

The Iliad

Book Thirteen The Trojans Attack the Ships

[Zeus turns away from the battle; Poseidon secretly helps the Achaeans, talks to the two Ajaxes and other warriors; Hector keeps advancing until stopped by close-packed Achaeans; Poseidon talks with Idomeneus; Idomeneus and Meriones meet at the huts, then return to battle; Idomeneus' exploits in the fight; Aeneas moves against him; Menelaus on the battle field; Polydamas gives advice to Hector; Hector insults Paris; Ajax and Hector exchange boasts; the armies resume the fight.]

Thus Zeus brought Hector and the Trojans to the ships.
Then he left the soldiers there to carry on their strife,
their wretched endless war. He turned his shining gaze
away from them, looking far off into the distance,
at the land of Thracian horsemen, Mysians,
men who fight hand to hand, proud Hippemolgi,
who drink mare's milk, to the most righteous men of all,
the Abii. Zeus no longer turned his radiant eyes
toward Troy, for in his heart he did not believe
[10] a single one of the immortal gods would move
to give assistance to the Trojans or Danaans.

But mighty Earthshaker Poseidon was keeping watch.
High on the tallest crest of wooded Samothrace
he sat looking down upon the war going on.
From that point, Mount Ida was clearly visible,
Priam's city, too, and the Achaean ships.
He'd come up from the sea and seated himself there,
pitying Achaeans, as Trojans beat them back,
and nursing a powerful anger against Zeus.
[20] Poseidon came down quickly from that rocky peak,
moving swiftly on his feet. Mountain peaks and woods
trembled under Poseidon's immortal stride.
He took three paces—with the fourth he reached his goal,
Aegae, where his famous palace had been built
of eternal gold and marble deep within the sea.
Going inside, he harnessed to his chariot

swift bronze-hooved horses with flowing golden manes.
Dressed in gold, he took his well-made golden whip,
climbed in the chariot, then set off across the waves.
[30] From the depths, sea creatures played around him everywhere,
acknowledging their king. The joyful ocean parted.
He sped on quickly, keeping the bronze axle dry.
The prancing horses carried him to the Achaean ships.

Half-way between Tenedos and rocky Imbros,
a wide cavern sits deep within the sea. In that spot,
Earthshaker Poseidon reined in his horses,
freed them from the chariot, and threw down ambrosia,
food for them to eat. Around their feet he placed
golden hobbles which they could not slip or break,
[40] so they'd remain secure there till their lord's return.
Then Poseidon moved on to the Achaean camp.

At that point, Trojans, like some fire or windstorm,
marched behind Hector, son of Priam, in a mass,
shouting and screaming with excitement, hoping
to seize Achaean ships and kill the best men there.
But Poseidon, who encircles and shakes the earth,
roused the Argives, once he'd moved up from the sea.
Taking on the shape and tireless voice of Calchas,
he first spoke to the Ajaxes, both keen to fight.

[50] "You Ajaxes, you must save Achaean troops.
Think of your fighting power, not cold flight.
In other places, I don't fear the Trojans,
whose powerful arms have brought hordes of them
across our wall. For well-armed Achaeans
will check them all. But I fear them here,
where we may experience disaster,
because of Hector, who leads their charge.
He's like a man possessed, a blazing fire,
as if he were a son of mighty Zeus.

[60] But perhaps some god will inspire the hearts

in both your chests, so you two can stand firm.
You could get other men to do the same.
Hector may be keen, but you could push him
back from our swift ships, even if Zeus himself
is driving him ahead.”

Poseidon finished speaking.
Then, the shaker and encircler of the earth
touched both men with his staff, infusing them
with power, strengthening their legs and upper arms.
Then Poseidon left. Just as a swift-winged hawk
[70] takes off while hovering above some high sheer rock,
swooping down over the plain to hunt another bird—
that how Earthshaker Poseidon went off then.
Swift Ajax, son of Oïleus, was the first
to recognize the god. At once he spoke to Ajax,
son of Telamon:

“Ajax, one of the gods
dwelling on Olympus, in a prophet’s shape,
tells us both to fight on by the ships.
For that man was no prophet Calchas,
who reads our omens. It was easy for me,
[80] as he went away, to see that from the back
by the markings on his feet and legs.
Besides, it’s easy to recognize the gods.
So now the spirit here in my own chest
is even keener than before to fight.
My upper arms have lots of energy.
I feel it also in my lower limbs.”

Telamonian Ajax then answered Oïlean Ajax:

“I’m ready to wrap my conquering hands
around my spear. My fighting power grows.
[90] My feet can now move fast. So I’m eager
to meet Hector, son of Priam, one on one—

the man whose fury so desires this fight.”

As the two Ajaxes talked like this to one another,
relishing the warlike spirit the god had put
into their hearts, the Encircler of the Earth
was encouraging Achaeans at the rear,
those whose spirits were recovering by the swift ships,
their limbs exhausted from their anguishing ordeals,
their hearts weighed down with sorrow at the sight
[100] of Trojan soldiers coming over their great wall.
When they saw that, their eyes shed tears—they thought
they’d not escape destruction. Earthshaker Poseidon
moved round with ease, bringing strength into the ranks.
He moved first to encourage Teucer and Leïtus,
then brave Peneleous, Thoas, Deïpyrus,
then Meriones and Antilochus, both skilled
in war shouts. He spoke to them—his words had wings:

