

The Iliad

Book Eleven The Achaeans Face Disaster

[The description of Agamemnon's armour as he prepares for battle; the battle resumes; Agamemnon's exploits on the battlefield; the Trojans are pushed back close to the city; Zeus sends Hector a message; Agamemnon is wounded, has to withdraw from the battle; Hector re-enters the battle, kills many Achaeans; Diomedes and Odysseus make a stand against the Trojans; Diomedes is wounded by Paris; Odysseus is left alone; Odysseus is wounded; Menelaus and Ajax come to help Odysseus; Machaon is wounded, taken from the battle by Nestor; Hector moves against Ajax; Ajax is forced to retreat; Eurypylus is wounded; Achilles sends Patroclus to find out news of the battle; Patroclus visits Nestor and Machaon; Nestor's long speech about his youthful fighting; Nestor questions Patroclus about Achilles; Patroclus meets Eurypylus, takes him to his hut, gives him medicines]

As Dawn rose from her bed beside lord Tithonus
bringing light to immortal gods and men alike,
Zeus sent Strife down to the fast Achaean ship
the savage goddess, carrying the sign of war.
She stood by Odysseus' broad-beamed black ship
in the middle of the line, so she could be heard
in both directions, from the huts of Ajax,
son of Telamon, to those of Achilles,
whose well-balanced ships were drawn up at the ends,
[10] for these men trusted courage and their own strong hands.
Standing there, the goddess screamed out a piercing call,
a dreadful sound. In the heart of each Achaean,
she put strength for war, for unrelenting combat.
To men war then became sweeter than sailing back,
going home in their hollow ships to their dear native land.
The son of Atreus shouted to his Argives
to get their armour on. He pulled on his shining bronze.
First on his legs he set his shin guards—beautifully made,
fitted with silver ankle clasps. Then he put
[20] a breast plate round his chest, something he'd received
as a gift of hospitality from Cinyras,
who'd learned in Cyprus the great news that Achaeans
were intending to set sail in their ships for Troy.

So to please the king, Cinyras gave the breastplate
to Agamemnon. On it were ten metal strips,
each dark blue, twelve of gold, and twenty made of tin.
On each side, three enameled snakes coiled to the neck,
like rainbows which the son of Cronos sets in clouds,
prophetic omens for mortal men. On his shoulder,
[30] he slung his sword studded with shining gold.
The scabbard was silver, fitted with golden straps.
Then he picked up his richly decorated shield,
which covered his whole body, a beautiful work,
with ten bronze circles, twenty bosses of white tin,
and in the centre a boss of blue enamel.
On that shield, as crowning symbol, stood the Gorgon,
a ferocious face with a horrifying stare.
Terror and Panic were placed on either side.
On the shield's silver strap writhed an enamel snake,
[40] its three heads intertwined, all growing from one neck.
On his head Agamemnon placed his helmet,
with four bosses, a double ridge, and horsehair plume,
which nodded menacingly on top. He took two strong spears,
sharp ones with bronze points, whose glitter shone from him
right up to heaven. Athena and Hera gave
peals of thunder overhead, paying tribute to him,
Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, rich in gold.
Then each man told his charioteer to curb his horses
and line up in good formation at the ditch's edge,
[50] while they marched ahead on foot in all their armour,
moving fast, shouting bravely in the early dawn.
They arranged their ranks on the far side of the ditch,
well beyond the chariots following at some distance.
Then Cronos' son brought them confusing signs of trouble,
sending down from high in heaven a rain of blood
dripping from the sky, for his intention was
to hurl the heads of many brave men down to Hades.
On the opposite side, by the high ground on the plain,
Trojans gathered round Hector, fine Polydamas,
[60] Aeneas, whom Trojan people honoured like a god,

and three sons of Antenor—Polybus, Agenor,
godlike man, and youthful Acamas, who seemed
like one of the immortals. In the front ranks,
Hector carried his shield, an even perfect circle.
As some ominous star now suddenly appears,
shining through the clouds, and then disappears again
into the cloud cover, that's how Hector looked,
as he showed up in front, then in the rear,
issuing orders. All in shining bronze, he flashed
[70] like lightning from Father Zeus, who holds the aegis.
Then, just as reapers work in some rich man's fields,
arranged in rows facing each other, cutting the crop,
wheat or barley, scything handfuls thick and fast,
that's how Trojans and Achaeans went at each other,
slicing men down. No one thought of lethal flight.
The sides were matched in fury equally—they fought
like wolves ripping at each other. Looking on, Strife,
goddess who brings much sorrow, was delighted.
She was the only god present at this battle.
[80] The others were far off, sitting at their ease,
in their own homes on many-ridged Olympus,
where a fine house had been built for each of them.
All blamed the son of Cronos, lord of the dark cloud,
because he planned to give glory to the Trojans.
But Father Zeus was not concerned on their account.
Withdrawing some distance from them, he sat apart,
exultant, glorious. He looked out at Troy,
at the Achaean ships, at the flashing bronze,
at warriors killing, and at warriors being killed.
[90] Throughout the early morning, as that sacred day
grew stronger, weapons thrown by both sides
took their grim toll—men kept on falling.
But at the hour a woodcutter prepares his meal
in some mountain glade, when his arms are tired
cutting big trees, when weariness comes in his heart
and sweet appetite for food overtakes his mind,
that's when Danaans, calling to each other in the ranks,

