

8: The Little Iliad

The above title is the name given to an epic in four books by Lesches of Mytilene, which occupies a position in Proclus' summary of the Epic Cycle after Arctinus' *Aethiopis* and before his *Sack of Troy*. If we had only Proclus' testimony to go by, we should doubtless assume that the plot of each epic followed seamlessly on from that of the last. But numerous fragments of the *Little Iliad* seem to indicate that it encompassed events falling within the sack of Troy (below, p. 68ff.); and the only securely attested fragment of the *Aethiopis* deals with the death of Ajax (above, p. 58f.), an event that falls outside Proclus' summary of that poem. Most scholars have therefore concluded that Arctinus' *Aethiopis*, with his *Sack of Troy* on the one hand, and Lesches' *Little Iliad* on the other, overlapped very considerably in subject-matter: the two poets were each responsible for a different attempt to supply a sequel to the contents of the *Iliad*. Proclus' summary, in its characteristic way (see p. 7), has deliberately eliminated the overlapping material to produce the impression of a single coherent narrative.

This is the most widely held and convincing explanation of the existing phenomena. But one may mention an alternative approach, quite popular with German scholars at the turn of the century, which reduced the three epics supposedly distinguished above to one, the *Little Iliad*, of which the *Aethiopis* was an earlier portion (compare the Odyssean *Telemachy*), the *Sack of Troy* a later episode. This interpretation has some evidence compatible with it: in particular the relatively large number of fragments cited from the *Little Iliad* (c.25), the vanishingly small number cited from *Aethiopis* (1) and *Sack of Troy* (4). The opening lines of the *Little Iliad* (F 1) might also be thought to imply a treatment of all of the Trojan War, or, at least, more than the usual interpretation of this poem's scope would allow. But the information available suggests that some episodes (in particular the death of Priam: see below, p. 68f.) were treated differently in the *Little Iliad* from their

counterparts in the *Sack of Troy*, and this whole approach takes an unnecessarily poor view of Proclus' reliability since by definition it must discount what he says of two separate poets, three separate epics, and the specific number of books in each.

The opening two lines of the poem are preserved as F 1:

Of Ilium I sing, and of Dardania, land of fine horses, for whose
sake the Danaans, servants of Ares, endured many sufferings.

In traditional epic style the subject-matter of the poem is placed as the first word (like the *Iliad's* 'anger' and the *Odyssey's* 'man': but this epic's subject-matter is thereby announced as more conventional and predictable than either of Homer's works). Then we have the subject-matter extended by a relative clause (as with the *Iliad's* 'anger...which caused many deaths' or the *Odyssey's* 'man...who wandered far') and a stress on suffering as the theme of the poem (here, too, Homer's epic poems are comparable). The only significant formal difference is our poet's use of the first-person verb 'I sing' rather than the Iliadic or Odyssean injunctions 'sing to me, Muse'. This has been taken as a sign of lateness, but since Homer means to ask the Muse to sing through him, and the picture of the poet as the Muse's spokesman is widespread in early Greek literature, there is less difference between the two modes of opening than there might at first seem.

The first event of which the *Little Iliad* sang was, according to Proclus, the judgement over Achilles' arms, and then Odysseus' victory (thanks to advice given by Athena) and the consequent madness of Ajax. It may of course be that Proclus has tailored the opening of the epic to fit the close he has imposed upon the *Aethiopis*. But a plunge *in medias res* with the quarrel between Ajax and Odysseus would have been proper for epic.

F 2 elaborates our picture of the judgement of the arms by stating that Nestor advised the Greeks to send scouts under the walls of Troy to eavesdrop on conversation concerning the respective bravery of Ajax and Odysseus. The spies thus sent overhear two young girls disagreeing about precisely this topic. One advances Ajax's claims and says:

'<Ajax is superior,> for Ajax lifted and carried out of the press of war the body of the heroic son of Peleus, while the noble Odysseus was unwilling.'

This seemingly intelligent observation evoked the following crushing rebuke from the other girl:

'What is this you have said? How have you come to speak so contrary to reason? Even a woman could carry such a burden – provided a man were to set it upon her. But she could not fight <in the way Odysseus did, conducting a rear-guard action to cover Ajax's retreat>.'

