

PLAGUE AND WRATH

The Greek army is led by Agamemnon (son of Atreus). It is besieging *Ilium*, a town in the region of *Troy* whose ruler is *Priam*; it is the tenth year of the war (2.134).

To satisfy their desire for booty, the Greeks carry out raids on local towns. Human captives are especially prized. They are kept as slaves or sold for ransom. After one such raid, the young girl *Chryseis* is selected as an appropriate prize for Agamemnon. But *Chryseis* is the daughter of *Chryses*, a local priest of *Apollo* . . .

1-7: The poet announces his theme and asks the goddess (the Muse, goddess of memory) to 'sing', through him, the destructive anger of the greatest Greek fighter Achilles (son of Peleus).

8-52: [1st. day] *Chryses* offers a ransom for his daughter, which Agamemnon brutally rejects. *Apollo* sends a plague on the Greeks.

[Nine-day plague]

53-120: [10th day] Achilles calls an assembly, at which Agamemnon agrees to return *Chryseis*, but demands immediate compensation.

121-307: Achilles and Agamemnon quarrel over compensation. The insulted Achilles threatens to walk out. The goddess *ATHENE* prevents Achilles killing Agamemnon and promises him massive rewards for the insult. When the much respected Nestor fails to reconcile the two, Achilles stalks out of the fighting, taking his companion Patroclus and their troops (the Myrmidons) with him.

308-48: The mission to return *Chryseis* sets off, and Agamemnon's heralds seize Achilles' girl *Brisis*.

348-430: Achilles appeals for help to his divine mother *THETIS*.

430-92: *Chryseis* is handed over, and the plague ends [11th day].
 [Evening absence of the gods, beginning from the 9th day, 1.424.]
 493-530: [21st day] *THE TIS* supplicates a reluctant *ZEUS* and persuades him to make the Greeks start losing. That will force them to take *Achilles* back - with due compensation and the return of *Briséis*.

531-611: *ZEUS* quarrels with his wife *HERA*, who supports the Greeks. *HEPHAESTUS* restores the peace, and the gods turn to feasting and song. Night falls.

Anger - sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that accused anger, which brought the Greeks endless sufferings and sent the mighty souls of many warriors to Hades, leaving their bodies as carrion for the dogs and a feast for the birds; and Zeus' purpose was fulfilled. It all began when Agamemnon lord of men and godlike Achilles quarrelled and parted.

Which of the gods was it that made them quarrel? It was *Apollo*, son of *Zeus* and *Leto*, who started the feud because he was furious with *Agamemnon* for not respecting his priest *Chryses*. So *Apollo* inflicted a deadly plague on *Agamemnon's* army and destroyed his men.

Chryses had come to the Greeks' swift ships to recover his captured daughter. He brought with him an immense ransom and carried the emblems of the Archer-god *Apollo* on a golden staff in his hands. He spoke in supplication to the whole Greek army and most of all its two commanders, *Agamemnon* and *Menelaus*, the sons of *Atreus*:

'Sons of *Atreus* and you other Greek men-at-arms; you hope to sack *Priam's* town and get home in safety. May the gods that live on *Olympus* grant your wish. Now respect the Archer-god *Apollo* son of *Zeus*, accept this ransom and release my beloved daughter.'

Then all the other Greeks shouted in agreement. They wanted to see the priest respected and the splendid ransom taken. But this was not at all to *Agamemnon's* liking. He cruelly and bluntly dismissed the priest:

'Old man, don't let me catch you loitering by the hollow ships today or coming back again in the future, or you may find the god's staff and emblems a very poor defence. That girl I will not release. She will grow old in *Argos*, in my household, a long way from her country, working at the loom, sharing my bed. Now get out and don't provoke me, if you want to save your skin.'

So he spoke, and the old man was afraid and did as he was told. He went off without a word along the shore of the sounding sea. But when he had gone some distance, the old man poured out prayers to lord *Apollo*, son of lovely-haired *Leto*:

'Hear me, *Apollo*, lord of the silver bow, protector of *Chryse* and holy *Cilla*, and mighty ruler over *Tenedos*! Plague-god, if ever I built a temple that pleased you, if ever I burnt you offerings of the fat thighs of bulls or goats, grant me this wish. Make the Greeks pay with your arrows for my tears.'