“Shame on you Argives, nothing but young boys!
I’m counting on your strength to save our ships.
[110] If you’re holding back in this grim fight,
then now’s the day the Trojans overcome us.
Alas! What my eyes witness here astounds me,
a dreadful thing I never thought would happen—
Trojans moving up to our own ships,
men who previously were shy, like deer,
which in the woods are prey to jackals,
wolves, and leopards, as they wander round,
alone and frightened, with no will to fight.
Before now, Trojans never wished to stand
[120] confronting the fierce fighting power
of Achaean arms, not even for a moment.
But now, far from their city, they fight here,
right by our hollow ships. And the reason’s this—
our leadership’s been bad, our army slack.
For those who quarrel with our general
won’t protect our fast-moving ships from harm,

and so are being cut down among them there.
But even if wide-ruling Agamemnon,
heroic son of Atreus, is to blame,
[130] if he really is the reason for all this,
because he treated swift Achilles badly,
in this battle we must hold back nothing.
Let's fix all this—and quickly. In their hearts
fine men can change. It's bad if you restrain
your fighting spirit any longer,
especially you, the best of all our troops.
Myself, I wouldn't argue with a man
not keen to fight because he is a coward.
But in you my heart is disappointed.
[140] Friends, by this hanging back you'll help to make
an even worse disaster. Let each of you
feel shame and indignation in his heart.
A great battle has just started. Hector,
skilled at war cries, is fighting by our ships.
His force has smashed our gates, our long bolts, too.”

By rousing men this way, Earthshaker Poseidon
pushed Achaeans into action. Round both Ajaxes
soldiers made a stand and strongly held their ground.
If Ares had come there, he would have approved of them,
[150] as would Athena, who inspires men in war.
Those known for their great bravery did not back off.
They fought lord Hector and the Trojans spear for spear,
shield with layered shield, in close-packed formation,
shields linked together and helmet touching helmet,
troops shoulder to shoulder. As men moved their heads,
horsehair crests on shining helmet ridges touched—
that's how densely packed they stood in that formation.
Their strong hands held the spears out so they overlapped.
Their minds were firm and fully ready for the fight.

[160] The Trojans came on in a mass, led by Hector,
always charging forward, like a rolling boulder,

which some river in a winter flood dislodges
from a cliff beside its banks, its great flood eroding
what supports that lethal stone. In its fall, it bounces—
woods crash underneath it, as it accelerates
in a straight line, unimpeded—then it hits the plain,
where, for all its impetus, its motion stops.

That's how Hector threatened then to smash his way
with ease down to the sea, to Achaea's huts and ships.

[170] But when he ran into the tight-packed lines of men,
he came close but was held in check. Achaea's sons
faced up to him with swords, with double-bladed spears,
and pushed him back. Shaken, Hector had to give ground.
He let out a piercing shout, calling to his Trojans:

“Trojans, Lycians, you Dardan spearmen,
hold your place. Achaeans won't keep me back,
not for long. Even though they've set themselves
in a defensive wall, I think they will retreat
before my spear, if the greatest of the gods,

[180] Hera's loud-thundering mate, inspires me.”

Saying this, Hector gave heart and spirit to each man.
Deïphobus, son of Priam, moved out before them,
full of ambitious hopes. Holding his round shield
in front of him, he stepped lightly forward,
under cover of that shield. Then Meriones
after taking aim, threw his shining spear at him.
He didn't miss. He struck that round leather shield.
But the spear did not break through. Before it could,
it snapped off at the socket. Then Deïphobus,

[190] his heart afraid of warlike Meriones' spear,
held his leather shield at arm's length away from him.
But Meriones had withdrawn into the group
of his companions, upset at his double loss—
the victory and the spear which he'd just shattered.
He set off for the Achaean huts and ships,
to fetch another spear he'd left inside his hut.

The others kept on fighting. The din was constant.
The first to kill a man was Teucer, son of Telamon.
He slew Imbrius, a spearman, son of Mentor,
[200] who owned many horses. He'd lived in Pedaeum
before Achaea's sons arrived. He married
one of Priam's bastard daughters, Medesicaste.
When the curved ships of the Danaans came to Troy,
he went back. The people there thought much of him.
He lived with Priam, who honoured him as well,
as if he were his child. But the son of Telamon
with a long spear thrust hit Imbrius below the ear.
Teucer pulled the weapon back. Imbrius collapsed.
Just as an ash tree growing on a mountain top,
[210] visible from every side, is chopped down by bronze,
its foliage crashing to the ground—that's how he fell.
His armour, finely decorated bronze, rang out,
reverberating round him. Teucer then jumped out,
eager to strip away his armour, but as he charged,
Hector threw a shining spear at him. Teucer,
seeing it coming, safely dodged the bronze spear point.
But Hector's spear hit Amphinachus, son of Cteatus,
Actor's son, in the chest, as he was coming up,
about to join the battle. He fell with a crash,
[220] his armour echoing around him. Hector ran up,
eager to tug away the helmet tightly bound
around the temples of brave Amphinachus.
But with his bright spear Ajax lunged at Hector,
as he came forward. He didn't touch his flesh,
for Hector was encased in terrifying bronze.
But Ajax struck the central boss on Hector's shield,
and his great power pushed him back. Hector withdrew
and left the corpses, so Achaeans dragged them off.
Amphinachus was carried back to the Achaean troops
[230] by Stichius and by noble Menestheus,
who led Athenian troops. The two Ajaxes,
still full of battle rage, hauled Imbrius away.