These words, reported back, will have secured Odysseus' victory. There need be no contradiction between the fragment's reference to Nestor's advice and the naming of Athena as adviser which we find in Proclus. (Nestor may have been inspired by Athena, the scouts may have been directed to the young girls by the goddess and so on.) Such double-motivation is quintessentially epic. Various versions of the judgement of Achilles' armour were current in antiquity (above, p. 57f.). According to the most straightforward, a panel of Greek chieftains decided the issue. But as early as *Od.* 11.547 'the judges were the children of the Trojans, and Pallas Athena'. Some poets (perhaps including the author of the *Aethiopis*) interpreted this paradoxical statement to mean that the opinion of Trojan captives was sought (by a familiar idiom, the phrase 'the children of the Trojans' cited from the *Odyssey* will be a mere periphrasis for 'the Trojans'). But the version adopted by the poet of the *Little Iliad* ingeniously (and also perversely) placed a more literal interpretation on 'children' by having the two Trojan girls (with their implausible knowledge of and interest in military matters) decide the issue. It is hard not to see this as a later elaboration of the more straightforward tradition(s) mentioned above.

Odysseus' victory over Ajax (foreshadowed allusively by Odysseus' defeat of Ajax in the wrestling-match at *Il.* 23.708ff.) drives the latter out of his mind. Such madness is highly unHomeric as we have seen above (p. 42). In this state Ajax slaughtered the cattle of the Achaeans

and committed suicide, according to Proclus. Presumably a fuller account of this episode would more or less coincide with the background presupposed in Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*: The hero had originally planned to murder Agamemnon and Menelaus (an unHomeric act of treachery) and Athena deflects his attention onto the cattle. On becoming sane and recognising what he had done he killed himself (a further unHomeric action). F 3 of the *Little Iliad* observes that Ajax's body was not cremated in the normal heroic way, but buried in a coffin because of Agamemnon's anger <at the way Ajax had tried to murder him>. The motivation here seems to represent a relatively late rationalisation. The original purpose behind the treatment of Ajax's corpse will probably have related to his suicide: the belief that those who have died by their own hands must be buried differently from those who die normally is primitive and world-wide and takes many manifestations.

Proclus' summary proceeds to relate that after this Odysseus captured Helenus in an ambush, and the latter delivered a prophecy concerning the sack of Troy. Diomedes then brought back Philoctetes from Lemnos. We have already had cause to mention the unHomeric figure of Priam's seer-son Helenus in connection with the *Cypria* (above, p. 38). Given that the detail about his prophecy is followed by Diomedes' despatch to Lemnos, it would be simple-minded not to infer a connection between the two. Helenus presumably revealed what we know from later sources – an oracle that Troy could not fall without Philoctetes and his bow. Philoctetes is another unHomeric figure, already encountered in the context of the *Cypria* (above, p. 45). Note too the recurrent stress on the oracular.

What does Proclus tell us next of the *Little Iliad's* contents? Philoctetes, brought back to Troy, was healed by <Asclepius' son> Machaon and proceeded to kill Paris in a duel. Paris' corpse was mutilated by Menelaus and then the Trojans recovered it and gave it burial. Machaon is a figure whose fate varies wildly according to whatever poet is dealing with him. In some accounts (cf. above, p. 51f.) he was despatched by Penthesileia. In the *Little Iliad* he survives to cure Philoctetes (and then, in F 7, be killed by Eurypylos: see below, p. 65). In yet a third account he is still around to be included among the heroes that lurked within the Trojan Horse.

Menelaus' mutilation of Paris' body is one more of the poem's unHomeric features. Such mutilations are often threatened in the *Iliad* but do not actually occur (with the (partial) exception of Achilles' behaviour towards Hector's corpse). That Menelaus (a notably mild and humane character within the Homeric tradition) should have been portrayed as doing this to his enemy's corpse speaks volumes for the difference in ethos between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and a poem like ours.

Paris being dead, the poet of the *Little Iliad* supplied Helen with another spouse: Proclus tells us that Paris' brother Deiphobus married her (cf. *Od.* 4.276).

Next (Proclus continues) Odysseus fetched Neoptolemus from the isle of Scyros and presented him with his father Achilles' armour. How Achilles came to have ever been on Scyros was explained in the *Cypria* (see above, p. 43). It was also touched on in the *Little Iliad*, for F 4^A of the poem preserves an account of how

Peleus' son Achilles was brought to Scyros by a gale and there during that night he put in at an unwelcoming harbour.

