

Book 11

Now Dawn from her bed at the side of noble Tithōnos
rose up, to bring light to immortals and humankind;
and to the Achaians' swift ships Zeus now sent out Strife—
that baneful spirit—cradling a portent of war in her hands.¹
She stopped by Odysseus's ship, black and deep-hulled, 5
that lay halfway along, so a shout could reach either end,
could be heard at the huts both of Aias, Telamōn's son,
and those of Achilles—the two who had drawn up their trim ships
furthest away, relying on their prowess, their hands' strength.
The goddess stood there and uttered a loud and terrible cry, 10
shrilly, infusing great strength into every Achaian's
heart, to engage in unceasing warfare and battle;
so that to them, at once, war now became much sweeter
than going back in their hollow ships to their own dear country.

Atreus's son roared his command to the Argives to gird themselves, 15
and himself amongst them now donned the gleaming bronze.
His greaves first he fastened on about his shins—
finely made, and fitted with silver ankle-pieces.
Next, to cover his chest, he put on his corselet,
the one he'd received as a guest-gift from Kinyras, who had 20
heard the great news on Cyprus, that the Achaians
were about to make the voyage to Troy in their ships,
and so sent him this present, to seek favor with the king.
On it were ten bands of darkest cobalt enamel,
along with twelve of gold and twenty of tin, 25
and dark cobalt serpents writhing up towards the neck,
three on each side, like the rainbows that Kronos's son
sets in the clouds, as a portent for humankind.
Then about his shoulders he settled his sword, and on it
the studs gleamed golden, while the scabbard that held it 30
was made of silver, and fitted with golden chains.

1. "[W]hat Eris [Strife] held in her hands it is impossible to say and perhaps was never precisely conceived. . . . Like her war-shout it is the more awesome for being vague," as Hainsworth says (214).

Next he hefted his fine shield—all-protective, richly inlaid,
 battle-hungry: around it ran ten bands of bronze,
 and on it were set twenty bosses fashioned of tin,
 gleaming white, and a single central one of dark cobalt, 35
 encircling the Gorgon, with her menacing features,
 glaring horribly, flanked by Terror and Panic;
 from the shield hung a silvered baldric, and upon it
 writhed a dark cobalt serpent, that had three heads
 turned in different directions, yet growing from one neck. 40
 Then he put on his leather helmet, double-bossed, quadruple-plated,
 with its horsehair crest nodding terribly above it,
 and picked out two strong spears, each tipped with bronze,
 and sharp: the gleam of the bronze shone from him to high heaven,
 and Athēnē and Hērē sent the thunder pealing 45
 in salute to the king of great and golden Mykēnai.

And now to his own charioteer each man gave orders
 to hold his horses in place, in good order, there by the ditch,
 while they themselves, on foot, arrayed in their battle gear,
 charged. An unquenchable clamor filled the early morning 50
 as they got in line by the ditch ahead of their charioteers,
 who advanced a little behind them. This fearsome uproar
 was stirred up amongst them by Kronos's son: from the heights
 of the airy sky he sent down raindrops dripping with blood,
 a sign of all the brave heads he'd soon dispatch to Hādēs. 55

The Trojans on their side, on the rise of the plain,
 were drawn up around great Hektōr and peerless Poulydamas,
 and Aineias, who was honored like a god by the Trojan people,
 and Antēnōr's three sons, Polybos and noble Agēnōr
 and youthful Akamas, in appearance like the immortals. 60
 Hektōr among the foremost bore his well-balanced shield:
 like the baleful star that from among the clouds emerges,
 a bright point, soon lost again behind those shadowy clouds,
 so Hektōr kept appearing, now out among the foremost,
 now in the rear, giving orders. Clad all in bronze, 65
 he shone like the lightnings of Zeus, the aegis-bearer.

So they, like rows of reapers confronting one another
 who drive their line ahead through a wealthy man's field
 of wheat or barley, and the swathes fall thick and fast,

so Trojans and Achaians both came charging forward, 70
 cutting down men: neither side gave a thought to fatal flight,
 but stayed head to head in the struggle, attacked like wolves,
 and Strife, that great misery-maker, watched in delight.
 Alone of the gods she was there among them as they struggled;
 the other gods were not present, but sitting apart, uninvolved, 75
 in their own halls—where, for each one of them,
 along the folds of Olympos, a fine house had been set up—
 all blaming the lord of the storm clouds, Kronos's son,
 because he was minded now to give glory to the Trojans.
 But the Father paid them no heed: he'd moved away, 80
 and was sitting apart from the others, exultant in his glory,
 staring out at the Trojans' city, the ships of the Achaians,
 the glinting of bronze, the killed and those killing them.

While it was morning still, with the sacred light brightening,
 both sides' shots struck home, and men dropped, hit; 85
 but at the hour when a woodcutter gets out his meal,
 in some mountain glen, when hands and arms are weary
 from felling tall trees, and exhaustion quells his spirit,
 and a longing for tasty food invades his mind, then it was
 that the Danaäns by their valor broke through the battle line, 90
 cheering their comrades along the ranks. Here Agamemnōn
 was first to charge: he took out Biēnōr, shepherd of men,
 and, next, his comrade Oileus, whipper of horses,
 who'd sprung down from his chariot to confront him,
 and, charging, was hit in the forehead by Agamemnōn's 95
 sharp spear: his bronze-laden headpiece failed to block it,
 through metal and bone it drove, mashing up as it went
 all the brain inside. It stopped his charge stone-dead.
 Agamemnōn, king of men, left these two prostrate there,
 bare torsos white, when he'd stripped them, tunics and all, 100
 and pressed on then to slaughter Isos and Antiphos
 two sons of Priam, one bastard, the other from wedlock,
 both in one chariot: of whom the bastard was driver,
 while famed Antiphos stood beside him. These two Achilles,
 among the foothills of Ida, once trussed up with pliant willow 105
 after catching them herding their sheep, let them go for a ransom.
 But now the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnōn,
 speared Isos in the chest, up over the nipple,

slashed Antiphos close by his ear, knocked him off the chariot;
then, hastening to strip both of their fine gear, recognized 110
who they were: he'd already seen them, by the swift ships,
when fleet-footed Achilles brought them in from Ida.