As two lions snatch a goat from sharp-toothed hounds,
then take it in their jaws off through thick underbrush,
holding it well off the ground, that's how both Ajaxes
held Imbrius up. They stripped off his armour.
In his anger at the killing of Amphimachus,
Oïlean Ajax hacked through the tender neck,
then, with a swing of his body, threw away the head,
[240] like some ball, into the crowd. It fell into the dust,
right at Hector's feet.

At that point, Poseidon,
angry that his grandson Amphimachus had died
in that harsh fight, went through Achaea's huts and ships,
rousing Achaeans, planning trouble for the Trojans.
He met the famous spearman Idomeneus
coming from a comrade who'd just left the fight.
A sharp bronze blow had struck him in the knee.
His companions brought him in. Idomeneus,
having issued his instructions to the healers,
[250] was going to his hut, still eager to fight on.
The mighty Earthshaker spoke to him, making his voice
sound like Thoas, son of Andraemon, who ruled
Aetolians all through Pleuron and steep Calydon,
honoured by his people like a god:

“Idomeneus,
Cretan counsellor, what's happened to those threats
Achaea's sons once made against the Trojans?”

Idomeneus, Cretan leader, then said in reply:

“As far as I know, Thoas, no one's to blame.
For all of us are very skilled in fighting,
[260] and no one is timid here or frightened,
or, gripped by doubts, holds back from evil war.
Somehow it must please Cronos' mighty son
that Achaeans perish now without a name,

far from Argos. But Thoas, in times past,
you were a man who always stood his ground
and encouraged other men to do the same,
if you saw someone shirking. Don't stop now.
Issue your instructions to each man."

Earthshaker Poseidon then replied:

"Idomeneus,
[270] may the man who will not fight today,
and willingly, never return from Troy.
May he become a toy for dogs to play with.
But get your armour and then come with me.
If we're to work well, we must work together,
although we're only two. For courage
of the highest sort comes when men combine,
even among men worth very little,
and we two know how to battle with the best."

Having said this, Poseidon went away, a god
[280] among the toiling men, and Idomeneus
went into his well-made hut, strapped fine armour
round his body, took two spears and then strode out,
looking like a lightning bolt which Cronos' son
grips in his hand and hurls down from bright Olympus,
revealing in its dazzling flash a sign for mortal men,
that's how, as he moved, bronze glinted on his chest.

Meriones, his brave attendant, met him
close by the hut. He'd come in search of a bronze spear.
Strong Idomeneus said to him:

"Meriones,
[290] swift-footed son of Molus, the companion
I cherish most, why have you come here,
leaving the war and giving up the fight?
Have you been hurt? Or wounded by a spear?"

Are you in pain? Or have you come with news?
Me, I don't want to stay here in my hut.
I want to fight."

Wise Meriones then replied:

"Idomeneus, counsellor of bronze-armed Cretans,
I've come to get a spear, if by any chance
there's one left in your huts. The one I had
[300] shattered in pieces when I hit the shield
of that arrogant fighter Deiphobus."

To this, Idomeneus, Cretan leader, then replied:

"Spears? As many as you want—in my hut
twenty-one stand against the sunny wall,
Trojans spears I take from warriors I kill.
I never think of fighting hostile troops
from far away—that's why I've got there
brightly shining spears and embossed shields,
with helmets, too, and body armour."

[310] Wise Meriones then answered Idomeneus:

"In my hut, too, and in my black ship,
there's lots of Trojan loot. But it's not close—
too inconvenient. For I can claim
I don't neglect my fighting prowess.
Whenever battles start, I stand and fight
with men in front, in those encounters
where men win glory. Other Achaeans
might not know my fighting quality, but you,
I think you've seen it for yourself."

[320] Idomeneus, leader of the Cretans, answered Meriones:

"I know your courage. Why talk that way?"

If by the ships right now we were naming
the best men for an ambush, where one sees
a warrior's courage most conspicuously,
where cowards and brave men truly show themselves—
for a coward's colour always changes,
the man's so nervous he just can't sit still,
shifting around, resting first on one foot,
then another, heart pounding in his chest,
[330] his mind preoccupied with thoughts of death,
and his teeth keep chattering in his mouth,
while a brave man's colour never changes,
he feels no great fear as he takes his place
in the group selected for the ambush,
no—he prays the killing will soon start.
In such a scene no one could challenge you,
or fault your battle rage or your strong arms.
For if, in the middle of the fighting,
some flying weapon hit you, or you were stabbed,
[340] that weapon wouldn't strike your neck or body
in the back. No, you'd be hit in front,
in chest or stomach, as you charged ahead,
getting your joy from fighting at the front.
But let's not chat about this any longer,
standing here as if we were young children.
That could make some people very angry.
Go in my hut. Get yourself a heavy spear.”

Idomeneus finished. Then Meriones,
like swift Ares, quickly took a bronze spear from the hut.
[350] Filled with an urge to fight, he went with Idomeneus.
Just as man-killing Ares sets off to battle
accompanied by his son Terror, just as strong,
as fearless, who makes any man afraid,
no matter how courageous he may be—the two of them
setting out from Thrace, having armed themselves to fight
Ephyreans or brave Phlegians, giving glory
to one of them, without listening to either side—

that's how Meriones and Idomeneus,
leaders of men, set off to battle, fully armed
[360] in glittering bronze. Meriones was the first to speak:

“Son of Deucalion, where do you think
we should rejoin the fight? On the right side
of the whole army, the middle, or the left?
To my mind, this last place is the one
where long-haired Achaeans stand most in need.”

