Book 23

So these were mourning throughout the city; but the Achaians,
when they all had made their way back to the ships and the Hellespont,
now scattered, the rest of them, each man to his own vessel:
but Achilles would not permit the Myrmidons to disperse,
and among his war-minded comrades thus he spoke up:
"Myrmidons! Lords of swift horses, most loyal of comrades,
let's not yet unyoke our whole-hoofed steeds from their chariots,
but with horses and chariots let us now drive close
to Patroklos, and mourn him: this is a dead man's privilege.
Then, when we've had our fill of painful lamentation,
We'll unyoke our horses and all take our evening meal together."

So he spoke: they all cried out as one, and Achilles led them:
three times round the corpse they drove their fine-maned steeds,
weeping, while Thetis stirred in them an urge for lamentation.
Damp with tears was the sand, and damp the men's battle gear,
such a maker of rout was he whose loss they mourned.
The son of Pēleus now led them in their heartfelt lamentation,
laying his murderous hands upon his comrade's breast:
"Greetings, Patroklos, even in Hādēs' realm: for now
all I promised you earlier I'm bringing to fulfillment—
that I'd drag Hektōr here, give him raw to the dogs to rend,
and in front of your pyre would cut the throats of a dozen
noble Trojan youths, so enraged I was at your killing."

With that he devised vile treatment for noble Hektōr,
stretching him out face down by Menoitios's son's bier,
there in the dust; each man took off his arms and armor
of gleaming bronze, unyoked his neighing horses. Then they
sat down beside the ship of Aiakos's swift-footed grandson
in their thousands; he gave them a heart-warming funeral feast.
Many sleek oxen now struggled around the iron knife
while being slaughtered, many sheep and bleating goats;
and many a white-tusked hog, bulked up with lard,
was stretched out there to be singed in Hēphaistos's flame,
and around the corpse blood ran thick, by the cupful.

The swift-footed lord, son of Pēleus, was now escorted
to noble Agamemnōn by the Achaians' princes—although
they'd barely convinced him, so incensed he was for his comrade.
But when their procession arrived at Agamemnōn's hut,
they issued instructions at once to the clear-voiced heralds
to set on the fire a great cauldron, hoping they'd persuade
Pēleus's son to wash himself clean of the clotted gore.
But he adamantly refused them, and swore an oath besides:
"No, by Zeus, who's the highest and best of all the gods,
it isn't right that water should come anywhere near my head
till I've burned Patroklos's body, and raised him a burial mound,
and have cut my hair—since never again will such grief
possess my heart, while I'm numbered among the living!
For now, then, feast if we must, though the thought revolts me;
but tomorrow at dawn, Agamemnōn, you lord of men,
have the troops forage for firewood, make ready all that's proper
for the dead man to have when he goes down into darkness:
so the unwearying fire may burn him away, may quickly
remove him from our sight, and the troops return to their work."

So he spoke, and they listened attentively, did as he asked.
Each man quickly made ready his evening meal, and then
they feasted, and no one's heart lacked a fair share in the feasting.
But when they had satisfied their desire for food and drink,
they went, each to his own hut, to get their rest;
but Pēleus's son lay on the shoreline of the thunderous sea,
heavily sighing, with all his Myrmidons around him,
in a clear space, where the combers came crashing on the beach.
But when sleep laid hold of him, soothing the cares of his heart,
sweetly descending—since his bright limbs were exhausted
from harrying Hektōr as far as windy Ilion—then
there came to him the spirit of unhappy Patroklos,
like his live self in all aspects—his stature, his fine eyes,
his voice; and even the clothes he had on were the same.
He stood over Achilles' head and addressed these words to him:
"You sleep, and you've proved forgetful of me, Achilles.
While I lived you didn't neglect me—now I'm dead you do!
Bury me with all speed, let me pass through Hādēs' gates—
The spirits, the shades of the dead, are keeping me out,
won't let me cross the river to mingle with them, so here

I uselessly wander outside Hādēs' wide-gated realm.
And give me your hand, I beseech you, for never again
will I come back from Hādēs, once you give me my share of fire.
Nevermore, as in life, will we sit apart from our comrades
making plans together: the dread death-spirit assigned me
from birth has now opened her jaws to swallow me down!
And for you too your lot is destined, godlike Achilles—
to perish beneath the ramparts of the noble Trojans.
One more thing I'll say, and ask of you, if you'll agree:
Don't have my bones interred apart from yours, Achilles,
but together, the way we were both brought up in your house
after Menoitios brought me, a child still, from Opoeis
to your home, because of that wretched manslaughter business,
the day that I lost my temper and killed Amphidamas's son,
through childish folly, not meaning to, over a game of dice,
and then Pēleus the horseman took me into his own house,
and brought me up caringly, and named me to be your squire.
So have the same vessel enclose our bones together—
golden, two-handled, the one your lady mother gave you."

In answer to him swift-footed Achilles then said:
"Why, dearest comrade, have you come here to me thus?
Why all these detailed instructions? Of course I shall make sure
that everything's done, and exactly as you want it.
Come closer, I beg you: if only for a brief moment
let's embrace, and get our full measure of painful lamentation."

