attacking like wolves, man whirling against man.

Then Ajax, son of Telamon, hit Simoeisius,  
Anthemion's son, a fine young warrior. 550  
He was born on the banks of the river Simoeis,  
while his mother was coming down Mount Ida,  
accompanying her parents to watch their flocks.  
That's why the people called him Simoeisius.  
But he did not repay his fond parents for raising him.

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His life was cut short on great Ajax's deadly spear.  
As he was moving forward with the men in front,  
Ajax struck him in the chest, by the right nipple.  
The bronze spear went clean through his shoulder.  
He collapsed in the dust, like a poplar tree, 560  
one growing in a large well-watered meadow,  
from whose smooth trunk the branches grow up to the top,  
until a chariot builder's bright axe topples it,  
bends the wood, to make wheel rims for a splendid chariot,  
letting the wood season by the riverbank.  
That's how godlike Ajax chopped down Simoeisus,  
son of Anthemion.

Then Antiphus, Priam's son,  
with his shining helmet, hurled his sharp spear at Ajax  
through a crowd of men. He missed Ajax, but hit Leucus,  
a brave companion of Odysseus, in the groin, 570  
as he was dragging Simoeisus away.  
His hands let go. He fell down on the corpse.  
Enraged at Leucus' slaughter, Odysseus strode up,  
through the front ranks, armed in gleaming bronze. Going in close,  
he took his stand. Looking round, he hurled his glittering spear.  
As he threw, Trojans moved back, but the spear found a mark.  
It hit Democoön, Priam's bastard son, who'd come  
from Abydos, where he bred horses for their speed.  
Angry for his friend, Odysseus speared him in the temple.  
The sharp bronze pressed on through the other side, 580  
coming out his forehead. Darkness fell on his eyes,  
and he collapsed with a crash. The armour on him echoed.  
Trojans in the front ranks, among them noble Hector,  
backed away. Raising a huge shout, the Argives  
hauled off the corpses and charged ahead much further.

Looking down from Pergamus, Apollo grew annoyed.

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He called out to the Trojans, shouting:

“Charge ahead, you horse-taming Trojans.  
Don't make Argives happy. Their skin's not made  
of stone or iron. Once you strike at them 590  
it can't stop flesh-ripping bronze. And Achilles,  
son of lovely Thetis, isn't in this fight.  
He's sitting by his ships, nursing his anger.”

So the fearsome god spoke out from the city.  
Athena Tritogeneia, mighty Zeus' daughter,  
rushed among Achaeans, urging companies on,  
if she saw men holding back, hesitant to fight.

Death then came to Dioces, son of Amarynceus.  
He was hit by a jagged rock on his right shin,  
beside the ankle. It was thrown by Peirous, 600  
son of Imbrabus, captain of the Thracians,  
who'd come from Aenus. The cruel rock crushed both tendons  
and the bone. He fell onto his back down in the dust.  
There he reached out with both hands for his companions.  
His spirit left his body with each gasp he took.  
Peirous, who'd thrown the rock, ran up and speared his gut.  
His bowels spilled out onto the ground. Darkness hid his eyes.  
As Peirous moved off, Thoas, an Aetolian, hit him,  
his spear striking him above the nipple. The bronze spear point  
bit into his lungs. Thoas moved in to close quarters, 610  
pulled the heavy spear out from his chest, drew his sharp sword,  
then drove it straight into the middle of his belly,  
destroying Peirous' life. But Thoas couldn't strip  
the armour off. For Peirous' companions,  
Thracian men whose hair is piled atop their heads,  
rallied round, holding out long spears, forcing Thoas  
away from them. Thoas was big, strong, and brave,  
but he fell back, shaken. And so those two warriors

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lay stretched out in the dirt beside each other—  
one Thracian chief, one captain of bronze-clad Epeians.  
And many other men lay dead around them.

620

At that point, no man who joined in the battle there  
could take it lightly, not even one who strolled unhurt  
through the middle of the fight, untouched by that sharp bronze,  
with Pallas Athena escorting him by hand,  
shielding him from flying weapons. For on that day,  
many Trojans and Achaeans lay there side by side,  
stretched out together, face down in the dust.

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You have just read the first 100 pages of Ian Johnston's new translation of Homer's *The Iliad*.

