

Homer  
**The Odyssey**  
Abridged



Translated by  
Ian Johnston

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Abridged

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by  
Ian Johnston  
Vancouver Island University  
Nanaimo, British Columbia  
Canada

Homer

The Odyssey Abridged

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For Colleen



Homer  
The *Odyssey*  
Abridged

Translator's Note

This abridged text of the *Odyssey*, which is about one third of the complete poem, has been prepared by Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC, Canada, from his translation of the full text.

Every line in this text is a direct translation of Homer's poem (i.e., the complete work has been abridged by removing sections rather than by rewriting or summarizing Homer's work), except for the occasional short linking phrases I have inserted to make some transitions easier to follow.

From time to time I have included very brief summaries in prose of some sections which have been removed. These appear in italics and between square brackets. Such summaries do not include all the details of the missing material. Nor are they provided for most omissions. They are designed merely to clarify the continuity of the abridged story, not to provide details of all the missing elements in the complete narrative.

In numbering the lines, the translator has normally included a short indented line with the line immediately above, so that the two short lines count as a single line. There are a few exceptions to this practice.

Note that Homer calls the Greek forces Achaeans or Argives or Danaans, not Greeks.

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## Book One

### Athena Visits Ithaca

Muse, speak to me now of that resourceful man  
who wandered far and wide after ravaging  
the sacred citadel of Troy. He came to see  
many people's cities, where he learned their customs,  
while on the sea his spirit suffered many torments,  
as he fought to save his life and lead his comrades home.  
But though he wanted to, he could not rescue them—  
they all died from their own stupidity, the fools.  
They feasted on the cattle of Hyperion,  
god of the sun—that's why he snatched away their chance  
of getting home someday. So now, daughter of Zeus,  
tell us his story, starting anywhere you wish.<sup>1</sup> 10

The other warriors, all those who had escaped  
being utterly destroyed, were now back safely home,  
facing no more dangers from battle or the sea.  
But Odysseus, who longed to get back to his wife  
and reach his home, was being held in a hollow cave  
by that mighty nymph Calypso, noble goddess,  
who wished to make Odysseus her husband.  
But as the seasons came and went, the year arrived  
in which, according to what gods had once ordained,  
he was to get back to Ithaca, his home—  
not that he would be free from troubles even there,  
among his family. The gods pitied Odysseus,  
all except Poseidon, who kept up his anger  
against godlike Odysseus and did not relent  
until he reached his native land. 20

But at that moment,  
Poseidon was among the Ethiopians,

<sup>1</sup>The Muses, divine patrons of the arts, are daughters of Zeus, the most powerful god on Olympus.

a long way off. But other gods had gathered  
in the great hall of Olympian Zeus. Among them all, 30  
the father of gods and men was first to speak.  
In his heart he was remembering royal Aegisthus,  
whom Orestes, Agamemnon's famous son,  
had killed. With him in mind, Zeus addressed the gods:

“It's disgraceful how these humans blame the gods.  
They say their tribulations come from us,  
when they themselves, through their own foolishness,  
bring hardships which are not decreed by fate.  
Now there's Aegisthus, who took for himself  
the wife of Agamemnon, Atreus' son, 40  
and then murdered him, once the man came home.  
None of that was set by Fate. Aegisthus knew  
his acts would bring about his total ruin.  
So he has paid for everything in full.”<sup>1</sup>

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Zeus:

“Son of Cronos and father to us all,  
you who rule on high, yes indeed, Aegisthus  
now lies dead, something he well deserved.  
May any other man who does what he did  
also be destroyed! But my heart is torn 50  
for skillful Odysseus, ill-fated man,  
who has had to suffer such misfortune  
for so many years, a long way from friends.  
He's on an island, surrounded by the sea,  
the one that forms the ocean's navel stone.

<sup>1</sup>Aegisthus, as part of a scheme to avenge a terrible act of Agamemnon's father against his father, seduced Agamemnon's wife, Clytaemnestra, while Agamemnon was leading the Achaean army at Troy, and when Agamemnon returned victorious, the two lovers killed him and took control of Argos. Orestes, Agamemnon's son, who was away at the time of the murder, returned to Argos in disguise and avenged his father by killing Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. This famous story is referred to a number of times in the Odyssey. Agamemnon's shade provides some details of the killing in Book Eleven.

In the forests of that island lives a goddess,  
who stops the sad, unlucky man from leaving.  
But Odysseus yearns to see even the smoke  
rising from his native land and longs  
for death. And yet, Olympian Zeus, your heart  
does not respond to him. Did not Odysseus  
offer you delightful sacrifices  
on Troy's far-reaching plain beside the ships?  
Why then, Zeus, are you so angry with him?"