courageously broke through. The first to kill a man
was Agamemnon. He slaughtered Bienor,
[100] shepherd of his people, and his companion, too,
Oileus, the charioteer, who'd jumped down
from the chariot to challenge Agamemnon.
He'd charged straight at him, but his forehead took a blow
from a sharp spear. The rimmed helmet made of heavy bronze
didn't stop the spear, which smashed through it, through the bone,
and splattered his brain inside the entire helmet.
That stopped his bloodthirsty charge. Agamemnon,
king of men, stripped off their tunics and left them there,
their white skin showing. Then he moved on to butcher
[110] Isus and Antiphus, two of Priam's sons—
one was a bastard, the other one legitimate—
both travelling in a single chariot. The bastard,
Isus, held the reins, and renowned Antiphus
stood beside him as the fighting man. These two men
Achilles had once tied up with willow shoots,
when he'd captured them while they were herding sheep
along Mount Ida's lower slopes. He'd let them go
for ransom. But this time, wide-ruling Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, with his spear struck Isus in the chest,
[120] above the nipple, and his sword sliced Antiphus
right by his ear, throwing him out of the chariot.
He quickly stripped off their fine armour. He knew them,
for he'd noticed them before by the fast ships,
when swift-footed Achilles led them in from Ida.
Just as a lion chews up with ease the tender offspring
of some nimble deer, when he comes in their den—
his strong teeth seize them and rip out their tender life—
and the mother, even close by, cannot help them,
for a fearful trembling panic seizes her, so she runs fast,
[130] bolting in a lather through dense foliage and trees,
from that mighty beast's attack—in just that way,
no Trojan then could save these two from slaughter,
for they were running off in flight from Argives.
Next, Agamemnon battled brave Hippolochus

and Peisander, sons of fiery-hearted Antimachus,
a man who'd received much gold from Alexander,
a splendid gift, so he'd agree not to hand back
Helen to fair-haired Menelaus. This man had two sons.
Mighty Agamemnon now caught them, both riding
[140] in one chariot, attempting to control their horses.
The shining reins had fallen from the driver's hands,
panicking the horses. The son of Atreus jumped out
and faced them like a lion. From the chariot
the two warriors appealed to Agamemnon:
"Take us alive, son of Atreus. You'll get
a worthy ransom. There are many treasures
in Antimachus' homes—bronze and gold
and well-worked iron. Our father will be glad
to give a massive ransom from all that,
[150] if he learns we're at Achaean ships alive."
The men said this in tears, addressing the king
with tender words. But the reply they heard was harsh.
"If you're the two sons of Antimachus,
that hot-hearted man who, when Menelaus came
as envoy once to the assembled Trojans
with godlike Odysseus, urged the Trojans
to kill Menelaus, to stop him going back
to the Achaeans, now you'll pay the price
for those shameful actions of your father."
[160] Agamemnon spoke. Then he struck Peisander.
He knocked him from the chariot to the earth
with a spear thrust to his chest. He crashed on the ground
and lay there motionless. Hipplochus jumped out.
But Agamemnon killed him on the ground.
His sword sliced away his arms and slashed his head off.
Then he set the head rolling through the crowd,
like some round stone. Leaving the bodies there, he charged
into the line where soldiers' ranks were most confused,
leading other well-armed Achaeans with him.
[170] Their men on foot cut down soldiers compelled to flee.
Chariots went at chariots. On the plain, dust clouds arose

from underneath, kicked up by thundering horses' hooves.
Men butchered men with bronze. Mighty Agamemnon
surged on ahead, always killing as he moved,
shouting out instructions to the Argives.
Just as destructive fire strikes thick woodland scrub,
driven in all directions by the swirling wind,
burning thickets to their roots, so they disappear,
swallowed up in the inferno's fiery rush,
[180] that's how the heads of Trojans fell, as they ran off,
brought down by Agamemnon, son of Atreus.
Many strong-necked horses in the battle lanes
rattled past with empty chariots, missing their drivers,
excellent charioteers now lying on the ground,
far more friendly to the vultures than their wives.
Zeus pulled Hector back from the flying weapons,
dust, slaughter, blood, and noise, but Agamemnon,
bellowing orders to his Danaans, still pursued.
Trojans rushed back across the middle of the plain,
[190] past the tomb of ancient Ilus, son of Dardanus,
even past the fig tree, desperate to reach the city.
But with his invincible blood-spattered hands,
Agamemnon kept up his pursuit relentlessly.
When Trojans reached the Scaean Gates and oak tree,
they stopped there, to wait for their remaining men.
But they were still in flight across the middle of the plain,
like cows scattered by a lion coming at them
in the dead of night—a general stampede,
but clearly grim destruction for one of them,
[200] whose neck the lion first seizes in strong teeth,
breaks it, then gorges on the blood and all the innards—
that's how mighty Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
harassed Trojans, always killing off the stragglers,
as they fled back. Many men collapsed face down,
or on their backs, at the hands of Atreus' son,
as with his spear he raged up and down the field.
But just as Agamemnon was about to reach
the steep walls of the city, the father of gods and men

came down from heaven, sat on the peaks of Ida,
[210] with its many springs, holding a thunderbolt.
He sent off gold-winged Iris with a message:
“Go, swift Iris, and tell Hector this—
as long as he sees Agamemnon,
that shepherd of his people, rampaging
at the front, slicing down rows of men,
he must restrain himself, tell other troops
to fight the enemy in the killing zone.
But when Agamemnon, hit by a spear
or wounded with an arrow, mounts his chariot,
[220] then I’ll give Hector power to kill and kill,
until he moves up to the well-decked ships,
at sunset, when sacred darkness comes.”
Zeus finished. Wind-swift Iris obeyed, going down
from Ida to sacred Ilion. She found Hector,
wise Priam’s noble son, standing with his horses,
in his well-made chariot. Coming close beside him,
swift-footed Iris spoke:
“Hector, son of Priam,
like the gods for your wise counsel, Father Zeus
has sent me to give you these instructions—
[230] for as long as you see Agamemnon,
that shepherd of his people, rampaging
at the front, slicing down rows of men,
you must restrain yourself. Tell other troops
to fight the enemy in the killing zone.
But when Agamemnon, hit by a spear
or wounded with an arrow, mounts his chariot,
then Zeus will give you power to kill and kill,
until you move up to the well-decked ships,
at sunset, when sacred darkness comes.”
[240] After saying this, swift-footed Iris sped away.
With his weapons Hector jumped out of his chariot
down to the ground. Brandishing his sharp spear, he moved
all through the army, urging men to battle on,
encouraging their spirits for the dreadful fight.