So he spoke in prayer, and *Phoebus Apollo* heard him and came down in fury from the heights of *Olympus*, his bow and covered quiver on his back.

With every movement of the furious god, the arrows rattled on his shoulders, and his descent was like nightfall. He settled down some way from the ships and shot an arrow, with a terrifying twang from his silver bow.

He attacked the mules first and the swift dogs; then he aimed his sharp arrows at the men, and struck again and again. Day and night, packed funeral pyres burned.

For nine days the god's arrows rained down on the camp. On the tenth, *Achilles* had the men summoned to assembly, an idea the goddess white-armed *Hera* gave him in her concern for the Greeks whose destruction she was witnessing. When everyone had arrived and the gathering was complete, swift-footed *Achilles* rose and spoke to them:

'*Agamemnon* son of *Atreus*, what with the ravages of the fighting and the plague, any of us that are not dead by then will soon, I think, have to sail for home. Come, let us consult some prophet or priest or some interpreter of dreams (dreams, as you know, are sent by *Zeus*) and find out from him why *Phoebus Apollo* is so angry with us. He may be offended at

[Day 1]

APOLLO

avenges

Chryses: the

plague

some broken vow or failure in our rites. If so, he may be willing to accept an offering of unblemished sheep and goats and save us from the plague.

[Day 10] The son of Thestor rose to his feet. As a prophet, Calchas had no rival in the camp. Past, present and future held no secrets from him; and it was his second sight — a gift he owed to Apollo — that had guided the Greek ships to Ilium. He had their interests at heart as he rose and addressed them:

‘Achilles dear to Zeus, you have instructed me to account for the anger of lord Apollo the Archer-god; and I will do so. But listen to me first and swear an oath to use all your eloquence and strength to look after me and protect me. I ask this of you, being well aware that I am about to infuriate a man whose authority is great among us and whose word is law to all the Greeks. An ordinary mortal is no match for anyone in authority he angers. Even if his superior swallows his anger for the moment, he will still nurse his grievance till the day when he can settle the account. Consider, then, whether you can guarantee my safety.’

Swift-footed Achilles replied and said:

‘Put your mind at rest and tell us everything you have learnt from the god. For by Apollo son of Zeus, the very god to whom you pray, Calchas, when you reveal your prophecies — I swear that as long as I am alive and look on the earth, not one of all the Greeks here by the hollow ships will raise a fist against you, not even if the man you mean is Agamemnon, who now claims to be far the best of all.’

Then the matchless prophet took heart and said:

‘Apollo has found no fault with any broken vows or failures in our rites. Agamemnon insulted his priest, did not free his daughter and refused the ransom — that is why Apollo made us suffer and will continue to do so. He will not release us from this loathsome plague till we give the dark-eyed girl back to her father, without recompense or ransom, and send a sacred offering to the priest’s town of Chryse. Appease him like that, and we might persuade him to relent.’

With these words Calchas sat down, and the warrior son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon, leapt up, enraged. His heart seethed with fury, and his eyes were like flames of fire. With a menacing look he spoke first to Calchas:

‘Prophet of evil, never yet have you said a word to my advantage. It’s always trouble you revel in predicting. Not once have you delivered a positive prophecy — not once! And now you hold forth as the army’s prophet, telling the Greeks that the Archer-god Apollo is persecuting them because I refused the splendid ransom for the girl Chryseis. And why? Because I wanted to have her at home myself. Indeed, I like her better than my wife Clytaemnestra. Chryseis is quite as beautiful and no less clever or skilful with her hands.’

‘Still, I am willing to give her up, if that appears the better course. I want my army alive and well, not dead or dying. But give me another prize at once or I will be the only one of us without one. That cannot be right. You can all see for yourselves that the prize I was given is on its way elsewhere.’

Swift-footed godlike Achilles replied:

The argument
over prizes

‘Most glorious Agamemnon, unequalled in your greed, where will the great-hearted Greeks find you a fresh prize? I have yet to hear of any store of common property we have laid by. The plunder we took from captured towns has been distributed. It cannot be right to ask the men to reassemble that. No: give the girl back now, as the god demands, and we will compensate you three, four times over, if Zeus ever allows us to sack this Trojan town with its fine walls.’