60

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

“My child,  
How could I forget godlike Odysseus,  
pre-eminent among all mortal men  
for his intelligence and offerings  
to the immortal gods, who hold wide heaven?  
But Earthshaker Poseidon is a stubborn god,  
constantly enraged about the Cyclops,  
the one whose eye Odysseus destroyed,  
godlike Polyphemus, the mightiest  
of all the Cyclopes. Thoosa bore him,  
the nymph, a daughter of that Phorcys  
who commands the restless seas. Poseidon,  
down in those hollow caves, had sex with her.  
That's the reason Earthshaker Poseidon  
makes Odysseus wander from his country.  
Still, he has no plans to kill him. But come,  
let's all of us consider his return,  
so he can journey back to Ithaca.  
Poseidon's anger will relent. He can't  
fight the immortal gods all by himself,  
not with all of us opposing him.”<sup>1</sup>

70

80

<sup>1</sup>A cyclops, as we find out later in the poem, is a huge, one-eyed cannibal monster living in the wilderness. Poseidon, Zeus' divine brother, is god of the sea (hence, he is often called “Encircler of the Earth”). He is also called Earthshaker because he rules over earthquakes.

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Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes replied to Zeus:

“Son of Cronos and father to us all,  
ruling high above, let’s send Hermes,  
killer of Argus, as our messenger,  
over to the island of Ogygia, 90  
so he can quickly tell that fair-haired nymph  
our firm decision—that brave Odysseus  
will now leave and complete his voyage home.<sup>1</sup>  
I’ll go to Ithaca and urge his son  
to be more active, put courage in his heart,  
so he will call those long-haired Achaeans  
to assembly, and there address the suitors,  
who keep on slaughtering his flocks of sheep  
and shambling bent-horned cattle.<sup>2</sup> I’ll send him  
on a trip to Sparta and sandy Pylos, 100  
to learn about his father’s voyage home—  
he may hear of it somewhere—and to gain  
a worthy reputation among men.”

Athena spoke. Then she tied those lovely sandals  
on her feet, the immortal, golden sandals  
which carry her as fast as stormy blasts of wind  
across the ocean seas and endless tracts of land.  
She raced down from the peak of Mount Olympus,  
sped across to Ithaca, and then just stood there,  
at Odysseus’ outer gate before the palace, 110  
on the threshold, gripping the bronze spear in her fist.  
She looked like Mentès, a foreigner, the chief  
who ruled the Taphians. There she met the suitors,  
those arrogant men, who were enjoying themselves

<sup>1</sup>Cronos is Zeus’ father, whom Zeus fought against and imprisoned deep in the earth. Hermes, divine son of Zeus, killed the monster Argus, whom Zeus’ wife and sister, Hera, had told to guard the goddess Io, in order to prevent her getting into sexual mischief with Zeus.

<sup>2</sup>The suitors are the rich, young aristocratic men of Ithaca and the neighbouring islands who are seeking to marry Penelope, Odysseus’ wife, in the belief that Odysseus is dead.

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playing checkers right outside the door, sitting down on hides of cattle.

God-like Telemachus observed Athena first, well before the others. He moved up near Athena, then spoke to her—his words had wings:

“Welcome to you stranger.

You must enjoy our hospitality.

120

Then, after you have had some food to eat, you can tell us what you need.”

Saying this,

Telemachus led Pallas Athena into his home.

He brought Athena in and sat her in a chair, a beautifully crafted work. Under it

he rolled out a linen mat and then arranged a foot stool for her feet. Beside her he drew up a lovely decorated chair for him to sit in.

A female servant carried in a fine gold jug

and poured water out into a silver basin,

130

so they could wash their hands. Beside them she set down a polished table. Then the worthy housekeeper brought in the bread and set it down before them.

Next, she laid out a wide variety of food,

drawing freely on supplies she had in store.

A carver sliced up many different cuts of meat

and served them. He set out goblets made of gold,

as a herald went back and forth pouring their wine

Then, one after another, the proud suitors came.

They sat down on reclining seats and high-backed chairs.

140

Heralds poured water out for them to wash their hands,

and women servants piled some baskets full of bread,

while young lads filled their bowls up to the brim with drink.

The suitors reached out with their hands to grab

the tasty food prepared and placed in front of them.

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When each and every man had satisfied his need  
for food and drink, their hearts craved something more—  
dancing and song—the finest joys of dinner feasts.

A herald gave a splendid lyre to Phemius,  
so he was forced to sing in front of all the suitors. 150  
On the strings he plucked the prelude to a lovely song.  
But then Telemachus, leaning his head over  
close to Athena, so no one else could listen,  
murmured to her:

“Dear stranger, my guest,  
These men here, they spend all their time like this,  
with songs and music—it’s so easy for them,  
because they gorge themselves on what belongs  
to someone else, and with impunity,  
a man whose white bones now may well be lying  
on the mainland somewhere, rotting in the rain, 160  
or in the sea, being tossed around by waves.  
If they saw him return to Ithaca,  
they’d all be praying they had swifter feet  
rather than more wealth in gold or clothes.  
But by now some evil fate has killed him,  
and for us there is no consolation,  
not even if some earth-bound mortal man  
should say that he will come. But tell me,  
and speak candidly—Who are your people?  
What city do you come from?”

