Olympus and in Hades. Polydeuces chose the latter, and so the Dioscuri shared both immortality and death.1

As gods Castor and Polydeuces were especially connected with seafarers, to whom they appear as St. Elmo's fire.2 They were particularly honored at Sparta, and in the early fifth century B.C. their cult spread to Rome.3 One of the most prominent buildings in the Forum at Rome was the temple of Castor.

In the two Homeric Hymns to the Dioscuri they are addressed as the Tyndaridae because their mother, Leda, was the wife of Tyndareus. Hymn 17 is short and focuses on their conception and birth:

About Castor and Polydeuces sing, clear-voiced Muse, the Tyndaridae, who are sprung from Olympian Zeus. Beneath the peaks of Mt. Taygetus lady Leda bore them, after she had been stealthily seduced by the dark-clouded son of Cronus.

Hymn 33 depicts the Dioscuri in their important role as patron deities of sailors and seafarers:

O bright-eyed Muses, tell about the sons of Zeus, the Tyndaridae, splendid children of lovely-ankled Leda—Castor, the horse-tamer, and faultless Polydeuces. Leda joined in love with Zeus, the dark-clouded son of Cronus, and she gave birth beneath the summit of the great mountain, Taygetus, to these children, saviors of people on earth and of swift-moving ships, when wintry winds rage over a savage sea. Those on the ship go to the highest part of the stern and call on great Zeus with promises of white lambs. The strong wind and swell of the sea put the ship under water, but suddenly the two brothers appear, darting on tawny wings through the air. At once they calm the blasts of the harsh winds and quell the waves on the expanse of the whitecapped sea. Those who have been freed from pain and toil rejoice, since they have seen these two fair signs of deliverance from distress. (1–17)

Hail, Tyndaridae, riders of swift horses! Yet I shall remember you and another song too.

Helen

The daughters of Zeus and Leda were Clytemnestra and Helen. Clytemnestra became the wife of Agamemnon, and we have discussed her part in the Mycenaean saga (Chapter 18). Helen grew up to be the most beautiful of women, and from the many Greek princes (including Theseus and Odysseus) who were her suitors she chose Menelaus, who became king of Sparta. The rejected suitors swore to respect her choice and help Menelaus in time of need.

Helen lived for some years at Sparta and bore a daughter, Hermione, to Menelaus. In time, however, the Trojan prince Paris (also called Alexander), the son of Priam and Hecuba, visited Sparta while Menelaus was away in Crete. There he seduced Helen and took her back to Troy with him. To recover her and vindicate the rights of Menelaus, the Achaean (Mycenaean Greek) expedition, led by Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus, was raised against Troy.

Another version of Helen's story was invented by the seventh-century poet Stesichorus, who says in his Palinode:

That story is not true; you did not go in the well-bench'd ships, nor did you go to the towers of Troy.
The Judgment of Paris

The Olympian gods were guests at the wedding feast of Peles and Thetis. During the feast, the golden apple was presented, and the three goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite each claimed it, and Zeus decided that the argument should be settled by Paris, the Trojan prince. When Paris chose Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, he chose to favor her over his mother Thetis, who was the sea goddess. The reward for the winner was the love of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. In the end, Paris' decision led to the Trojan War, which eventually resulted in the fall of Troy and the death of many brave soldiers.

In the end, Paris was exiled from Troy and took refuge in Sparta, where he befriended Menelaus. However, Menelaus' wife, Helen, was also infatuated with Paris and left her husband to follow him. This led to the Trojan War, which was fought for the return of Helen and the destruction of Troy.
plague and Poseidon a sea monster to harass the Trojans. The oracles advised that the only way to get rid of the monster was to expose Laomedon's daughter Hesione and let it devour her. When Heracles came to Troy (see p. 569) he agreed to kill the monster and save Hesione in return for Laomedon's immortal horses, which were the gift of Zeus. Once again Laomedon cheated his benefactor; Heracles therefore returned with an army, captured Troy, and gave Hesione as wife to his companion, Telamon, by whom she became the mother of Teucer. Heracles killed Laomedon but spared his young son Podarces, who became king of the ruined city, changing his name to Priam.

**Priam and Hecuba**

King Priam was father of fifty sons and twelve (or fifty) daughters, of whom nineteen were children of his second wife, Hecuba (Aribea, his first wife, is not significant in the legend). In the *Iliad* Hecuba appears as a tragic figure whose sons and husband are doomed; her most famous legend takes place after the fall of Troy (p. 514).

**Paris (Alexander)**

The most important sons of Priam and Hecuba were Paris and Hector. While Paris was a shepherd on Mt. Ida he fell in love with a nymph, Oenone, a nymph. He fell in love with Oenone, who had the gift of healing. He left her for Helen. Years later, when he was wounded by Philoctetes, she refused to heal him, but when he died she killed herself in remorse. As a young man, Paris had returned to the royal palace and had been recognized by Priam as his son. As we have seen, his actions led to the Trojan War. In the war against Troy, Aeneas, the son of Anchises and Aphrodite, and sensual arrow that fell from the sky, was born. Hector, brother of Priam, was a warrior. As a child, he was raised in Crete, and Helen, the daughter of Laomedon and Hecuba, was their relative.

**Helenus**

Priam's son had licked the Greeks to death. He was the son of Laomedon, and Helen was his sister. Of Priam, Paris; his son was killed by Aeneas.

**Cassandra**

Cassandra, the daughter of Priam, was rejected by her mother, but she foretold that Troy would fall in vain. Helen, her sister, was the mother of Alexander.

**Aeneas**

Of the Trojans, the son of Anchises and Aphrodite, was saved from the sack of Troy. In Alexander's war, he withdrew and considered his options.
War, in which he appears as a brave warrior if uxorious. He was the favorite of Aphrodite, who saved him from being killed in combat by Menelaus. His vanity and sensuality contrasted with the dignity and courage of Hector. Paris shot the arrow that fatally wounded Achilles.

Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax

Hector, brother of Paris, was the champion of the Trojans, brave and honorable, and as a warrior excelled only by Achilles, by whom he was killed in single combat. As long as Achilles took no part in the fighting, Hector carried all before him. When he was killed, the Trojans knew they were doomed. His wife was Andromache, daughter of Eetion (an ally of the Trojans killed by Achilles); and their child was Astyanax. In the Iliad Homer draws unforgettable portraits of Paris and Helen and of Hector and Andromache, as he juxtaposes their characters and their relationships in moving scenes of universal power.

Helenus, Deiphobus, and Troilus

Priam's son Helenus had the gift of prophecy, for when he was a child serpents had licked his ears. In the last year of the war the prophet Calchas advised the Greeks to capture him, since he alone could tell what must be done to end the war. He was caught by Odysseus and honorably treated, so that he alone of Priam's sons survived the war. He eventually married Andromache and became a ruler in Epirus. As a prophet he appears for the last time in the Aeneid, where he foretells the course of Aeneas' future wanderings (pp. 693–694).

Of Priam's many other sons, Deiphobus married Helen after the death of Paris; his ghost spoke with Aeneas in the Underworld, and Troilus, who was killed by Achilles, became more significant in later times.

Cassandra and Polyxena

Cassandra and Polyxena are the most important of the daughters of Priam. Cassandra had been loved by Apollo, who gave her the gift of prophecy. When she rejected him, he added to the gift the fate that she should never be believed. Thus she foretold the fall of Troy and warned the Trojans against the Trojan horse all in vain. Her fate in the sack of Troy is described later in this chapter; as we have seen, she died in Mycenae, murdered by Clytemnestra.

Polyxena was sacrificed on the tomb of Achilles as his share of the spoils after the sack of Troy, as we describe later in this chapter.

Aeneas

Of the Trojan leaders outside Priam's immediate family, the most prominent is Aeneas, who belonged to another branch of the royal family. Although he was the son of Anchises and Aphrodite, he was not the equal of Priam in prestige or of Hector as a warrior. In the Iliad he fights in single combat with Achilles and is saved from death by Poseidon, who transports him miraculously from the fight. Poseidon prophesies that Aeneas and his descendants, now that Zeus has withdrawn his favor from Priam's family, will be the future rulers of Troy. We consider his later prominence, as depicted by Vergil, in Chapter 26.
Antenor

Antenor, brother of Hecuba, was conspicuous among those who did not want the war, and he advised returning Helen to the Greeks. When the Greeks first landed, he saved their ambassadors from being treacherously killed by the Trojans. In the last year of the war, he protested the breaking of the truce by the Trojans and still proposed the voluntary return of Helen. The Greeks spared him at the sack, and he and his wife, Theano, the priestess of Athena, were allowed to sail away. They reached Italy, where they founded the city of Patavium (Padua).

