

~ TRANSLATION EXCERPTS ~

Book I, 1–35: Invocation; Agamemnon Dismisses the Priest of Apollo

SING, Goddess, the wrath of Peleus' son Achilles,
The cause accursed of Achaean pains uncounted.
Many a hero's mighty soul did it hurl down
To Hell, the mighty themselves making meal for dogs
And banqueting for birds. Thus Zeus' intent advanced
From when the two contending parted first as foes,
Agamemnon king of men and dread Achilles.

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Which, then, of the gods, conjoined the two discordant?
The offspring of Leto and Zeus, the archer god,
Apollo. Enraged at the king, he confounded
The camp with pestilence, and the people perished
For Chrysēs' sake, whom Agamemnon dishonored;
For Chrysēs had come to the swift Achaean ships,
Arrayed in the robes of the archer Apollo,
With plentiful spoils, the ransom for his daughter.
And he beseeched the Achaeans, especially
Those twain of Atreus sprung, orderers of the ranks:
"Atreus' sons, and you other well-greaved Achaeans!
May the Olympian gods procure your plunder
Of Priam's town and your coming home thereafter,
But this ransom accept for my daughter's return,
Respecting the rights of far-shooting Apollo."

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Then agreed the Argives all, voicing their assent,
To respect the priest and take the teeming treasure;
But how this rankled Agamemnon, king of men!
Roundly he rebuked him, adding this reproof:
"Be ever gone, old grizzled one, your distance keep,

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That I no more encounter you, either dawdling
Here aside these hollow hulls or reappearing
Afterward. Forsworn the god's insignia then,
Not worth the thread. Your darling girl I'll not release,
'Til senescence be her lot, at my dwelling place
In Argos, far from her fatherland, plying my
Loom and bestriding my bed. But leave, no longer
Anger me, that you depart the more securely."

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Book II, 216–246: Thersites, the Ugliest Greek at Troy, Rails Against Agamemnon

Then were the others still, throughout their ranks restrained,
But Thersitēs alone, intemperate of tongue,
Yet scoffed and bawled, disorderly, obstreperous;
Convulsed was his vernacular, availing not,
With kings inclined to quarrel; intoxicate he,
Danaan dullard and simpleton, reprobate
Of Troy, blighted his breeding; bandy-legged, lame
Of foot, his shoulders inward shunted toward his chest;
Pointy-headed, and sparse the tuft atop his pate;
Despised of Odysseus he, to Achilles
Loathsome most, for he ever importuned the twain
And against Agamemnon relentlessly railed,
Disdained of the Danaans, held in their despite.
Bellowing forth he berated Agamemnon:
"Fault-finding Atreidēs, what, pray, is your beef?
Your tents with bronze abound, and many the woman
Awarded you whene'er we Argives raze a town.
Are you desperate for gold, that some horse-taming
Trojan might fetch you from Troy, a son's ransom, whom
I or another Danaan deliver bound,
Or for some winsome girl to gratify your groin,
Whom you cravenly fondle and maul? How grievous
When Argive leaders heap toil on the Argive host!
For pity! Reproaches all, Achaean women,

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No longer men! But here do let's abandon him, 240
 Prognosticating on his gains, that he perceive
 Whether we promote his enterprise or not who
 Has thus dishonored Achilles, a better man
 By far than he, having pilfered and impounded
 His prize. But truly is Achilles unperturbed, 245
 Uncaring quite, or this your final insult were."

***Book VIII, 617–631: The Campfires Scene; the Trojans
 Bivouac on the Beach, Opposite the Greeks***

Heavenward from the plain below high spiraling.
 These then, puissant at heart throughout the tiring war,
 Bided the night, their fires aflame in multitudes.
 Even as when in heaven 'round the radiant moon
 The stars shine stately forth as windless wanes the air, 620
 And to view revealed rise mountain peaks, and headlands
 High, and wooded vales—and infinite the aether
 Neath from heaven cleft—and discretely stand the stars,
 And rejoices the shepherd at heart; thus the fires
 In their fabled multitudes between the vessels 625
 And Xanthus refulgent that the Trojans kindled
 A'front the face of Ilium; a thousand fires
 Each upon the plain, by each sitting fifty men
 In the glinting incandescent; and their horses,
 On barley whites and rice-wheat sated, stood erect 630
 Aside their cars awaiting rosy-fingered Dawn.