Cretan leader Idomeneus answered Meriones:

“In the middle there are other men
to shore up the troops—the two Ajaxes,
Teucer, too, the best Achaean archer,
[370] good in hand-to-hand combat as well.
Those warriors will give Hector, Priam's son,
all he can handle, even if he's keen
to fight and really strong. He'll find it hard,
though in full battle frenzy, to overcome
their spirit, their all-powerful hands,
and then burn the fleet, unless Zeus himself,
son of Cronos, hurls a flaming firebrand
on our swift ships. That son of Telamon,
great Ajax, will not yield to any mortal man
[380] who eats Demeter's grain, who can be smashed
by massive rocks or bronze. He'd not give way
in a stand-up fight, not even to Achilles,
who destroys ranks of men and is so fast—
in running no one can beat Achilles.
No, we should move toward the army's left,
as you say, find out as soon as possible
if we'll win glory or give it to another.”

Idomeneus spoke. Like swift Ares, Meriones
led the way until they reached the army,
[390] where Idomeneus had instructed him to go.

When Trojans saw mighty Idomeneus,
like some flame, and his attendant Meriones
in his richly shining armour, they called out
to each other in the crowd, then made a massive charge.

By the ships' sterns both sides met in frantic battle.
Just as keen winds sometimes whip up gusts of air,
when dirt lies heavy on the roads, and stir up
all the dust into huge clouds—that's how this fight
gathered momentum then. In that crowd, men's hearts
[400] were set to slaughter one another with sharp bronze.
That man-destroying combat bristled with long spears
gripped by men to hack each other's flesh apart.
As troops moved up tightly bunched, men's eyes went blind
in the blaze of glittering bronze, glaring helmets,
finely polished body armour, gleaming shields.
It would take a hard man to find joy in the sight
of all that suffering and show no trace of sorrow.

Then two mighty sons of Cronos, at cross purposes,
made painful trouble for those mortal warriors.
[410] Zeus wanted victory for Hector and his Trojans,
to give swift Achilles glory—not that he wished
Achaea's army to be totally destroyed
in front of Troy, but he did want to honour Thetis,
and her great-hearted son, as well, Achilles.
But Poseidon moved around among the Argives,
urging action, coming out in secret from the sea,
angry that Trojans were destroying Achaeans,
and incensed at Zeus. Both gods had a common father—
the same family, too—but Zeus was older and more wise.
[420] So Poseidon avoided giving any overt help.
He did his work in secret through the army,
in human form, urging men to fight. So these two
looped the cords of powerful war and deadly strife
around both contending armies, then pulled them taut,
a knot no one could undo or slip away from,

a knot that broke the limbs of many fighting men.

Idomeneus, though old enough to have grey hair,
called out to the Danaans and then charged the Trojans,
driving them away. He killed Othryoneus,

[430] a man from Cabetes, who now lived in Troy.

He'd come recently, responding to the news of war.
He'd asked to marry Cassandra, most beautiful
of Priam's daughters, without paying a bride price.
Instead he'd promised a great action, saying he'd drive
Achaes's sons from Troy. Old Priam had agreed,
promising he'd give her to him. Othryoneus,
trusting the king's promises, went off to fight.
Aiming his shining spear at him, Idomeneus threw.
The spear struck him as he was striding forward.

[440] The bronze breastplate he was wearing didn't help him—
the spear lodged in his gut. He fell down with a crash.
Then Idomeneus cried out in triumph:

"Othryoneus,
of all mortal men I'd consider you
the happiest, if you'd accomplished
all those things you promised Dardan Priam,
so he'd give you his daughter. But come,
we'll make you the same proposition—
and we'll deliver. We'll give you the loveliest
of Agamemnon's daughters, bring her here

[450] from Argos, so you can wed her, if you,
for your part, will join us to destroy
the well-built city Ilion. So let's go.
We can arrange the marriage contract
by our seaworthy ships. We'll be generous
about your marriage price."

As he said this,
warrior Idomeneus dragged him by the feet
through lines of fighting men. But Asius then stepped up

to guard Othryoneus. He was on foot,
going before his horses, which his charioteer
[460] kept so close they breathed on Asius' shoulders.
He'd set his heart on hitting Idomeneus.
But Idomeneus was too quick for him.
He hit Asius with a spear below his chin,
forcing the bronze straight through his neck. Asius fell.
Just as a mountain oak, poplar, or tall pine falls,
cut down by working men with freshly sharpened axes,
to make timbers for some ship, that how Asius lay,
stretched out there before his chariot and horses,
gagging, his fingers clawing at the bloody dust.
[470] His charioteer, scared out of whatever wits he'd had,
didn't think of wheeling round his horses to escape
his enemies' hands. Taking aim, bold Antilochus
speared him in the stomach. The bronze breastplate he wore
was no protection. The spear struck in his stomach.
He fell out of the well-made chariot gasping.
Antilochus, brave Nestor's son, then drove the horses
from the Trojans over to well-armed Achaeans.

Grieving the loss of Asius, Deïphobus
came up to Idomeneus and hurled his polished spear.
[480] Idomeneus, seeing him clearly, dodged the spear,
covering himself with the round shield he carried,
one made of bull's hide and shining bronze in rings,
with two cross braces fitted on. Idomeneus
crouched down underneath this shield. The flying bronze
grazed the metal with a rasping sound. But that throw
from the strong arm of Deïphobus wasn't wasted.
His spear hit Hypsenor, son of Hippasus,
his people's shepherd, low down in the liver.
His legs collapsed. Deïphobus gave a noisy shout,
boasting aloud about his triumph:

[490] "Now Asius
is avenged! As he goes down to Hades,

the mighty gatekeeper, his heart, I think,
will be pleased I've given him an escort."