Glaucus

Of the allies of Troy, the most prominent in the Iliad were the Lycians, led by Glaucus and Sarpedon. When Glaucus and the Greek hero Diomedes were about to fight, they discovered that they were hereditary guest-friends (i.e., their ancestors had entertained one another and exchanged gifts). They exchanged armor instead of fighting and parted amicably. Since Glaucus’ armor was made of gold and that of Diomedes of bronze, Diomedes had the better of the exchange, as Homer says (Iliad 6.234–236):

Zeus took away Glaucus’ wits, for he exchanged golden armor with Diomedes for bronze, armor worth a hundred oxen for that worth nine.

Glaucus eventually was killed by Ajax (son of Telamon) in the fight over the corpse of Achilles.

Sarpedon

Sarpedon was the son of Zeus and the Lycian princess Laodamia, daughter of Bellerophon. Zeus foresaw Sarpedon’s death but could not change his destiny (moira) without upsetting the established order. He therefore had to content with raining drops of blood on the earth to honor his son before the catastrophe and saving his body after it. Here is Homer’s description of the scene (Iliad 16.676–683) after Sarpedon has been killed by Patroclus and Zeus has instructed Apollo to save his body:

Thus [Zeus] spoke, and Apollo did not disobey his father. He went down from the peaks of Ida into the terrible din of battle and straightway lifted godlike Sarpedon out of the way of the missiles and carried him far off. He washed him in the flowing waters of the river and anointed him with ambrosia and clothed him with immortal garments. And he sent him to be carried by two swift escorts, the twins Sleep and Death, who quickly set him down in the fertile land of broad Lycia.

After Hector, Sarpedon is the most noble of the heroes on the Trojan side. In Book 12 of the Iliad, when the Trojans are attacking the wall of the Greek camp, he addresses Glaucus in words expressing heroic arete (excellence) and nobility as memorable as those of Achilles in Book 9 (translated on p. 499). Unlike Achilles, he speaks as the leader of a community (Iliad 12.310–328):

Glaucus, why are we specially honored in Lycia with seats of honor, with meat and more cups of wine, and all people look upon us like gods, and we have been
allotted a great domain beside the banks of the Xanthus, fine for the planting of vineyards and for grain-bearing tillage. Therefore now must we stand in the front rank of the Lycians and face the raging battle, so that one of the well- armored Lycians may say: "Indeed not without glory do our kings rule over Lycia and eat the fat lambs and drink choice honey-sweet wine. Noble also is their strength, since they fight among the leaders of the Lycians." My friend, if we were to avoid this war and were to live out our lives ever ageless and deathless, then neither would I myself fight among the leaders nor would I station you in the battle that destroys men. Now, as it is, let us go, for ten thousand death-bringing fates are close upon us.

Rhesus

Other allied contingents who appeared at Troy were those of the Amazons and the Ethiopians, and the Thracians led by Rhesus. Their arrival coincided with a night patrol by Diomedes and Odysseus, during which they caught and killed a Trojan spy, Dolon, who first told them of the Thracians. They went on to kill Rhesus and twelve of his men and to capture his white horses. Rhesus, who was a son of one of the Muses, was worshiped as a hero in Thrace.

The Achaean Leaders

The organization of the Greek army was different from that of the Trojans, for Troy was a great city led by a powerful king and helped in war by independent allies. We have seen that Helen's suitors had sworn to help Menelaus if he called on them, and they assembled for war under the leadership of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae. While Agamemnon's position as leader was unquestioned, each of the Greek princes led his contingent independently and could at any time withdraw, as Achilles did.

Agamemnon

Agamemnon was the "lord of men," greatest in prestige among the Greeks, although neither the greatest warrior nor the wisest in council. His statue is shown in the scene in Book 3 of the Iliad when Helen names the Greek warrior whom Priam points out to her from their viewpoint on the wall (hence the scene is known as the "viewing from the wall," or teichoskopias). Priam begins (Iliad 3. 166-190):

"Tell me the name of this mighty man, whoever he is of the Greeks, a man valiant and great..."

Then Helen answered in words, goddess-like among women... "This is the son of Atreus, Agamemnon, ruler of a broad kingdom, both a noble king and a strong warrior. He was my husband's brother." Thus she spoke, and the old man was filled with wonder and said: "O happy son of Atreus, favored by Destiny, blest by fortune, many sons of the Achaean are your subjects. Long ago I went to Phrygia rich in vineyards, and there I saw great numbers of Phrygian warriors on their swift horses... But not even they were as great as are the quick-eyed Achaeanis."
In Book 11 (36–40) the terror inspired by Agamemnon as a warrior is shown in the devices on his shield and shield-strap, "The grim-looking Gorgon with her terrifying gaze, and around the shield Terror and Fear. And on the strap coiled a dark serpent, and it had three heads turning all ways, growing from one neck." Yet great warrior as Agamemnon was, he was a lesser hero than Achilles.

Menelaüs

We have seen how Menelaüs, king of Sparta, and his wife Helen were involved in the origin of the war. In the war itself he fought Paris in single combat. Aphrodite saved Paris just as Menelaüs was on the point of killing him. For the adventures of Menelaüs after the sack of Troy see page 526, and for Euripides' versions of his part in the stories of Orestes and Neoptolemus, see pages 453–454.

Diomedes

Diomedes, king of Argos, was a much greater warrior than Menelaüs. He was the son of Tydeüs, and second only to Agamemnon in power and prestige. He was also a wise counselor. He was a favorite of Athena and with her help could oppose even the gods in battle. He wounded both Ares and Aphrodite. He was especially associated with Odysseus, with whom he fetched Achilles from Scyros and later Philoctetes from Lemnos. Odysseus was also his companion in the night patrol where Dolon and Rhesus were killed and in the theft of the Palladium from Troy. This Palladium (the statue of Pallas, which Athena had made and Zeus cast down from heaven into Troy) was worshiped and looked upon as a talisman for the city's survival. When Odysseus and Diomedes stole it, Troy was doomed. Diomedes' meeting with Glauclus has already been described; his adventures after the war are discussed on p. 526.

Nestor

Nestor, king of Pylos and a son of Neleus, was the oldest and wisest of the Greek leaders. Like Priam, he had become king after Heracles sacked his city. In the sack Neleus and all his sons except Nestor were killed. At Troy, Nestor was a respected counselor, and his speeches, full of reminiscences, contrast with the impetuosity of the younger princes. He himself survived the war, although his son Antilochus was killed by Memnon. There is no tradition of his death.

Ajax the Greater of Salamis, the Son of Telamon

Ajax, son of Telamon, was second only to Achilles as a warrior. He is called the Great (or Greater) to distinguish him from Ajax the Less (or Lesser), son of Oileus. In the fighting before the Greek ships (Books 13–15) he was the most
stalwart defender, always courageous and the last to give ground to the enemy. Again he was the Greek champion in the fight over the body of Patroclus in Book 17, providing cover while Menelaus and Meriones retreated with the body. At the climax of that battle, he prayed to Zeus to dispel the mist of battle and let him die in the clear sunlight, a striking scene in which the sudden appearance of the sun and clear vision seems especially appropriate for this straightforward warrior. In the teichoskopia Priam asks Helen (Iliad 3.226–229):

"Who is this other Achaeans warrior, valiant and great, who stands out from the Achaeans with his head and broad shoulders?" [Helen replies] “This is Ajax, of huge size, the bulwark of the Achaeans.”

Ajax is both the foil to and the rival of Odysseus. His gruff and laconic speech in the embassy to Achilles (Book 9), which we discuss later, contrasts with the smooth words of the diplomatic Odysseus. In Book 23 they compete in the wrestling match in the funeral games, and Ajax’s defeat there foreshadows his far more tragic defeat in the contest with Odysseus for the armor of Achilles, discussed later in this chapter.

Ajax the Less (or Lesser)
Ajax the Less (as Homer calls him), prince of the Locrians and son of Oileus, is a less attractive character than his namesake. Although he figured prominently in the fighting and was the leader of a large contingent, his sacrilegious violation of Cassandra during the sack of Troy diminished his stature and led to his death on the voyage back to Greece (p. 525).

Idomeneus
Another important fighter with a large contingent was Idomeneus, son of Deucalion and leader of the Cretans. He stood in a different relationship to Agamemnon from most of the other leaders in that he came as a voluntary ally. He had long been a friend of Menelaus, and Agamemnon showed him great respect. In Book 13 of the Iliad he defends the Greek camp bravely and kills a number of leading Trojan warriors. Good as he was, however, as fighter and counselor at Troy, his most important legend is concerned with his return (p. 526).10

Achilles and Ajax Playing a Board Game. Attic amphora signed by Exekias as painter and potter, ca. 535 B.C.; height 24 ¼ in. There is no literary source for this scene, which appears in over 150 vase paintings, sometimes with the addition of Athena in armor. Achilles (to the viewer’s left) and Ajax are partly armed, while their shields are propped up behind them along with Ajax’s helmet on the right. Bending over the log that serves as a game-board, they count their points won, the numbers (four for Achilles, three for Ajax) being written out on the painting. The theme of heroes taking a break from battle is further emphasized by the elaborate decoration of their mantles, hardly the dress for warriors going into battle. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)
Odysseus

When Menelaüs and Agamemnon sent heralds throughout Greece and the islands to summon the Greek leaders and their contingents to the war, not all the Greek heroes came willingly; two of the most important, Odysseus and Achilles, attempted to avoid the war by subterfuge.