As a lion that catches a speedy hind's young fawns
easily crunches them up, when it gets its strong teeth on them,
after breaking into their den, rips out their tender hearts, 115
and their mother, even though near, remains unable
to protect them, since over her too come fearful tremors,
and quickly she runs away through dense thickets and woodland,
sweating in haste to avoid the mighty beast's attack—
so not one of the Trojans was able to ward off death 120
from these two, being themselves in flight before the Argives.

Next for him were Peisandros and steadfast Hippolochos,
the sons of shrewd Antimachos, who'd been the firmest—
since he'd taken Paris's gold, splendid presents—in refusing
to let them give Helen back to fair-haired Menelaös. 125

It was his two sons that the lord Agamemnōn now captured,
in the same chariot, both trying to manage their swift horses,
for the shining reins had slipped from their hands, and the team
was bolting; but Atreus's son went against them like a lion,
and they from the chariot now begged him: "Take us alive, 130
son of Atreus! You'll get a worthy ransom for us!

There are treasures in plenty stored up in Antimachos's house—
bronze, gold, and iron worked with much toil: from these
our father would gladly pay you ransom past counting
should he learn we are still alive by the Achaians' ships." 135

So these two, weeping, addressed themselves to the king
with honeyed words, but no honey was in the reply they heard:
"If you indeed are the sons of that same shrewd Antimachos,
who, in the Trojans' assembly, recommended that Menelaös—
who'd come there on an embassy with godlike Odysseus— 140
should be killed on the spot, not let go back to the Achaians,
then you'll pay the price now for your father's vile behavior."

That said, he forced Peisandros out of his chariot
with a spear-thrust to the chest: thrown, he lay prostrate.
Hippolochos sprang down, and him he killed on the ground, 145
severed both arms with his sword, slashed through his neck,

sent his torso off through the ranks like a roller. These two
 he left now, and where the disorderly rout was thickest,
 there he charged in, and with him other well-greaved Achaians.
 Footmen were killing those footmen forced into flight 150
 and horsemen horsemen: beneath them there rose from the plain
 the dust stirred up by their horses' thundering hooves
 as they dealt death with the bronze. And the lord Agamemnōn,
 ever killing, followed the rout, urging on the Argives:
 and as when devouring fire falls upon unthinned woodland, 155
 and a roiling wind spreads it everywhere, and thickets
 are consumed down to their roots by its blazing onslaught,
 so before Atreus's son Agamemnōn went down the proud heads
 of fleeing Trojans, and many the proud-necked horses
 that rattled their empty chariots across the battlefield, 160
 lacking their peerless drivers, who lay there on the ground,
 far more attractive by now to vultures than to their wives.

Zeus was drawing Hektōr away from the missiles, the dust,
 the blood, the confused uproar, and the slaughter of men;
 and Atreus's son followed, loudly urging the Danaāns on. 165
 Past the burial mound of old Ilos, Dardanos's son,
 across the mid-plain, by the wild fig tree they panted,
 pressing on to the city, with Atreus's son at their heels,
 in full cry, his invincible hands besmeared with bloody filth.
 But when they reached the Skaian Gates and the oak tree, 170
 there the Trojans halted, stood waiting for one another.
 Some were out in the plain still, stampeding like cattle
 that a lion has routed, coming on them at dead of night—
 all except one cow, and for her sheer destruction is manifest:
 when she's caught, first he breaks her neck with his powerful 175
 fangs, then gulps down her blood, along with all her innards.
 Just so did the lord Agamemnōn, Atreus's son, press hard
 on the routed Trojans, kept killing the hindmost as they fled.
 Many were thrust from their chariots, prone or supine,
 by Atreus's son's hands, as he raged all around him with his spear. 180
 But when he'd near got in beneath the city and its towering
 ramparts, then it was that the Father of men and gods
 seated himself on the peaks of spring-rich Ida,
 coming down from the heavens, a thunderbolt in his hands,
 and sent off golden-winged Iris to deliver a message: 185

“Go now, swift Iris, convey this charge to Hektōr:
 so long as he sees Agamemnōn, the people’s shepherd, ranging
 among the front-line fighters, cutting down the ranks of men,
 he’s to hold back himself, while urging the rest of his troops
 to battle the enemy in the grinding conflict. But when, 190
 either spear-struck or shot with an arrow, Agamemnōn
 takes to his chariot, then I shall guarantee to Hektōr
 the strength to go on killing till he reaches the well-benched ships,
 and the sun goes down, and sacred darkness comes on.”

So he spoke: wind-footed swift Iris did not ignore him, 195
 but went down from the heights of Ida to sacred Ilion,
 and found wise Priam’s son, illustrious Hektōr,
 standing behind his horses in his dovetailed chariot.
 Swift-footed Iris came up beside him and said:
 “Hektōr, son of Priam, Zeus’s equal in counsel, 200
 Zeus the Father has sent me to give you this message:
 So long as you see Agamemnōn, the people’s shepherd, ranging
 among the front-line fighters, cutting down the ranks of men,
 you’re to hold back yourself, but should urge the rest of your troops
 to battle the enemy in the grinding conflict. But when, 205
 either spear-struck or shot with an arrow, Agamemnōn
 takes to his chariot, then Zeus will guarantee you
 the strength to go on killing till you reach the well-benched ships,
 and the sun goes down, and sacred darkness comes on.”

That said, swift-footed Iris went on her way, and Hektōr 210
 leapt to the ground from the chariot in his battle-gear,
 brandishing two sharp spears, and ranged widely through the ranks,
 urging them on to fight, stirred up the clash of battle.
 So they rallied, stood firm, confronting the Achaians,
 and the Argives opposite them now strengthened their ranks, 215
 and the battle was set. They stood face to face. Agamemnōn
 was the first to charge, mind set on fighting ahead of them all.