Deiphobus spoke. His boast depressed the Argives,
and gave special pain to warlike Antilochus.
Despite his sorrow, Antilochus did not forget
his comrade. He came running up and stood over him,
with his shield above his body. Two loyal companions,
Mecistus, son of Echius, and Alastor, bent down,
[500] then carried Hypsenor groaning to the hollow ships.

Idomeneus did not relent his fighting frenzy.
He kept on trying to wrap some Trojan soldier
in death's dark night or to fall himself, defending
Achaeans from disaster. He killed Alcathous,
dear warrior son of divinely bred Aesyetes,
Anchises' son-in-law. He'd married Hippodamia,
eldest of the daughters. Her mother and father
had set their heart's love on her when she was at home.
She surpassed all girls her age in beauty, work,
[510] good sense. That's why the very finest man in Troy
had married her. Now at Idomeneus' hands
Poseidon slaughtered Alcathous. The god cast a spell—
he covered his bright eyes and froze his glistening limbs,
so he couldn't flee or dodge the spear, but stood there,
motionless, like a pillar or some high leafy tree.
Warrior Idomeneus hit him with his spear
square in the chest, shattering the bronze breastplate,
which earlier had kept his skin untouched by death.
But now it cracked aloud as the spear ripped through.
[520] He fell with a crash, the spear stuck in his chest.
The power of his heart beat made that spear shaft quiver,
right to the butt, until great Ares stilled its force.
Idomeneus then spoke out, boasting aloud
about his triumph:

"Deiphobus,

since you like to brag this way, my friend,
shall we now call it even, three men killed
a fair exchange for one? Why don't you step out—
face me here, so you can see for yourself
what kind of child of Zeus confronts you.

[530] Zeus first fathered Minos to rule Crete.

Minos then fathered worthy Deucalion.
Deucalion fathered me, a king ruling
many men in spacious Crete. Now my ships
have brought me here as a destroying force,
against you, your father, and other Trojans.”

Idomeneus spoke. Deïphobus was of two minds—
should he step back and pick out a companion
from stout-hearted Trojans, or should he try to fight
all on his own? As he thought about his options,

[540] he thought his best plan was to find Aeneas.

He met him standing at the back, among the crowd,
for Aeneas, who excelled among the warriors,
always resented Priam for not showing him
enough respect. Deïphobus approached Aeneas,
then spoke to him—his words had wings.

“Aeneas, Trojan counsellor,
now you must defend your brother-in-law,
if you feel any grief. It's urgent.
Come with me and fight for Alcathous,
who was your sister's husband. He raised you

[550] as an infant in his home. Now Idomeneus,
that celebrated spearman, has just killed him.”

Deïphobus finished. His words stirred the heart
in Aeneas' chest. He strode off to face Idomeneus,
fiercely eager for this fight. But no fear gripped
Idomeneus, as if he were some pampered child.
He stood his ground. Just as a wild mountain boar,
trusting its own strength, stands firm against a mob,

a crowd of men who chase it in some lonely place,
with hair bristling along its back, its eyes lit up,
[560] like fire, gnashing its teeth ferociously, eager
to toss dogs and men aside—that's just the way
the famous spearman Idomeneus stood then,
without backing off, as swift Aeneas came at him.
He called out to the companions he could see,
Ascalaphus, Aphareus, Deïpyrus, Meriones,
Antilochus—all famous for their war shouts.
Idomeneus yelled, urging them to help him—
his words had wings:

“My friends—over here!
I'm alone, so bring some help. I'm worried.
[570] Aeneas, who moves fast, is coming at me.
He's powerful at killing men in battle.
He's also in the flower of his youth,
when strength is at its peak. Were I his age
and both of us had equal courage,
he or I would soon win a huge victory.”

Idomeneus finished. All his companions,
united by a common spirit, came at his call.
They stood beside him as a unit, sloping their shields
down from their shoulders. On his side, Aeneas
[580] called out to those companions he'd caught sight of—
Deïphobus, Paris, and Agenor—leaders,
just as he was, of those Trojan warriors.
Men came up behind them. Just as a flock of sheep
follows the ram from pasture to their water,
filling the shepherd's heart with joy, so Aeneas
was happy in his chest to see that band of soldiers
standing there around him.

The men now battled on,
close combat with long spears, over Alcatous.
As they lunged at one another in the crowd of men,

[590] their bronze chests echoed with the fearful noise.

Two men stood out above the rest for bravery—
Aeneas and Idomeneus, equals of Ares,
striving to slash each other's flesh with ruthless bronze.
First, Aeneas threw a spear at Idomeneus,
who, seeing it coming, eluded the bronze spear,
which then impaled itself in earth, still quivering—
it had flown from that strong hand but missed its target.
Then Idomeneus struck Oenomaus in the stomach,
smashing the front plate on his body armour.

[600] His bowels spilled out, as he dropped in the dust
and clutched the dirt. Idomeneus yanked his long spear
out of the corpse. But he couldn't strip away
any of the lovely armour on its shoulders,
for he was being attacked with flying weapons.
His lower limbs were no longer fast enough
for him to charge in quickly after his own spear
or dodge aside. He could keep grim death at bay
in pitched battle, but that's all his legs could do—
they were too slow for him to run away from combat.