Odysseus, king of Ithaca, pretended to be mad. When Agamemnon's envoys came, he yoked an ox and an ass and plowed a field, sowing salt in the furrows. One of the envoys, Palamedes, took Odysseus' infant son Telemachus from his mother, Penelope, and put him in the path of the plow. Odysseus was sane enough to avoid him; his pretense was uncovered, and he joined the expedition.  

Odysseus was the craftiest and wisest of the Greeks, as well as a brave warrior. He was the best in council, and his powerful speech in Book 2 (284–332) decided the debate in favor of staying before Troy to finish the war. He attacked the unattractive and sardonic Thersites for intervening in the debate, when only princes should speak, and for this he was greatly honored by the Greeks. He was the principal speaker in the embassy to Achilles in Book 9, and he undertook the dangerous night mission with Diomedes as well as other missions mentioned earlier. Above all Odysseus was a skilled speaker, and this is brought out in the teichoskopía (A Viewing from the Walls), a designation given to the section of the Iliad where Helen identifies for Priam the Greek commanders (Iliad 3. 191–224):

Next the old man [Priam] asked about Odysseus. "Come, tell me also about this man, dear child, who is he. He is shorter by a head than Agamemnon, son of Atreus, but I see that he is broader in the shoulders and chest. His arms lie on the fruitful earth, and he like a ram is going up and down the ranks of warriors. I liken him to a thick-fleeced ram which goes through the flocks of white-fleeced sheep." Then Helen, daughter of Zeus, answered: "This is crafty Odysseus, son of Laërtes, who was raised in the land of Ithaca, rocky though it is. He knows all kinds of deceit and clever plans." (191–202)

Then wise Antenor spoke to her and said: "Lady, true indeed are your words. Godlike Odysseus came here once before with Menelaüs, dear to Ares, for news of you. I was their host and welcomed them in my home, and I knew their stature and their wise intelligence. But when they joined in the assembly of the Trojans, Menelaüs was taller when they stood by his [head and] broad shoulders; yet when they both were seated Odysseus was the more noble. But when they began to weave their speeches and proposals before all, then indeed Menelaüs spoke glibly, a few words in a clear voice, since he was not long-winded or irrelevant, and he was younger also. But whenever wise Odysseus rose to speak he would stand and look down and fix his eyes on the ground, and he would not gesture with the sceptre before or behind him, but held it stiffly, like some unskilled man. You would say that he was angry and unintelligent too. But when he sent forth the great voice from his chest and the words that were like falling winter snows, then no other mortal could compete with Odysseus. Indeed then we were not amazed as we looked at the appearance of Odysseus." (203–224)

The double portrait of the wise orator and the glib young king vividly puts before us two sides of the heroic ethos, and it prepares us for the complexity of Odysseus' character in the saga of his return from Troy.
Achilles, His Parents, Peleus and Thetis, and His Son, Neoptolemus (Pyrrhus)

The second chieftain who attempted to avoid the war was Achilles, prince of the Myrmidons (a tribe of Phthia, in northern Greece on the southern border of Thessaly) and the greatest of the Greek warriors as well as the swiftest and most handsome. He was the son of Peleus and Thetis. Thetis was a sea-goddess, daughter of Nereus, who was avoided by Zeus when the secret was revealed hitherto known only to Prometheus and Themis—that Thetis’ son would be greater than his father. Their son Achilles did indeed become greater than his father.

Peleus was the son of Aeacus, king of Aegina, and brother of Telamon. For killing his half-brother Phocus, he had to leave Aegina, whereupon he went to Eurytion of Phthia, who purified him and gave him part of his kingdom. Peleus accompanied Eurytion on the Calydonian boar hunt and accidentally killed him with a javelin intended for the boar. He went into exile again and was purified by Acastus, son of Pelias and king of Iolcus.

Now the wife of Acastus, Astydamia (Pindar calls her Hippolyta) fell in love with Peleus; and when he refused her advances, she accused him before her husband of trying to seduce her. Rather than kill his guest, Acastus took...
him hunting on Mt. Pelion, where he left him asleep, but not before hiding his sword (a gift from Hephaestus) in a pile of dung. Peleus awoke to find himself surrounded by wild animals and centaurs, who would have killed him had not Chiron protected him and given him back his sword.

When Zeus avoided a union with Thetis, whose son was destined to be greater than his father, she was given to Peleus because of his virtue. The wedding feast was celebrated on Mt. Pelion, and all the gods and goddesses came as guests. As we have seen, with them came Eris (Discord) as an uninvited guest, bringing the apple that eventually led to the judgment of Paris and the Trojan War. Peleus returned to Phthia, where he became the father of Achilles. Thetis soon left Peleus, angry because he interrupted her while she was making Achilles immortal.

Thus, Thetis was married to a mortal, Peleus, king of the Phthians. Peleus took part in the Argonauts' expedition and the Calydonian boar hunt, but as a mere mortal he was hardly a match for Thetis. It was with difficulty that he married her, for she was able to turn herself into various shapes in attempting to escape from him. Although the gods attended their wedding feast, Thetis left Peleus not long after the birth of Achilles. She tried to make Achilles immortal, either by roasting him in the fire by night and anointing him with ambrosia by day or by dipping him in the waters of the Styx. In the latter story, all parts of Achilles' body that had been submerged were invulnerable. Only his heel, by which Thetis held him, remained vulnerable. It was here that he received the fatal arrow wound.

Once Thetis had left Peleus, Achilles was sent to the centaur Chiron for his education. From him he learned the art of music and other skills. While Achilles was with Chiron, Thetis learned that Troy could not be taken without Achilles; she also knew that he could live long and die gloriously or go to Troy and die young and glorious. To circumvent his early death, she tried to prevent his going by disguising him as a girl and taking him to the island of Scyros, where he was brought up with the daughters of Lycomedes, king of the island. One of them was Deidamia, with whom Achilles fell in love; their child, born after Achilles left Scyros, was Neoptolemus (also called Pyrrhus, which means "redhead"), who took part in the capture of Troy after his father's death. Odysseus and Diomedes exposed Achilles' disguise at Scyros. They took gifts for the daughters of Lycomedes, among them weapons and armor, in which Achilles alone showed any interest. As the women were looking at the gifts, Odysseus arranged for a trumpet to sound; the women all ran away, thinking it was a battle signal, but Achilles took off his disguise and put on the armor. Here is the description of the scene by the Roman poet Statius (Achilleid 1. 852–884), after the gifts have been set out by Diomedes:

The daughters of Lycomedes see the arms and assume that they are a present for their mighty father. But when fierce Achilles saw the shining shield close by, chased with scenes of war and lying next to the spear, he grew violent... and Troy filled his heart.... When he saw his reflection in the golden shield he shuddered and blushed. Then observant Odysseus stood close to him and whispered: "Why do you hesitate? We know. You are the pupil of the centaur, Chiron, you are the descendant of the gods of sky and sea. The Greek fleet is waiting for you, the Greek army is waiting for you before raising its standards, the walls of Troy itself are ready to fall before you. Hurry, no more delaying!... Already Achilles was beginning to take off his woman's dress when Agyrtès sounded a loud blast on the trumpet, as he had been ordered to do [by Odysseus]. The girls
began to run away, scattering the gifts. . . . Achilles' clothing of itself fell from his chest, and he quickly seized the shield and short spear and, miraculously, he seemed to be taller by head and shoulders than Odysseus and Diomedes. . . . Stepping like a hero he stood forth.

So Achilles was discovered and joined the expedition. At Troy, he proved to be the mightiest of the champions on either side and a hero of enormous passions.

**Phoenix and Patroclus**

Two of Achilles' associates, Phoenix and Patroclus, are important. Phoenix, at the instigation of his mother, lay with his father's mistress. His father cursed him with childlessness, and Phoenix sought refuge from his father's wrath with Peleus, who made him the tutor and companion of Achilles both in Phthia and at Troy.

Patroclus was a great warrior. When very young, he had killed a rival in anger over a dice game. Peleus took him in and brought him up to be the companion of Achilles. Achilles and Patroclus become devoted friends and perhaps lovers, and their relationship provides a major theme for the *Iliad*.

The Gathering of the Expedition at Aulis

Menelaus and Agamemnon sent heralds throughout Greece and the islands to summon the Greek leaders and contingents to the war; the expedition gathered at Aulis (on the coast of Boeotia, opposite Euboea) numbering nearly twelve hundred ships with their crews and fighting men.