Tell me now, Muses, you who have your homes on Olympos,
 who was it first came forward to stand against Agamemnōn,
 of the Trojans themselves, or of their far-famed allies? 220
 Iphidamas son of Antēnōr, a valiant man and tall,
 who was brought up in rich-soiled Thrace, the mother of flocks:
 Kissēs reared him at home while he was still a small child—

his mother's father, who sired the fair-cheeked Theanō.
 But when he reached the milestone of glorious youth, 225
 Kissēs, to keep him there, gave him his daughter; yet
 from the bridal chamber he went seeking glory from the Achaians,
 with twelve curved ships that accompanied him. Now these
 trim vessels he later abandoned at Perkōtē,
 and himself continued, on foot, his journey to Ilion. 230
 He now came out to face Agamemnōn son of Atreus.
 When they'd advanced to within close range of one another,
 Atreus's son threw and missed, his spear going wide,
 but Iphidamas hit on his baldric below the corselet, put
 all his weight into the thrust, trusting his strong hand, 235
 yet failed to pierce the bright baldric: far short of that
 his spear-point struck against silver, was bent like lead.
 Then seizing it in one hand wide-ruling Agamemnōn
 dragged it toward him, mad as a lion, and wrenched it
 out of Iphidamas's grasp, slashed his neck with his sword, 240
 unstrung his limbs. So he fell, and slept the sleep of bronze,
 wretched youth, helping his countrymen, far from his wife,
 the bride that he'd had no joy of, much though he'd paid for her:
 a hundred oxen he first gave, then promised a thousand
 goats and sheep from the countless flocks herded for him. 245
 But now Atreus's son Agamemnōn stripped his body
 and went back among the Achaians with his fine battle gear.

 When Koön—distinguished warrior, Antēnōr's eldest son—
 caught sight of him, huge overpowering grief
 blinded his eyes for the sake of his fallen brother. 250
 Up on one side he came, with his spear, unseen by noble
 Agamemnōn, and pierced his mid-arm below the elbow.
 The point of the bright spear went clean through his arm,
 and at that the lord of men, Agamemnōn, shuddered;
 yet not even so did he break off from battle and warfare, 255
 but sprang upon Koön, wind-toughened spear² in hand.
 Now Koön had seized Iphidamas, his brother, his father's son,
 by one foot, was dragging him off, and appealing to all the bravest;
 but then, as he dragged him, right under his bossed shield

2. The epithet "wind-toughened" (*ἀνεμοτρεφής*, *anemotrophēs*) puzzled ancient scholars: the consensus was that trees buffeted by the winds yielded tougher timber, and irrespective of the truth of the assumption, this seems the likeliest explanation.

Agamemnōn thrust his bronze spear tip, unstrung his limbs, 260
 stepped close, and cut off his head, right over Iphidamas.
 So there both Antēnōr's sons met their destined fate at the hands
 of the king, Atreus's son, and went down to the house of Hādēs.

Agamemnōn continued to range up and down the Trojan ranks
 with spear and sword and great stones,³ just as long as the blood 265
 still flowed warm from his wound; but from the moment
 the wound started drying up, and the flow of blood ceased,
 sharp pains began to weaken the powers of Atreus's son;
 just as a keen dart targets any woman in labor—the piercing
 pains sent by the Eileithyai, spirits of hard childbirth, 270
 Hērē's daughters, who have bitter birth-pangs in their keeping—
 so sharp pains began to weaken the powers of Atreus's son.
 Now he climbed up into his chariot, ordered his driver
 to make for the hollow ships, since his heart was heavy-laden;
 and in a carrying voice he called out to the Danaāns: 275
 “My friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives,
 it's up to you now to keep far from our seagoing vessels
 the grievous business of fighting, since Zeus the counselor will not
 allow me to war all day long against the Trojans.”

So he spoke, and his driver whipped the fine-maned horses 280
 towards the hollow ships, and they, nothing loath, sped off:
 foam splattered their chests, dust coated their underbellies
 as they bore the afflicted king away from the fighting.

When Hektōr became aware of Agamemnōn's withdrawal
 he called out in a carrying voice to the Trojans and Lycians: 285
 “Trojans! Lycians! You Dardanian front-line fighters!
 Be men now, my friends! Remember your fighting spirit!
 Their best man has gone, and to me great glory is granted
 by Zeus, son of Kronos: now drive your whole-hoofed horses
 straight for these Danaān battlers, win yourselves still greater glory!” 290

By his words he stirred up each man's force and spirit.
 The way that a hunter sets his white-fanged bloodhounds

3. Lines 265–89 are found in a late third-century B.C.E. papyrus (see Hainsworth 254ff.). Comparison with the standard text shows at least nine extra lines (mostly undecipherable) and some very dubious readings, which, as Hainsworth says, offer “striking testimony to the deterioration of Homer's text in the hands of Hellenistic booksellers” and “show the difficulty, and the necessity, of the work of the Alexandrian scholars.”

in pursuit of a wild boar or lion, just so against the Achaians
 did Priam's son Hektōr, a match for Arēs, killer of mortals,
 urge on the great-spirited Trojans, and himself advanced, 295
 with high resolve, amongst the very foremost fighters,
 and flung himself into the conflict like some high-gusting storm
 that swoops down to roil the deep sea's violet waters.

Who then was the first, and who the last, to be slaughtered
 by Priam's son Hektōr, when Zeus now granted him glory? 300
 Asaios first, and then Autonoös and Opitēs,
 and Dolops, Klytios's son, Opheltios, Agelaös,
 Aisymnos, and Ōros, and steadfast Hipponoös—these
 were the Danaän leaders he took down, and then he assailed
 the mass of troops. As when the west wind rolls back the clouds 305
 brought by the cleansing south wind, hits them with a deep squall,
 wave rolls upon swollen wave, and aloft the spindrift
 is dispersed by the force of the veering wind, so high
 was the head-count of soldiers now laid low by Hektōr.

Then there would have been havoc, and actions irreparable, 310
 and the fleeing Achaians would have fallen, aboard their ships,
 had not Odysseus called out to Tydeus's son Diomēdēs:
 "Tydeus's son, what's made us forget our fighting spirit?
 Come here, stand by me! Shame indeed it will be
 if bright-helmeted Hektōr gets to capture our vessels." 315

Answering him, strong Diomēdēs declared:
 "Indeed I'll remain and stand firm, but all too brief
 our satisfaction will be, since Zeus the cloud-gatherer
 surely wants a win for the Trojans rather than for us."