The Iliadic scholion that quotes these verses gives their context as the storm that scattered the Greek forces after the abortive Teuthranian expedition (above, p. 42). From the same portion of the poem must derive F 5 with its description of the spear once given to Peleus by Chiron (see above, p. 35) and later wielded by Achilles:

The golden hoop flashes brightly and fastened by it the two-pronged spear...

Since early Greek poetry does not seem to have employed the historic present, the word meaning 'flashes' must either be emended to the past tense (which is easily done) or we must infer that the fragment comes from a direct speech. The late epic poet Quintus of Smyrna (third century AD) included in his *Posthomeric* a scene in which Odysseus described to Neoptolemus, while they were still on Scyros, his father's armour. Perhaps the *Little Iliad* had a similar scene.

We return to Proclus to learn that at Troy Achilles appeared in a vision

to his son Neoptolemus (cf. below, p. 78). Then Eurypylus, the son of Telephus, arrived to serve as the Trojans' ally. He performed deeds of valour but was then slain by Neoptolemus. Eurypylus, as we learn from later writers, especially Sophocles' tragedy of that name (*Tr.G.F.* 4.195ff. Radt), was despatched to Troy by his mother, whom Priam bribed to send him (compare the like motif involving Harmonia's necklace within the Theban cycle. F 6 is part of a description of the bribe, which was obviously mentioned in parenthesis. It consisted of a golden vine crafted by Hephaestus:

The vine which Zeus son of Cronus gave <to Laomedon> as a compensation for <the abduction of> his son <Ganymedes>, a vine flowering with golden leaves †...† and with grape-clusters which Hephaestus had wrought and presented to father Zeus, and he in turn gave it to Laomedon in return for Ganymedes.

The description of an object which has been passed down to man from the gods and then through generations of men is a familiar one in Homeric epic (compare, for instance, Agamemnon's sceptre in *Il.* 2.101ff.). Much less Homeric, however, is the passage's frank avowal of Zeus' homosexual abduction of Ganymedes, an individual mentioned no more than twice in Homer (and then only in the context of the family-tree of the Trojan royal house, never as Zeus' cup-bearer on Olympus, a role reserved for Hebe). Also unHomeric is the notion that a warrior's participation in battle is explicable through motives other than heroism. Eurypylus' death at Neoptolemus' hands is mentioned at *Od.* 11.519ff. and it is no coincidence that Memnon is also named in that passage. For Eurypylus is a doublet of the Aethiopian king, handily providing Achilles' son with a worthy antagonist to kill on the battlefield before Troy is captured. Just as the *Cypria* postponed the Greeks' arrival at Troy with various elaborate retardations (above, p. 42ff.), so the poet of the *Little Iliad* seems to have put off the capture of the city by a number of devices ostensibly working towards that end (Helenus' prophecy, the fetching of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, Paris' death). But now the very last of Priam's allies has been summoned and despatched, and it is hardly surprising to learn from Proclus' résumé that the next episode involved the besieging of the city by the Greeks.

Its first development (to continue with Proclus' summary) was that, on Athena's suggestion, Epeius devised the trick involving the Trojan Horse. Epeius is one of those heroes who feature in *Iliad* 23's Funeral Games for Patroclus and there attain an eminence that reflects their importance in the Epic Cycle rather than the *Iliad* itself. Indeed, Epeius does not feature in Homer outside that one episode. The building of the Wooden Horse is variously ascribed in ancient writers to Athena, to Epeius, or to Odysseus, most often to Epeius *on the prompting* of Athena or Odysseus. Even at this stage the sack of Troy does not immediately follow on. There were further retardations. Proclus tells us that the next development was for Odysseus to disfigure himself and thus disguised to enter Troy as a spy. Here he was recognised by Helen and conferred with her about the capture of the city. He then killed some Trojans and returned safe to the Greek ships. Some such tradition of Odysseus' infiltration is already presupposed at *Od.* 4.244ff. in Helen's account of events leading up to the sack of Troy. F 8 of the *Little Iliad* has its place in this context: Odysseus was wounded by Thoas when they were going to the Trojan citadel together. Some sort of association between Odysseus and Thoas, leader of the Aetolian contingent against Troy, is implied by another Odyssean passage, the false tale spun by Odysseus at 14.469ff. The last episode related in Apollodorus' *Epitome* involves an unusual tradition that Odysseus was tried before Neoptolemus for his killing of the suitors and, being exiled, went to Aetolia and married Thoas' daughter. The present fragment of our epic belongs to this circle of tales associating the two heroes. Its detail of the wounding does not entail any hostility: on the contrary it shows close co-operation between the pair. As a further means of escaping suspicion, Odysseus had his comrade wound him to increase the verisimilitude of his disguise (compare the tale of the voluntarily mutilated Zopyrus in Herodotus 3.156-8).