Book XI, 16–48: Agamemnon Arms Himself for Battle

But shouted Agamemnon aloud, ordering
 The Danaans to ready themselves for battle,
 And himself amid them donned irradiant bronze.
 First attached he greaves about his legs; splendidous
 They were, with ankle-safeties of silver fitted. 20

Next a corselet secured he across his chest
 Which Cinyras once gave him, a guest-gift, hearing
 The great report to Cyprus borne of th' Achaean
 Ship-bound trial to Troy. A breastplate he thus bestowed,
 Delighting the king. Set thereon were fillets ten 25
 Of dusky cobalt, a dozen gold, and twenty
 Of tin; and cobalt the snakes that upward slithered
 Toward the neck, three to either side, like to rainbows
 On cloud by Cronus' son inlaid, for mortalkind
 A portent. And 'round his shoulders he set a sword 30
 Glistening with studs of gold, silver the scabbard
 About it, fitted with golden straps. And seized he
 His dauntless shield effulgent, protecting a man
 From side to side, a handsome shield encompassed 'round
 With circles ten of bronze, and upon it twenty 35
 Spurs of coruscating tin, atop them a knob
 Cobalt tempered; and crowning it the Gorgon's glare,
 Ghastly, grim countenanced, above her towering
 Terror and Rout. From the shield was strap of silver
 Slung whereon writhed a triple-headed cobalt asp, 40
 Each direction turned but to single neck affixed.
 Upraised he to his head a helmet, double-horned
 With bosses four, with horsehair crest—and from above
 The plume swayed dreadfully. And two hefty brazen-
 Tipped lances he took, keen pointed; and to heaven 45
 The bronze glistened distantly afar; and thundered
 Athena and Hera withal, honor paying
 The potentate of gold-resplendent Mycenae.

***Book XI, 619–628; Book XVII, 70–78:
 Two Extended Homeric Similes***

And as when a mule, slipped past the boys, impinges
 On the maize, a sluggish mule about whose ribs stand 620
 Many a cudgel cracked, yet e'er it encroaches
 Laying waste the luscious corn, and thwack it the boys

About, though meagre their might withal and little
 From its fodder's fill do they dislodge it; just so
 Did the high-hearted Trojans, aside their allies 625
 From many lands assembled, smite Ajax, offspring
 Of Telamon, assailing his shield with lances
 To its middle point, and upon him ever press.

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And as when a mountain-bred lion, unflagging 70
 Its fortitude, has grabbed from out a grazing herd
 The heifer most delectable, first grasping her
 Neck with muscly maw, then breaking it, thereafter
 Enragedly gorging upon entrails and blood,
 And 'round about the hounds and hollering herdsmen 75
 Their distance keep, not wanting to encounter him,
 For sallow the fear that seizes them; so dared not
 A soul to encounter acclaimed Menelaus.

***Book XXIV, 511–534: Priam Appears Suddenly in
 Achilles' Tent, Seeking to Ransom Hector's Body***

So spoke Hermes, departing to high Olympus.
 And Priam descended his chariot, there leaving
 Idaeus, who stood holding the horses and mules.
 But proceeded the elder straightway to the hut
 Where Achilles, beloved of Zeus, was wont to sit. 515
 There he found Pēleidēs, sitting apart his
 Comrades, two only, the warrior Automedōn,
 And Alcimus, of Ares' root, who busily
 Attended him. And now had he finished eating,
 Even of viands and drink, and stood the table 520
 Nearby. And by these unnoted entered Priam,
 Approaching Achilles and encircling his knees,
 And kissed the hands, the hideous man-slaying hands

That had slaughtered his many sons. And as when sheer
 Madness of spirit o'ertakes a man who at home 525
 Another slays—escapes he to a distant land,
 To a wealthy person's dwelling place, and wonder
 O'erwhelms those witnessing it; so seized with wonder
 Was Achilles, espying the godlike Priam,
 And astonished alike were the others, glancing 530
 In each direction. But Priam entreated him,
 Addressing Achilles thus: "Remember your sire,
 O godlike Achilles, whose years, as mine, progress
 In senescence and grievous dissolution . . .