Then Athena, 170  
goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Telemachus:

“To you I will indeed speak openly.  
I can tell you that my name is Mentès,  
son of the wise Anchialus, and king  
of the oar-loving Taphians. My ship  
is berthed some distance from the city.  
But come, speak openly and tell me this—

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What is this feast? Who are these crowds of men?  
Why do you need this? Is it a wedding?  
Or a drinking party? It seems clear enough  
this is no meal where each man brings his share.  
It strikes me that these men are acting here  
in an insulting, overbearing way,  
while dining in your home.”

180

Noble Telemachus

then said to Athena in reply:

“Stranger,  
since you’ve questioned me about the matter,  
I’ll tell you. Our house was once well on its way  
to being rich and famous—at that time  
Odysseus was alive among his people.  
But now the gods with their malicious plans  
have changed all that completely. They make sure  
Odysseus stays where nobody can see him—  
they’ve not done this to anyone before.  
But it’s not him alone who makes me sad  
and cry out in distress. For now the gods  
have brought me other grievous troubles.  
All the best young men who rule the islands,  
Dulichium and wooded Zacynthus,  
and Same, as well as those who lord it here  
in rocky Ithaca—they are all now  
wooing my mother and ravaging my house.  
She won’t turn down a marriage she detests  
but can’t bring herself to make the final choice.  
Meanwhile, these men are feasting on my home  
and soon will be the death of me as well.”

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200

This made Pallas Athena angry—she said to him:

“It’s bad Odysseus has wandered off  
when you need him here so much! He could lay  
his hands upon these shameless suitors.

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Listen now to what I'm going to tell you. 210  
Tomorrow you must call Achaea's warriors  
to an assembly and address them all,  
appealing to the gods as witnesses.  
Tell the suitors to return to their own homes.  
As for your mother, if her heart is set  
on getting married, then let her return  
to where her father lives, for he's a man  
of power with great capabilities.  
He'll organize the marriage and arrange  
the wedding gifts, as many as befit 220  
a well-loved daughter. Now, as for yourself,  
if you'll listen, I have some wise advice.  
Set off in search of news about your father,  
who's been gone so long. Some living mortal  
may tell you something, or you may hear  
a voice from Zeus, which often brings men news.  
Sail first to Pylos—speak to noble Nestor.  
After you've been there, proceed to Sparta  
and fair-haired Menelaus, the last one  
of all bronze-clad Achaeans to get home. 230  
You must not keep on acting like a child—  
the time has come when you're too old for that.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her:

“Stranger, you've been speaking as a friend,  
thinking as a father would for his own son—  
and what you've said I never will forget.  
But come now, though you're eager to be off,  
stay here a while. Once you've had a bath  
and your fond heart is fully satisfied,  
then go back to your ship with your spirit 240  
full of joy, carrying a costly present,  
something really beautiful, which will be  
my gift to you, an heirloom of the sort  
dear guest-friends give to those who are their friends.”

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Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes then said to him:

“Since I’m eager to depart, don’t keep me here  
a moment longer. And whatever gift  
your heart suggests you give me as a friend,  
present it to me when I come back here,  
and pick me something truly beautiful.  
It will earn you something worthy in return.”

250

This said, Athena with the gleaming eyes departed,  
flying off like some wild sea bird. In his heart she put  
courage and strength. She made him recall his father,  
even more so than before. In his mind, Telemachus  
pictured her, and his heart was full of wonder.  
He thought she was a god. So he moved away.  
And then the noble youth rejoined the suitors.  
Celebrated Phemius was performing for them,  
as they sat in silence, listening. He was singing  
of the return of the Achaeans, that bitter trip  
Athena made them take when they sailed home from Troy.

260

In her upper room, the daughter of Icarius,  
wise Penelope, heard the man’s inspired song.  
She came down the towering staircase from her room,  
but not alone—two female servants followed her.  
Once beautiful Penelope reached the suitors,  
she stayed beside the door post in the well-built room,  
with a small bright veil across her face. On either side  
her two attendants stood. With tears streaming down,  
Penelope addressed the famous singer:

270

“Phemius,  
you know all sorts of other ways to charm  
an audience, actions of the gods and men  
which singers celebrate. As you sit here,  
sing one of those, while these men drink their wine  
in silence. Don’t keep up that painful song,  
which always breaks the heart here in my chest,

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for, more than anyone, I am weighed down  
with ceaseless grief which I cannot forget.  
I always remember with such yearning  
my husband's face, a man whose fame has spread  
far and wide through Greece and central Argos."

280

Sensible Telemachus answered her and said:

"Mother, why begrudge the faithful singer  
delighting us in any way his mind  
may prompts him to? One can't blame the singers.  
It seems to me it's Zeus' fault. He hands out  
to toiling men, each and every one of them,  
whatever he desires. There's nothing wrong  
with this man's singing of the evil fate  
of the Danaans, for men praise the most  
the song which they have heard most recently.  
Your heart and spirit should endure his song.  
Go up to your rooms and keep busy there  
with your own work, the spindle and the loom.  
Tell your servants to perform their duties.  
Talking is a man's concern, every man's,  
but especially mine, since in this house  
I'm the one in charge."