The troops rallied and stood up against Achaeans.
Opposing them, the Argives reinforced their ranks.
Agamemnon was among them, first to charge ahead,
eager to fight well out in front of everyone.
Tell me now, you Muses inhabiting Olympus,
[250] who was the first to come against Agamemnon—
one of the Trojans or one of their famous allies?
It was Iphidamas, son of Antenor,
a fine large man, raised in the fertile land of Thrace,
which nurtures flocks. His mother was lovely Theano.
Cisseus, his mother's father, raised him in his house
when he was very young. Once Iphidamas had reached
the age when younger men seek glory, Cisseus tried
to keep him there, marrying him to his own daughter.
But he'd left his bridal chamber to chase after fame
[260] against Achaeans, taking with him twelve beaked ships,
which followed him. He'd left these well-balanced ships
at Percote, then come on foot to Ilion.
Now he moved out to face Atreus' son Agamemnon.
When the two were close, within each other's range,
Agamemnon threw and missed—his spear turned aside.
But Iphidamas struck Agamemnon in his belt,
just below the breast plate, thrusting with all his force,
trusting his strong hands. But he didn't penetrate
the gleaming belt, for the spear hit the silver first,
[270] then bent aside, like lead. Wide-ruling Agamemnon
grabbed the spear in his fists and yanked it towards him
with the fury of a lion, pulling it away,
right out of Iphidamas' hands. Then he hit him,
his sword slashing through his neck—his limbs collapsed,
and Iphidamas fell there into a bronze sleep,
unhappy man, far from the wife he'd married,
to help his fellow citizens, far from that lady
from whom he'd had no favours, though for bride price
he'd offered much. First, he'd given a hundred cattle
[280] and promised a thousand goats and sheep combined,
taken from the immense numbers in his flocks.

But then Agamemnon, son of Atreus, killed him,
stripped him, and went off through the Achaean throng,
carrying his armour.
When Coön noticed this,
an eminent man, Antenor's eldest son,
his eyes darkened with grief for his fallen brother.
He moved out of lord Agamemnon's line of sight,
to one side, then struck his forearm with his spear,
just below the elbow. Coön's shining spear point
[290] sliced straight through. Agamemnon, king of men, shuddered,
but didn't stop the fight or pull back from battle.
He charged at Coön, holding up his battered spear.
Coön was frantically dragging his blood brother,
Iphidamas, out by the feet, crying for help
to all the finest men. Agamemnon struck him
with his bronze-tipped spear shaft below his embossed shield,
as he was pulling Iphidamas out from the crowd.
Coön's limbs gave way. Agamemnon stood over him,
then hacked off his head, so it fell on Iphidamas.
[300] Thus, Antenor's sons came to their fatal end
at king Agamemnon's hands and went down to Hades.
While the warm blood was still flowing from his wound,
Agamemnon strode around the other ranks,
with spear and sword and massive rocks. But once that wound
began to dry and blood stopped flowing, then sharp pain
started to curb Agamemnon's fighting spirit.
Just as a sharp spasm seizes women giving birth,
a piercing labour pain sent by the Eilithyiae,
Hera's daughters, who control keen pangs of childbirth,
[310] that's how sharp pain sapped Agamemnon's fighting strength.
He climbed into his chariot and told his driver
to go back to the hollow ships. His heart was heavy.
He gave a piercing shout, calling his Danaans:
"Friends, leaders, rulers of Argives,
it's up to you now to guard our seagoing ships
in this dangerous war. For Counsellor Zeus
won't let me fight these Trojans all day long."

- Agamemnon spoke. His charioteer lashed the horses
with the lovely manes toward the hollow ships.
- [320] The horses flew on willingly, chests flecked with foam,
their underbellies caked with dust, as they took
the exhausted king away and left the battle.
When Hector saw Agamemnon going back,
he gave a loud shout to the Lycians and Trojans:
“Trojans, Lycians, Dardan spearmen,
be men, my friends, call on your fighting strength.
Their best man is leaving. Zeus, son of Cronos,
gives me glory. Drive your sure-footed horses
straight at those strong Danaans, so you can seize
an even greater glory.”
- [330] Hector spoke.
In every man he stirred up the spirit of war.
Just as a hunter urges on his white-fanged hounds,
to chase a lion or wild boar, that’s how Hector,
son of Priam, like that man-destroyer Ares,
urged his great-hearted Trojans on against Achaeans.
He himself moved with those in front, fully confident,
falling on the enemy like a furious storm
swooping down to lash the purple ocean.
Who were the first, who were the last men slaughtered
- [340] by Hector, son of Priam, once Zeus gave him glory?
First was Asaeus, then Autonus, Opites,
and Dolops, son of Clytius, then Opheltius,
Agelaus, Aesymnus, Orus, and Hipponous,
a strong fighter. Hector killed these Danaan leaders.
Then he went after common soldiers. Like West Wind,
when it demolishes white South Wind’s clouds,
striking them with heavy squalls, while many waves roll on,
massive and swollen, scattering spray high in the air,
under the howling of the veering wind storm—
- [350] that’s how thick and fast Hector destroyed those men.
At that very moment, disaster would have struck,
inflicting on Achaeans irreparable damage—
they’d have been routed and fallen on their ships,

if Odysseus had not called out to Diomedes:

“Son of Tydeus, what’s the matter with us?