After this (to return to Proclus) Odysseus, with Diomedes' aid, carried off the Palladium from Troy. Here too Odysseus' collaboration with a colleague has Homeric precedent (see above, p. 48), but this episode is more profoundly unHomeric in several ways. Firstly the Palladium, a divine talisman on whose preservation in Troy the city's safety depends, is a piece of superstition and folk-lore which Homer

nowhere sees fit to mention. Further, we gather from F 9 that the *Little Iliad*'s narrative of this episode was connected in antiquity with the proverbial saying 'Diomedes' compulsion'. The only way to make sense of this connection is to suppose that the epic included details about the theft of the Palladium which are only explicitly recorded by later writers: that Odysseus tried to gain sole possession of the talisman by literally stabbing Diomedes in the back; but that Diomedes turned round in time, drew his sword and drove Odysseus before him, beating his back with the flat of his sword. In other words, like the detail of Palamedes' death in the *Cypria* (above, p. 48), another unHomeric story of cowardice, treachery and deceit.

Finally the ruse of the wooden horse was put into effect. Proclus says that the Greeks placed the best of their heroes inside the horse; then the remainder set fire to their huts and sailed off to Tenedos. F 10 of our epic, preserved by Apollodorus, seems to claim that the *Little Iliad* stated that three thousand warriors were lurking inside the horse, but this extravagantly large number cannot be right, even if one accepts that the poet need not have named them all. The warriors hidden inside the horse were in all likelihood originally conceived of as an advance force whose main, indeed only, function was to let in the main body of troops. A small hand-picked body of men would suffice for this and it is easy to correct the number that stands in our text of Apollodorus to something more in line with this concept (e.g. 'thirteen').

Proclus' résumé of the events in the *Little Iliad* ends with a sentence describing the reaction of the Trojans to the Greek ploy. Imagining their misfortunes were at an end, they brought the Trojan Horse into the city, demolishing part of the wall to do so, and then proceeded to feast and celebrate their imagined victory over the Greeks.

At this point, Proclus' summary of the *Little Iliad* is artificially curtailed, for reasons we examined above (p. 60), and a transition to the events described near the beginning of the *Sack of Troy* is contrived. However, we still possess a large number of fragments relating to details covered by that portion of the *Little Iliad* for which we no longer possess Proclus' résumé, and it seems best to consider these next before turning to the separate epic called the *Sack of Troy*.

F 11 touched on the time of night at which the sack of Troy began:

It was the middle of night, and the bright moon was starting to rise.

From the references to midnight and the rising moon later authors tried to calculate the exact month and day of the year when the sack took place.