290

Astonished at his words,  
Penelope went back to her own chambers,  
setting in her heart the prudent words her son had said.  
With her attendant women she climbed the stairs  
up to her rooms and there wept for Odysseus,  
her dear husband, until bright-eyed Athena  
cast sweet sleep on her eyelids.

300

In the shadowy halls  
the suitors started to create an uproar,  
each man shouting out his hope to lie beside her.  
Then shrewd Telemachus began his speech to them:

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“You suitors of my mother, who all have  
such insolent arrogance, let us for now  
enjoy our banquet, but no more shouting,  
for it’s grand to listen to a singer  
as fine as this one—his voice is like a god’s.  
But in the morning let us all assemble,  
sit down for a meeting, so I can speak  
and tell you firmly to depart my home.  
Make yourself some different meals which eat up  
your own possessions, moving house to house.  
But if you think it’s preferable and better  
for one man’s livelihood to be consumed  
without paying anything, I’ll call upon  
the immortal gods to see if Zeus  
will bring about an act of retribution.  
And if you are destroyed inside my home,  
you will not be avenged.”

Telemachus finished.

They all bit their lips, astonished that he’d spoken out  
so boldly. Then, Antinous, son of Eupheithes,  
declared:

“Telemachus, the gods themselves,  
it seems, are teaching you to be a braggart  
and give rash speeches. I do hope that Zeus,  
son of Cronos, does not make you king  
of this sea island Ithaca, even though  
it is your father’s legacy to you.”

At that point, the suitors  
switched to dancing and to singing lovely songs.  
They amused themselves until dark evening came.  
Then each man went to his own house to sleep.

Telemachus moved up to where his room was built  
high in the splendid courtyard, with a spacious view,  
his mind much preoccupied on his way to bed.

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Accompanying him, quick-minded Eurycleia  
held two flaming torches. She was Ops's daughter.  
Of all the female household slaves she was the one  
who loved him most, for she had nursed him as a child.  
He opened the doors of the well-constructed room,  
sat on the bed, and pulled off his soft tunic,  
handed it to the wise old woman, who smoothed it out,  
and folded it, then hung the tunic on a peg  
beside the corded bedstead. Then she left the room,  
pulling the door shut by its silver handle.  
Telemachus lay there all night long, wrapped up  
in sheep's wool, his mind thinking of the journey  
which Athena had earlier proposed to him.

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## Book Two

### Telemachus Prepares for His Voyage

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
Odysseus' dear son jumped up out of bed and dressed.  
He slung a sharp sword from his shoulders, then laced  
his lovely sandals over his shining feet.  
At once he asked the loud-voiced heralds to summon  
all the long-haired Achaean to assembly.

They issued the call, and the Achaeans came,  
gathering quickly. When the assembly had convened,  
Telemachus moved to the meeting. Among the men,  
heroic Aegyptius was the first to speak,  
a man stooped with age.

10

“Men of Ithaca,  
listen now to what I have to say.  
We have not held a general meeting  
or assembly since the day Odysseus  
sailed off in his hollow ships. What man  
has made us gather now? What's his reason?  
Has he heard some news about the army  
and will tell us details of its journey home,  
or is it some other public business  
he will introduce and talk about?”

20

Odysseus' dear son Telemachus began to speak,  
talking to Aegyptius first of all:

“Old man,  
the one who called the people to this meeting  
is not far off, as you will quickly learn.  
I did. For I'm a man who suffers more  
than other men. But I have no reports  
of our returning army, no details  
I've just heard myself to pass along to you,  
nor is there other public business

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I'll announce or talk about. The issue here  
is my own need, for on my household  
troubles have fallen in a double sense.  
First, my noble father's perished, the man  
who was once your king and my kind father.  
And then there's an even greater problem,  
which will quickly and completely shatter  
this entire house, and my whole livelihood  
will be destroyed. These suitors, the dear sons  
of those men here with most nobility,  
are pestering my mother against her will. 40  
They're don't want to journey to her father,  
Icarius, in his home, where he himself  
could set a bride price for his daughter  
and give her to the man he feels he likes,  
the one who pleases him the most. Instead,  
they hang around our house, day after day,  
slaughtering oxen, fat goats, and sheep.  
They keep on feasting, drinking sparkling wine  
without restraint, and they consume so much.  
My home is being demolished in a way 50  
that is not right. You men should be ashamed.”