With that he thrust Thymbraios clean out of his chariot, 320
 spearing him through his left nipple, while Odysseus
 took down Molíōn, the prince's godlike henchman.
 These then they left, after finishing them as fighters,
 and both went creating havoc among the ranks: as when
 two fierce wild boars turn against a pack of hunting dogs, 325
 so they turned, attacked, killed Trojans; and the Achaians
 were glad of a breathing space in their flight from noble Hektōr.

A chariot they caught next, with two warriors in it—the sons
 of Merōps of Perkôtē, who outstripped all other men

in seercraft, and tried to prevent his sons from going
off to murderous warfare.⁴ But they flatly refused 330
to obey him: black death's spirits were driving them on.
So now Tydeus's son, the famed spearman Diomēdēs,
deprived them of breath and life, took away their fine battle gear,
while Hippiodamos and Hypeirochos fell to Odysseus. 335

Then for them Kronos's son stretched the battle taut and even⁵
as he looked down from Ida; and they kept killing one another.
The son of Tydeus wounded Agastrophos with his spear,
Paiōn's warrior son, on the hip joint: his horses weren't at hand
for him to escape—he, blindly deluded, had left them 340
to be held, some way off, by his henchman, while he on foot
charged through the front-line fighters till he lost his life.
But Hektōr soon glimpsed them across the lines, ran at them,
whooping aloud, and the ranks of the Trojans followed.
At the sight of him Diomēdēs of the great war cry shuddered, 345
but at once exclaimed to Odysseus, standing beside him:
“Here's calamity rolling in on us, it's mighty Hektōr!
Come on, let's make a stand, hang firm here, drive him back!”

With that he poised and let fly his far-shadowing spear,
and his cast did not miss, struck home high on Hektōr's head, 350
caught the top of his helmet; but the bronze was stood off by bronze,
failed to reach his fine flesh, was stopped by the triple layers
of the eyeholed helmet that Phoibos Apollo gave him.
Hektōr backed off a great distance, merged with the throng,
fell to his knees and stayed so, one strong hand propped 355
on the ground, and dark night now enveloped his eyes.
But while Tydeus's son was going after the cast of his spear,
far beyond the front-line fighters, where it had hit the ground,
Hektōr came to again, and reboarded his chariot,
drove into the mass of troops, escaped the black death-spirit. 360

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4. “Seers and priests are popular as fathers of the slain, their disregarded warnings . . . being a ready source of pathos,” Hainsworth says (262). See, e.g., 5.148–51, 13.663–72.
5. There is a clear echo here of the image of Zeus's heavenly scales, used to favor one side or the other: see 8.69–75 and 22.209–14. The weighing was most commonly connected with wool (cf. 12.433–35), regularly checked in households by the housekeeper (*tamiē*); Zeus in this connection is referred to as the male equivalent (*tamias*), generally translated as “steward”. The metaphor borrows the most popular social practice for fair adjudication to express an act of completely arbitrary divine authoritarianism. See Onians 408–10.

But strong Diomēdēs with his spear pursued him, shouting:
 “Once more, dog, you’ve dodged death, though close indeed
 that evil came to you! But once more Phoibos Apollo
 saved you, to whom it must be you pray before entering
 the clash of spears—and for sure, when I meet you later,
 if there’s any god who’s *my* helper, I’ll finish you off!
 Meanwhile I’ll go after the others, see whom I can catch.”

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With that he started to strip the famed spearman, Païōn’s son.
 But Aléxandros, the husband of fair-haired Helen,
 drew his bow upon Tydeus’s son, the shepherd of the people—
 leaning against the column set up on the mound men raised
 for Ilos, Dardanos’s son, a folk-elder in former times—
 as he was pulling off the shining corselet from sturdy
 Agastrophos’s chest, and the shield from off his shoulders,
 and his weighty helmet. Paris drew back his arm from the bow
 and shot. Not in vain did the arrow fly from his hand,
 but hit Diomēdēs’ right foot, on the flat part: the shaft went through,
 stuck fast in the ground. Then, with loud laughter, Paris
 sprang out from his hiding place and shouted boastfully:
 “You’re hit! Not in vain did my shaft fly! Oh, how I wish
 I’d caught your nether belly, and taken your life away!
 Then would the Trojans have had some relief from their troubles,
 who now tremble before you like bleating sheep with a lion.”

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To him, quite unafraid, strong Diomēdēs replied:
 “Bowman, foul-mouthed curser, pretty-locks, ogler of virgins!—
 If you’d only make trial of me face to face, wearing armor,
 then your bow and your showers of arrows would not protect you;
 and even now your boast is just to have scratched my foot!
 I don’t care—it could well have been a daft child or a woman
 that shot me, so blunt the shafts of a weakling, a nobody!
 Very different indeed, if it only grazes its target,
 is the sharp spear sped by *my* hand: it brings a man instant death,
 and the cheeks of his widow are torn in grief and mourning,
 and his children are orphaned, while he reddens the earth
 with his blood, and rots, more vultures than women round him.”

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So he spoke, and Odysseus, famous spearman, came up
 and stood over him while he sat there and pulled out the sharp
 shaft from his foot, and a flash of agony lanced his flesh.

Diomēdēs then boarded his chariot, ordered his driver
to make for the hollow ships, since his heart was heavy-laden. 400

Odysseus, famous spearman, was now alone: not one
of the Argives remained with him, since fear had gripped them all,
and deeply stirred he addressed his own proud spirit:
“Ah, what’s to become of me? A black mark if I run for it,
scared off by their numbers—and yet much worse if I’m taken, 405
alone, now the rest of the Danaāns have been put to flight
by Kronos’s son. Yet why does my heart debate these things?
For this I know well: a coward may walk away from battle,
but a first-class fighter is under an obligation
to hold his ground, whether striking another, or stricken.” 410