The Anger of Achilles, by J.-L. David (1748–1825); oil on canvas, 1819, 4' 3/4 X 5' 7/4 in. Iphigenia has been brought to Aulis on the pretext that she is to be the bride of Achilles. David shows the moment when Agamemnon has revealed his true intention to Achilles, who draws his sword in anger to strike Agamemnon. The anger of the men contrasts with the sadness of Iphigenia, who has learned that she will be sacrificed, and of Clytemnestra, who gazes at Achilles as she puts her hand on her daughter's shoulder. The subject is based on Euripides' tragedy, *Iphigenia at Aulis*. (Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas/Art Resource, NY)
deals only with events from the outbreak of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon to the ransoming and burial of Hector.

Nine years were spent in a fruitless siege of Troy, varied only by abortive diplomatic exchanges and raids against cities allied with Troy. The division of the spoil from these cities led to the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles. Agamemnon was given in his share Chryses, daughter of Chryses, priest of Apollo—but (as we shall see) he had to send her back. Therefore he took Briseis, who had been given to Achilles and whom Achilles had come to love greatly. The wrath of Achilles, the principal theme of the Iliad, is characterized in the poem's opening lines (1. 1–7):

The wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son, sing, O goddess, a ruinous wrath, which put countless woes upon the Achaeans and hurled many mighty souls of heroes to Hades, and made them a feast for dogs and a banquet for birds, and the will of Zeus was being accomplished, from the time when first Agamemnon and Achilles stood opposed in strife.

The passionate theme of "wrath," the very word with which the poem begins, determines the intensity of emotion and the scope and form of its action. In verses of visual and auditory clarity as deceptively simple as they are profound, the story unfolds through scenes of great dramatic power. With Chryses in his possession, Agamemnon refused to allow Chryses to ransom his daughter, and Chryses therefore prayed to Apollo to punish the Greeks. Apollo's answer to the prayer is described in these vivid lines (Iliad 1. 43–52):

So Chryses prayed, and Phoebus Apollo heard him. Angry at heart, he strode down from the peaks of Olympus, having his bow slung from his shoulder and his hollow quiver. The arrows clashed loudly upon his shoulders as he strode in his anger, and like night did he go. Then he sat apart from the ships and shot an arrow; terrible was the twang of his silver bow. First he shot the mules and the swift dogs, and next he shot his sharp arrow at the men. Constantly were the funeral pyres burning in great numbers.

This is the first appearance of a god in the Iliad, and it shows how the gods are participants in the saga of Troy, with Apollo constantly favoring the Trojans. Calchas advised that the evil could be ended only by the return, without ransom, of Chryses. Accordingly she was sent back, but this left Agamemnon without his share of the spoils, a humiliating situation for the greatest of the Greek kings. He therefore took Briseis from Achilles, and Achilles repaid the dishonor by withdrawing his contingent, the Myrmidons, from the war.

Achilles is the embodiment of heroic arete (excellence). Important in the concept of arete is one's standing in the eyes of others, which is gained not only by words and deeds but also by gifts and spoils relative to those of others. Therefore Achilles' honor was slighted when Agamemnon took away Briseis, and he had good cause to withdraw from the fighting, even though the Greeks suffered terribly as a result. Homer describes the mighty quarrel, during the course of which Athena restrains Achilles from attacking Agamemnon, and he describes the prophecy of Achilles as he withdraws from the war (1. 234–246):21

*By this sceptre, which will never grow leaves or roots, since it was cut in the mountains . . . and now the sons of the Achaeans bear it in their hands when
they administer justice, for they defend Justice in the name of Zeus—and this will be a great oath: In time all the sons of the Achaeans will long for Achilles. Then you [Agamemnon] will not be able to do anything, grieved though you be, while many men fall in death before Hector, slayer of men. And you will tear your heart, angry that you did not honor the best of the Achaeans.” So spoke the son of Peleus, and he cast the golden-studded sceptre upon the ground, and down he sat.

Angry, hurt, and resentful, Achilles finds comfort and support from his mother, Thetis. Theirs is a sad and touching relationship, tragic in the knowledge that Achilles has chosen to come to Troy to die young and gloriously rather than stay at home to live a long but mundane existence. Thetis agrees to go to Zeus for help, and she obtains from the supreme god an oath that he will honor her son, whom Agamemnon has dishonored, and grant success to the Trojans in his absence, so that the Greeks will come to regret Agamemnon’s actions and increase the glory of Achilles.

At the end of Book 1, it is difficult not to condemn Agamemnon as a guilty, arrogant sinner, first against Apollo and his priest and then against Achilles. Achilles’ tragic withdrawal, like Apollo’s arrows, will cause the deaths of countless of his Greek companions, and he will be condemned for his selfish, cruel, and pitiless behavior. Yet the wrath of Apollo, until properly appeased, has been just as devastating, heartless, and indiscriminate, causing innumerable deaths, in this case, too, because of the arrogance of Agamemnon. Homer juxtaposes the wrath of Achilles and that of Apollo at the beginning of his epic. Are we to judge the actions of the god and those of the mortal demigod by two different standards?

In Book 3 a truce is agreed upon to allow Menelaus and Paris to fight in individual combat, in order to decide the issues and the fate of Helen. In the duel, Menelaus gets the better of Paris. He takes hold of Paris by the helmet and swings him around so that he is choked by the neck-strap. When Aphrodite notices that Paris is lost, she quickly snatches up her favorite with the ease of a goddess and transports him to his fragrant bedchamber. She goes to summon Helen, who has already witnessed the humiliation of her husband from a high tower of Troy. Although Aphrodite is disguised as an old woman, Helen recognizes the beautiful breasts and flashing eyes of her mirror image, and with this recognition of herself she rebels.

As the scene proceeds, through the literal depiction of the goddess Aphrodite, the inner soul (the psyche) of Helen is laid bare. Helen wonders where in the world beauty and passion—Aphrodite—will lead her next, and in indignation she demands that the goddess abandon Olympus and go herself to Paris until he makes her his wife or his slave. Helen is too ashamed before the eyes of the Trojan women to return to his bed. At this Aphrodite becomes enraged and threatens to turn against Helen. Helen submissively returns to her bedchamber and to Paris, whom Aphrodite has restored from a bedraggled loser into a beautiful dandy. Yet a disillusioned Helen greets her beloved with these demeaning words (3. 428–436):

“You have come out of battle? You ought to have died there, beaten by a stronger man, who was my former husband. To be sure you boasted before that you were mightier than warlike Menelaus in the might of your hands and your sword. So then go now and challenge warlike Menelaus again to face you in
battle. No, I bid you hold on and do not fight in combat against blond Menelaüs in your rashness, lest somehow you will quickly be subdued by his spear."

Paris responds with characteristic nonchalance, and Aphrodite is victorious once again (3. 438–447):

"My wife, do not rebuke me with harsh words; now Menelaüs has won with the help of Athena. At another time I will beat him, for the gods are on our side too. Come on now, let us go to bed and make love. Never at any time has desire so clouded my senses, not even when we first consummated our love on the island of Cranæ, after I had carried you out of lovely Sparta and we sailed away. This is how I love you now and how sweet desire takes hold of me." He spoke, and led her to bed, and his wife followed along.

In Book 6, Hector, the valiant brother of Paris, seeks out his wife, Andromache, to bid her farewell before returning to the battlefield. On his way he looks in on Paris, who is still dallying with Helen in their home. After his defeat by Menelaüs and his lovemaking with Helen, Paris is sullenly polishing his armor. Hector has presumably interrupted another of their quarrels. Paris tells his brother how Helen has just been urging him to go out to battle, and he agrees with them both that it is time for him to return. Helen speaks to Hector in words fraught with misery and self-reproach (6. 344–358):

"My brother-in-law, how I wish that I—cold, evil-scheming bitch that I am—had died on the day when first I was born before all this had happened—that a terrible blast of wind had hurled me into the side of a mountain or into a wave of the resounding sea to be swept away. But since the gods have so ordained these evils, I wish that I were the wife of a better man, who felt a sense of guilt and shame before the eyes of society. But his character is not rooted in such values and he will never change, and so I think that he will reap the rewards. Now come here and sit down in this chair, brother-in-law, since the battle toil has crushed you the most, all on account of me, a bitch, and retribution for Paris' guilt. Upon us both has Zeus imposed an evil fate, so that we might become for future generations the subjects for poetic songs."