[610] As Idomeneus retreated step by step,
Deïphobus tried to hit him with a shining spear—
he'd always hated Idomeneus—but he missed,
hitting Ascalaphus instead, a son of Ares.
The heavy spear passed straight through his shoulder.
He collapsed in the dust, hands clawing at the ground.

Loud-voiced mighty Ares was not yet aware
his own son had fallen in the killing zone.
He sat on the highest part of Mount Olympus,
under golden clouds, confined by Zeus' will,

[620] along with the rest of the immortal gods,
forbidden to participate in warfare.

The close fighting over Ascalaphus continued.
Deïphobus stripped off the corpse's shining helmet.
But Meriones, like swift Ares, jumped out

and speared him in the arm. The plumed helmet,
with a clang, fell on the ground. Like a vulture,
Meriones leapt out again, pulled the heavy spear
out of his upper arm, then moved back to his group,
But Deïphobus' blood brother Polites,
[630] with both arms round his waist, hauled him from the fight,
until he came to his swift horses in the rear.
They were standing there, waiting for him,
with charioteer and finely decorated chariot.
These took him away, back to the city, tired out,
moaning heavily, blood dripping from his wounded arm.
The rest kept fighting, with no let up in the noise.

Then Aeneas went at Aphareus, son of Caletor,
as he was facing him. His sharp spear hit his throat.
Aphareus' head snapped back—his shield and helmet
[640] fell down on him, and Death, which takes the living spirit,
gathered him in.

Antilochus kept watching Thoön.
As he turned, he rushed up and stabbed him,
severing the vein which runs the full length of the back
up to the neck—Antilochus slashed through this vein.
Thoön fell, stretching his arms up from the dust,
reaching to his friends. Antilochus jumped on him
and began to strip the armour on his shoulders.
But he kept his eyes alert, for he was surrounded,
with Trojan men on every side, thrusting their spears
[650] at his broad shining shield. But their ruthless bronze
could not scratch the tender skin behind that shield,
for Earthshaker Poseidon was guarding Nestor's son,
even in that hail of spears. So Antilochus
never moved far from his enemies. He kept going,
ranging around among them. His spear never stopped,
always in motion, quivering, his eager heart
keen to throw that spear at someone or attack him.

As Antilochus went through that crowd of men,
he was observed by Adamas, son of Asius,
[660] who charged close in—his sharp bronze spear struck
the middle of his shield. But dark-haired Poseidon,
unwilling to concede Antilochus' life,
made the spear point fail—so part of it got stuck
in Antilochus' shield, like the charred end of a stick,
and half fell on the ground. Adamas then withdrew,
returning to the group of his companions,
avoiding death. But Meriones went after him,
as he moved back, and hit him underneath his navel,
in the scrotum, the most agonizing way
[670] for men to perish miserably in battle.
When that spear struck Adamas, he doubled up,
bent down over the spear, writhing like a bull
which farmers in the mountains bind with willow shoots
and drag along by force, against the creature's will.
That's how Adamas, once hit, twitched there for a while,
but not for long. Warlike Meriones, running up,
pulled out his spear. Then darkness covered up his eyes.

At close quarters, Helenus then hit Deïpyrus,
striking his helmet with a massive Thracian sword,
[680] knocking it off, so it fell to earth and rolled away
among the soldiers' feet. Some Achaean picked it up.
Deïpyrus' eyes grew cloudy, and darkness took him.

Atreus' son Menelaus, skilled at war shouts,
was overcome with grief. He stepped up, threatening
and waving a sharp spear at warrior Helenus.
Helenus pulled back on the centre of his bow.
They both let fly together—one with a sharp spear,
the other with an arrow from his bowstring.
Priam's son hit Menelaus with his arrow—
[690] on the front plate of his armour, in the chest.
The keen arrow bounded off. Just as black beans or peas
fly off a broad shovel on large threshing floors,

driven by the sharp wind or winnower's strength—
that's how the arrow point glanced off the breast plate,
then flew aside, away from glorious Menelaus.

When Atreus' son Menelaus, skilled at war shouts,
threw his spear, he hit Helenus in the hand,
the one which held the finely polished bow.

The bronze sliced through his hand into the bow.

[700] Helenus drew back into the group of his companions,
escaping death. He let his hand hang by his side,
dragging the ash spear behind him, till brave Agenor
pulled it out. Agenor then bound up his hand
in a strip of twisted sheep's wool and made a sling,
which his attendant carried for him, his people's shepherd.

Then Peisander made straight for glorious Menelaus.

But an evil fate was leading him towards his death,
destroyed at your hands, Menelaus, in lethal war.

When the two men had approached each other,

[710] standing at close range, Menelaus threw but missed—
his spear point was deflected. Then Peisander struck,
hitting glorious Menelaus' shield, but his bronze
could not break through. The broad shield withstood the blow,
which snapped the spear off at its socket. But in his heart,
Peisander still felt a joyful hope of victory.

The son of Atreus pulled out his silver-studded sword,
then leapt at Peisander, who, from under his own shield,
produced a fine axe of well-cast bronze, with a long shaft
of finely-polished olive wood. The two men met.

[720] Peisander struck Menelaus on his helmet ridge,
at the top, just underneath the horsehair crest.

But as Peisander charged, Menelaus hit him—
right on the forehead, just above his nose.