Professor Johnston's works are increasingly becoming the translations of choice in high schools, colleges and universities in the U.S. here and around the world. Reviews of his work can be found on our website, which is listed below.

To read this text in its entirety, we suggest you visit the publisher's website at:

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## A Note on the Translator

Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and educated in England and Canada. He has a BSc from McGill (Geology and Chemistry), a BA from Bristol (English and Greek), and an MA from Toronto (English). For many years he taught literature (English, Classics, and Liberal Studies) in the British Columbia college and university-college system, mostly at Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, before retiring in 2004. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (1988) and some justly forgotten satirical musical dramas. He now lives in Nanaimo, British Columbia. His numerous translations from German, French, and Greek are available on his web site at the following address: <http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/index.htm>, and his translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have recently been published in the United States by Richer Resources Publications. Sound recordings of his complete translations of these two poems are available at Naxos Audiobooks: <http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com>.

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*  
Aristophanes, *Clouds*  
Aristophanes, *Frogs*  
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*  
Aristophanes, *Birds*  
Homer, *Iliad* (both full and abridged versions)  
Homer, *Odyssey* (both full and abridged versions)  
Euripides, *Bacchae*  
Euripides, *Medea*  
Sophocles, *Antigone*  
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

Sound recordings of his translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are available from Naxos AudioBooks at [www.naxosaudiobooks.com](http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com).

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# Appendices

Glossary of People and Places

Map of the home states of some of the major  
Achaean and Trojan Leaders

Map of the Area Around Troy

A Few Suggestions for Further Study

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## Glossary of People and Places

Below is a partial list including only the important names and a few others. For a complete list of all the names in the *Iliad*, together with a detailed glossary indicating where their names appear in the poem, please consult the following internet site:

[http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad\\_index.htm](http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad_index.htm).

**Achaea:** mainland Greece.

**Achaeans:** collective name for the forces from Greece under Agamemnon, used interchangeably with the term **Argives** or **Danaans**.

**Achilles:** leader of the Myrmidons, part of Achaean army, son of Peleus and Thetis, often referred to as “son of Peleus” or “descendant of Aeacus.”

**Aeneas:** major Trojan warrior, leader of Dardanians, son of Anchises and Aphrodite.

**Agamemnon:** king of Mycenae, son of Atreus, leader of Achaean forces, brother of Menelaus, commonly called “wide ruling” or “mighty.”

**Agenor:** son of Antenor, Trojan warrior.

**Ajax (1):** son of Telamon, leader of forces from Salamis, greatest Achaean warrior after Achilles, known as the great Ajax or greater Ajax. **Ajax (2):** son of Oileus, leader of Locrian troops, the swift or lesser Ajax.

**Alexander:** another name for **Paris**.

**Andromache:** wife of Hector, daughter of Eëtion.

**Antenor:** senior Trojan counselor.

**Aphrodite:** divine daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of erotic love, a supporter of the Trojans.

**Apollo:** divine son of Zeus and Leto, a supporter of the Trojans.

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**Ares:** son of Zeus, god of war, especially the destructive aspects, a supporter of the Trojans.

**Argives:** see **Achaean**s.

**Argos (1):** town in northern Peloponnese ruled by Diomedes. **Argos (2):** a large area ruled by Agamemnon. **Argos (3):** a general term for the homeland of Achaeans generally (i.e., mainland Greece and Peloponnese). **Argos (4):** region in north-east Greece, part of the kingdom of Peleus (sometimes called Pelasgian Argos).

**Artemis:** goddess, daughter of Zeus and Hera, sister of Apollo, supporter of the Trojans.

**Asteropaeus:** alleged son of Pelagon, son of the river Axius and Periboea, Trojan warrior.

**Astyanax:** son of Hector and Andromache, an infant, also called **Scamandrius**.

**Ate:** divine daughter of Zeus, responsible for human and divine folly.

**Athena:** goddess daughter of Zeus, strong supporter of the Achaeans, commonly called “glittery eyed.”

**Atreus:** king of Argos, son of Pelops, father of Agamemnon and Menelaus (known as the “sons of Atreus”).

**Automedon:** Achaean warrior.

**Boeotia:** region of central Greece whose men are part of the Achaean forces.

**Briseis:** daughter of Briseus, captive awarded to Achilles.

**Calchas:** priest and interpreter of omens for Achaean army.

**Cebriones:** bastard son of Priam and brother of Hector.

**Chryseis:** young daughter of Chryses, captured by Achaeans.

**Cronos:** divine father of Zeus, overthrown by Zeus and kept imprisoned in Tartarus.

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**Danaans:** see **Achaeans**.