Lord Agamemnon replied and said:

‘You are a great warrior, godlike Achilles, but don’t imagine you can trick me into that. I am not going to be outmanoeuvred or persuaded by you. “Give up the girl”, you say, in order to keep your own prize safe. Do you expect me to sit tamely by, while I am robbed? No: if the army is prepared to give me a fresh prize, they must choose one to my taste to make up for my loss. If not, I shall come and help myself to your prize, or Ajax’s, or maybe I shall walk off with Odysseus’. And what an angry man I shall leave behind me!

140 'However, we can deal with all that later. For the moment, let us run a black ship down into the bright sea, carefully select her crew, load the animals for sacrifice and put the girl herself, fair-cheeked Chryseis, on board. And let some adviser be in charge, Ajax, Idomeneus, godlike Odysseus, or you yourself, Achilles, most impetuous of all Greeks, to offer the sacrifice and win us back Apollo's favour.'

Swift-footed Achilles gave him a black look and replied:

150 'You shameless, self-centred . . . ! How can you expect any of the men to comply with you willingly when you send them on a raid or into battle? It was no quarrel with Trojan warriors that brought *me* here to fight. They have never done *me* any harm. They have never lifted oxen or horses of mine, nor ravaged my crops back home in fertile Phthia, nurse of warriors. The roaring seas and many a dark range of mountains lie between us.

'We joined your expedition, you shameless swine, to please you, to get satisfaction from the Trojans for Menelaus and yourself, dog-face - a fact you utterly ignore. And now comes this threat from you, of all people, to rob me of my prize, in person, my hard-earned prize which was a tribute from the army. It's not as though I am ever given a prize equal to yours when the Greeks sack some prosperous Trojan town. The heat and burden of the fighting fall on me, but when it comes to dealing out the spoils, it is you that takes the lion's share, leaving me to return to my ships, exhausted from battle, with some pathetic portion to call my own.

170 'So, I shall now go back home to Phthia. That is the best thing I can do - to sail home with my beaked ships. I can see no point in staying here to be insulted, while I pile up wealth and luxuries for you.'

Agamemnon lord of men replied:

Agamemnon
dismisses
Achilles
Zeus wise in counsel is first among them. Of all the Olympian-bred lords here, you are the most hateful to me. Rivalry, war,

'Run for it, then, by all means, if that's the way you feel. I am not going down on bended knees to entreat you to stay here on my account. There are others with me who will treat me with respect, and Zeus wise in counsel is first among them. Of all the Olympian-bred lords here, you are the most hateful to me. Rivalry, war,

fighting - these are the breath of life to you. If you *are* a great warrior, it is because the god made you so. Go home now with your ships and your men-at-arms and rule your Myrmidons. I have no interest in you whatsoever. Your resentment leaves me cold.

'But here is a threat: in the same way as Phoebus Apollo is robbing me of Chryseis, whom I propose to send off in my ship with my crew, I will come in person to your hut and take away fair-cheeked Briseis, your prize, Achilles, to let you know how far I am your superior and to teach others to shrink from claiming parity with me and playing the equal to my face.'

190 So he spoke, and his words infuriated Achilles. In his manly chest, his heart was torn whether to draw the sharp sword from his side, thrust his way through the crowd and disembowel Agamemnon, or control himself and check his angry impulse. These thoughts were racing through his mind, and he was just drawing his great sword from his sheath when Athene came down from the skies. The goddess white-armed Hera had sent her because she felt equally close to both men and was concerned for them.

Athene stood behind Achilles and seized him by his auburn hair. No one but Achilles was aware of her; the rest saw nothing. Achilles was amazed. He swung round, recognized Pallas Athene at once - so wonderful was the light from her eyes - and spoke winged words:

200 'Why have you come here this time, daughter of Zeus who drives the storm-cloud? Is it to witness Agamemnon's humiliating affront? I tell you bluntly and, believe me, I mean it: he stands to pay for this insolence with his life.'