Have we no memory of our warlike courage?

Come here, friend, stand by me. We’ll be disgraced,

if Hector of the gleaming helmet takes the ships.”

Powerful Diomedes then answered Odysseus:

[360] “I’ll stay and stand up to their attack.

But we won’t enjoy this fight for very long,

since cloud-gatherer Zeus would sooner give

the victory to Trojans rather than to us.”

Diomedes spoke. With his spear, he hit Thymbraeus

in his left nipple, tossing him from his chariot to the ground.

Odysseus struck Molion, godlike attendant

to lord Thymbraeus. They left the two men there,

for their fighting days were done, and charged to battle,

creating havoc. Just as two furious wild boars

[370] fall on the dogs chasing after them, that’s how

Diomedes and Odysseus turned back again

to slaughter Trojans. So Achaeans got welcome relief

in their flight from godlike Hector.

The two warriors

then seized a chariot with two men, their people’s finest,

two sons of Merops from Percote, a man skilled,

above all others, in prophecy. He wouldn’t let his sons

go off to war’s destruction. But they did not obey.

For Fates lured them on to the darkness of their deaths.

That famous spearman Diomedes, son of Tydeus,

[380] stole their living spirit and stripped their lovely armour.

Odysseus then killed Hippodamus and Hypeirochus.

Gazing down from Ida, the son of Cronos made the fight

an equal combat, so on both sides men killed each other.

With his spear, Tydeus’ son wounded brave Agastrophus,

son of Paeon, on the hip. There were no horses ready,

close at hand for his escape, a fatal blunder.

His attendant was holding them some distance off,

while he went on foot through those fighting at the front,

until lord Diomedes robbed him of his life.

- [390] Hector kept a sharp watch on those men. With a shout,
he went after them, taking ranks of Trojans with him.
Brave Diomedes, skilled at war cries, noticed this.
He shuddered and said to Odysseus, who was close by:
“Mighty Hector’s lethal wave engulfs us.
Let’s make a stand, stay here, and beat him back.”
Diomedes spoke. He drew back his long-shadowed spear,
then hurled it unerringly. The spear hit Hector,
on the head, catching his helmet at the very top.
Bronze deflected bronze—the spear missed his splendid skin,
[400] prevented by the triple layers on the helmet,
which he’d been given by Apollo. Jumping back,
Hector quickly rejoined the massed ranks of his troops.
He fell on his knee and stayed there, holding himself up
with his strong hand on the ground. Black night hid his eyes.
But as the son of Tydeus rushed in to retrieve his spear
from where it hit the earth among the front-line fighters,
Hector revived. He leapt into his chariot once more,
drove back into the crowd, eluding his black fate.
Brandishing his spear, powerful Diomedes yelled:
[410] “You dog—once more you’re evading death for now.
But you’ve narrowly escaped disaster.
Phoebus Apollo has saved you once again.
No doubt you always pray to him, every time
you go into the sound of thudding spears.
Next time we meet, I’ll surely finish you
if some god is there to help me out, as well.
But now I’ll attack the rest, any man
I chance to meet.”
Diomedes spoke.
Then he stripped the armour off the son of Paeon,
[420] a famous spearman. But fair-haired Helen’s husband,
Alexander, now aimed his bow at Diomedes,
his people’s shepherd, leaning against a gravestone,
part of the funeral mound men had built for Ilus,
son of Dardanus, an elder of the people long ago.
Diomedes was stripping the gleaming breast plate

- off the chest of strong Agastrophus, taking, too,
the shield from off his shoulders and his heavy helmet.
Alexander drew back on the centre of the bow.
He shot. The arrow did not leave his hand and miss.
- [430] It hit Diomedes' foot, the right one, on the top—
it passed through and drove into the ground. Laughing aloud,
Paris jumped from his cover, shouting out this boast:
“You're hit. My arrow wasn't wasted.
I wish I'd got you low down in the gut,
taken your life. That way, there'd be some relief
for Trojans from the misery you bring.
Right now they shake with fear in front of you,
like bleating goats confronted by a lion.”
Without a sign of fear, strong Diomedes then replied:
- [440] “You useless archer, brave only with your bow,
seducer, if you stepped out to face me
with real weapons, that bow and clutch of arrows
would be no use to you. So now you've grazed me
on my foot, and you boast like this. It's nothing—
like some blow from a woman or witless child.
A weapon from a coward has no bite at all.
But from me, it's different, even a slight hit.
My spear is sharp. The man it hits, it kills.
His wife tears at her cheeks, his children then
- [450] are orphans. Earth is blood-soaked where he rots,
with vultures instead of women round him.”
Diomedes spoke. Famous spearman Odysseus
came up and made a stand before him. He sat down
behind Odysseus and pulled the arrow from his foot.
Sharp pain shot through his flesh. Then he got in his chariot,
took the reins, and with a heavy heart went to the hollow ships.
Now famous spearman Odysseus was left alone,
no Achaeon there beside him, for fear gripped them all.
Greatly troubled, he spoke to his proud heart:
- [460] “Here's trouble. What's going to happen to me?
If I run away from this crowd in fear,
I'll be badly shamed. But to be trapped here,

all alone, that could be worse. For Cronos' son
has made the rest of the Danaans flee.

But why's my fond heart arguing all this?

I know that those who leave the war are cowards.