Fragments 12-18 and 21-3 of the *Little Iliad* all derive from the description of the famous painting of the Sack of Troy by Polygnotus which the second-century AD writer Pausanias gives in Book 10 of his *Periegesis* or Guide to Greece. Several details in this visual representation are compared or contrasted with the traditions followed in our epic. Thus in F 12 Pausanias says that Lesches in his poem (see above, p. 60) described the wounding of the Greek warrior Megeas in the arm by Admetus son of Augeas, and of the Greek Lycomedes in the wrist by Agenor, and that Polygnotus derived his depiction of those wounds from the epic. In F 13 we learn of another epic account of wounding, this time of the Trojan Helicaon: he was then recognised by Odysseus and led out of the battle. This detail is to be explained in the light of the tradition found in *Il.* 3.123ff. and 205ff. that when Menelaus and Odysseus visited Troy on their embassy for the recovery of Helen (above, p. 46) they were entertained by Antenor, Helicaon's father. Hence Odysseus' present act of friendship and gratitude. F 14, describing Polygnotus' portrayal of Neoptolemus smiting the Trojan Astynous, informs us that Astynous was mentioned in our epic. F 15 is a short list of other slayings: the poem had the Trojan Eioneus killed by Neoptolemus and Admetus (mentioned also in F 12) by Philoctetes. F 16 is another such detail: Coroebus, the fiancé of Cassandra, was killed in our epic by Diomedes, though the majority of authors name Neoptolemus in this role. F 17 touches on what must have been the climactic death in the sack of Troy, that of Priam: unlike other accounts, our epic did not have the old king despatched at the altar of Zeus *Herkeios*, Zeus god of the hearth (see below, p. 72). Rather, Neoptolemus dragged him from the altar and finished him off at the doors of his own palace. F 18 deals with an incidental death, that of Axion, one of the remaining sons of Priam, who was killed by Eurypylus son of Euaemon. Agenor, the fragment adds, was killed by Neoptolemus (for Agenor see also F 12). F 21 (from the same portion

of Pausanias' account of Polygnotus' painting) deals with the Trojan women taken captive after the sack: Andromache's son <Astyanax>, we are told, was thrown to his death from a tower and this was due not to a formal decision of the Greeks but to Neoptolemus acting on a purely personal grudge. Finally, F 23 deals with the fate of Aethra, mother of the great Athenian hero Theseus, whose presence at Troy was explained in the cyclic epic, the *Sack of Troy* (see below, p. 75). She had been one of Helen's handmaids but was now recognised by her grandsons Demophon <and Acamas>, and the former asked Agamemnon that she be restored to them. This he did, after first ascertaining that Helen had no objections. Leaving aside for the moment Aethra herself, we may still find this episode very unHomeric, because the sons of Theseus feature in neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey*: the former epic, indeed, depicts the leader of the Athenian forces at Troy as Menestheus, a remarkably colourless and unmemorable figure of whom little is heard outside the pages of that epic. And it gave much trouble to later writers and mythographers to explain just why in the *Iliad* it is this nonentity, rather than the expected sons of Theseus, who appears as the Athenian commander.

Two more fragments, not preserved by Pausanias, contain further details of events in the sack of Troy as described by the *Little Iliad*. F 19 deals with the encounter between Menelaus and Helen: the angry husband drew his sword to punish the erring wife, but the weapon fell from his hands at the sight of her breasts. This was a familiar scene in later literature (e.g. Ibycus fr. 296P and Euripides *Andr.* 629ff.) and art. Its eroticism goes beyond anything Homer allows himself, even in his relatively chaste and restrained accounts of love-making. The meeting between Hector and Andromache at the end of *Iliad* 6 nobly depicts the tenderness of married love, but its physical expression goes no further than the holding of hands and touching, and when Hector turns to leave it is his son Astyanax not Andromache that he kisses and fondles.

This aptly brings us to the longest extant fragment of the *Little Iliad*, the account of the death of Astyanax in F 20:

But the glorious son of great-hearted Achilles arranged for Hector's wife to be sent off down to the hollow ships. And

taking the child from the bosom of his fair-tressed nurse he whirled him around by the foot and then cast him from the top of the tower. He fell and then dark death and mighty fate seized upon him.

And he selected for himself Andromache, the fair-girdled spouse of Hector, whom, in fact, the leaders of the assembled Achaean force had given him to keep as a pleasing prize, thus requiting him; and also the noble offspring of Anchises, tamer of horses, Aeneas, he caused to set foot on the sea-faring ships to lead him off as a choice prize over and above those of the other Danaans, surpassing them all.

One of the great insoluble mysteries associated with the Epic Cycle is that the second paragraph here is attributed by a different quoter to the Hellenistic poet Simias. Even if we confine our attentions to the first paragraph, as alone unambiguously attributed to the *Little Iliad*, we cannot fail to register a sense of disappointment. The death of the infant Astyanax, which might have been anticipated as a moment of high pathos and tragedy, is described (as numerous scholars have complained) in a dry, dull manner, as if it were a sack of potatoes, rather than a human being, that was being dumped over the walls. In comparison with the moving *anticipation* of the same event by Hector in *Il.* 6.447ff., the *Little Iliad's* passage does not exist as poetry. But this is ever the way of the world: a great poet like Homer can foreshadow an event more poignantly than a second-rate poet (like the *Little Iliad's*) can actually describe it.