The goddess grey-eyed Athene replied:

210 'I came from the skies to cool your fury, if you will listen to me. The goddess white-armed Hera sent me because she feels equally close to both of you and is concerned for you. Come now, give up this quarrel and take your hand from your sword. Insult him with words instead and tell him what you mean to do. I tell you bluntly and I *do* mean it: the day shall come when

splendid gifts three times as valuable as what you have now lost will be laid at your feet because of that humiliating affront. Hold your hand, then, and do as we tell you.'

Swift-footed Achilles replied and said:

'Goddess, a man must respect what you and Hera say, however angry he may be. Better for him if he does. The gods listen to the man who goes along with them.'

220 He spoke, placed his heavy hand on the silver hilt, drove the long sword back into its scabbard and complied with Athene, who then set out for Olympus and the palace of Zeus who drives the storm-cloud, where she rejoined the other gods.

Not that Achilles curbed his anger. He rounded bitterly on Agamemnon and said:

230 'You drunkard, you, with your eyes of a dog and heart of a doe! You never have the courage to arm yourself and go into battle with the men, let alone join the pick of the Greeks in an ambush - you'd sooner die. It suits you better to remain in camp, walking off with the prizes of anyone who contradicts you - a leader who grows fat on his own people! But then, you rule over nobodies: otherwise, son of Atreus, this outrage would prove your last.

240 'But I tell you bluntly, and I am going to take a solemn oath on this staff in my hands. Once cut from its stem in the hills, it can never put out leaves or twigs again. The bronze axe stripped it of its bark and foliage: it will sprout no more. The men who in the name of Zeus safeguard our traditions now hold it when they give judgement. By this I solemnly swear that the day is coming when the Greeks one and all will miss Achilles badly, and you in your despair will be powerless to help them as they fall in their multitudes to man-slaying Hector. Then you will tear your heart out in remorse for giving no respect to the best of the Greeks.'

250 So spoke the son of Peleus, flung down the staff with its golden studs and resumed his seat, leaving Agamemnon thundering at him from the other side. But Nestor now leapt up, eloquent Nestor, the clear-voiced orator from Pylos whose speech flowed sweeter than honey off his tongue. He had already seen two generations of men born, grow up and die in sacred Pylos, and

now he ruled the third. He had their interests at heart as he rose and addressed them:

260 'What can I say? This is indeed enough to make Greece weep! How happy Priam and his sons would be, how all the Trojans would rejoice, if they could hear you at each other's throats, you, the two best Greeks when it comes to giving advice and fighting!

270 'Now listen to me. You are both my juniors. What's more, I have mixed in the past with even better men than you and never failed to carry conviction with them, the finest men I have ever seen or shall see, men like Peirithous and Dryas shepherd of the people, Caeneus, Exadius, godlike Polyphemus and Aegeus' son Theseus, a man like the gods. These Lapiths were the strongest men that earth has bred, the strongest men who pitted themselves against the strongest enemies - the mountain-dwelling Centaurs, whom they violently destroyed. These were the men I left my home in Pylos to join. I travelled far to meet them - they invited me, personally - and I fought my own campaign. Not a soul on earth today could live with those men in battle - and they listened to what I said and followed my advice. You two do the same. It's for your own good to go along with what I tell you.

280 'You, Agamemnon, though you have the authority, do not rob him of his girl. The Greek army gave her to him first. Let him keep his prize. And you, Achilles, give up your desire to cross swords with your leader. Through the authority he derives from Zeus, a leader who holds the sceptre of power has more claim to our respect than anyone else. Even if you, with a goddess for mother, are the better fighter, yet Agamemnon is your superior since he rules more people. Agamemnon, cool your fury; I, Nestor, entreat you to put aside your anger against Achilles who is a mighty tower of strength for every Greek in the hell of battle.'

Lord Agamemnon replied and said:

290 'Venerable sir, all that is very true. But this man here wants no superiors: he wants to dominate everyone, to lord it over everyone and to give us each our orders, though I know one person who is not going to stand for that. What if the everlasting

gods did make a spearman of him? Does that entitle him to hurl insults —?’