The bones cracked. Both his bloody eyes fell out
into the dirt beside his feet. Peisander doubled up
and then collapsed. Menelaus stepped on his chest,
stripped off his armour, crying out in triumph:

“You arrogant Trojans, who can’t get enough
of war’s destructive noise, this is the way
[730] you’ll go back from these ships of the Danaans,
who ride fast horses. You’re not reluctant,
where insults and dishonour are concerned,
to go after me, you worthless mongrel dogs,
without fearing in your hearts harsh anger
from thundering Zeus, god of hospitality,
who some day will destroy your lofty town.
For you carried off the wife I married,
lots of my property, and brought them here,
although she’d entertained you royally
[740] in her own home. Now you’re madly eager
to throw deadly fire on our sea-going ships,
to kill Achaean warriors. But you’ll be stopped,
no matter how much you now want to fight.
O Father Zeus, people say for wisdom
you exceed all others, men and gods alike.
Yet all this comes from you, the way you show
favours to these insolent men, these Trojans,
whose aggressive spirit has no limit,
who can never get enough of battle,
[750] though they’re not winning in an equal fight.
To all things there is a limit set—to sleep,
to love, sweet songs, and gorgeous dancing.
A man would rather have his fill of these, not war.
But Trojans here are gluttons for a fight.”

After Menelaus spoke, he stripped the body,
then gave its bloody armour to his comrades.
He went back and rejoined those fighting in the front.

The next man to charge against him was Harpalion,
son of king Pylamenes, who came to fight at Troy
[760] following his dear father. But he never did return
to his own country. With his spear at close range,
he struck the centre of Menelaus’ shield,

but the bronze could not penetrate completely.
So he drew back into the throng of his companions,
escaping death. He looked around him carefully,
as he moved, so no warrior's bronze would hit his flesh.
But on his way back, Meriones shot at him.
The bronze-tipped arrow hit his right buttock, pushing
underneath the bone, going right into the bladder.

[770] He sat down there, in the arms of his dear comrades,
choking his life away, convulsing on the ground,
like some worm. His dark blood gushed out, soaking the earth.
Brave Paphlagonians came up to help Harpalion.
They set him in a chariot and took him away,
full of sorrow, to sacred Ilion. His father
went back with them, in tears, for he could find
no satisfaction for the slaughter of his son.

Harpalion's death made Paris really angry.
For with the Paphlagonians he'd welcomed Paris
[780] as his guest. In a fit of anger, Paris shot off
a bronze-tipped arrow. Now, there was a certain man
called Euchenor, son of Polyidus the prophet,
a rich, brave man, who lived at home in Corinth.
He'd set sail knowing full well his deadly fate,
for many times his brave old father, Polyidus,
had told him—he would either die in his own home
from some foul disease or be destroyed by Trojans
among Achaean ships. Euchenor thus escaped
both the stiff penalty exacted by Achaeans
[790] and deadly sickness—he felt worthy in his heart.

The arrow Paris shot hit this man by his jaw,
right on the ear. At once his spirit left his limbs,
and hateful darkness carried him away.

Thus the men keep fighting like a blazing fire.
But Hector, dear to Zeus, hadn't heard and didn't know
how the Achaeans were killing off his army
at the left end of the ships. Glory in this battle

would soon have been awarded to Achaeans—
that's how powerfully Earthshaker Poseidon,
[800] who enfolds the earth, was driving Argives forward,
helping them with his own strength as well. But Hector
charged on from where he'd first breached the gates and wall,
smashing up the close-packed ranks of the Danaans,
right to the ships of Protesilaus and Ajax,
drawn up on the beach beside the blue-grey sea.
By these ships the wall was lowest. So there the fight
with men and horses was particularly fierce.
There Boeotians fought, Ionians in long tunics,
Locrians, Phthians, and glittering Epeians.
[810] But they had trouble standing up to Hector's charge,
as he attacked the ships. They couldn't push him back,
away from them, as he came up, like an inferno,
not even the finest men of the Athenians,
with their leader Menestheus, son of Peteos,
alongside Pheidas, Stichius, and brave Bias,
with the Epeians led by Meges, son of Phyleus,
Amphion, Dracius, and the Phthians,
led by Medon and Podarces, both brave men.
Medon was a bastard son of noble Oileus
[820] and Ajax's brother. But he lived in Phylace,
far from his native land, for he'd killed a man,
one related to Eriopis, his stepmother,
wife of Oileus. Podarcus was Iphicles' son,
child of Phylaces. These men in their armour
were fighting at the head of those brave Phthians,
standing with Boeotians to defend the ships.

Ajax, son of Oileus, would not move away
from Ajax, son of Telamon—he fought beside him.
Just as in a meadow a pair of wine-dark oxen
[830] strain with the same heart to pull a jointed plough,
beads of sweat running from the bottom of their horns,
with nothing but a well-polished yoke between them,
as they labour down the furrows, till the plough

slices through the edges of the field—that's the way
the two Ajaxes stood together then, side by side.
Telamonian Ajax had many comrades with him,
courageous soldiers, who'd relieve him of his shield
when his sweaty limbs grew tired. But the Locrians
had not come forward with brave Oïlean Ajax—
[840] they lacked courage for fighting in the killing zone,
for they had no plumed bronze helmets, no round shields,
and no ash spears. They'd come to Troy with Ajax
trusting in their bows and slings of twisted sheep's wool.
Later they battled on with these, firing thick volleys,
breaking ranks of Trojans. So one group of men,
those with glittering weapons, fought at the front
against bronze-armed Hector and his Trojans,
while another shot from safe positions at the back.
The arrows drained the Trojans' fighting spirit.