Hector tells Helen that he must be on his way. He finds that his wife, their son Astyanax, and the boy's nurse are not at home; they have been anxiously watching from the battlements in concern for his fate. In the sad farewell between husband and wife, Andromache implores Hector not to go to battle and leave her a widow and their child an orphan. Achilles has already killed her father and seven brothers; he captured their mother, and although he accepted a ransom for her return, she has died too. So Hector is father, mother, and brother to her, as well as dear husband. Hector responds with loving conviction (6. 441–484):

"To be sure, all these things are of deep concern to me too, but I should feel terrible shame before the Trojan women with their long robes if like a coward I were to shrink from battle. Nor would my spirit allow me to, since I have learned to be brave always and to fight amidst the first of the Trojans, winning great glory for myself and for my father. For I know this well in my heart and in my soul. The day will come when Troy will be destroyed and Priam and the people of Priam of
the fine ashen spear. The suffering that will follow for the Trojans—for Hecuba herself and king Priam and my many brave brothers who will fall in the dust under the hands of their enemies—is not so much a grief for me as is the pain that you will endure when one of the bronze-clad Achaean soldiers leads you away weeping and takes from you the day of your liberty. In Greece at another’s bidding you will work the loom and draw water from a spring in Laconia or Thessaly, much against your will, but heavy necessity will lie upon you. Then someone, seeing you in tears, will say, ‘This is the wife of Hector, who was by far the best fighter when the horse-taming Trojans did battle for Ilium.’ Thus at some time will someone speak, and your grief will be awakened anew because you are without such a husband to ward off the day of your slavery. But may I die with the earth heaped up over my grave before I hear your cries of anguish as you are dragged away a captive.” (6. 441–465)

Thus radiant Hector spoke and reached out for his son, but the child clung to the bosom of the fair-girdled nurse, screaming in dismay at the sight of his
father, startled as he saw the bronze crest of his helmet and the horsehair plume nodding dreadful from its peak. His dear father laughed aloud and his lady mother, and immediately Hector took the helmet from his head and placed it all-shining on the ground. Then he kissed his dear son and fondled him in his arms and spoke in prayer to Zeus and the other gods: (6. 466-475)

"Zeus and you other gods, grant that this son of mine become outstanding among the Trojans, just as I am, excellent in his might and a strong ruler over Ilium. Some day let someone say that this boy has turned out to be far better than his father, as he comes out of the battle, and when he has killed his enemy may he bring home the gory spoils and may his mother rejoice in her heart.”

Thus speaking he placed his son in the hands of his dear wife. She took him to her fragrant bosom, laughing amidst her tears. (6. 476-484)

On two other occasions, Andromache prophesies her fate and that of her son and of the city, each time addressing Hector’s corpse. Here is how she takes her farewell of him (24. 725-738):

"My husband, you were young when you were taken from life, and you leave me a widow in the palace. The boy is still just a baby, who is our child, yours and mine, ill-fated that we are. I do not think that he will grow to manhood, for the city will first be utterly sacked now that you, its guardian, are dead, who defended the city, the chaste wives, and the little children. They will soon go away in the hollow ships, and I with them. And you, my child, either will go with me, where you will perform demeaning tasks, laboring for a harsh master; or else one of the Achaeans will take you by the hand and hurl you in anger from the tower—a grim death—because Hector once killed his brother or father or son.”

Indeed, Andromache became the slave of Neoptolemus after the fall of Troy, and her infant son Astyanax was thrown from the city walls.

A major development in the theme of Achilles’ wrath occurs in the ninth book. Should Achilles have relented when Agamemnon offered to restore Briseis with many valuable gifts? It is a measure of his sensitive and passionate nature that he refused the offer, presented by three envoys, Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax, son of Telamon.

Odysseus’ speech to Achilles echoes for the most part the directions given by Agamemnon, but it begins and ends with more tactful and artful persuasion. In describing the successes of the Trojans, Odysseus emphasizes the danger to Achilles and the opportunity to destroy Hector. The fury of Hector cannot wait to come down to destroy their ships. Then he lists the gifts to be given to Achilles immediately upon his return: seven tripods, ten talents of gold, twenty shining cauldrons, twelve prize-winning horses, seven women from Lesbos, particularly beautiful and skilled (whom Achilles had picked out for himself when he took Lesbos!), and Briseis, with a solemn oath that Agamemnon had never slept with her. In addition, if the gods were to grant that Priam’s city be sacked, Achilles might heap up his ship with gold and bronze and choose twenty Trojan women for himself, the most beautiful after Helen. Beyond this, if they return safely to Greece, Agamemnon promises to make Achilles his son-in-law, with a dowry larger than any ever given before and a kingdom of seven rich cities over which he might rule like a god.
At the conclusion of his speech, Odysseus is careful not to repeat Agamemnon’s final instructions: “Let him be subdued—Hades is the most hateful of gods and mortals because he is inexorable and inflexible. Let him submit to me, inasmuch as I am more royal and assert that I am the elder” (9. 158–161). Instead Odysseus, with more tact and wisdom, begs that Achilles, even if his anger and hatred of Agamemnon are too great for forgiveness, should at least have pity on the other Greeks, who are worn out in battle and will upon his return honor him like a god. In conclusion Odysseus tries to win Achilles over by playing upon his jealousy of Hector’s arrogant success, implying that now is his chance to achieve his desire for glory through the defeat of Hector, who thinks that no Greek is his match. By questioning some of these values in his reply, Achilles reveals a sensitivity and introspection that make him unique (9. 309–345):

“I must give a direct answer to your speech, telling you honestly what I think and what I will do, so that you ambassadors may not try to wheedle me one after the other. For I hate the man who hides one thing in his heart and says something else as much as I hate Hades and his realm. I will say outright what seems to me best. I do not believe that the son of Atreus, Agamemnon, will persuade me, nor will the other Greeks, since it was no pleasure for me always to fight against the enemy relentlessly. The coward is held in equal honor with the brave man who endures and fights hard, and equal is his fate. The one who does nothing and the one who does much find a similar end in death. It was no advantage to me when I suffered deeply, continually risking my life in battle. As a bird brings food to her unfledged nestlings, after she has won it with much distress, so I used to spend many sleepless nights and endure days of blood in fighting against enemies belligerent in the defense of their wives. (9. 309–327)

Indeed, I say to you, I plundered twelve populated cities by ship and attacked another eleven by land; from all these I took many splendid treasures and brought them back to give to Agamemnon, the son of Atreus. He who had remained behind by his swift ships took them, distributing a few things but keeping much for himself. All that he gave as prizes to the nobles and kings they kept secure; it was from me alone of the Achaeans that he stole. He has a dear wife, let him sleep with her for his pleasure. Why must the Greeks fight with the Trojans? Why did the son of Atreus gather an army to bring here? Was it not on account of Helen with her beautiful hair? Are the sons of Atreus the only ones among mortals who love their wives? To be sure, any decent and responsible man loves and cares for his own, just as I loved Briseis from the depths of my heart, even though she was won by my spear. As it is now, since he took my prize out of my hands and deceived me, let him not try me, since I know him too well—he will not persuade me.” (9. 328–345)

Achilles’ response continues at some length. He makes it clear that he despises gifts from Agamemnon, however grand they may be, and he has no need or desire to be chosen as his son-in-law. Surely Agamemnon could find someone more royal and worthy of respect! The shameless Agamemnon, “dog that he is, would not dare to look me in the face!” The gifts are excessively generous, but Achilles sees through Agamemnon’s façade. This is not reconciliation but bribery. Many critics have said, with some justice, that Achilles by his rejection of these gifts has gone too far in his pride and that he is guilty of the sin of hubris. He should understand, they say, that Agamemnon cannot humiliate himself by coming to
Achilles with apologies, as if to a god. Is it really too much, however, to ask a good king to admit his error in person? Agamemnon by his royal arrogance may be as guilty as Achilles, if not more so, because he, the commander-in-chief, is ultimately responsible for all the slaughter and suffering that might have been avoided.

So Agamemnon's attempt to win Achilles back has failed. Achilles' old tutor, Phoenix, also tries to persuade Achilles, but to no avail. In the course of his speech, he draws a parallel between Achilles and the hero, Meleager, who foolishly rejected gifts (see Appendix to this chapter). The third envoy, the warrior Ajax, son of Telamon, bluntly concludes the embassy (9. 628–638):

"Achilles has put a savage and proud spirit within his breast. Obdurate, he does not care for the love of his friends, with which we honored him above all men beside the ships, un pitying as he is. Yet others have accepted payment for the death of a brother or a son. . . . But the gods have put in your breast a spirit unforgiving and harsh, because of one girl."

Without Achilles, the Greeks were driven back by the Trojans until Hector began to set fire to the ships. All this was done, says Homer, in fulfillment of the will of Zeus (1. 5), for Zeus had agreed to honor Achilles in this way after Thetis had prayed to him to avenge the wrong done by Agamemnon.