Telemachus spoke, then threw the sceptre on the ground  
and burst out crying. Everyone there pitied him,  
so all the others men kept silent, unwilling  
to give an angry answer to Telemachus.  
Antinous was the only one to speak. He said:

“Telemachus you boaster, your spirit  
is too unrestrained. How you carry on,  
trying to shame us, since you so desire  
the blame should rest on us. But in your case, 60  
Achaean suitors aren't the guilty ones.  
Your own dear mother is, who understands  
how to use deceit. It's been three years now—  
and soon it will be four—since she began

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to frustrate hearts in our Achaean chests.  
She gives hope to each of us, makes promises  
to everyone, and sends out messages.  
But her intent is different. In her mind  
she has thought up another stratagem:  
in her room she had a large loom set up,  
and started weaving something very big,  
with thread that was quite thin. She said to us:

70

‘Young men, those of you who are my suitors,  
since lord Odysseus is dead, you must wait,  
although you’re keen for me to marry,  
till I complete this cloak—otherwise  
my weaving would be wasted and in vain.  
It is a shroud for warrior Laertes,  
for the day a lethal Fate will strike him dead.  
Then none of the Achaean women here  
will be annoyed with me because a man  
who acquired so many rich possessions  
should lie without a shroud.’

80

“That’s what she said.

And our proud hearts agreed. And so each day  
she wove at her great loom, but every night  
she set up torches and pulled the work apart.  
Three years she fooled Achaeans with this trick.  
They trusted her. But as the seasons passed,  
the fourth year came. Then one of her women  
who knew all the details spoke about them,  
and we caught her undoing her lovely work.  
Thus, we forced her to complete the cloak  
against her will. The suitors now say this,  
so you, deep in your heart, will understand  
and all Achaeans know—send your mother back.  
Tell her she must marry whichever man  
her father tells her and who pleases her.  
But we are not going back to our own lands,

90

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or some place else, not until she marries  
an Achaean man of her own choosing.”

100

Prudent Telemachus then said in reply:

“Antinous, there’s no way I will dismiss  
out of this house against her will the one  
who bore and nursed me. As for my father,  
he’s in a distant land, alive or dead.  
It would be hard for me to compensate  
Icarius with a suitable amount,  
as I would have to do, if I sent her back.  
If I didn’t do that, then her father  
would treat me badly, and some deity  
would send other troubles, since my mother,  
as she left this house, would call upon  
the dreaded Furies. Men would blame me, too.  
That’s why I’ll never issue such an order.  
Just give me a swift ship and twenty rowers—  
so I can make a journey and return  
to various places, to sandy Pylos  
and then to Sparta, to see if I can find  
some news about my father’s voyage home.  
If I hear my father is still living  
and returning home, I could hold out here  
for one more year, although it’s hard for me.  
If I learn he’s dead and gone, I’ll come back  
to my dear native land, build him a tomb,  
and there perform as many funeral rites  
as are appropriate. And after that,  
I’ll give my mother to a husband.”

110

120

Telemachus said this and soon dissolved the meeting.

The men dispersed, each man to his own house.

Telemachus walked away to the ocean shore.

There, once he’d washed his hands in gray salt water,  
to Athena he made this prayer:

130

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“O hear me,  
you who yesterday came to my home  
as a god and ordered me to set out  
in a ship across the murky seas,  
to learn about my father’s voyage back  
after being away so long. All this  
Achaean are preventing, most of all,  
the suitors with their wicked arrogance.”

As he said this prayer, Athena came up close to him, 140  
looking and sounding just like Mentor. She spoke—  
her words had wings:

“You must not delay  
that trip you wish to make. I am a friend  
of your ancestral home, so much so that I  
will furnish a fast ship for you and come  
in person with you. But now you must go home.  
Mingle with the suitors. I’ll go through the town  
and quickly round up a group of comrades,  
all volunteers. In sea-girt Ithaca,  
I’ll choose from the many ships, new and old, 150  
the best one for you, and then, when that ship  
has been made ready and is fit to sail,  
we’ll launch it out into the wine-dark sea.”

*[Telemachus goes down into the storage rooms of the palace and instructs Eurycleia to get some supplies ready for his voyage. He swears her to secrecy.]*

Telemachus went up into the dining hall  
and there rejoined the company of suitors.

Then goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes  
thought of something else. Looking like Telemachus,  
she went all through the city. To every man  
she came up to she gave the same instructions,  
telling them to meet by the fast ship that evening. 160  
Next, she asked Noemon, fine son of Phronius,

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for a swift ship, and he was happy to oblige.  
Then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.  
Athena dragged the fast ship down into the sea  
and stocked it with supplies, all the materials  
well-decked boats have stowed on board, then moved the ship  
to the harbour's outer edge. There they assembled,  
that group of brave companions, and the goddess  
instilled fresh heart in every one of them.

Then bright-eyed Athena told Telemachus  
to come outside, by the entrance to the spacious hall.

170

“Telemachus, your well-armed companions  
are already sitting beside their oars,  
waiting for you to launch the expedition.  
Let's be off, so we don't delay the trip  
a moment longer.”

With these words, Pallas Athena  
quickly led the way, and Telemachus followed.  
Then, with Athena going on board ahead of him,  
Telemachus embarked. She sat in the stern.  
Telemachus sat right beside her, as the men  
untied the stern ropes, then climbed aboard the ship  
and went to seat themselves beside their oarlocks.  
Bright-eyed Athena arranged a fair breeze for them,  
a strong West Wind blowing across the wine-dark sea.  
As the ship sliced straight through the swell on its way forward,  
around the bow began the great song of the waves.  
Then all night long and well beyond the sunrise,  
their ship continued sailing on its journey.