Abruptly, godlike Achilles replied:

‘A pathetic little nonentity I shall be called, for sure, if I give in to you at every point, no matter what you say. Issue your commands to the rest. Don’t tell me what to do. I have done with taking your orders. And I’ll tell you something else, and you bear it in mind. I am not going to fight you, or anyone else, with my bare hands for this girl’s sake. You Greeks gave her to me, and now you take her back. But there’s much else by my swift black ship that is mine, and you will take none of that against my will. Come on, just try, so that everyone here can see what happens. Your black blood will soon be flowing down my spear.’

The war of words was over. The two stood up and dismissed the assembly by the Greek ships. Achilles, with Menoetius’ son Patroclus and his Myrmidon troops, made off to his hut and ships; while Agamemnon launched a swift ship into the water, chose twenty rowers, loaded the offering of cattle for sacrifice to the god and seated fair-cheeked Chryseis on board. Quick-thinking Odysseus went as their leader and, when everyone was aboard, they set off along the highways of the sea.

Meanwhile Agamemnon ordered the army to purify itself by bathing. When they had done this and thrown the dirty water into the waves, they offered perfect sacrifices of bulls and goats to Apollo on the shore of the murmuring sea. The smell of sacrifice, mixed with the curling smoke, went up into the sky.

While the army was engaged on these duties in the camp, Agamemnon did not forget his quarrel with Achilles and the threat he had made at the assembly. He spoke to Talthibius and Eurybates, his heralds and busy attendants:

‘Go to Achilles’ hut, take fair-cheeked Briseis by the hand and bring her here. If he refuses to let her go, I shall come in force to fetch her myself, which will be all the worse for him.’

So he spoke, and bluntly dismissed them. The two made their unwilling way along the shore of the murmuring sea till they reached the Myrmidons’ huts and ships, where they found

Achilles himself sitting by his own black ship. It gave him no pleasure to see them. They came to a halt, too terrified and embarrassed before their lord to address him or ask anything. But he realized what was going on and spoke out:

‘Heralds, ambassadors of Zeus and men, welcome. Come in. My quarrel is not with you but with Agamemnon, who sent you here to fetch the girl Briseis. Come, Olympian-born Patroclus, bring the girl out and hand her over to these men. I shall count on them to be my witnesses before the blessed gods, before men and before the obstinate Agamemnon as well, if the Greeks ever need me again to save them from some terrible disaster. That man is raving mad, incapable of understanding the past or the future, let alone how the army is going to survive when it’s fighting for its life by the ships.’

So he spoke, and Patroclus did as his dear companion had told him, brought out fair-cheeked Briseis from their hut and gave her up to the two men, who made their way back along the line of the ships: the girl went unwillingly with them.

Withdrawing from his men, Achilles broke into tears. He sat down by himself on the shore of the grey sea and looked out across the boundless ocean. Then, stretching out his arms, he poured out prayers to his mother:

‘Mother, since you, a goddess, bore me to live the briefest of lives, surely high-thundering Olympian Zeus owes me some measure of respect. But he pays me none — not even a little. Look how wide-ruling Agamemnon son of Atreus has dishonoured me. He took my prize, made off with her in person and now he has her for himself.’

So he spoke in tears, and his lady mother heard him where she sat in the depths of the sea with her old father. She rose swiftly from the grey water like a mist, came and sat by her weeping son, stroked him with her hand and said:

‘My child, why these tears? Why this sorrow? Tell me, don’t keep it to yourself. We must share it.’

Swift-footed Achilles sighed heavily and said:

‘You know and, since you know, why should I tell you the whole story? We went to Thebe, Eëtion’s sacred town, sacked

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Achilles

appeals to

his mother

THETIS

it and brought back all the plunder. The sons of the Greeks shared it out among themselves in the proper way and chose fair-cheeked Chryseis for Agamemnon. Then Chryses, priest of the Archer-god Apollo, came to the ships of the bronze-armoured Greeks to recover his captured daughter. He brought with him an immense ransom and carried the emblems of the Archer-god Apollo on a golden staff in his hands. He spoke in supplication to the whole Greek army, and most of all its two commanders, Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus. Then all the other Greeks shouted in agreement. They wanted to see the priest respected and the splendid ransom taken. But this was not at all to Agamemnon's liking. He cruelly and bluntly dismissed the priest.