The man who wants to fight courageously
must stand his ground with force, whether he's hit,
or whether his blows strike the other man."

[470] While in his mind and heart he turned this over,
ranks of shield-bearing Trojans advanced against him,
encircling him. But this only brought them trouble.
As when young men and hunting dogs harass a boar,
the beast charges from dense foliage on every side,
whetting white teeth on its curving jaws, and they dodge
all round it, to the sound of champing tusks,
hunters and dogs standing firm, for all their fear—
that's how Trojans then kept going at Odysseus,
whom Zeus loved. First he wounded fine Deïopites

[480] above his shoulder, lunging at him with his sharp spear.
Then he killed Thoön, Ennomus, and Chersidamas,
whom Odysseus speared as he jumped from his chariot.
He hit him in the groin below his shield. As he fell,
he clawed handfuls of dust. Odysseus left these men,
then with his spear struck Charops, son of Hippiasus,
blood brother of rich Socus. That god-like man
came up, stood close to him, and cried:

"Renowned Odysseus,
your store of tricks, of suffering, is infinite.

Today you'll boast you killed both sons of Hippiasus,

[490] slaughtered two men and stripped away their armour,
or else you'll lose your life, hit by my spear."

Saying this, Socus struck the even circle of Odysseus' shield.

The strong spear punctured the bright shield, forcing its way
through the finely decorated breastplate, slicing off
the flesh along his ribs. But Pallas Athena
stopped it from sinking into any vital organ.

Odysseus knew the spear had not hit a fatal spot.

He drew back and spoke to Socus:

- “You poor man,
now’s the moment grim death surely takes you.
[500] Yes, you’ve prevented me from fighting Trojans,
but I promise here this very day you’ll meet
the fatal darkness of your death, killed on my spear.
I’ll get the glory. You’ll give your life to horseman Hades.”
Odysseus spoke. Turning round, Socus began to run.
But Odysseus hit him as he was moving off,
spearing him in the back between the shoulder blades,
driving the spear clean through his chest. He fell with a thud.
Lord Odysseus cried out in triumph:
“Ah, Socus,
son of fierce horse-taming Hippasus,
[510] Death’s final end was quick—no escape for you.
Unhappy man, you’ll not have your father
or your noble mother close your eyes in death.
Flesh-eating birds will now rip you apart,
spreading their thick wings all over you.
But if I die, god-like Achaeans will provide
a proper burial for me.”
With these words,
Odysseus pulled Socus’ strong spear out of his flesh
and removed it from his shield. But as he drew it out,
he began to bleed. Odysseus grew concerned.
[520] When great-hearted Trojans saw blood on Odysseus,
they shouted through the ranks and rushed him all at once.
Odysseus stepped back, calling out to his companions.
Three times he yelled, as loud as any man can shout.
Three times warlike Menelaus heard him call.
He quickly spoke to Ajax, who stood close by.
“Ajax, divinely born son of Telamon,
leader of your people, I’ve just heard
a voice call—it belonged to brave Odysseus.
It sounds as if Trojans have him cut off,
[530] caught him on his own in the killing zone.
Let’s go to that crowd. We’d better save him.
I’m afraid that he’s in trouble. He’s a fine man—

he'd be a great loss to the Danaans.”
Saying this, Menelaus led on. Ajax, that godlike man,
went with him. They found Odysseus, whom Zeus loved,
encircled by Trojans, like red mountain jackals
surrounding a horned stag wounded by an arrow
from some man's bow—its legs enable it to flee,
for while its warm blood flows, its limbs have power—
[540] but as soon as that sharp arrow's drained its strength,
in some forest shade, wild mountain carnivores attack,
but should some god then lead a hungry lion there,
the jackals scatter, and the lion eats the stag—
that's the way resourceful fierce Odysseus was attacked
by many daring Trojans. The single warrior,
wielding his spear, held at bay his pitiless fate.
Then Ajax approached, carrying his towering shield.
He made a stand beside Odysseus. Trojans scattered
in all directions. Taking Odysseus by the hand,
[550] warlike Menelaus led him from the crowd,
until his attendant could bring up his chariot.
Ajax then charged the Trojans. He killed Doryclus,
one of Priam's bastard sons. Then he hit Pandocus,
Lysander, Pyrasus, and Pylantes. As some river,
a mountain torrent in full winter flood, crashes down
onto the plain, gaining its power from Zeus' storms,
sweeping up many withered oaks and pine trees,
throwing piles of mud into the sea—that's how
glorious Ajax then charged out onto the plain,
[560] creating havoc, slaughtering men and horses.
Hector did not notice Ajax, for he was fighting
on the far left of the battle, by Scamander's banks,
where the slaughter was most fierce. A constant din arose
around great Nestor and warlike Idomeneus.
Hector was in the crowd there with them, grimly killing
with chariot and spear, decimating young men's ranks.
But the brave Achaeans would not have given way,
if Alexander, fair-haired Helen's husband,
had not stopped Machaon, shepherd of his people,

[570] as he was proving himself among the very best.
Alexander's arrow, with a triple barb,
hit Machaon's right shoulder. Then Achaeans,
who breathe fighting spirit, feared for Machaon—
they thought he might be captured, should the battle change.
At that point Idomeneus spoke to Nestor:
"Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory
of Achaeans, come, climb up into my chariot.
Let Machaon get in there beside you.
Drive those sure-footed horses to the ships,
[580] and quickly, too. Machaon's a healer
and so worth more than other men, with skill
to cut out arrows and use healing potions."
He finished. Geranian horseman Nestor heard him.
He climbed into the chariot. Machaon got in beside him,
son of that excellent healer Asclepius.
Nestor whipped the horses. They dashed off willingly,
their spirits happy to be heading for the hollow ships.
Then Cebriones noticed Trojans were being driven back.
Going up to Hector, he spoke to him:
"Hector,
[590] here the two of us mingle with Danaans,
but on the outskirts of this hard-fought battle.
Other Trojans, both men and horses,
are being driven back in great confusion,
routed by Ajax, son of Telamon.
I know him well. He carries a huge shield
around his shoulders. Let's get our horses
and drive there in our chariot—that's where
most of those fighting with horses or on foot
are slaughtering each other, where men fight
[600] with most intensity. The noise never stops."
Saying this, Cebriones urged on their horses
with the lovely manes, cracking his whip over them.
Obeying the lash, they took the fast chariot at top speed
in the direction of the Trojans and Achaeans,
trampling on shields and corpses as they galloped on.