180

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## Book Three

### Telemachus Visits Nestor in Pylos

*[Telemachus and his crew reach Pylos and are welcomed and entertained by Nestor, king of Pylos; Nestor provides a chariot for Telemachus to journey to Sparta and sends his son with him on the trip.]*

## Book Four

### The Suitors Plan to Kill Telemachus

*[Telemachus and Peisistratus arrive at Menelaus' home in Sparta; Menelaus gives a long account of his travels in Egypt, especially his adventures with the Old Man of the Sea, the death of the lesser Ajax, and the death of Agamemnon; Menelaus invites Telemachus to stay, but Telemachus declines.]*

Meanwhile, back in Telemachus' Ithaca, the suitors were outside Odysseus' palace, enjoying themselves by throwing spears and discus on level ground in front—with all the arrogance they usually displayed. Their two leaders, Antinous and handsome Eurymachus, were sitting there—by far the best of all the suitors. Then Noemon, Phronius' son, came up to question Antinous. He said:

“Antinous,  
in our hearts do we truly know or not  
when Telemachus will journey back  
from sandy Pylos? He went away  
taking a ship of mine which I now need  
to make the trip across to spacious Elis.”

10

He finished. In their hearts the suitors were amazed. They had no idea Telemachus had gone to Pylos, land of Neleus, and still believed

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he was somewhere with the flocks on his estates.  
Antinous, Eueithes' son, then spoke to them.  
He was annoyed, his black heart filled with rage,  
his flashing eyes a fiery blaze:

20

“Here's trouble.

In his overbearing way Telemachus,  
with this voyage of his, has now achieved  
significant success. And we believed  
he'd never see it through. Come now,  
give me a swift ship and twenty comrades,  
so I can watch for him and set an ambush,  
as he navigates his passage through the strait  
dividing Ithaca from rugged Samos,  
and bring this trip searching for his father  
to a dismal end.”

30

Antinous picked out his men,  
twenty of the best. They went down to the shore  
and dragged a swift black ship into deep water.  
The suitors then embarked and sailed away  
on their trip across the water, minds fully bent  
on slaughtering Telemachus. Out at sea,  
half way between Ithaca and rugged Samos,  
there's the rocky island Asteris. It's small,  
but ships can moor there in a place with openings  
in both directions. The Achaeans waited there  
and set up their ambush for Telemachus.

40

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

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). 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.

The following Ian Johnston translations are available as printed books from Richer Resources Publications:

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*

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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

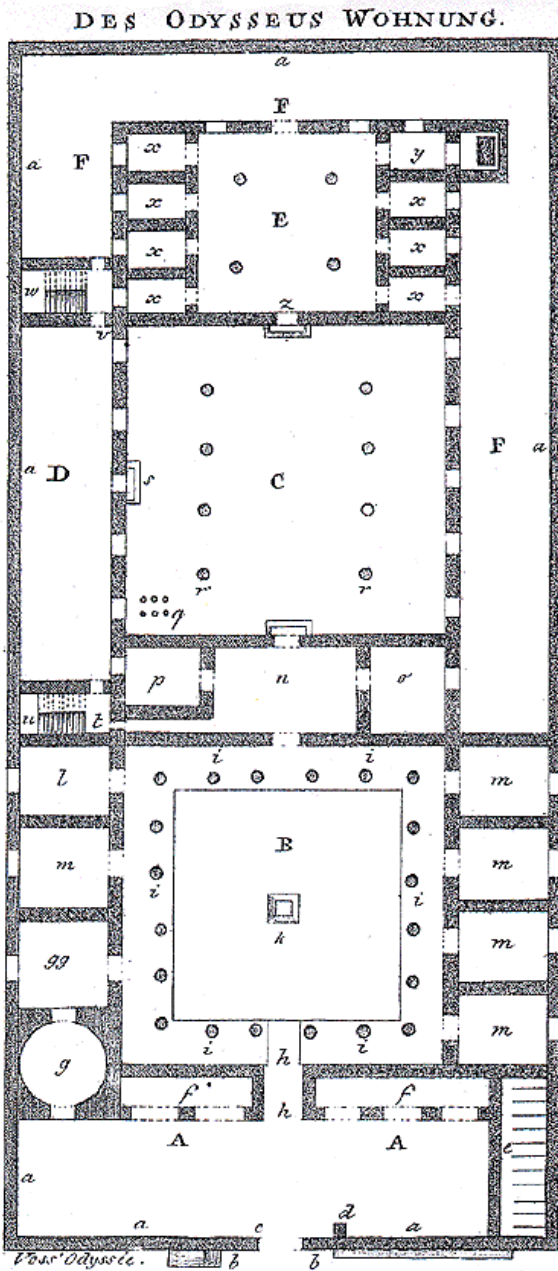
Ground Plan of Odysseus' Palace

Glossary of Names

Map Showing Locations of Odysseus' Adventures

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Odysseus' Palace, According to Voss (1820)  
 (with permission of Carlos Parada of the Greek Mythology Link)