**Dardanians:** people from around Troy, led by Aeneas.

**Deiphobus:** son of Priam, Trojan warrior.

**Demeter:** goddess of grain and food generally.

**Diomedes:** son of Tydeus, king of Argos, a younger warrior with the Achaeans.

**Earthshaker:** common epithet for Poseidon.

**Eumelus:** leader of Thessalian troops, part of the Achaean army.

**Euryalus:** a senior leader of the troops from the Argolid, an Achaean warrior.

**Eurybates:** one of the Achaean heralds.

**Eurymedon:** Achaean warrior, attendant on Agamemnon.

**Eurypylus:** leader of troops from parts of Thessaly, part of the Achaean army.

**Glaukus:** son of Hippolochus, leader of the Lycians (Trojan allies).

**Hades:** brother of Zeus and Poseidon, god of the dead.

**Hector:** leader of Trojan forces, son of Priam and Hecuba, often called “Hector of the shining helmet,” or “man-killing Hector.”

**Hecuba:** wife of Priam, mother of Hector (and others).

**Helen:** mortal child of Zeus, wife of Menelaus and later of Paris (Alexander).

**Helenus:** son of Priam, reader of omens for Trojans.

**Hephaestus:** divine son of Zeus and Hera, artisan god, crippled in his legs, supporter of the Achaeans.

**Hera:** divine wife and sister of Zeus, daughter of Cronos, frequently called “white armed” or “ox eyed,” a strong supporter of the Achaeans.

**Hercules:** son of Zeus and Alcmene, legendary Greek hero, father of Tlepolemus.

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**Hermes:** divine son of Zeus, often called “killer of Argus” or “Messenger.”

**Ida:** a mountain near Troy.

**Idaios:** a Trojan herald.

**Idomeneus:** son of Deucalion, leader of Cretan forces, a senior commander in the Achaean forces.

**Ilion:** another name for **Troy**.

**Iris:** divine messenger of the gods.

**Leto:** goddess mother of Apollo and Artemis.

**Lycia/Lycians:** region of Asia Minor whose troops, led by Sarpedon and Glaucus, are allied with the Trojans.

**Machaon:** leader of troops from parts of Thessaly, a healer in the Achaean army.

**Meges:** son of Phyleus, leader of troops from Doulichium, part of the Achaean army.

**Menelaus:** son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, first husband of Helen of Troy, king of Sparta, a major figure in Achaean leadership.

**Menestheus:** leader of Athenian soldiers fighting with the Achaeans.

**Meriones:** an attendant on Idomeneus, part of the Cretan contingent in the Achaean forces.

**Myrmidons:** troops from Thessaly under the command of Achilles.

**Nestor:** king of Pylos, a senior warrior among Achaeans, called “the Geranian horseman.”

**Odysseus:** king of Ithaca, major warrior for the Achaean forces, commonly called “resilient” and “resourceful” and “cunning.”

**Olympus:** mountain in Greece where the major gods (the Olympians) live.

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**Ouranos:** divine father of Cronos.

**Pandarus:** son of Lycaon, leader of troops from Zeleia, part of the Trojan forces.

**Paris:** son of Priam and Hecuba, brother of Hector, abductor of Helen from Menelaus, also called **Alexander**.

**Patroclus:** son of Menoetius, an Achaean warrior and special comrade of Achilles.

**Peleus:** father of Achilles.

**Phoebus:** see **Apollo**.

**Phoenix:** old companion and tutor of Achilles, an Achaean warrior.

**Phthia:** region in south Thessaly (in northern Greece), home of Achilles and his father Peleus.

**Polydamas:** a Trojan warrior.

**Poseidon:** major Olympian god (ruling the sea), brother of Zeus, commonly called “Earthshaker” or “Encircler of the Earth.”

