

## **The Aftermath of the *Iliad***

The Trojan War has not yet ended at the close of the *Iliad*. Homer's audience would have been familiar with the struggle's conclusion, and the potency of much of Homer's irony and foreboding depends on this familiarity. What follows is a synopsis of some of the most important events that happen after the *Iliad* ends.

### **The Death of Achilles**

In the final books of the *Iliad*, Achilles refers frequently to his imminent death, about which his mother, Thetis, has warned him. After the end of the poem, at Hector's funeral feast, Achilles sights the beautiful Polyxena, the daughter of Priam and hence a princess of Troy. Taken with her beauty, Achilles falls in love with her. Hoping to marry her, he agrees to use his influence with the Achaean army to bring about an end to the war. But when he travels to the temple of Apollo to negotiate the peace, Paris shoots him in the heel—the only vulnerable part of his body—with a poisoned arrow. In other versions of the story, the wound occurs in the midst of battle.

### **Achilles' Armor and the Death of Ajax**

After Achilles' death, Ajax (Achilles' cousin and next in line for the title of Greatest Greek Warrior) and Odysseus go and recover his body. Thetis instructs the Achaeans to bequeath Achilles' magnificent armor, forged by the god Hephaestus, to the most worthy hero. Both Ajax and Odysseus covet the armor; when it is awarded to Odysseus, Ajax commits suicide out of humiliation.

### **The Palladium and the Arrows of Heracles**

By the time of Achilles' and Ajax's deaths, Troy's defenses have been bolstered by the arrival of a new coalition of allies, including the Ethiopians and the Amazons. Achilles killed Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons, before his death, but the Trojans continue to repel the Achaean assault. The gods relay to the Achaeans that they must perform a number of tasks in order to win the war: they must recover the arrows of Heracles, steal a statue of Athena called the Palladium from the temple in Troy, and perform various other challenges. Largely owing to the skill and courage of Odysseus and Diomedes, the Achaeans accomplish the tasks, and the Achaean archer Philoctetes later uses the arrows of Heracles to kill Paris. Despite this setback, Troy continues to hold against the Achaeans.

### **The Fall of Troy**

The Achaean commanders are nearly ready to give up; nothing can penetrate the massive walls of Troy. But before they lose heart, Odysseus concocts a plan that will allow them to bypass the walls of the city completely. The Achaeans build a massive, hollow, wooden horse, large enough to hold a contingent of warriors inside. Odysseus and a group of soldiers hide in the horse, while the rest of the Achaeans burn their camps and sail away from Troy, waiting in their ships behind a nearby island.

The next morning, the Trojans peer down from the ramparts of their wall and discover the gigantic, mysterious horse. They also discover a lone Achaean soldier named Sinon, whom they take prisoner. As instructed by Odysseus, Sinon tells the Trojans that the Achaeans have incurred the wrath of Athena for the theft of the Palladium. They have left Sinon as a sacrifice to the goddess and constructed the horse as a gift to soothe her temper. Sinon explains that the Achaeans left the horse before the Trojan gates in the hopes that the Trojans would destroy it and thereby earn the wrath of Athena.

Believing Sinon's story, the Trojans wheel the massive horse into the city as a tribute to Athena. That night, Odysseus and his men slip out of the horse, kill the Trojan guards, and fling open the gates of Troy to the Achaean army, which has meanwhile approached the city again. Having at last penetrated the wall, the Achaeans massacre the citizens of Troy, plunder the city's riches, and burn the buildings to the ground. All of the Trojan men are killed except for a small group led by Aeneas, who escapes. Helen, whose loyalties have shifted back to the Achaeans since Paris's death, returns to Menelaus, and the Achaeans at last set sail for home.

### **After the War**

The fates of many of the *Iliad's* heroes after the war occupy an important space in Greek mythology. Odysseus, as foretold, spends ten years trying to return to Ithaca, and his adventures form the subject of Homer's other great epic, the *Odyssey*. Helen and Menelaus have a long and dangerous voyage back to their home in Sparta, with a long stay in Egypt. In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus travels to Sparta in search of his father, Odysseus, and finds Helen and Menelaus celebrating the marriage of their daughter, Hermione. Agamemnon, who has taken Priam's daughter Cassandra as a slave, returns home to his wife, Clytemnestra, and his kingdom, Mycenae. Ever since Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia at the altar of Athena, however, Clytemnestra has nurtured a vast resentment toward her husband. She has taken a man named Aegisthus as her lover, and upon Agamemnon's return, the lovers murder Agamemnon in his bath and kill Cassandra as well. This story is the subject of Aeschylus's play *Agamemnon*. Meanwhile, Aeneas, the only great Trojan warrior to survive the fall of Troy, wanders for many years, searching for a new home for his surviving fellow citizens. His adventures are recounted in Virgil's epic *Aeneid*.