While he pondered these matters in his mind and spirit,
the ranks of shield-bearing Trojans advanced, surrounding him
on all sides—yet setting up disaster for themselves.
And just as round a boar, dogs and strapping young hunters
close eagerly in as he bursts from some deep thicket, 415
sharpening the white tusks set in his curving jaws,⁶
and come at him from all around, and the sound of grinding
fangs is heard, but they stand firm, alarming though he is—
so now around Odysseus, beloved of Zeus, the Trojans
pressed close. But he first wounded peerless Deīopeitēs 420
from above, in the shoulder, springing at him with sharp spear,
then cut down Thoōn and Ennomos; after them
Chersidamas, who’d just jumped down from his chariot,
he speared in the navel, striking under his embossed shield,
and he fell in the dust, one bent hand clawing the ground. 425
These he left, and then speared Charōps, Hippiasos’s son,
full brother of wealthy Sōkos; and Sōkos now,
a godlike man, came up to protect him, and stood
close in front of Odysseus, and addressed him, saying:
“Ah, storied Odysseus, ever hungry for tricks and trouble! 430
Today you’ll either boast over both sons of Hippiasos,
having slain two such men, and stripped off their battle gear,
or else, struck by my spear, you’ll lose your life.”
So saying,

6. See Leaf, 1: 366–67: “The ancient legend was that the boar prepared for battle by whetting his teeth upon smooth rocks.”

he thrust with piercing force at Odysseus's well-balanced shield:
 through the bright shield his heavy spear went, and through 435
 the richly wrought corselet it drove its path, and **severed**
all the flesh from the ribs; yet Pallas Athēnē did not
let it tear in as far as the vitals. Odysseus sensed
 that the shaft had failed to get through to a fatal spot,
 so he backed off, and then had this to say to Sōkos: 440
 "Ah, wretch, surely now sheer destruction's on your heels!
 You may have stopped me fighting against the Trojans,
 but I tell you, death and the black death-spirit will find you,
 here and today: laid low by my spear you'll give
 glory to me, and your soul to horse-proud Hādēs." 445

At that Sōkos turned away, preparing to run for it,
 but as he was in mid-turn Odysseus planted his spear
 squarely between his shoulders, drove it through to his chest.
 He fell with a thud, and over him noble Odysseus exulted:
 "Ah, Sōkos, son of shrewd Hippiasos, breaker of horses, 450
 the end of death overtook you, you couldn't escape it!
 Wretched man, your father and lady mother will never
 close your eyes in death now: the flesh-eating birds of prey
 will tear them out raw, wings beating madly around you—
 but I, should I die, will get burial from the noble Achaians." 455

So saying, he pulled fierce Sōkos's heavy spear
 from his flesh and his embossed shield; and when it was out
 the blood came spurting, sickened him to his heart.
 But when the great-hearted Trojans saw Odysseus's blood,
 they called through the crush to each other, and all went at him. 460
 So he now drew back, and cried out to his comrades:
 thrice he shouted, as loud as any man's head could compass,
 and thrice Menelaös the war-lover heard him shout,
 and at once said to Aias, who was standing near him:
 "Aias, Zeus's scion, son of Telamōn, lord of men, 465
 the cry that came to my ears was from steadfast Odysseus—
 sounding as though he was being overpowered, alone,
 cut off by the Trojans in the raging conflict!
 Let's get to him through the turmoil: relief's our best answer.
 I fear he may come to harm, left alone among the Trojans, 470
 tough though he is, and the Danaäns may suffer a great loss."

That said, he led on: Aias, mortal but godlike, followed.
 They found Odysseus, beloved of Zeus, surrounded
 by Trojan attackers, like tawny mountain jackals
 round an antlered stag that's wounded, that some man has hit 475
 with a shot off his bowstring. The stag has escaped from him,
 running swiftly, so long as it has warm blood, responsive knees;
 but when in the end the swift arrow overcomes it,
 then the flesh-eating jackals rend it, high in the mountains,
 in a shadowy glen. But some spirit directs against them 480
 a ravening lion: the jackals scatter, it scoffs their prey.
 So now round shrewd Odysseus, that man of many wiles,
 pressed a crowd of valiant Trojans; but the hero,
 charging out with his spear, fended off the pitiless day.
 Then Aias moved in, hefting up his tower-like shield, 485
 and stood at his side. The Trojans scattered, this way and that,
 and Menelaös the war-lover led Odysseus out of the crush,
 held by one hand, till his henchman drove up with their chariot.
 But Aias charged the Trojans, taking down Doryklos,
 a bastard son of Priam, then wounded Pandokos, 490
 and went on to wound Lysandros, Pylartēs, and Pyrasos.
 As when a flooded river pours down into the plain
 in winter spate from the mountains, lashed on by the rains of Zeus,
 and masses of dried-out driftwood, both oak and pine,
 come with it, and it discharges much silt into the sea— 495
 so now, in disruptive pursuit across the plain, illustrious
 Aias charged, slaying both horses and men. But Hektör
 knew nothing of this, was fighting on the battle's far left flank,
 by the banks of the river Skamandros, where men's heads
 were dropping thickest, and an unquenchable clamor 500
 was going up around great Nestör and warlike Idomeneus.
 Among these Hektör joined battle, was doing grim work
 with spear and skilled horsemanship, breaking young fighters' ranks.
 Yet no way would the noble Achaians have faltered in their course
 had not Aléxandros, the husband of fair-haired Helen, 505
 cut short the great deeds of Machaön, his people's shepherd,
 shooting him in the right shoulder with a three-barbed arrow.
 Then, breathing rage, the Achaians were alarmed on his behalf,
 lest the tide of battle should turn, and he be captured,
 and at once Idomeneus spoke to noble Nestör, saying: 510
 "Ah, Nestör, son of Nēleus, great glory of the Achaians,

be quick, get aboard your chariot, have Machaōn mount
beside you, and drive your whole-hoofed steeds to the ships,
with all speed, for a healer's worth many ordinary men,
being skilled at cutting out arrows and applying soothing herbs." 515

So he spoke, and Nestōr, Gerēnian horsemen, did not
ignore him, but quickly boarded his chariot, with Machaōn
beside him, the son of Asklēpios, peerless healer.
He whipped the horses, and they, nothing loath, flew on
to the hollow ships, where their own hearts yearned to be. 520