When Hector broke through to the Greek ships, Achilles finally allowed his friend and companion, Patroclus, to take his armor and fight Hector and the Trojans. For a while, Patroclus carried all before him, even killing Sarpedon, son of Zeus, but he went too far in his fury. Homer describes (16. 786–867) how Apollo opposed him in the battle and struck him across the back with his hand. Patroclus was dazed by the blow, and the Trojan Euphorbus wounded him with a spear. It was left for Hector to deal the deathblow to the entebled and stunned Patroclus.

The death of Patroclus is the turning point of the epic. Achilles is overcome by grief, guilt, and remorse. His anguish is so terrifying that his comrades fear he may take his own life. Yet his mother, Thetis, provides comfort once again as Achilles steadfastly makes the tragic decision to return to battle to avenge Patroclus and so, assuredly, to fix the seal upon his own fate. At the beginning of Book 18, Antilochus, son of Nestor, who brings the tragic news of Patroclus' death, finds Achilles agonized with anxiety and fear that Patroclus has ignored his warning not to fight Hector and is dead. Antilochus in tears addresses Achilles (18. 18–38):

"Ah, son of brave Peleus, you must hear my painful message—how I wish this had never happened—Patroclus lies dead and they are fighting over his corpse, which is naked. Hector with the flashing helmet has taken his armor." (18. 18–21)

Thus he spoke and a black cloud of grief enveloped Achilles. He clutched the black dirt with both his hands and poured it over his head and his handsome face was defiled. The dark filth covered his immortal tunic and he, his mighty self, lay stretched out mightily on the ground and he tore at his hair and befouled it. (18. 22–27)

And the women whom Achilles and Patroclus had taken as captives, stricken to the heart with grief, cried aloud and ran out to surround great Achilles and they all beat their breasts and the limbs of each of them went limp. Antilochus
also by his side, shedding tears and lamenting, restrained the hands of Achilles, whose proud heart was overwhelmed with sorrow, because he feared that he would cut his throat with his sword. Achilles cried out a terrifying scream of woe and his divine mother heard him, as she sat beside her aged father Nereus in the depths of the sea and in turn she answered with a cry. The goddesses gathered around her, all her sister Nereids who were there in the deep sea. (18. 28–38)

Homer goes on to name all these Nereids in lines that read very much like a catalogue that might have been composed by Hesiod. Homer then continues (18. 50–126):

Together all the Nereids beat their breasts and Thetis began her lament: (50–51)

“Hear me, my sisters, daughters of Nereus, so that all of you, once you have listened, will know well how many sorrows are in my heart. Ah, poor me, unhappy mother of the best of sons born for an evil fate, since I give birth to a child, both blameless and strong, the best of heroes. He shot up like a young sapling and nurtured him and he flourished like a tree, growing up strong, the pride of the orchard. But then I sent him forth with the curved ships to battle against the Trojans on Ilium. He will not return home to the house of Peleus and I will never get him back again. All the while that he lives and looks upon the light of the sun, he suffers in anguish, and when I go to him I am not able to help him at all. Nevertheless, I will go to him in order to see my dear son and I will listen to the sorrow that has come to him as he stays out of the battle.” (18. 52–64)

Thetis lamented thus and left her cavern and her sisters went with her, in tears, and the swell of the sea broke and gave way. When they reached fertile Troy, they all came to shore in an orderly stream, where the cluster of the Myrmidons’ ships were anchored close by swift Achilles. His divine mother stood before him, as she heaved a deep sigh, and uttering a sharp cry she clasped the head of her son and grieving spoke winged words: “My son, why are you weeping? What sorrow has touched your heart? Tell me and don’t keep it hidden. These things have been brought to fulfillment through Zeus, just as you once wanted, lifting your hands in prayer that all the sons of the Achaeans be pinned against the prows of their ships and suffer terrible atrocities, all because of their need for you.” (18. 65–77)

Achilles, swift of foot, groaning deeply answered: “Mother, Olympian Zeus has accomplished these things for me but what joy is there in them now, since my dear friend has perished, Patroclus, whom I loved more than my other comrades, loved as much as my own life. I have lost him. Hector has killed him and stripped him of my mighty armor, wondrous to behold. The gods gave it to Peleus, a splendid gift, on the day when they brought you to the bed of a mortal man. How I wish you had continued to live among the immortal goddesses of the sea and Peleus had won a mortal wife! But as it is now there must be endless sorrow in your heart for the death of your son, whom you will never welcome back again, as he returns home. For I have no more heart to go on living, unless Hector first is struck down by my spear and loses his life and pays the price for stripping my armor from Patroclus, son of Menoetius.” (18. 78–93)

Thetis then in turn answered him amidst her tears: “My son, your life will soon be over from what you are saying. For right after the death of Hector, your own death is at hand.” (18. 94–96)
Then in great distress Achilles, swift of foot, answered her: “So may I die at once, since it was never destined to save my comrade from death. He has perished very far from his fatherland because he did not have me, with my prowess in war, as protector. Now then alas I will not return to my fatherland and I did not become any light of salvation for Patroclus or my other comrades, so many of whom were struck down by mighty Hector. But I sit by my ships, useless, a burden on the earth, though I am superior in battle like no other of the bronze-armed Achaians, even if others are better speakers in counsel. I wish strife would disappear from among both gods and human beings and wrath, which has sent even the most sensible into a rage and which, much more sweet than the dripping of honey, wells up in the breasts of men like smoke. Thus the king of men Agamemnon enraged me but we will let this be a thing of the past, and even though I am angry I will overcome the anger in my heart because I have to. For now I will go back into battle so that I may seek out Hector, the slayer of my dear friend. I will accept my own death whenever Zeus wishes to bring it about or the other immortal gods. For not even Heracles in his might escaped death, he who was most dear to Zeus the king, son of Cronus, but fate defeated him and the fierce anger of Hera. So I too, if a like fate has been fashioned for me, will lie down in acceptance when death comes. But now may I win goodly renown and compel some one of the Trojan women or deep-girdled Dardanians to wipe away the tears from her tender cheeks with both her hands in her outburst of grief and may they so realize that I have stayed away from the fighting for too long a time. Do not try to keep me away from the battle, however much you love me because you will not persuade me.” (18. 97–126)

Thetis sadly agrees with the tragic decision made by Achilles to determine his own death by avenging Patroclus, and she tells him that she will go to Hephaestus to have new armor made for him.

Grief over the death of Patroclus drove Achilles to end his quarrel with Agamemnon and to return to the fighting with one goal, to kill Hector. So Briseis was returned with costly gifts, and upon her return she lamented over the corpse of Patroclus (19. 287–300):

"Patroclus, most dear to my unhappy heart, I left you alive when I was taken from the hut, and now upon my return I find you, leader of the host, dead. Thus for me evil follows upon evil. I saw my husband, to whom my father and lady mother gave me, transfixed by a sharp spear in front of his city, and my dear brothers, all three born to our mother, on that day found their way to ruinous death. You would not let me cry when swift Achilles killed my husband and sacked the city of godlike Mynes, but you said that I should be made the wedded wife of godlike Achilles and that I would be taken back in his ship to Pthlia to celebrate our marriage among the Myrmidons. So I lament for you unceasingly, you who were always gentle."

Thetis brought new armor, made by Hephaestus, to her son. Homer describes the shield of Achilles in detail, with its portrayal of the human world of the Mycenaeans—cities at war and at peace, scenes of farming and other peaceful activities (a lawsuit, for example, marriage, dancing, and music).
Meanwhile Hector has spoiled Patroclus’ corpse of the armor of Achilles, which he himself put on. As he changes his armor, Zeus watches and foretells his doom (17. 194–208):

He put on the immortal armor of Achilles, son of Peleus, which the gods had given to his father and he in turn in his old age gave to Achilles his son. But the son did not grow old in the armor. And when Zeus the cloud-gatherer saw Hector from afar arming himself with the arms of the godlike son of Peleus, he moved his head and spoke to his own heart: “Ah, wretched man! You do not now think of death that will come close to you. You are putting on the immortal arms of the best of men, before whom others also tremble. That man’s friend you have killed, gentle and strong, and you have taken the arms from his head and shoulders, as you should not have done. For now I will give you great strength. In return, Andromache will never take the noble arms of the son of Peleus from you when you return from battle.”

Achilles returned to the battle and drove the Trojans back to the city, in his rage fighting even the river-god Scamander and filling the river with Trojan corpses. Eventually the Trojans were driven into the city, and only Hector remained outside the wall. The single combat between Hector and Achilles is the climax of the Iliad. Hector is chased by Achilles three times around the walls: “as in a dream the pursuer cannot catch him who is running away, nor can he who runs escape nor the other catch him” (22. 199–200). Finally, Zeus agrees to the death of Hector (Iliad, 22. 209–214):

Then indeed the Father held up the golden scales, and in them he put two lots of grievous death, the one for Achilles, and the other for Hector, tamer of horses, and he held the scales by the middle. And the fatal day of Hector sank down toward the house of Hades. Then Phoebus Apollo left Hector, and Athena, the grey-eyed goddess, came to the son of Peleus.