380 'So, the old man went back in anger; but Apollo listened to his prayers – the priest was very dear to him – and launched his deadly arrows at the Greek army. The men fell thick and fast, since the god's arrows rained down on every part of the broad Greek camp. At last a prophet who understood the god's will explained the matter to us. I was the first to rise and advise them to appease the god. This made Agamemnon furious. He leapt to his feet and threatened me. And now he has carried out his threats. The dark-eyed Greeks are taking Chryseis to Chryse in a swift ship with offerings for the god, while Agamemnon's heralds have just gone from my hut with the girl Briseis, whom the army gave to me.

400 THETIS
asked to
intervene
with ZEUS
how you alone among the gods once saved Zeus who darkens the clouds from a terrible disaster when some of the other Olympians – Hera, Poseidon and Pallas Athene – had plotted to throw him in chains. You, goddess, went and had him released. You immediately summoned to high Olympus that monster with a hundred arms – the gods call him Briareus, but mankind Aegaeon – a giant more powerful even than his father. He took up his position beside Zeus son of Cronus, exulting in

his glory, and the blessed gods slunk off in terror, leaving Zeus free.

410 'Sit by him now, take him by the knees and remind him of that. Persuade him, if you can, to help the Trojans and to fling the Greeks back on their ships, pen them hard against the sea and massacre them. That would teach them the true measure of their leader. Make wide-ruling Agamemnon son of Atreus realize the delusion he is under in giving no respect to the best of all the Greeks.'

Thetis replied in tears:

'My son, my son! Cursed in my child-bearing, was it for this I nursed you? If only you could have been left to pass your days without tears or trouble beside the ships, since destiny has given you so short a life, no time at all. As it is, you are not only doomed to an early death but also to a most miserable life. It was indeed to an evil destiny that I brought you into the world.

420 'Nevertheless, I will go to snow-capped Olympus to tell all this myself to Zeus who delights in thunder, and I will see whether I can move him. Meanwhile, stay by your swift ships, keep up your anger against the Greeks and take no part in the fighting. Yesterday, I must tell you, Zeus left for Ocean to join the matchless Ethiopians at a feast, and all the gods went with him. But in twelve days' time he will be back on Olympus, and then I shall go to his bronze-floored palace where I will fall on my knees at his feet. I am convinced he will do what I ask.'

With these words she departed and left Achilles there, anger mounting in his heart at the treatment of his well-girdled woman Briseis, whom they had taken from him against his will.

430 Meanwhile Odysseus and his crew reached Chryse with the sacred offerings. When they had brought their ship into the waters of the deep-bayed port, they gathered up the sails and stowed them in the black ship's hold, quickly slackened the forestays, dropped the mast into its crutch, rowed the ship into her moorings, threw out anchor-stones from the prow into the sea, tied up the stern hawsers on land and disembarked on to the beach.

[Day 11]

Chryseis is

returned to

her father

440 The cattle for the Archer-god Apollo were landed, and Chryseis stepped ashore from the seafaring vessel. Quick-thinking Odysseus then led the girl to the altar, gave her back into her father's arms and said:

'Chryses, Agamemnon lord of men has ordered me to bring you your daughter and to make a sacred offering of oxen to Apollo on the Greeks' behalf, in the hope of pacifying the god who has been inflicting sorrow and mourning on our men.'

With these words he handed the girl over into the arms of her father, who joyfully welcomed his beloved child.

450 The sacred offering of oxen to do honour to the god was quickly set in place round the well-built altar. The men rinsed their hands and took up the sacrificial grains. Then Chryses lifted up his hands and prayed aloud:

'Hear me, Apollo, lord of the silver bow, protector of Chryse and holy Cilla, mighty ruler over Tenedos! You heard me when I prayed to you before; you showed your respect for me and struck a great blow at the Greek army. Now grant me a second wish and lift the loathsome plague from the Greeks.'

460 So he spoke in prayer, and Phoebus Apollo heard him. When they had made their prayers and thrown the grain over the victims, they first drew back the animals' heads, slit their throats and skinned them. Then, for the god's portion, they cut out the thigh bones, wrapped them in folds of fat and laid raw meat from the rest of the animal above them. These pieces the old priest burnt on wooden spits while he poured libations of red wine over them and the young men gathered round him with five-pronged forks in their hands. When the god's portion had been consumed by fire, they ate the offal and then carved the rest of the victims into small pieces, pierced them with skewers, roasted them carefully and drew them all off.