[850] The Trojans would then have been shamed into retreat,
moving back from the ships and huts to windy Troy,
if Polydamas hadn't approached bold Hector, saying:

“You're a difficult man to deal with, Hector,
for you don't take advice. God has made you
more excellent in war than other men.
Thus, in council you want us all to think
you're better than the rest. But in yourself
you can't be everything at once. The gods
make one man superior in warfare,
[860] another in the dance, or singing,
or playing the lyre. For some others,
all-seeing Zeus puts wisdom in their hearts—
and from these men many people benefit,
many are saved, for such men know what's right.
So I'll say what I think it's best to do.
All around you war's fiery circle rages,
but some brave Trojans, having breached the wall,
are standing idle with their weapons.

Others, scattered around the ships, fight on—
[870] but in small groups against a larger mass.
You should fall back, then summon here to you
all our finest men. Then we can weigh our options—
whether we should assault the well-decked ships,
in the hope god wants to give us victory,
or whether, for safety's sake, we leave the ships.
I'm afraid Achaeans may avenge the hurt
we gave them yesterday, since by their ships
there sits a man with appetite for war—
I think he may change his decision not to fight.”

[880] Polydamas finished. His advice pleased Hector.
At once he jumped out of his chariot to the ground.
He took up his weapons and spoke—his words had wings:

“Polydamas, keep all the best men here.
I'll go back to battle over there,
returning when I've told them what to do.”

Saying that, Hector strode off, like a snowy mountain,
going by Trojans and allies, shouting instructions.
When these men heard what Hector wanted them to do,
they all came running over to Polydamas,
[890] kind son of Panthous. Hector marched through the ranks
of their best warriors, looking for Deïphobus,
brave prince Helenus, Adamas, son of Asius,
and Asius, son of Hyrtacus. But these men
had not come through unscathed. Some were already dead,
killed at Argive hands by the sterns of Achaea's ships.
Others inside the wall had spear or arrow wounds.
On the left flank of that destructive battle,
Hector met Paris, husband of fair-haired Helen,
encouraging his comrades, urging them to fight.
[900] Approaching him, Hector taunted Paris:

“You may be the best-looking man around,

but you're a useless woman-mad seducer.
Where are Deiphobus, brave prince Helenus,
Adamas, son of Asius, and Asius,
son of Hyrtacus? Where's Othryoneus?
Tell me that. All of high Ilion
has been destroyed. Your own death is certain."

Then noble Alexander answered Hector:

"Hector, you're now blaming someone innocent.
[910] At other times I have held back from war,
but not this time. When my mother bore me,
she did not produce a total coward.
Since the moment you told your men to fight
beside the ships, we've been in combat here,
in a constant struggle with Danaans.
Those comrades you just mentioned have been killed.
Only Deiphobus and brave Helenus
have gone back, both wounded in the arm—
hit by long spears—but Zeus saved them from death.
[920] But now, lead on where your spirit tells you,
we'll follow you quite willingly. I don't think
we'll show a lack of courage while our strength holds out.
Once that goes, no matter how keen a man may be,
he can no longer continue in the war."

Warrior Paris' words won his brother's heart.
They set off for the centre of that noisy battle,
with Cebriones, noble Polydamas,
Phalces, Orthaeus, godlike Polyphetes,
Palmys, Ascanius, Morus, son of Hippotion,
[930] men who'd come from fertile Ascania the day before
as reinforcements. Now Zeus incited them to war.
The Trojans advanced. Just like blasts of storming winds
striking the earth under Father Zeus' thunder,
then with a roar slicing into the sea, whipping up
a crowd of surging waves across a booming ocean,

with lines of arching foam, one following another—
that how Trojans marched behind their leaders,
in a tight formation, one behind the other,
glittering in bronze. Like man-destroying Ares,
[940] Hector, son of Priam, led them. He held his shield
in front of him, an even circle made of hide,
densely packed, then covered with a solid layer
of hammered bronze, helmet gleaming round his temples.
He moved out, testing all parts of the Achaean lines,
to see if they'd retreat from him as he came forward
covered by his shield. But Achaean hearts stood firm.
The first fighter to challenge Hector was great Ajax,
who marched out with long strides and shouted:

“Come closer,
you poor man. Why try to scare the Argives?
[950] When it comes to fighting, we're not ignorant.
Zeus' harsh whip has lashed Achaeans back,
and your heart now wants to break our ships.
But we've got hands to raise in their defence.
In fact, I think it's far more likely now
we'll take your well-built city—these hands of ours
will smash it long before you seize our ships.
I say the time has come when you'll run back,
praying to Father Zeus and other gods,
to make your horses with their lovely manes
[960] fly as fast as hawks, when they speed through dust
to get you to your city on the plain.”

As Ajax spoke, a bird flew out on the right,
a high-flying eagle. Encouraged by the omen,
the Achaean soldiers responded with a cheer.
Glorious Hector then said to Ajax in reply:

“What are you saying, you stupid boaster?
I wish it were as certain that I was
the son of aegis-bearing Zeus himself,

with Hera for my mother, and honoured
[970] like Apollo or Athena, as I am that this day
brings disaster to the Argives—all of them.
You'll lie among the dead, if you dare
to stand up to my long spear. It will slice
your lily skin. Then once you fall down there,
beside Achaea's ships, Trojan dogs and birds
will feed upon your flesh and fat."

Hector spoke.
Then he advanced—the troops moved up behind him,
making a huge din, even from soldiers at the back.
On the other side, the Argives raised a shout.
[980] They hadn't lost their courage. They'd held their line
against the finest Trojans launching their attack.
The noise from both sides went up into bright Zeus' sky