9: The Sack of Troy

Proclus' summary opens with the Trojans suspicious and debating what to do with the horse: some were for pitching it off a high peak, some for burning it, some for dedicating it as sacred to Athena. The last-mentioned opinion prevailed. There is some inconcinnity here with the close of the *Little Iliad's* summary, which left the Trojans innocently rejoicing at the termination of the war. There is also a contradiction arising if we try to treat the two résumés as providing a seamless narrative: it is odd of the Trojans first to demolish part of their city wall to let the horse in and only then deliberate whether to preserve it or not. One infers two original traditions: deliberation outside the walls followed by demolition, or deliberation inside with no preceding demolition. Next, we are told, the Trojans turned to rejoicing and feasting, since they were quit of the war (Proclus' language here closely echoes that in the last sentence of his résumé of the *Little Iliad*: it is odd that this duplication was not avoided).

The next episode concerns the fate of Laocoon and his sons. Two snakes appeared and killed him and one of his children. Alarmed at this omen Aeneas and his men secretly left the city and betook themselves to Mt. Ida. This is our earliest extant literary reference to the role of Laocoon in the sack of Troy: he is a figure very important for later authors (especially Sophocles in his lost play of that name: see *Tr.G.F.* 4.330ff. Radt) but manifestly conspicuous by his absence from Homer. These later sources specify the elder of the two sons as the snakes' other victim. If the same tradition occurred in our epic, the portent to which Aeneas and his followers react might be thus interpreted: the two snakes are Agamemnon and Menelaus; Laocoon the father symbolises the doomed city of Troy, and the elder son represents the death of Priam, eldest son of Laomedon. The survival of the younger son is an allusion to the survival of Aeneas. Whatever the precise details, the prophetic function of the event would be alien to Homer. But this reconstruction

is extremely hypothetical; better to remind ourselves that we have no idea why, in the Sack of Troy's scheme of things, Laocoon suffers as he does and whether (as in some later accounts) Apollo is to be envisaged as punishing his priest by sending the snakes. We can, however, at least infer that this epic envisaged Aeneas and his descendants as remaining in the Troad (a tradition also implied by such early sources as Il. 20.307f., H.H. Aphr. 196 and 256ff., Hes. Th. 1010).

The details that Proclus proceeds to recount are familiar from later authors, in particular the account of Troy's sack that occurs in Book Two of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Sinon sent a fire-signal to the Greeks, having first entered the city in disguise (cf. *Aen.* 2.57ff.). The Greeks then sail off from Tenedos (see above, p. 67) while the heroes hidden within the horse issued forth and fell upon the enemy, and, having killed many of them, captured the city by force. Neoptolemus killed king Priam at the altar of Zeus god of the hearth to which the old man had fled for safety (for the *Little Iliad*'s different tradition see above, p. 68). Menelaus came across Helen and led her off to the ships having killed Deiphobus (see above, pp. 64 and 69).

The next major section of the poem dealt with Locrian Ajax's assault on Cassandra, daughter of Priam. She had taken refuge at the temple of Athena and was clinging to the goddess' wooden image when Ajax dragged her off with such force that the image came away too. The Greeks were appalled at this act of desecration and planned to stone Ajax, but he took refuge at the altar of Athena and was thus saved. This story of the crime and punishment of Locrian Ajax gets no mention in Homer (though Il. 23.773ff. may imply some hostility between this hero and Athena) but it was popular in later writers (e.g. Sophocles' lost *Ajax the Locrian*: see *Tr.G.F.* 4.102ff. Radt). We must be careful to segregate the early epic account from some of the later treatments (e.g. the notion that Ajax actually raped Cassandra in front of Athena's statue, which averted its eyes from the sacrilege, need not predate Callimachus fr. 35 Pf). Later writers mention an oath made by Ajax (its content is uncertain) and trial by the Greeks, and some scholars have combined the two details and placed them after the flight to Athena's altar. However, a closer examination of the evidence would suggest that the oath was made at a relatively early stage just after the initial act of desecration. Cassandra