The axle was completely spattered underneath,
as were the rails behind, with gobs of blood thrown up
from horses' hooves and chariot wheels. Hector pushed on,
eager to join the throngs of men, to jump into the fight,
[610] to smash that group to pieces. He made Danaans
totally confused—his spear hardly seemed to pause.
He ranged up and down Achaean soldiers' ranks
with spear and sword and massive rocks. But he kept away
from any fight with Ajax, son of Telamon.
Then Father Zeus, enthroned on high, put fear in Ajax.
He stood bewildered, shifted his seven-layered shield
onto his back, turned, looked round at throngs of Trojans,
like some wild beast, then backed off step by step, retreating,
but often turning back. Just as a tawny lion
[620] is driven from a farmyard holding cattle
by dogs and farmers, who keep watch all night long
to stop it tearing some well-fed cow to pieces,
but the beast, ravenous for meat, keeps charging in,
without success, for a storm of spears rains down on him,
thrown by eager hands, followed then by burning sticks,
which, for all his fierce desire, make him afraid,
so, at dawn, he slinks away in bitter disappointment—
that's how Ajax most unwillingly retreated then,
away from Trojans, his spirit in distress.
[630] He was very much afraid for the Achaean ships.
Just as when some donkey taken past a cornfield—
a stubborn beast on whose sides many sticks are broken—
bolts from boys tending it and goes to munch deep corn,
while boys beat it with sticks—although their strength is small,
at last they drive it out, once it's had its fill—
that's how proud Trojans and allies from many lands
then pushed back great Ajax, son of Telamon,
their spears always jabbing at the centre of his shield.
From time to time, remembering his warlike spirit,
[640] Ajax would turn again, holding off the ranks
of horse-taming Trojans. Then he'd turn back to retreat.
But he blocked the way to the swift ships for all of them.

He stood alone between the Trojans and Achaeans,
fighting furiously. Some spears hurled by brave hands
flew swiftly forward, then stuck in his great shield,
and many stood upright in the space between them,
impaled in earth, still eager to devour his flesh.
When Eurypylus, fine son of Euaemon,
saw Ajax being attacked by this hail of spears,
[650] he went and stood by him. He hurled his shining spear
and hit Apisaon, son of Phausius,
a shepherd to his people, below his diaphragm,
in the liver. His legs gave way. Eurypylus rushed up
to strip armour from his shoulders, but he was seen
by godlike Alexander, as he was pulling off
the armour from Apisaon. So Paris grabbed his bow,
aimed at Eurypylus, then shot an arrow in his leg,
his right thigh. The arrow shaft snapped off.
His thigh was crippled. So Eurypylus moved back
[660] among his comrades and thus escaped destruction.
But he shouted far and wide, calling to Danaans:
“Friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives,
rally your ranks. Save Ajax from a brutal death.
He’s being attacked with spears, and I don’t think
he’s able to get out of this grim fight.
Come, stand by great Ajax, son of Telamon!”
Eurypylus yelled this out as he lay wounded.
Men closed their ranks around him, leaning their shields
against their shoulders with their spears extended.
[670] Ajax came to meet them. When he reached his comrades,
he turned around and stood his ground once more.
Thus these soldiers went at the fight like a raging fire,
as Neleus’ horses carried Nestor from the fight.
Swift-footed Achilles, looking on, noticed Nestor.
Achilles stood by the stern of his broad-beamed ship,
watching the harsh work of battle, the pitiful retreat.
At once he spoke out to Patroclus, his companion,
calling him beside the ship. From inside the hut
Patroclus heard him. He came out, looking like Ares.

[680] This moment marked the start of his final rush to death.

Patroclus, Menoetius' fine son, was the first to speak:

"Why did you summon me, Achilles?

Is there something you need me to carry out?"

Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:

"Fine son of Menoetius, joy of my heart,

I think the time has come for the Achaeans

to stand around my knees in supplication,

for their needs have now become unbearable.

But Patroclus, dear to Zeus, go now—

[690] ask Nestor who that wounded person is

he's taking from the battle. From the back,

he looked exactly like Machaon,

son of Asclepius. But I didn't see

his face, for the horses passed me quickly

in their haste to gallop on."

Achilles spoke.

Patroclus then obeyed his dear companion.

He went on the run through Achaean huts and ships.

When the others reached the huts of Nestor, Neleus' son,

they stepped out on the fertile earth. Then Eurymedon,

[700] Nestor's aide, unharnessed horses from the chariot.

The two men let the sweat dry on their tunics,

standing in the seashore breeze. They went inside the hut

and sat down on some chairs. Fair-haired Hecamede

made them a soothing drink. Old Nestor had taken her

from Tenedos, when Achilles ransacked the place.

Daughter of great-hearted Arsinous, she'd been chosen

for him by Achaeans, because he excelled them all

in giving wise advice. First, she pushed out in front of them

a well-polished table with feet of blue enamel.