Athena helps Achilles by leading Hector to his death through treachery. She takes the form of his brother Deiphobus, in whom Hector, now rendered defenseless, puts his final trust (22. 294–301):

He called with a great shout to white-shielded Deiphobus and asked for a long spear, but Deiphobus was nowhere near him. And Hector knew the truth in his heart and said, “Alas! Now for sure the gods have summoned me deathward. For I thought that the hero Deiphobus was beside me, but he is inside the walls and Athena has deceived me. Now indeed evil death is not far away but very near, and I have no way out.”

Deserted by the gods and deceived by Athena, Hector died at the hands of Achilles, who refused to show any mercy and dragged the corpse back to his hut behind his chariot. Next Achilles celebrated the funeral of Patroclus, on whose pyre he sacrificed twelve Trojan prisoners. He also held athletic games in honor of Patroclus, at which he presided and gave valuable prizes for the winners. Yet his anger against Hector was still unassuaged, and daily for twelve days he dragged Hector’s body round the tomb of Patroclus behind his chariot; the
Priam and Achilles. Red-figure skyphos, by the Brygos painter, ca. 490 B.C. This is one of the finest and most striking renderings of the Ransom of Hector. Priam, white haired and holding a walking staff, approaches Achilles from the left. Behind Priam four attendants, two men (shown here) followed by two women, bring the gifts. Achilles reclines on a banquet couch alongside the banquet table still laden with food. The couch, covered with mattress and blanket, is handsomely built and decorated. Achilles is turning to address a serving boy. He holds a piece of meat in his left hand, which rests on two large cushions, and a dagger in his right, which he has brought to his lips. Achilles has not yet noticed Priam’s arrival. Hector’s wounded body can clearly be seen beneath the couch in full view. While this detail is contrary to Homer’s tale, vase painters often included the body of Hector for dramatic effect. Another added feature is the presence of Hector’s (formerly Achilles’) armor on the wall and a shield with a gorgoneion (a representation of a stylized head of a gorgon). The artist has also taken liberties with the timing of the scene. In Homer Achilles has just finished eating when Priam enters. This slight change has resulted in a stark contrast that is particularly gruesome: Achilles eating meat with the corpse beneath, while grease from the food drips onto the bloody body. The horror of the scene is fully realized when one recalls both Achilles’ vow to refrain from eating until he has avenged the death of Patroclus and his threat to Hector, just before he kills him, that if he had the heart he would tear his flesh apart and eat him raw. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

Great Priam entered, unseen by Achilles’ companions, and stood near Achilles. With his hands he took hold of Achilles’ knees and kissed his hands, hands terrible and man-killing, which had killed many of Priam’s sons. . . . Achilles was full of wonder as he looked at godlike Priam, and the others also wondered and they looked at each other.

When Priam has made his appeal to Achilles and they both have had their fill of lamentation, each remembering his sorrows, Achilles explains the ultimate reason for human misery (24. 524–532):

“No [human] action is without chilling grief. For thus the gods have spun out for wretched mortals the fate of living in distress, while they live without care. Two jars sit on the doorsill of Zeus, filled with gifts that he bestows, one jar of
The second theomachy is in Books 20 and 21. In the Council of the Gods at the beginning of Book 20, Zeus gives permission to the gods to fight on the field of battle, while he remains above it all (Iliad 20. 22–25):

I will stay here in a fold of Olympus: I will watch from my seat and delight my mind. You other gods may go to the Trojans and Achaeans and give help to both sides, wherever you decide.

Thus the battle becomes more violent, as the gods inspire the heroes with fighting spirit and themselves take part. Once again the contrast is drawn between the reality of human suffering and the triviality of the gods’ injuries. Mortals must fight and die: the wounds of the immortals are soon healed.

Not all the gods who are on the battlefield fight. Poseidon challenges Apollo, who replies (Iliad 21. 462–467):

Earth-shaker, you would not say I was prudent if I were to fight you for the sake of wretched mortals. They are like leaves that flourish with fiery colors, for a little while eating the fruits of the earth. Then they fade away and perish, lifeless. Let us, however, stop fighting now, and let mortals fight.

The theomachies help us see the unbridgeable gap between the mortal and the divine. They show that it is ridiculous for gods to fight like mortals, yet they also show that human warfare is a concern of the Olympians. The theomachies, by recognizing the triviality of divine pain, serve to illuminate human suffering. Nor should we take them too seriously: we end this discussion with the description of Hera’s attack on Artemis (Iliad 21. 489–496):

Hera spoke and with her left hand seized Artemis by her wrists. With her right hand she stripped the bow and arrows from her shoulder, and with a smile she boxed her ears and stunned her. Out fell the arrows from the quiver. In tears the goddess [Artemis] fled like a pigeon that flies into a hole in a rock chased by a hawk (for it was not fated that the pigeon should be caught)—even so did Artemis run away in tears and left her bow and arrows there.

The Fall of Troy

The brilliance of the Iliad makes the rest of the saga of the Trojan War pale by comparison. Episodes are recorded in summaries of lost epics, in drama, in many vase paintings, and in Vergil’s Aeneid, so that we can tell the story of the rest of the war.

Achilles and Penthesilea

After the funeral of Hector the fighting resumed, and Achilles killed the leaders of two contingents that came from the ends of the earth to help the Trojans. From the north came the Amazons—the legendary warrior women—led by Penthesilea. Achilles killed her; in some versions, just as Achilles was about to deal the final thrust, their eyes met and he fell in love with her. 24 Achilles mourned over her death and her beauty and killed Thersites, who taunted him. 25
For this murder Achilles had to withdraw for a time to Lesbos, where he was purified by Odysseus.

**Achilles and Memnon**

A second foreign contingent was that of the Ethiopians, from the south. They were led by Memnon, son of Eos (Aurora), goddess of the dawn, and of Tithonus (a brother of Priam). After Memnon’s death, his followers were turned into birds that fought around his tomb. Achilles did not long survive these victories.

**The Death of Achilles**

As he pursued the Trojans toward the city, Achilles was fatally wounded in the heel by an arrow shot by Paris with the help of Apollo. After a fierce fight, his corpse was recovered by Ajax, son of Telamon, and buried at Sigeum, the promontory near Troy. Agamemnon’s ghost tells the ghost of Achilles about the battle over his corpse and his splendid funeral. The Greeks prepared the corpse for cremation and shaved their heads. Thetis herself came from the sea accompanied by her sea-nymphs, and, with the Muses, they mourned with wailing and dirges, while the Greeks wept (Odyssey 24: 63–70):

> For seventeen days and nights, immortal gods and mortal men, we wept for you. On the eighteenth we gave you to burning fire, and we sacrificed flocks of fat sheep. You were burned in the clothing of the gods, anointed with oil and sweet honey. Many of the Achaean heroes paraded in armor around the burning pyre, men on foot and horseback, and a loud roar arose.

Agamemnon describes how Achilles’ bones were put in a golden urn by Thetis, mixed with those of Patroclus. Then the great tomb was raised, and Thetis gave funeral games in honor of her dead son. Thus Achilles, the greatest of Greek heroes, was given a funeral and burial that would ensure his fame for posterity.26 (See The Funeral of Patroclus, p. 506.)

The ghost of Achilles appeared to the Greeks after the sack of Troy and demanded that Polyxena, the daughter of Priam and Hecuba, be sacrificed at his tomb. The sacrifice of Polyxena is one of the principal themes of Euripides’ tragedy Hecuba, in which the dignity and virtue of Polyxena are a striking contrast to the violence of the young Greeks and their leaders. Thus the aftermath of the war involved the sacrifice of a maiden before the Greek army just as it had been preceded by the sacrifice of Iphigenia. In a version especially popular in medieval legend, Polyxena had been loved by Achilles, and it was while he was meeting her that he was ambushed and killed by Paris.

**Odysseus and Ajax Compete for the Armor of Achilles**

Achilles’ armor was claimed by both Odysseus and Ajax, son of Telamon, as the leading warriors surviving on the Greek side. Each made a speech before an assembly of the Greeks, presided over by Athena. Trojan prisoners gave evidence that Odysseus had done them more harm than Ajax, and the arms were awarded to Odysseus. The disgrace of losing sent Ajax mad; he slaughtered a
Bock of sheep (which he believed were his enemies) and on becoming sane again killed himself for shame by falling on his sword. From his blood sprang a flower (perhaps a type of hyacinth) with the initials of his name (AI-AL) on its petals. This legend is the subject of Sophocles' tragedy Ajax, in which the hostility of Athena toward Ajax contrasts with Odysseus' appreciation of the human predicament. Athena asks Odysseus if he knows of a hero who was greater than Ajax, and his reply is a final commentary on the heroic tragedy of the Iliad (Sophocles, Ajax 121-133):

ODYSSEUS: I do not know [of a greater hero]. I pity him in his misery, nevertheless, although he is my enemy. Because he is yoked to evil madness (ate) I look at this man's troubles nō more than at my own. For I see that we who live are nothing more than ghosts and weightless shadows. (121-126)

ATHENA: Therefore when you see such things, say nothing yourself against the gods and swear no boastful oath if your hand is heavy [with success] or with deep and enduring wealth. For time lays low and brings back again all human things. The gods love those who are moderate (sophrones) and hate those who are evil. (127-133)

We can hardly find a better expression of the way in which the Greeks used mythology to express their deepest understanding of human life.