470 When their work was done and the meal prepared, they feasted, and no one went without a fair share. Their hunger and thirst satisfied, the young men filled the mixing-bowls to the brim with wine and went round the whole company, pouring some into each cup for a libation to the god. And for the rest of the day the young Greek warriors sang and danced to appease

the god with a beautiful hymn celebrating the Archer Apollo, to which he listened with delight.

480 When the sun set and darkness fell, they lay down to sleep by the hawsers of their ship. But when early-born, rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, they set sail for the broad Greek camp, taking advantage of a favourable breeze the Archer-god had sent them. They put up their mast and spread the white sail. The wind filled its belly, and a dark wave hissed loudly round her keel as the vessel gathered way and sped through the swell, forging ahead on her course. So they returned to the broad Greek camp, where they dragged the black ship high up on the sandy shore and kept it upright with wooden props. That done, they dispersed to their several huts and ships.

490 But Olympian-born son of Peleus swift-footed Achilles was sitting by his ships, nursing his anger. He had not only kept away from the fighting but had attended no meetings of the assembly where men win glory. He stayed where he was, eating his heart out and longing for the sound and fury of battle.

500 Eleven days went by, and at dawn on the twelfth the ever-lasting gods returned in full strength to Olympus, with Zeus at their head. Thetis, remembering her son's instructions, emerged in the morning from the waves of the sea, rose into the broad sky and reached Olympus. She found far-thundering Zeus sitting away from the rest of the gods on the highest of Olympus' many peaks. She sank down in front of him, put her left arm round his knees, took his chin in her right hand and in supplication spoke to lord Zeus son of Cronus:

'Father Zeus, if ever I have served you well among the gods by word or deed, grant me this wish: give honour to my son. He is already singled out for an early death, and now Agamemnon lord of men has dishonoured him. He took his prize, removed her in person and now he has her for himself. But you at least do him honour, Olympian Zeus wise in counsel, and let the Trojans have the upper hand till the Greeks pay back my son and increase the honour in which he is held.'

510 So she spoke, and Zeus who marshals the clouds made no reply. He sat in silence for a long time, with Thetis clinging to

his knees as she had done throughout. Then she asked once more:

'Promise me faithfully and bow your head in agreement, or else, since you have nothing to fear by doing so, refuse; then I shall know for sure that no other god is less respected than I am.'

Much perturbed, Zeus who marshals the clouds replied:

'This is going to mean trouble! You will make me fall foul of my wife Hera when she heaps me with abuse for this, as she will. Even as things are, she slanders me constantly before the other gods and accuses me of helping the Trojans in this war.'

'However, leave me now, or Hera may notice us; and I will see the matter through. But first, to reassure you, I will bow my head in agreement – and the immortals recognize no surer guarantee from me than that. When I seal a promise with a nod, there can be no failure to fulfil it, no going back, no deception.'

The son of Cronus spoke and nodded his sable brows. The divine locks rolled forward from the lord god's immortal head, and great Olympus shook.

The agreement was made, and the two now parted.

ZEUS nods
to THETIS;
HERA's rage

Thetis plunged down from glittering Olympus into the salt-sea depths, while Zeus departed for his own palace. There the whole company of gods rose from their seats in their Father's presence. There was no one that dared to keep his seat as he approached; they all stood up as he came in.

So Zeus sat down on his throne; and Hera had seen, and knew that he and silver-footed Thetis, daughter of the Old Man of the Sea, had hatched a plot between them. At once she spoke to Zeus with cutting words:

'Which god has been hatching plots with you this time, you arch-deceiver? How like you it is to wait till my back is turned and then cook up some secret schemes, on your own. You have never been willing to confide in me.'

The Father of men and gods replied to her:

'Hera, don't expect to learn all my decisions. You would find the knowledge hard to bear, although you are my wife. What it is right for you to hear, no man or god shall know before you.'

But when I choose to take a step without referring to the gods, don't cross-examine me about it.'

