

The Trojan Epic Cycle

The only two texts that have survived in the Trojan cycle are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The other texts in the cycle have been paraphrased, quoted, listed or commented on by other ancient authors and scholars. The majority of the information in these notes concerning the "lost" texts in the cycle comes from Hesiod.

***The Cypria* (11 books):** Starts with the wedding feast and the golden apple, and the judgment of Paris. Paris (also Alexander or Alexandrus) then travels to Sparta, sent there by his father King Priam of Troy to work on a peace treaty with Menelaus representing the Greeks (Acheans). There he is put together with Helen, largely by Aphrodite- remember, she promised Helen to him in exchange for the golden apple. Menelaus sails for Crete, sensing nothing is amiss, and together Helen and Paris load a ship with treasures and make their way to Troy. Hera is angered, and stirs up a storm against the two, but they eventually make it back to Troy and celebrate their marriage.

Menelaus is told in Crete of what Paris has done, and he returns to Sparta and makes plans with his brother Agamemnon to sail for Troy. Menelaus next goes to Nestor, and the three kings send messengers to the other Greek kings to call them to war. Odysseus offers some resistance, and then redeems himself by helping bring Achilles out of hiding. All the Greek kings have assembled at Aulis, and are making ready to sail for Troy, when Agamemnon shoots and kills a stag, and brags he is a better hunter even than Artemis herself. Angered, Artemis brings up a strong wind that prevents the fleet from sailing. Before they will be allowed to leave the island, Artemis demands that the Greeks make a sacrifice of Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter. Agamemnon sends home for his daughter, lying to his wife that she is to be married to Achilles. Iphigenia arrives at the fleet, and is led to the sacrifice. At the last minute, Artemis whisks her off to become a priestess in her temple in a far away land, and places a stag on the altar in her place. After this episode, the Greeks sail for Troy.

Eventually the Greeks arrive at Troy and engage the Trojans in battle. They attack and destroy or capture all of the surrounding cities.

***The Iliad* (24 books):** The text opens during the final year of the Trojan War. After the sacking of the other cities in the *Cypria*, Agamemnon and Achilles both take captured women as prizes. As it happens, the woman Agamemnon has captured happens to be the daughter of a priest of Apollo. He prays to Apollo for help, and Agamemnon is ordered to give up his prize. He is indignant, and vows not to do so unless Achilles is made to do the same. So, basically, the *Iliad* opens up with an argument between two of the Greek generals. The remainder of the *Iliad* covers several primary battles in which heroes on both sides die. A great deal of fighting amongst the Greeks, and images of the peaceful and generous Trojans are contained in the text. Hector, hero and prince of Troy, kills many Greek heroes, including Patroclus, Achilles' greatest friend. Achilles kills Hector in revenge and defiles his body by dragging it around the walls of Troy behind his chariot. Apollo is outraged by this behavior and keeps the body in pristine condition, even though Achilles abuses it for twelve days. King Priam slips into the Greeks' camp with the help of Hermes (Zeus commanded it), and pleads with Achilles to let him take his son's body back to Troy for a proper burial befitting a hero. Achilles agrees, showing some kindness to the old man. Achilles keeps the Greek forces away for twelve days while the Trojans bury their hero. The *Iliad* essentially closes on the burial of Hector.

***The Aethiopis* (5 books):** Picks up the story of the Trojan War as Penthesileia, an Amazon and daughter of Ares, comes to the aid of the Trojans. She is killed by Achilles and buried by the Trojans as a hero.

A hero by the name of Memnon then comes to help Troy, wearing armor made by Hephaestus. He kills the Greek hero Antilochus, another great friend of Achilles. Achilles then kills Memnon. He and his forces then turn back the Trojans and follow them into the city. With the help of Apollo, Paris kills Achilles by shooting him in the heel with an arrow. The Greeks bury Antilochus and have a huge funeral for Achilles. During the ceremonies, an argument breaks out amongst the Greek kings over Achilles' armor.

The Little Iliad (4 books): Opens with a contest to decide who should be awarded the armor of Achilles. With the help of Athena, Odysseus wins the honor. Ajax is enraged, goes mad and destroys all the Greeks' livestock then kills himself. Another Greek hero, Philoctetes, fights in single combat with Paris and kills him. Menelaus seizes the body and intends to defile it, but the Trojans recover it and bury Paris. Odysseus disguises himself and sneaks into Troy to spy. He meets and is recognized by Helen, who plots with her the breaching of the city and defeat of the Trojans. He steals a sacred treasure, the Palladium, and sneaks back out of Troy. The Greeks construct the Trojan Horse, burn their camps and load their best warriors into the horse, and take their ships away from the bay. The Trojans, thinking the Greeks have given up and left the horse as an offering, tear down a section of their wall and wheel the huge statue into the city. A victory feast begins.