was removed from Ajax and given as booty to Agamemnon (see below, p. 80). According to Apollod. *Epit.* 5.23, when the Greeks were on the point of sailing off, they were checked by Calchas who warned them of Athena's anger over the impiety of Ajax. The Greeks were ready to kill him but he escaped to the altar and they left him there. This may have been the course of events in the Epic Cycle. Whatever its content, Ajax's oath failed to appease Athena; on Calchas' advice the Greeks tried Ajax and were prepared to avert their communal guilt by stoning the guilty man. He, however, broke loose and fled to the altar of Athena. By this action he doubled his guilt and by failing to take the matter further the Greeks too incurred further guilt.

The next words of Proclus' summary specify the form taken by the goddess' punishment. The Greeks, it is said, sailed off and Athena plotted destruction for them on the high sea. And yet the remainder of Proclus' résumé deals with events that took place while the Greeks had not yet left Troy, and his summary of the *Returns Home* begins with the Greeks still at the city. Numerous attempts have been made to remove this contradiction. The simplest and most convincing supposes that the *Sack of Troy* originally looked forward to the wreck of the Greek fleet consequent upon Ajax's crime. This sequel has somehow got incorporated into Proclus' résumé as if it were part of the actual narrative (and the corresponding section in the *Returns*' narrative has been eliminated as a doublet. We are finally told of the sacrifice of Polyxena on Achilles' tomb (see above, p. 49f.), Odysseus' killing of Astyanax, and Andromache's distribution to Neoptolemus (cf. above, p. 69f.).

Such is Proclus' summary of the epic's contents. Now let us consider the handful of actual fragments we possess. The longest and most interesting deals with an episode that probably fell outside the strict confines of the poem and featured parenthetically. This is the madness of Telamonian Ajax (F 1):

For their father <Poseidon> † the earth-shaker...† had given them both <skill in medicine> and had made each more glorious than the other. On the one he bestowed nimbler hands and the power to cut darts from the flesh and heal all wounds, and in the other he set in his chest all means of unerring discernment both to recognise the unknowable and to cure the incurable. This latter

son it was, in fact, who was the first to detect the mad anger of Ajax, both his flashing eyes and his burdened mind.

These lines are deeply unHomeric in several ways. Firstly, the distinction between chirurgy as practised by Machaon and the diagnostic skill of Podalirius – who is able thereby to infer the madness of Ajax – is a refinement not specifically present in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Next, the very notion of insanity (as opposed to e.g. heroic wrath or battle-frenzy) is largely avoided in the Homeric epics (see pp. 42 and 62). From the wording of our fragment it would be both difficult and dangerous to conclude how strictly the poet ever distinguished between genuine lunacy and the sense of heroic aggrievement at failure to win Achilles' armour which may have been the starting-point of that madness. But no special skills would be required to detect normal heroic resentment. Finally Machaon and Podalirius feature in Homer as the sons of Asclepius, the physician-god. In the *Sack of Troy*, however, they are (rather unusually) regarded as the offspring of Poseidon. There is some, admittedly tenuous, evidence that this god was worshipped on the island of Tenedos under the title *iatros* or 'healer', and *Od.* 9.520f., where Polyphemus unconvincingly tells Odysseus that his father Poseidon will cure his blinded eye, has also been associated with our fragment.

F 2 was only re-discovered at a relatively recent date (about thirty years ago) when the elimination of a mere single letter from a hitherto unintelligible word revealed 'Arctinus' as the source of the remarkable notion that the eyes, tail (and knees) of the Trojan Horse were capable of movement. The scholar responsible for this emendation compared Hephaestus' mobile automata in *Il.* 18.417ff., but the world of Olympus is surely different from that of mankind, and a more apt observation would be that we now have yet one more instance of the Epic Cycle's predilection for the fantastic, the miraculous and the picturesque. Athena's involvement in the construction of the Horse (see above, p. 66) may partly explain the concept (and the horse's alleged size: 50 x 100 feet).

F 3 deals with the throwing of Astyanax from the walls of Troy, a detail that also had its place in the *Little Iliad* (above, p. 69f.).