The Roman poet Ovid tells the story of Ajax and the armor of Achilles at length. Here is how he describes its end (Metamorphoses 13. 382-398):

The Greek leaders were impressed [i.e., by the speech of Odysseus], and the power of eloquence was made clear in the consequences. The eloquent man took away the armor of the brave warrior. Ajax, who alone so many times had resisted Hector, who had opposed iron missiles and fire and the will of Jupiter, could not resist one thing, anger. Shame conquered the unconquered hero. He seized the sword and thrust the lethal blade into his breast, never before wounded. The ground reddened with his blood and put forth a purple flower from the green grass, the flower which earlier had sprung from the wound of Hyacinthus. The same letters were written on the petals for hero and youth, for the one signifying his name, for the other the mourning cry.

The Deaths of Paris and Priam

After Achilles' death, Odysseus captured Helenus, who told the Greeks of a number of conditions that must be fulfilled before they could capture the city. Among these was the summoning of two absent heroes, Neoptolemus (Pyrrhus) and Philoctetes. As we have mentioned, Philoctetes was brought from Lemnos, cured of his snakebite, and with his indispensable bow and arrows shot Paris. Neoptolemus (his name means "new recruit"), the son of Achilles, proved himself to be a brutal warrior, and his butchering of Priam at the altar during the sack of Troy is one of the most moving scenes in the Aeneid. Vergil's description of Priam's remains echoes a familiar theme: the once mighty king now "lies, a great and mutilated body, head torn from the shoulders, a nameless corpse on the seashore" (2. 557-558).
The Wooden Horse

The Greeks finally took the city by deception. One of them, Epeus, built an enormous hollow wooden horse, in which the leading warriors were concealed. The Iliad does not mention the Trojan horse, which is repeatedly mentioned in the Odyssey. In Book 8 the bard, Demodocus, sings a second song at the request of Odysseus, whose identity has not yet been revealed (Odyssey 8: 487–495):

[Odysseus speaks:] “Demodocus, I honor you above all mortals. A Muse, daughter of Zeus, was your teacher, or Apollo, for well do you sing in proper order of the sorrows of the Greeks—their deeds and sufferings and labors—as if you yourself had been there or had heard them from another. Come now, and change your song: sing of the wooden horse, which Epeus made with the help of Athena. Odysseus brought it as a deception into the acropolis [of Troy], when he had filled it with men who sacked Troy.”

Demodocus then tells the story of the horse, in which Odysseus has the most prominent role (Odyssey 8: 502–515):

They [i.e., the Greek heroes] sat around glorious Odysseus in the center of Troy, concealed in the horse, for the Trojans themselves had dragged it up to the acropolis. Thus it stood there, and the Trojans sat and debated around it. They

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The Building of the Trojan Horse, by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804); oil on canvas, 1773. 76 × 141 in. This huge painting is the only survivor of three final versions of a series on The Fall of Troy, for which all three preparatory oil sketches exist. The massive horse dominates the composition, as workmen with their tools and ladders swarm over it. To the left two figures stand on a rock outside the walls of Troy, probably Epeus (gesturing) and, behind him, Odysseus disguised with a turban and ill-fitting cloak. In the background are the walls of Troy, in front of which a warrior, a woman with a baby, and a servant (possibly, if improbably, Hector and his family) observe the building, while other Trojans look down from the tower on the left. (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY)
favored three plans: either to drive a sharp bronze [spear] through its hollow belly, or to drag it to the edge of the precipice and throw it down the rocks, or to let it be a great dedication to placate the gods. This was the course which they would choose, for it was fated that they would be destroyed once the city held the great wooden horse, where sat all the noblest of the Argives, bringing slaughter and fate to the Trojans. He sang, too, how the sons of Achaeans sacked the city when they poured out of the horse, leaving their hollow place of ambush.

"This was the bard's song," says Homer, and Odysseus wept when he heard it, even as a woman weeps whose husband has been killed in battle—the very suffering that Odysseus himself had inflicted on the Trojans. The song of Demodocus is the basis for Vergil's detailed account of the sack of Troy in the second book of the Aeneid. Odysseus himself tells the story of the horse to the ghost of Achilles in the Underworld, narrating how only Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, had been fearless and eager to fight as he sat waiting in the horse, whereas the other Greek heroes had wept and their knees were weak with fear. Odysseus is shown in both of these accounts to be the leader of the Greeks in the horse.

The horse was left outside the city walls, while the other Greeks sailed off to the island of Tenedos, leaving behind one man, Sinon. The Trojans, thinking that their troubles were over, came out of the city and captured Sinon, who pretended to be the bitter enemy of Odysseus and the other Greeks. He told the Trojans that the horse was an offering to Athena, purposely made too big to pass through the city walls; if it were brought inside, the city would never be captured. Not all the Trojans believed him; Cassandra, the prophetic daughter of Priam, foretold the truth, and Laocoön, son of Antenor and priest of Apollo, hurled his spear into the horse's flank and said that it should be destroyed. Yet the Trojans ignored Cassandra and failed to hear the clash of armor as Laocoön's spear struck the horse. Their judgment appeared to be vindicated when two huge serpents swam over the sea from Tenedos as Laocoön was sacrificing to Apollo and throttled him and his two sons.

The Sack of Troy

The Trojans pulled down part of the city walls and dragged the horse in. Helen walked round it calling to the Greek leaders, imitating the voice of each one's wife, but they were restrained from answering by Odysseus. So the horse achieved its purpose; that night, as the Trojans slept after celebrating the end of the war, Sinon opened the horse and released the Greeks. The other Greeks sailed back from Tenedos and entered the city; the Trojans were put to the sword and the city burned.

Antenor was spared, and of the other Trojan leaders only Aeneas escaped, along with his son, Ascanius, and his father, Anchises. Priam and the others were killed; Hector's infant son, Astyanax, was thrown from the walls, and his widow, Andromache, along with Hecuba and the other Trojan women, were made slaves of the Greek leaders. Neoptolemus' share of the spoil included Andromache, but eventually she married Helenus and founded the dynasty of the Molossian kings. In Book 3 of the Aeneid, she and Helenus figure prominently. She is the only one of the Trojan women to regain some sort of independent status after the fall of Troy.
During the sack of the city, Cassandra took refuge in the temple of Athena. She was dragged from this asylum by Ajax the Locrian, son of Oileus, and for this he was killed by the gods on his way home. Cassandra became the slave and concubine of Agamemnon, who took her back to Mycenae, where she was murdered with him by Clytemnestra. In Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon*, she foresees her own death in a moving scene (see p. 450); yet her audience, the Chorus in the play, does not believe her. The curse of Apollo remained with her to the end.

As Hecuba sailed back to Greece with Odysseus (to whom she had been given as part of the spoils), she landed in Thrace and there recognized the corpse of her son Polydorus when it was washed up on the seashore. He had been murdered by the local king Polymestor (to whom he had been sent for safety during the war) because of the treasure that had been sent with him. Taking advantage of Polymestor's avarice, Hecuba enticed him and his children into her tent, pretending that she knew the whereabouts in Troy of some hidden treasure, while she appeared to know nothing of the murder of Polydorus. Once they were in the tent, Hecuba's women murdered the children before Polymestor's eyes, then blinded him with their brooches. After this, Hecuba was turned into a bitch; when she died, the place of her burial (in Thrace) was called Cynossema, which means the "dog's tomb."

**The Trojan Women of Euripides**

In Euripides' tragedy *The Trojan Women*, the results of the fall are seen through the eyes of Hecuba, Cassandra, and Andromache. The death of Astyanax is a central part of the tragedy, in which he is torn from his mother's embrace to be hurled from the walls. Later his body is brought back on stage and placed by Hecuba on the shield of Hector, a symbol of the defenselessness of Troy once her champion had been killed. The chorus of Trojan captives recalls the entry of the wooden horse (*Trojan Women* 515–541):

> Now I shall sing of Troy, how I was destroyed by the four-wheeled contrivance of the Greeks and made their prisoner, when they left the horse at the gates, echoing to the skies with the clash of armor and caparisoned with gold. And the Trojan people shouted as it stood on the rock of Troy: "Come, the labor of war..."