**Priam:** king of Troy, husband of Hecuba, father of Hector, Paris, and numerous others.

**Sarpedon:** son of Zeus and leader of the Lycians, Trojan allies.

**Scaean Gates:** the major gates through the Trojan walls.

**Scamander:** river outside Troy (also called the **Xanthus**), also the river god.

**Scamandrius:** see **Astyanax**.

**Simoeis:** river near Troy.

**Sthenelus:** one of the leaders of troops from the Argolid, a special comrade of Diomedes, an Achaean warrior.

**Strife:** goddess active in war, sister of Ares.

**Talthybius:** one of the Achaean heralds.

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**Terror:** son of Ares, divine presence active in battle.

**Teucer:** bastard son of Telamon and hence brother to the greater Ajax, an Achaean warrior noted for his skill with a bow.

**Thetis:** divine sea nymph married to a mortal, Peleus, mother of Achilles.

**Thrasymedes:** son of Nestor, an Achaean warrior.

**Tydeus:** father of Diomedes.

**Xanthus (1):** one of Hector's horses. **Xanthus (2):**Trojan warrior.

**Xanthus (3):** river in Lycia (Asia Minor). **Xanthus (4):** river outside Troy, also called the **Scamander**, also the river god. **Xanthus (5):** one of Achilles' horses.

**Zeus:** most powerful of the gods, commonly called “the son of Cronos,” “cloud gatherer,” “lord of the lightning bolt,” “aegis-bearing,” brother and husband of Hera, father of numerous gods and men.

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# The Area Around Troy

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# Map of Ancient Greek World



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## A Few Suggestions for Further Study

There are innumerable books and essays dealing with the *Iliad* and Homer. The brief list below includes some recommended titles for those wishing to explore Homer in more detail.

Howard Clarke, *Homer's Readers* (a very interesting study of the transmission and influence of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*).

Ian Johnston, *Essays on Homer's Iliad*, available on line at the following site:  
<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliadessaystofc.htm>.  
(a detailed look at the vision of life presented in the *Iliad*).

James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (an influential modern study of Homer's epic).

Simone Weil, *The Iliad or The Poem of Force* (a classic study of the *Iliad*, still as eloquent as ever).

Michael Wood, *In Search of Troy* (a fascinating and easy-to-read account of the archeological work carried out to find Troy)

There are a number useful sites on the web including the Homer Home Page.

This site can be found at the following address:

[http://www.gpc.edu/~shale/humanities/literature/world\\_literature/homer.html](http://www.gpc.edu/~shale/humanities/literature/world_literature/homer.html).

So there is no shortage of additional suggestions.

A recording of the complete translation contained in this book is available from Naxos Books, *The Iliad*, read by Anton Lesser (ISBN 9-626344-28-8), through the Naxos internet site: <http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com/>.

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# The Iliad by Homer

## A New Translation by Ian Johnston

This translation provides an accurate text of the Iliad in a modern English poetic form. It has been designed, first and foremost, for people who are reading Homer's Iliad for the first time.

The book is accompanied by a glossary, maps and other study aids intended to help ensure that one's initial venture into the world of the Iliad is a fruitful one.

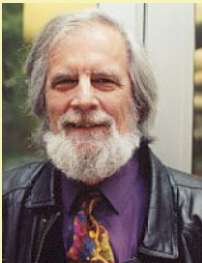
Composed between 800 and 700 BC and telling the story of a war which took place over 3000 years ago, the Iliad is a true classic, its beauty rivaled only by its longevity.

Here's what some readers of his translation have said:

*"Johnston's translation is extremely faithful to Homer's Greek text, and yet at the same time is characterized by a very readable English style, so that the clarity and fluency of this translation immediately set it apart from many other alternatives. The result is an interesting and evocative synthesis of a past vision and modern sensibilities."* Dr. Anne Leavitt, Professor of Philosophy and Liberal Studies  
Malaspina University-College

*"Ian Johnston provides his readers with a clear and comprehensible translation of the Iliad that presents itself as a dynamic equivalent of the Greek original. Johnston captures the text with an eye to both accuracy and his modern readership."*  
Dr. Andrew Porter, University of Missouri-Columbia

## About the Translator



Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and raised in Canada and England. He attended McGill University in Montreal, the University of Bristol and the University of Toronto. He worked for many years as a college and university-college instructor in British Columbia teaching English, Classics and Liberal Studies. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*. He is now retired and living in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

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