[710] Then she set there a bronze basket holding onions,

to spice up their drink, with pale honey and bread

made of sacred barley. Beside these she set a cup,

a magnificent work Nestor had brought from home,

studded with gold. There were four handles on it,

around each one a pair of golden doves was feeding.
Below were two supports. When that cup was full,
another man could hardly lift it from the table,
but, old as he was, Nestor picked it up with ease.
In this cup Hecamede, looking like a goddess,
[720] made a soothing drink for them from Pramnian wine.
In it with a bronze grater she shredded goat's cheese,
then shook white barley grain on top. When she'd prepared it,
she invited them to drink. The two men drank
and quenched their parching thirst. They started talking,
enjoying each other's pleasant conversation.
Then Patroclus stood in the doorway, like some god.
Seeing him, old Nestor leapt up from his shining chair,
took him by the hand and invited him to sit.
Patroclus declined, staying where he was. He said:

[730] "Old man, divinely bred, I can't sit down.
You'll not talk me into it. The man who sent me
is honourable but quick to take offence.
I'm here to learn the name of that wounded man
you drove in with. But I see him for myself.
I know Machaon, his people's shepherd.
Now I'll go back and tell this to Achilles.
You know well enough, divinely bred old man,
what he's like—not someone to take lightly.
He'd be quick to blame an innocent man."

[740] Geranian horseman Nestor then said to Patroclus:
"Why is Achilles showing pity now
for Achaea's sons, those men hurt with spears
and arrows? He knows nothing of our trouble,
the great suffering which afflicts the army.
For our best men lie injured at the ships,
crippled by arrows, spears, and swords.
Strong Diomedes, son of Tydeus, is hurt,
as is Odysseus, famous for his spear,
Agamemnon and Eurypylus as well,
[750] with an arrow in his thigh. This man here,

hurt with an arrow from some bowstring,
I've just brought in from battle. Achilles is brave,
but shows no pity, feels nothing for Danaans.
Is he waiting till our fast ships by the sea
are set on fire with all-consuming flames,
and Achaeans, powerless to stop it,
are slaughtered one by one? My strength now
in my supple limbs is not what it used to be.
I wish I were as young, my strength as firm,
[760] as when the Eleans and our people
went to war for stolen cattle, when I killed
Itymoneus, brave son of Hypeirochus,
a man from Elis, as I was driving off
what we'd seized in reparation. He was fighting
for his cattle. In the foremost ranks,
a spear from my hand struck him. He collapsed.
His country people ran away, and so we seized
a huge amount of plunder from that plain—
fifty herds of cattle, as many flocks of sheep,
[770] fifty droves of pigs, fifty herds of wandering goats,
one hundred fifty horses, all chestnut mares,
many with foals still standing under them.
At night we drove these to the citadel
of Neleus' city, Pylos. Neleus rejoiced,
glad at heart, because I'd shared in so much loot,
though I was just a young man going to war.
Next day at dawn, heralds proclaimed out loud
that all those to whom Elis stood in debt
should meet together. The leading men of Pylos
[780] thus gathered to appropriate the spoils,
for Epeians were in debt to many men.
Those of us in Pylos were few and weak.
Mighty Hercules had come some years before
and sapped our strength by killing our best men.*
Neleus once had twelve worthy sons—
I'm the only one remaining. The others
were all wiped out. Bronze-armed Epeians

at that point took advantage of us,
committing evil and aggressive acts.

[790] From that plunder old Neleus selected
a herd of cattle, a large flock of sheep,
taking three hundred of them with their shepherds.
Holy Elis owed him an enormous debt—
four prize-winning horses with their chariot,
which had come to Elis to compete, intent
on racing for a tripod. But Augeias,
king of men, kept the horses there in Elis.
He sent their driver back, grieving for his team.
Old Neleus was angry with Augeias

[800] for what he'd said and done. That's why he took
so much booty for himself. The rest he gave
to be distributed among the people
in equal shares, so no one would object.
We allocated each and every bit
and sacrificed to all the city gods.
On the third day Epeians came in force,
all together, with their sure-footed horses,
at top speed, lots of them. Among them came
the two Moliones, fully armed, still young,

[810] not knowing much of serious warfare.
Now, there's a certain city Thryoessa,
far off on a steep hill by the Alpheius,
at the very end of sandy Pylos.
Desperately eager to destroy this place,
they pitched their forces round it in a siege.
But once Epeians crossed the entire plain,
Athena came speeding from Olympus
down to us at night. She brought a message—
we should arm ourselves. She mustered a force

[820] of volunteers in Pylos, all keen for war.
Neleus would not let me take up arms.
He hid my horses—he thought I was ignorant
of anything to do with war. But even so,
though I fought on foot, I made my mark

among our charioteers. For Athena
planned the battle out in just that way.
There is a river Minyeïus, which meets the sea
near Arene. The Pylian horsemen
waited there till dawn while squads of men on foot
[830] came streaming in. We moved out quickly
with our weapons, all together. At noon
we reached the holy river Alpheius.
We sacrificed fine beasts to Zeus almighty,
a bull to Poseidon, and one to Alpheius.
To Athena with the glittering eyes we offered
a cow from our own herd. Then we had dinner
at our positions there throughout the camp.
We went to sleep, each man with his weapons,
along the river bank. The brave Epeians
[840] were encircling the city, hearts set on razing it.
Before they managed that, they saw a fight,
a major battle. For when the sun appeared
above the earth, we sacrificed to Zeus
and to Athena, then started our attack.
When Pylians and Epeians began the battle,
I was the first to kill a man and seize
his sure-footed horses. That man was Mulius,
a spear fighter, son-in-law to Augeias.
He'd taken as his wife fair-haired Agamede,
[850] the eldest daughter, who knew all medicines
this wide earth provides. As he came against me,
I struck him with my bronze-tipped spear. He fell
into the dust. I jumped in his chariot,
taking my place among the foremost fighters.
Stout-hearted Epeians saw the man go down,
leader of their horsemen, their best fighting man.
They ran away in all directions. I pursued,
going after them like some black whirlwind.
I captured fifty chariots. In every one
[860] two warriors bit the dust, slain by my spear.
And I'd have slaughtered both the Molines,