Now Kebrionēs saw the Trojans being routed in disorder
as he stood at Hektōr's side, and spoke to him, saying:
"Hektōr, while you and I are engaged with the Danaāns here,
at the furthest edge of this wretched battle, the rest
of the Trojans are fleeing in disorder, themselves and their horses, 525
driven by Aias, Telamōn's son—I know him well
by that wide shield slung from his shoulders! We too should take
our horses and chariot there, where the conflict is worst,
where foot and horse both, competing in dread strife,
are killing each other, and raising an unquenchable clamor." 530

So saying, he lashed the fine-maned horses with his
whistling whip, and they, in reaction to the stroke,
speedily bore the swift chariot among Trojans and Achaians,
trampling corpses and shields: all the axle beneath
was spattered with blood, and the rails round the chariot, 535
flecked with the flying drops from the horses' hooves
and the rims of the wheels. Now Hektōr was straining to leap in
and shatter the mass of troops; appalling the turmoil
he wrought on the Danaāns, little rest did he give his spear,
but ranged to and fro down the ranks of the other fighters 540
with spear and sword and great stones, yet always avoided
engaging in combat with Aias, the son of Telamōn
[since Zeus was indignant with him when he battled a better man].⁷

Zeus the Father, seated aloft, now stirred terror in Aias:
dazed, his seven-layered oxhide shield slung behind him, 545

7. Line 543 (referred to by both Aristotle and Plutarch) is absent from all medieval MSS and would seem to have been inserted very early in order to satisfy those who were curious as to why the leading attacker, Hektōr, avoided the leading defender, Aias, in defiance of traditional epic etiquette (Hainsworth 282).

he stared nervously at the crowd, like a wild beast, and backed off,
 often turning around, moving step by slow step. Just as
 a tawny lion's driven off from their oxen's steading
 by country folk with their dogs, who won't allow him
 to get in and seize the fattest steer, who are vigilant 550
 the whole night through—yet he, so desperate for meat,
 keeps coming, but gets nowhere, has to face a shower
 of hunting spears flung by strong hands, and blazing firebrands
 before which, for all his eagerness, he shrinks back,
 and at dawn goes on his way, his spirit sorry: 555
 so Aias, before the Trojans, sorry at heart, gave ground
 against his will, much afraid for the ships of the Achaians.
 As an ass, passing a wheat field, breaks loose from boys—
 a stubborn beast, on which many cudgels have been broken—
 and goes in, and scoffs the ripe grain, and the boys flail at him 560
 with cudgels, but their strength's only that of children,
 and they can barely remove him, even when he's stuffed himself—
 so now was great Aias, the son of Telamōn, dogged
 by the arrogant Trojans and their allies from many countries,
 all thrusting with spears at the center of that great shield of his. 565
 Now Aias would be mindful once more of his fighting valor,
 wheel round and face them, and stand off the advance
 of the horse-breaking Trojans; and now he would turn and retreat.
 But he halted them all in their march against the swift ships,
 one man embattled, alone, between Trojans and Achaians, 570
 making his stand. Spears came at him from powerful arms:
 some in their forward flight stuck fast in his great shield,
 and many fell short, never reached his white flesh, yet still
 yearned, though fixed in the ground, to glut themselves on flesh.

When Euaimōn's splendid son Eurypylos observed him 575
 being hard-pressed by showers of missiles, he came up
 and stood at his side, and cast his own gleaming spear,
 and hit Phausios's son Apisaōn, shepherd of the people,
 in the liver, under his midriff, and at once unstrung his knees.
 Eurypylos sprang on him, to strip the gear from his shoulders, 580
 but the moment godlike Aléxandros perceived him
 stripping the gear from Apisaōn, straightway he drew
 his bow at Eurypylos, hit his right thigh with an arrow,
 and the arrow's shaft broke off, and his thigh went heavy.

He withdrew to his comrades' company, dodging fate, 585
 and in a carrying voice called out to the Danaäns:
 "Friends! Argive leaders and rulers! Stop! Turn back!
 Make a stand! Fight off the pitiless day of doom
 from Aias, a target for spears now! I hardly think
 he can survive this rough conflict alone—so stand firm, 590
 face the enemy, gather around great Aias, Telamôn's son!"

So spoke the wounded Eurypylos: they came and stood
 close beside him, shields lined up against their shoulders,
 spears couched; and Aias came on, facing them,
 and turned, and stood, when he reached his comrades' ranks. 595

These, then, were battling on in the likeness of blazing fire;
 but the mares of Nēleus, sweating, bore Nestōr from the battle,
 taking with him Machaōn, the shepherd of the people.
 Now he was observed by noble swift-footed Achilles
 as he stood on the afterdeck of his deep-hulled vessel, 600
 watching the burdensome struggle and unhappy rout;
 and at once he spoke to Patroklos, his companion,
 calling to him from the ship; and he heard, and came out
 as battle-minded as Arēs: so began his undoing.
 He it was, Menoitios's noble son, who spoke first: 605
 "Why did you call me, Achilles? What is it you need?"
 In answer to him swift-footed Achilles then said:
 "Noble son of Menoitios, delight of my heart,
 now, I think, the Achaians will come crowding round my knees,
 entreating me, now that need past bearing's come upon them! 610
 But go now, Patroklos, dear to Zeus, and ask Nestōr
 who this wounded man is that he's bringing from the battle?
 Certainly from behind he looked much like Machaōn,
 Asklēpios's son, but I didn't see the man's eyes—
 the horses sped too fast by me, galloping onward." 615

So he spoke, and Patroklos obeyed his dear companion,
 and ran off down the line of the Achaians' huts and ships.