## Labels for the Diagram on the Facing Page

- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room
- m. various rooms
- n. vestibule
- o. room for bathing
- p. activity room
- q. wine preparation room
- r. pillars
- s. simple doors
- t. door from vestibule
- u. stair to Odysseus' rooms
- v. door to women's rooms
- w. stairs to Penelope's room
- x. ground floor rooms
- y. Penelope's bedroom
- z. door
- A. courtyard and fence
- B. level middle court
- C. the hall
- D. passage by-passing the hall
- E. Penelope's work room
- F. rear courtyard

When Odysseus kills the Suitors he is standing with his bow at the lower entrance to the main hall, C. The doors to the women's quarters (at v and z) have been locked. The only way out for the Suitors is a small door at s, which leads to the passageway D. Odysseus places Eumaeus at the end of the passage (at point t) to prevent any Suitor getting out into the courtyard B.

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## Glossary

The following glossary includes the names of the main characters and places in this abridged *Odyssey* and a few others.

**Achaean:** a collective name of the Greeks (used interchangeably with **Danaans** and **Argives**)

**Achilles:** son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaean warriors at Troy, where he died and was buried.

**Aegisthus:** son of Thyestes, lover of Clytaemnestra and murderer of Agamemnon.

**Aeolus:** son of Hippotas, god of the winds, living on the island Aeolia.

**Agamemnon:** son of Atreus, king of Argos, leader of the Achaean forces which attacked and destroyed Troy.

**Agelaus:** son of Damastor, one of the Suitors.

**Ajax:** son of Telamon, greatest Achaean warrior after Achilles at Troy, where he died and was buried..

**Alcinous:** son of Nausithous, husband of Arete, king of the Phaeacians.

**Amphimedon:** son of Melaneus, one of the Suitors.

**Amphinomus:** son of Nisus, one of the Suitors from Dulichium.

**Amphitrite:** divine wife of Poseidon, a sea goddess.

**Anticleia:** daughter of Autolycus, mother of Odysseus.

**Antinous:** son of Eupheithes, one of the leaders of the Suitors.

**Antiphates:** king of the Laestrygonians.

**Aphrodite:** divine daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of erotic love.

**Apollo:** divine son of Zeus and Leto, often called Phoebus or Phoebus Apollo.

**Ares:** divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of war.

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**Arete:** wife of Alcinous, queen of the Phaeacians.

**Argives:** see **Achaeans**.

**Artemis:** divine daughter of Zeus and Leto, goddess of the hunt.

**Athena:** divine daughter of Zeus, goddess of wisdom.

**Calypso:** daughter of Atlas, goddess living on the island of Ogygia.

**Cephalenia:** an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus' kingdom, often applied to that kingdom and its people generally.

**Charybdis:** a divine sea monster which acts as a whirlpool.

**Cicones:** inhabitants of Ismarus, a city close to Troy.

**Circe:** a goddess living on the island of Aeaea.

**Clytaemnestra:** daughter of Tyndareus, wife of Agememnon.

**Cyclopes** (singular **Cyclops**): monstrous creatures with one eye.

**Cronos:** father of Zeus, overthrown by his son and imprisoned deep in the earth.

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

**Demodocus:** the blind minstrel in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.

**Dolius:** an old servant of Laertes and Penelope.

**Dulichium:** an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus' kingdom.

**Eumaeus:** a servant of Odysseus, keeper of pigs.

**Eupeithes:** father of Antinous (one of the Suitors).

**Eurycleia:** daughter of Ops, elderly family servant to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.

**Eurylochus:** one of Odysseus' companions, related to him by marriage.

**Eurymachus:** son of Polybus, one of the leading Suitors.

**Eurynome:** housekeeper in Odysseus' and Penelope's home.

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**Furies:** goddesses of blood revenge.

**Giants:** the race of divinities before Zeus, many now imprisoned by Zeus deep in the earth.

**Hades:** god of the underworld, also the underworld itself.

**Hephaestus:** divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of the forge, divine artisan.

**Hercules:** mortal son of Zeus, made into a god after his death.

**Hermes:** divine son of Zeus and the nymph Maia, messenger god, often called “killer of Argus.”

**Hyperion:** god of the sun (also called **Helios**)

**Ilion:** another name for Troy.

**Ithaca:** island off the west coast of mainland Greece, kingdom ruled by Odysseus.

**Laertes:** son of Arcesius, father of Odysseus.

**Laestrygonians:** race of giants living in Telpylus.

**Leiodes:** son of Oenops, one of the Suitors, a soothsayer.

**Leocritus:** son of Euenor, one of the Suitors.

**Medon:** a herald in Odysseus’ palace.

**Melanthius:** son of Dolius, a goatherd friendly to the Suitors.

**Menelaus:** son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, king of Sparta.

**Mentor:** son of Alcimus, steward of Odysseus’ place, an old companion of Odysseus.

**Nausicaa:** daughter of Arete, princess of the Phaeacians.

**Nestor:** son of Neleus, king of Pylos.

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**Oceanus:** the river running around the outer rim of the world.