Actor's descendants, but their father,
the wide-ruling shaker of the earth, Poseidon,
with a thick concealing mist let them escape.
Then Zeus put great power into Pylians.
We pursued Epeians over that wide plain,
killing them and gathering their fine weapons,
until we pushed our horses into Bouprasion,
a wheat-rich region, to the rock of Olene,
[870] the place which people call Alesium hill.
There Athena turned our soldiers back.
I killed the final warrior and left him there.
Achaeans quickly led their fast horses back
from Bouprasion to Pylos, all of them
paying tribute among all the gods to Zeus,
and among all men to Nestor. That's how
I once used to be, when I was a man
among the men. But what of Achilles?
His courage will profit no one but himself.
[880] I think he might bitterly regret all this,
once our army is destroyed. O my friend,
that day Menoetius sent you from Phthia
in Agamemnon's cause, he gave you orders.
Both lord Odysseus and myself were present.
We heard all he said to you there in his house.
We'd come to the well-built home of Peleus,
mustering men across fertile Achaea.
And we found warrior Menoetius and yourself,
together with Achilles. In the courtyard,
[890] old horseman Peleus was burning thigh bones
rolled in fat to thunder-loving Zeus.
He held a golden cup, poured gleaming wine,
libations, on the flaming sacrifice.
The two of you were busy with the ox meat.
We two stood in the doorway. Achilles
jumped up in great surprise, took our hands,
brought us inside, inviting us to sit.
Then we received fine hospitality,

the sort appropriate for strangers. Later,
[900] when we'd had our fill of food and drink,
I began to speak, asking you to come with us.
You were really eager. Both older men
gave you instructions about many things.
Old Peleus ordered his son Achilles
always to be the best, to stand pre-eminent,
above all other men. Menoetius, son of Actor,
told you:

'My son, Achilles is by birth
a finer man than you. But you are older.
In strength he is by far your better,
[910] but it's up to you to give shrewd advice,
prudent counsel, and direction to him.
He'll comply, for that works to his benefit.'
That's what the old man said. But you forget.
Even now, if you'd speak to fierce Achilles,
you might persuade him. Who knows? Some god
might help you shift his spirit with your words.
A friend's persuasion is an excellent thing.
But if his heart knows of some prophecy
that he's avoiding, something from Zeus
[920] his mother's mentioned to him, then at least
let him send you to war, in command
of other Myrmidons—it may well be
you'll prove a saving light to the Danaans.
Let him also give you his fine armour
to carry into battle, so Trojans may confuse
the two of you and thus refrain from fighting.
Achaëa's warrior sons are tired out.
They might gain a breathing space, something rare
in warfare. Your troops are fresh. They might drive
[930] Trojans worn out with fighting to the city,
far from our ships and huts."

Nestor finished speaking.

His words stirred up the heart inside Patroclus' chest.
He went off on the run along the line of ships,
towards Achilles, descendant of Aeacus.
But as Patroclus ran by lord Odysseus' ships,
right where they held assemblies and judicial court,
where they'd built their altars to the gods as well,
he met Eurypylus, royal son of Euaemon,
limping from the battle, his thigh wounded by an arrow.
[940] Down his head and shoulders ran rivulets of sweat.
Black blood seeped from his nasty wound. But his spirit
was still strong. Seeing him, Menoetius' worthy son
felt compassion. He spoke winged words of sympathy:
"You leaders, you rulers of Achaeans,
it seems to be your destiny to feed the dogs
with your white flesh at Troy, far from your friends,
far from your native land. But come now,
Eurypylus, you royal warrior, tell me
whether Achaeans will manage to contain
[950] warlike Hector, or whether they'll all die,
slaughtered here on Hector's spear."
Wise Eurypylus then said in answer to Patroclus:
"Lord Patroclus, there's no longer anything
can save Achaeans, who'll fall back to their black ships.
All those who were our finest fighters
are lying by the ships, hurt or wounded
at Trojan hands, whose strength keeps growing.
But take me safely back to my black ship,
cut the arrow from my thigh, and with warm water
[960] wash away the black blood there, then rub on
fine soothing medication, whose use, they say,

Achilles taught you, an art he learned
from Cheiron, most righteous of the Centaurs.
Of our healers, Podalierius and Machaon,
one, I believe, lies wounded in our huts,
himself requiring some worthy healer,
the other's out there on the plains, holding off

the fighting spirit of the Trojans.”

Menoetius’ fine son then said to Eurypylus:

[970] “How can you get this cure? What can we do,
noble Eurypylus? I’m on my way
to inform warlike Achilles of the news
which Geranian Nestor, Achaea’s guardian,
asked me to report. But I won’t leave you
in such suffering.”

When Patroclus had finished,
he put his arm around Eurypylus’ chest, then took
that shepherd of his people to his hut. Seeing them,
an aide put down some ox hides. Settling him there,
with a knife Patroclus cut out the arrow, razor sharp,
[980] from his thigh, and washed the blood off with warm water.
He put some bitter root onto his hands and rubbed it in,
something to relieve the hurt, remove all pain.
The wound then dried, and blood stopped flowing.