When those others arrived at the hut of Nēleus's son,
 they themselves dismounted onto the bounteous earth,
 while old Nestōr's henchman Eurymedōn unyoked his horses 620
 from the chariot. They dried off the sweat on their tunics
 standing to face the breeze from the seashore, then they went

into the hut, and sat down on chairs, and for them
 lovely-tressed Hekamēdē mixed a posset—old Nestōr
 had taken her from Tenedos when Achilles sacked it, 625
 great-hearted Arsinoös's daughter, whom the Achaians
 chose for him, since he always gave them the best advice.
 First she brought out a table and set it before them,
 a fine one, well polished, its feet enameled in cobalt,
 and set on it a bronze basket, with an onion as relish 630
 for their drink, and pale honey, and sacred barley-meal,
 with an exquisite cup, that old Nestōr had brought from home,
 studded with golden rivets. Its handles were ears,
 four in number; round each a pair of golden
 doves were feeding: it rested upon a double base. 635
 Others needed to strain to hoist this cup from the table
 when full, yet Nestōr, the old man, raised it without effort.
 In it, for them, this woman resembling the immortals
 now mixed a posset, grating goat's cheese on Pramnian wine
 with a bronze grater, and sprinkled white barley meal over it, 640
 and when she'd prepared this brew, desired them to try it.
 So when both had drunk, and allayed their parching thirst,
 they then began chatting, took pleasure in conversation.
 Patroklos, godlike mortal, appeared now, stood at the door,
 and the old man, seeing him, sprang up from his polished chair, 645
 took his hand, led him in, invited him to be seated.
 But Patroklos, for his part, demurred, and thus addressed him:
 "I can't stay, old sir, Zeus's nursling: you won't persuade me.
 Demanding respect, quick to censure is he who sent me
 to learn who this man is you've brought back wounded. But I 650
 know him myself, can see he's Machaōn, the people's shepherd.
 So I'll go back as messenger, bring this word to Achilles.
 Well do you know, old sir, Zeus's nursling, just what kind
 of fearsome fellow he is—quick to blame even the blameless."

 In answer to him then Nestōr, Gerēnian horseman, said: 655
 "Why is Achilles so sorry for the sons of the Achaians,
 all those wounded by missiles? He knows nothing at all
 of the grief that's arisen in camp, now our best warriors
 are laid up aboard their ships, either shot or speared:
 shot is the son of Tydeus, mighty Diomēdēs, 660
 speared are Odysseus, famed spearman, and Agamemnōn,

shot, too, is Eurypylos, with an arrow through his thigh,
 as well as this man whom I just brought back from the fighting,
 struck by a shaft from the bowstring. Yet Achilles,
 brave though he is, neither pities nor cares for the Danaäns— 665
 Is he waiting until our swift ships there by the sea,
 in despite of the Argives, are ablaze with devouring fire,
 and we ourselves, one by one, are killed? For my strength
 is not what it once was, when my limbs were supple.
 I wish I were that young now, with all my strength 670
 as unimpaired as when we and the Eleans quarreled
 about cattle-rustling, that time I killed Itymoneus—
 Hypeirochos's excellent son, who had his home in Ēlis—
 when driving off beasts in reprisal. While defending his oxen
 among the foremost, he was hit by a spear from my hand, 675
 and fell, and the country folk round him fled in terror.
 So a vast amount of booty we herded out of the plain:
 fifty droves of oxen, as many flocks of sheep,
 no fewer herds of swine and wide-ranging goats,
 while of chestnut horses we took one hundred and fifty, 680
 all mares, and many with suckling foals. All these
 we drove at night to Pylos, city of Nēleus, brought them
 inside the walls, and Nēleus rejoiced at heart that so much
 had come my way while going to war for the first time.
 And at daybreak heralds made their loud-voiced proclamation 685
 that all who were owed a debt in noble Ēlis should now
 come forward, and the Pylians' leaders gathered together
 and divided the spoil: the Epeians had debts to many,
 since we in Pylos were few, and weakened by violence,
 after Hēraklēs' mighty force had done us outrage 690
 in the years before, and all our best men had been killed.
 We sons of peerless Nēleus were twelve in number,
 of whom I alone was left: all the rest had perished:
 Made arrogant by this, the bronze-corseleted Epeians
 devised in contempt outrageous acts against us. 695
 Now old Nēleus had chosen of oxen a drove, and of sheep
 a great flock, three hundred in all, and their shepherds too,
 he being owed a sizable debt in noble Ēlis—
 four racehorses, prizewinners, along with their chariot.
 They had gone to the games, were due to enter a race 700
 for a tripod, but Augeias, king of men, kept them there,

and sent back their driver lamenting for his lost horses.
The old man, infuriated by things both said and done,
helped himself to a huge amount, gave the people the rest
to divide, so that none should miss out on a fair share. 705

“So we were settling all this, and around the city
making sacrifice to the gods; on the third day the Epeians
came, in great numbers, they and their whole-hoofed horses
all together, and with them, armed, Molos’s two descendants,⁸
still youths, with as yet no knowledge of fighting valor. 710

There’s a city, Thryoessa, a steep site on a hilltop,
remote, by the Alpheios, on the marches of sandy Pylos,
and this they laid under siege, mad keen to destroy it.
But when they’d scoured all the countryside, **Athēnē came to us,**
by night, rushing down from Olympos, with the message 715

to arm ourselves. Nothing loath was the force she raised in Pylos,
but zealously eager to fight. However, Nēleus refused
to let me arm myself, and hid away my horses,
because, he said, as yet I knew nothing about war’s business.

But even so I stood out among our horsemen, 720
on foot though I was, **since thus Athēnē shaped the conflict.**

There’s a river, the Minyēios, that flows out into the sea
near Arēnē, where we waited for bright Dawn—we, the horsemen
of the Pylians—while the foot soldiers’ companies
came flowing in. From there, quickly arming ourselves, 725
we made our way at noon to Alpheios’s sacred stream.

There we made fine offerings to all-powerful Zeus,
and a bull to Alpheios, a bull also to Poseidōn,
but **to grey-eyed Athēnē a cow from the herd;** and then
we took our supper by companies throughout the camp, 730

and lay down to sleep, each man in his battle gear,
by the flowing river. Meanwhile the great-spirited Epeians
had the city under siege, were mad keen to destroy it;
but before that could be, they were faced with war’s mighty action,
for when the sun rose radiant over the earth, **then we** 735
joined battle, making our prayers to Zeus and Athēnē.

At the outset of combat between the Pylians and Achaians

8. The Epeian twins Kteatos and Eurytos were officially sons of Aktōr, in fact of Poseidōn (751); here and at 750 they are, unusually, identified by descent from their maternal grandfather Molos, a member of the Aiōlian royal house.