**Odysseus:** king of Ithaca, son of Laertes, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus.

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

**Ogygia:** island where Calypso lives and where she detains Odysseus.

**Orestes:** son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, killer of Aegisthus.

**Penelope:** daughter of Icarius, wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachus.

**Persephone:** wife of Hades, goddess of the underworld.

**Phaeacians:** inhabitants of Scheria, master sailors.

**Phemius:** son of Terpes, the professional minstrel in Odysseus' palace.

**Philoetius:** a goat and cattle herder on Ithaca friendly to Odysseus.

**Polyphemus:** a cyclops, son of Poseidon.

**Pontonous:** a herald in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.

**Poseidon:** god of the sea, brother of Zeus, often called “encircler of the earth” or “Earthshaker.”

**Priam:** king of Troy, killed when the city was captured by Achaeans.

**Pylos:** city state in the south Peloponnese ruled by Nestor.

**Pytho:** the location of the shrine of Apollo.

**Same:** an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus' kingdom.

**Scheria:** distant land where the Phaeacians live.

**Scylla:** a monster with many heads.

**Sirens:** two singers who lure sailors to their destruction.

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**Sparta:** city in the central Peloponnese ruled by Menelaus.

**Styx:** river in Hades by which the gods swear their most solemn oaths.

**Suitors:** aristocratic young men courting Penelope in hopes of marrying her.

**Teiresias:** a blind prophet from Thebes.

**Telemachus:** son of Odysseus and Penelope.

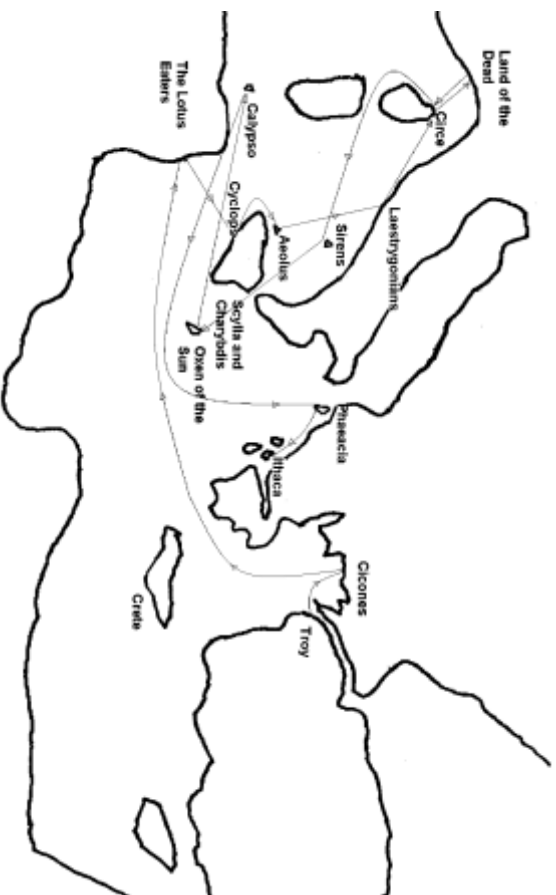
**Troy:** city in Asia Minor, near the Hellespont, besieged by the Achaean (Greek) forces for ten years.

**Zacynthus:** an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus' kingdom.

**Zeus:** major divine presence on Olympus, often called "son of Cronos."

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## Map of Odysseus' Wanderings



This map represents a possible route for Odysseus' wanderings.

The most confusing geographical point is the location of Calypso's island, which some commentators place far in the west at the Straits of Gibraltar, others just off the coast of North Africa, and others further to the east.

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# Homer The Odyssey Abridged

A New Translation by Ian Johnston

Homer's *Odyssey*, composed in the eighth century BC, is the most influential and most popular epic poem in our cultural traditions.

The story of Odysseus' adventures on his return home from the Trojan War has inspired the imaginations of readers for centuries and has become an integral part of our civilization's greatest artistic achievements, exerting its appeal on writers, painters, poets, film makers, and others, right up to the present time.

Ian Johnston's abridged version of this magnificent poem, approximately one third the length of the original, is based upon his acclaimed new translation of the entire work (also published by Richer Resources Publications). Every line in the abridged text comes from Homer's poem, and a few short summary comments are included to keep the narrative thrust of the action coherent. This abridgment also has explanatory footnotes, a glossary of names and places, a floor plan of Odysseus' palace, and a map of his route home. It thus serves as an ideal entry into Homer's poem for those who do not have the time yet to tackle the full poem.

## About the Translator



Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and educated in Canada and England. He has a BSc from McGill in Geology and Chemistry, a BA from Bristol in English and Greek, and an MA from Toronto in English. For many years he taught 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*. His translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have recently been published in both book and audiobook form. He is now retired and living in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

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