F 4 alludes to Acamas and Demophon, the sons of Theseus who led the Athenian contingent to Troy (another detail shared with the *Little Iliad*: see above, p. 69). According to one unspecified strand of tradition,

all they received by way of booty was their grandmother Aethra who had been brought to Troy together with other of Helen's possessions, having originally been carried off from Athens when the Dioscuri brought back Helen from Theseus' clutches (above, p. 39). The author of the *Sack of Troy*, we are told, was more generous, or at least represented Agamemnon as so being:

And on the sons of Theseus lord Agamemnon bestowed gifts,
as he did also on Menestheus, great-hearted shepherd of his
people.

It has been suggested that the gifts in question were the portions of land in the vicinity of Troy which we find mentioned at Aesch. *Eum.* 397ff. and Eur. *Tro.* 30ff. It is anyway clear that the *Sack of Troy* combined the Homeric tradition, whereby the otherwise obscure Menestheus was the Athenian commander (see above, p. 69), with the more familiar and intelligible version that the sons of Theseus occupied this role.

A final fragment would cast fascinating light on our epic if only we could be sure that it genuinely preserves matter deriving from it (*fr. dub.*). This long passage from the historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus (whose *floruit* is 30 BC) professes to give the early history of the Trojan Palladium (above, p. 66f.) from the time when, together with other items of dowry deriving from Athena, it came into the possession of Dardanus, who later founded Troy. An oracle relating to the Palladium is cited:

In the city which you found, dedicate it to the gods as a permanent object of reverence and reverence it with protective watches and sacrifices and dances. For, as long as these gifts of <Athena> the daughter of Zeus to your wife, venerable as they are, remain in your land, so long will your city be unsacked for all its day forever.

Doubts as to which (if any) of these details come from the *Sack of Troy*, doubts in particular as to whether the oracle is quoted from there, begin to obtrude when, towards the end of his account, Dionysius states that Aeneas escaped with the surviving Palladium, since Odysseus and Diomedes had previously purloined the other one, and that Aeneas

brought his Palladium to Italy. Arctinus (Dionysius continues) says that one Palladium was given to Dardanus by Zeus and remained hidden until the city's sack, whereas a mere replica placed on open display was what the Greeks had stolen. This sophisticated (and sophistical) account has a very late ring to it, since such a distinction would otherwise be dated to a time when the development of the Aeneas-legend in Rome made it imperative to have that hero convey Palladium and Penates from Troy to Rome. The account is further flawed by an internal contradiction, since Troy falls though the Palladium is still within Troy.

10: The Returns Home

The epic is by Agias and comprised five books. At the start of Proclus' résumé we read that Athena caused a quarrel to break out between the two brothers Menelaus and Agamemnon over the question of sailing off from Troy. The tradition of this quarrel also occurs in *Od.* 3.135ff. where we are told that Menelaus was for sailing home straight away, while Agamemnon wished to keep the army back and appease Athena by a sacrifice of hecatombs. The hostility of this goddess (which underlies both accounts) is to be explained, of course, in terms of Ajax's earlier crimes (above, p. 72f.). A dispute between heroes is a standard motif of epic (see p. 45). Consistently with the background implied by the *Odyssean* lines, Proclus' summary next portrays Agamemnon as staying behind at Troy in an attempt to abate the anger of Athena. Diomedes and Nestor, in contrast, sailed off and were the only portion of the expedition to reach home safely. This is the picture consistently presented by all our sources, though some variously specify troubles awaiting Diomedes on his return home, and a number of scholars would trace at least some of these traditions back to our epic.

It is again consistent with the *Odyssean* schema that Proclus' résumé should next report how Menelaus sailed forth after Diomedes and Nestor had left, and finally reached Egypt with five ships, the remainder having been destroyed by storm at sea. Consistent both with the passage about the Atreidae's quarrel cited above, and with Menelaus' presence in Egypt as related in his speech to Telemachus at *Od.* 4.351ff.

According to the next section of Proclus' résumé, Calchas, Leontes and Polypoetes went on foot to Colophon and there buried Tiresias, who had died. Here we finally move into a relatively unHomeric section of the poem, though the three Greek leaders are all mentioned in the *Iliad*. Apollod. *Epit.* 6.2 has a slightly fuller account of this episode whereby Amphilocheus (brother of Alcmaeon (see pp. 27 and 29)) and Podalirius (see p. 74) are also among the Greek leaders, and it is not Tiresias but