The Sack of Ilium (2 books): This text overlaps the Aethiopis slightly, in that it opens with the Trojans debating whether to bring the horse into the city; some are distrustful of the offering, as it might be some sort of trap laid by the Greeks. Laocoon, a Trojan priest, convinces his people that the horse is nothing good, and should not be trusted. Just then a great serpent rises from the sea and kills the priest and one of his sons. The Trojans take this as a sign from the gods (Poseidon esp.) that the gift should not be refused, and they drag the horse into the city.

In the middle of the night, after the Trojans have feasted and drunk themselves into a stupor, the advance Greek troops climb down out of the horse and attack the sleeping Trojans, raising a signal to the rest of the Greeks to come out of hiding and storm the city. The Greeks slaughter the Trojans, convinced (some say by Odysseus) that they should wipe out Priam's entire line. Priam is killed as he sought shelter on the altar of Zeus, and the Greeks throw Hector's toddler son, Priam's last heir, from the highest walls of Troy. These acts angered even the gods who had favored the Greeks; Athena swore to destroy them during their journey home. The Little Iliad closes as the Greeks sail from the ruins of Troy. Other interpretations of the text imply that Odysseus, his head swelled with pride at defeating Troy "single-handedly", defies the gods by refusing to sacrifice in thanks and for a safe journey home.

The Nostoi—"The Returns;" (5 books) : Athena causes an argument between Menelaus and Agamemnon concerning the journey home. Agamemnon stays on the shores of Ilium to try and appease Athena's anger. Nestor and another Greek king, Diomedes, set sail for home and arrive safely after uneventful voyages. Menelaus, traveling with his "rescued" wife Helen, are blown to Egypt with only five of his ships; the rest of his sizeable fleet has been destroyed. [Menelaus tells the story of much of his adventures in Egypt to Telemachus in Book IV of *The Odyssey*]. Neoptolemus, another Greek king/general, travels overland to Thrace and briefly meets with Odysseus, then journeys on. This is the last time we encounter the king of Ithaca until Book V of *The Odyssey*.

After finally leaving Troy, Agamemnon sails for home. The ghost of Achilles appears to him and tries to warn him of dangers that await him. Upon reaching home, Agamemnon is killed by his wife, Clymenestra and her lover, Aegisthus. His son, Orestes, avenges him by killing both Aegisthus and his own mother.

The Odyssey (24 books) : This is the story of Odysseus' journey home from Troy to his kingdom of Ithaca, his wife Penelope, and his son Telemachus. Odysseus left for the Trojan war not long after his son's birth, fights at Troy for ten years, and tries for ten more years to get home before he succeeds. By the time he reaches his home he has lost his entire fleet of twelve ships, and all his men. On his travels home, Odysseus encounters cannibals, one-eyed giants, sea serpents, enchanting goddesses and travels to world of the dead. Cursed by Poseidon, he suffers in his journey until allowed to return home only to discover his kingdom overrun by men intent on marrying his wife and taking his kingdom. While he is lost at sea, his son, Telemachus, leaves Ithaca for the first time in search of news of his father, hoping to prove him alive and rid his household of the suitors. Telemachus visits King Nestor in Pylos and then travels to Sparta to speak with King Menelaus and Queen Helen. By the time he returns home to Ithaca, Telemachus finds Odysseus already there, and with Athena's assistance they are able to defeat the suitors and save Ithaca.

The Telegonia or Telegony (2 books) : After the slaughter in Odysseus' hall at the end of *The Odyssey*, the bodies of the suitors are buried and mourned by their families. Odysseus then travels to Elis, a smaller island in his kingdom(?), to check his herds of cattle. After feasting and gifting there, he travels back to Ithaca briefly to make sacrifices, then on to Thesprotis, where he marries the queen, Callidice. Callidice has a son by an earlier marriage, Polypoetes; apparently Odysseus himself has become the suitor in this text. Later, he leads the Thesprotins in a war against a people called the Brygi. Ares destroys Odysseus' army, and Athena attacks Ares, and they fight until Apollo separates them. Callidice dies, and Polypoetes takes his place as king and Odysseus sails for home.

Meanwhile, Telegonus (or Teledamus), Odysseus' son by the goddess Circe, travels to find his father. Telegonus lands on Ithaca, but, unaware he has reached his father's kingdom, attacks it. Odysseus and Telemachus fight the invading forces, and Telegonus unknowingly kills Odysseus. Telegonus is made aware of his error, makes peace with his half brother and Penelope, and takes them and the body of Odysseus back to Circe's Island. Circe makes Telemachus and Penelope immortal, and Telegonus marries Penelope and Telemachus marries Circe.