Ox-eyed lady Hera replied:

'Dread son of Cronus, what are you suggesting now? Surely it was never my way to pester you with questions; you are at liberty to make whatever decisions you like. But now I have a terrible fear you have been talked round by silver-footed Thetis, daughter of the Old Man of the Sea. She sat with you this morning and took you by the knees. This makes me suppose you have given your word to her to honour Achilles and let the Greeks be slaughtered in their multitudes by their ships.'

Zeus who marshals the clouds replied and said:

'Remarkable! You can never stop "supposing". I can keep no secrets from you. But there is nothing you can do – except to turn me even more against you, which will be all the worse for yourself. If things are as you say, you may take it that my will is being done. Sit there in silence and obey me, or all the gods on Olympus will be of no help in keeping me off when I lay my unconquerable hands on you.'

So he spoke, and ox-eyed lady Hera was afraid and, restraining her feelings, sat down in silence. The Sky-gods in Zeus' palace were filled with consternation, till at last the great craftsman Hephaestus, who sided with his mother white-armed Hera, began to address them:

'This is going to mean trouble, and we are not going to put up with it, with you two squabbling over mere mortals and setting the gods at loggerheads. It will be impossible to enjoy a good feast with so much trouble in the air. I do advise my mother, who knows

well enough what is best, to make her peace with my dear Father Zeus, or she may draw another rebuke from him and the feast be entirely spoiled. If he wanted to, the Olympian lord of the lightning flash, our superior by far, could blast us all from our seats. No, Mother, deal with him tactfully, and the Olympian will be gracious to us again.'

So he spoke, hurried forward with a two-handled cup, put it in his mother's hands and said:

'Mother, be patient and swallow your resentment, or, much

HEPH-

AESTUS

restores the

peace

590 as I love you, I may see you thrashed here in front of me. A distressing sight for me, but I will be unable to do anything to help you. The Olympian is a hard god to resist. Why, once before, when I was trying to save you, he seized me by the foot and hurled me from the threshold of Olympus. I flew all day and, as the sun sank, I fell, all the life knocked out of me, on Lemnos, where I was picked up and looked after by the Sintians.
 600 So he spoke, and the goddess white-armed Hera smiled and took the cup from her son, still smiling. Then Hephaestus went on to serve the rest in turn, beginning from the left, with sweet nectar which he drew from the mixing bowl; and a fit of helpless laughter seized the blessed gods as they watched him bustling up and down the hall.

610 So the feast went on, all day till sundown. No one went short of the pleasures of food or music: Apollo played his magnificent lyre and the Muses sang, voice answering glorious voice. But when the bright lamp of the sun had set, they all went home to bed in the separate houses that the famous lame god Hephaestus with his supreme skill had built for them. Olympian Zeus, lord of the lightning flash, retired to the bed where he usually rested when sweet sleep overcame him. There he went up and slept, with Hera of the golden throne beside him.

2

A DREAM, A TESTING AND THE CATALOGUE OF SHIPS

1-207: [Night of 21st day] ZEUS sends a dream that makes Agamemnon think the Greeks are about to win. [22nd day: first day of combat] When Agamemnon tests the morale of the men, they charge for the ships to return home. ATHENE alerts Odysseus, who restrains the senior men and hits out at the ranks.

207-393: The assembly reconvenes and a common soldier Thersites abuses Agamemnon. Odysseus thrashes Thersites, to applause. Odysseus and Nestor give morale-boosting speeches. The Greeks prepare for battle.

394-483: The army feeds, Agamemnon offers a sacrifice and a prayer. Nestor suggests the troops now assemble. The troops are marshalled with ATHENE's help.

484-779: The catalogue of Greek ships.

780-815: The goddess IRIS alerts the *Trojans* and their leader *Hector* to the Greek threat.

816-77: The catalogue of *Trojan* contingents.

The other gods and all the fighting men slept through the night, but there was no such soothing sleep for Zeus. He was wondering how to honour Achilles and have the Greeks slaughtered in multitudes by their ships. He decided that the best way would be to send Agamemnon son of Atreus a destructive dream. So he spoke to one with winged words:

'Off you go, destructive dream, to the Greek ships. Go to Agamemnon in his hut and repeat to him exactly what I say. Tell him to prepare his long-haired Greeks for battle at once. His chance of capturing the Trojans' town with its broad streets