I was the first to kill my man, get his whole-hoofed horses—
 Moulios the spearman, Augeias's son-in-law,
 wed to his eldest daughter, the fair-haired Agamēdē, 740
 who knew every medical herb that the wide earth nourishes.
 Him, as he charged me, I stopped with my bronze-tipped spear,
 and he fell in the dust. I boarded his chariot,
 took my place with the foremost fighters. The bold Epeians
 scattered and fled when they saw that the man had fallen 745
 who was their horsemen's leader and a first-class warrior.
 I descended upon them then like a dark whirlwind:
 fifty chariots I took, in each of which a couple
 of warriors bit the dust, laid low by my spear.
 And I'd have killed Aktōr's sons, Molos's two descendants, 750
 had not their true father, the wide-ruling Earth-Shaker,
 wrapped them in heavy mist, and saved them from the battle.
 So there Zeus granted great power to the men of Pylos,
 for we kept up our pursuit across the far-flung plain,
 killing the men and collecting their splendid armor, 755
 driving our horses as far as Bouprasion's rich wheat fields
 and the Olēnian rock and the district where stands the hill
 of Alēsion: there Athēnē turned back our troops,
 and I slew my last man, and left him, and the Achaians
 brought their swift horses from Bouprasion back to Pylos, 760
 and all extolled Zeus among gods, and, among men, Nestōr.

"Such was I—if truly I ever was—among men. But Achilles
 alone will have joy of his valor: and I suspect he'll weep
 bitterly when it's too late, when our men have perished!
 Dear boy, thus indeed it was that Menoitios charged you 765
 that day he sent you out from Phthiē to Agamemnōn—
 we were both in the house there, I and noble Odysseus,
 and heard it all, just as he told you, every word of it.
 We'd made our way to the well-built home of Pēleus
 while recruiting an army through richly fertile Achaia, 770
 and there in the house we found the hero Menoitios,
 and you, and Achilles with you. Old Pēleus, the horse-driver,
 was burning a bull's fat thighs for Zeus the thunderer
 in his enclosed courtyard, and holding a golden cup
 to pour the fire-bright wine on the flaming sacrifice. 775
 You two were watching the ox meat. We came and stood

in the doorway. Achilles leapt to his feet, amazed,
 clasped our hands, led us in, invited us to be seated,
 set rich fare before us, a fitting welcome for strangers.
 But when we'd assuaged our desire for food and drink, 780
 I was the first to speak, urged you to follow with us:
 you both agreed, and your fathers both offered much advice.
 Old Pēleus gave this instruction to his son Achilles,
 always to be the best, preeminent over others;
 but you got this exhortation from Menoitios, Aktōr's son: 785
 'My child, in birth Achilles is higher than you are,
 but you are the older, though in strength he far outstrips you.
 It's your job to speak wisely to him, to give him shrewd advice,
 to guide him; and he'll obey you, to his profit.' Thus
 did the old man instruct you, but you're forgetful. Yet even 790
 now you could talk this way to warlike Achilles, perhaps
 get his consent. Who knows? With some god's aid you might
 touch his heart, bring him round: a comrade's persuasion's useful.
 But if in his mind there's some prophecy he's evading—
 some word from Zeus that his lady mother told him— 795
 at least let him send you out, and the rest of the Myrmidon
 force with you: maybe you'll prove a light to the Danaäns!
 He should give you his splendid armor to wear into battle:
 then the Trojans may take you for him, back off
 from the fighting, and thus the Achaians' warlike sons, 800
 worn out now, may relax: too brief is battle's respite.
 You—fresh, not tired—should easily drive men exhausted
 by battle back to the city, away from the ships and huts."

So speaking, he stirred the spirit in the breast of Patroklos, who
 now ran back past the ships to Achilles, Aiakos's grandson. 805
 But when in his running Patroklos reached the ships
 of godlike Odysseus—site of assemblies and the tribunal,
 where they'd also built their altars to serve the gods—
 there it was he encountered Eurypylos, scion of Zeus,
 Euaimōn's son, with the arrow-wound in his thigh, 810
 limping away from the fighting. The sweat was running down
 from his shoulders and head, and out of his grievous wound
 the black blood oozed, yet his mind was still unimpaired.
 At the sight of him Menoitios's valiant son felt pity,
 groaned aloud, and addressed him with winged words: 815

“Ah, wretched men, you Danaän leaders and rulers,
 thus it was, then, you were destined, far from friends and
 homeland,
 with your white fat to glut the scurrying dogs of Troy!
 But tell me this, Eurypylos, you hero, Zeus’s nursling—
 is there some way for the Achaïans to hold back great Hektör, 820
 or must they now perish, vanquished by his spear?”

Then the wounded Eurypylos made him this answer:
 “Patroklos, Zeus’s scion, no longer will the Achaïans
 have any defense: they’ll die beside their black ships.
 For indeed all those who before were the best fighters 825
 are laid up aboard their vessels, spear-struck or shot with arrows
 at the hands of the Trojans, whose strength grows ever greater.
 But take care of me now, lead me back to my black ship,
 cut the arrow out of my thigh, wash the black blood from the wound
 with water that’s warm, spread it with soothing herbals, 830
 those good ones that, they say, you learnt from Achilles,
 whom Cheirôn taught, the most just of the Centaurs.
 For of the healers we have, Podaleirios and Machaôn,
 the one, I think, lies wounded here in the huts,
 himself in need of a peerless healer; the other 835
 is out on the plain, awaiting the Trojans’ sharp assault.”

Then the valiant son of Menoitios made him this answer:
 “How can such things be? Lord Eurypylos, what shall we do?
 I’m on my way with a message to warlike Achilles
 from Gerēnian Nestōr, protector of the Achaïans. 840
 But I’ll not, even so, abandon you in your distress.”

With that, one arm round the waist of the people’s shepherd,
 he led him off to his hut. His henchman saw them, spread oxhides.
 Patroklos made him lie down, with a knife cut out of his thigh
 the sharp arrow,⁹ washed the black blood from the wound 845
 with water that was warm, then applied a bitter root
 after crushing it up in his hands, a painkiller, that allayed
 all his pang: the wound began drying, the blood ceased to flow.

9. Thus partially avoiding the agony that Diomēdēs had suffered (396–98) by simply
 pulling an arrow out of his wound against the barbs.