So saying, he reached out to him with his hands, but failed
to clasp him: Patroklos's spirit disappeared like smoke
beneath the earth, crying thinly. Achilles, stunned, sprang up,
clapped both hands together, and said, sadly wondering:
"Well, so there really is something, even in Hādēs' realm—
a spirit, a phantom—though with nothing substantial to it;
for all night long the spirit of poor Patroklos
stood over me, weeping and wailing, making requests for all
he wanted done—looking marvelously like his living self."

So he spoke, and stirred in them all the urge for lamentation,
and Dawn, the rosy-fingered, revealed them weeping still
around the piteous corpse. Now the lord Agamemnōn
sent out mules and men from all the huts in camp

to bring back firewood: they had a fine warrior in charge—
Mērionēs, who was squire to kindly Idomeneus.
Off they went, hands clutching axes for felling timber
and well-braided ropes, with the mules going ahead of them:
back and forth, uphill and down they went, across and aslant—
and when they reached the spurs of spring-rich Ida, at once
they briskly set to, began felling tall leafy oaks
with the keen-edged bronze, and a mighty crash they made
on falling, after which the Achaians split them apart
and hitched them behind the mules. These churned up the earth
with their feet, straining plainwards through the thick undergrowth.
The woodcutters all carried logs, having been so ordered
by Mērionēs, the squire of kindly Idomeneus:
on the shore in a row they stacked them, at the point where Achilles
was planning a great burial mound for Patroklos and himself.

When they'd amassed great piles of timber all around
they sat down in a group and waited. Then Achilles
promptly issued his orders to the war-loving Myrmidons
to gird on their bronze gear, and for each man to yoke his horses
to their chariot. Up they all got, and donned their equipment,
then mounted their chariots, both warriors and drivers.
The chariot teams went ahead; a cloud of infantry followed,
thousands strong: in their midst his comrades bore Patroklos,
his body clothed with the hair they'd cut off and laid upon it.
Behind them noble Achilles in sorrow cradled the head
of the peerless comrade he now was sending to Hādēs' realm.

When they came to the place that Achilles had indicated
they laid down the body, and quickly stacked wood in plenty
for it.
Then swift-footed noble Achilles thought of something else:
standing away from the pyre he cut a lock of his fair hair
that he'd let grow long to offer to the river Spercheios;
and said, deeply troubled, looking out at the wine-faced deep:
"Spercheios, all in vain did my father Pēleus assure you
that when I came back home to my native land, for you
I'd cut off my hair and make a fine sacred offering—
fifty ungelded rams I'd sacrifice on the spot
into your waters, beside your precinct and fragrant altar.
Such the old man's vow, but you failed to fulfill his purpose.

Now, since I'll not be returning, ever, to my own country,
let me give this lock to the hero Patroklos, to take with him."

So saying, in the hands of his dear comrade he placed
the lock, and thus stirred in them all the urge for mourning;
and indeed the sun's light would have set on their sorrow,
had not Achilles at once approached Agamemnōn, saying:
"Son of Atreus—since it's your word that the Achaian troops
will most readily obey—one can have one's fill of wailing.
Dismiss them now from the pyre, bid them ready their meal.
We, to whom the dead man was closest, will take care
of all matters here; but let the commanders stay with us."

On hearing this, the lord of men, Agamemnōn,
at once dispersed the troops among their trim ships;
but the close mourners remained, and stacked the timber,
making a pyre with each side one hundred feet in length,
and upon it, silently grieving, set the dead body.
Then many fattened sheep and sleek shambling oxen
they flayed and dressed by the pyre; and from all these
great-hearted Achilles took fat, and covered the corpse
from head to foot, piled the flayed carcasses round it,
and two-handled jars of honey and oil he set down,
resting against the bier.[1] Then four horses with arching necks
he hastily, sobbing aloud, flung onto the pyre.
Nine dogs there had been that were fed from their master's table:
two of these he tossed on the pyre after cutting their throats;
and twelve noble sons of the high-spirited Trojans
he slew with the bronze: vile actions were in his mind.[2]
Then to the pyre he set fire's iron might, to consume it,
and groaned aloud, and called on his dear comrade by name:
"Greetings, Patroklos, even in the realm of Hādēs!
See, now I'm fulfilling all that I promised you earlier:
twelve noble sons of the high-spirited Trojans—all these,
with you, the flames will devour; but Priam's son
Hektōr I'll not give to fire, but to dogs to feed on."

1. These jars are clearly the kind of amphora (or, later, funeral *lēkythos*) with a pointed foot, that was meant to be stuck in the ground, and could not stand unsupported on the logs of the pyre: Leaf, 2: 392; Richardson 189.
2. Thus fulfilling the promise he had earlier made to the dead Patroklos: cf. 18.336–37.

So he spoke, threatening; yet no dogs were getting at Hektōr,
for the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodītē, kept him safe from them
by day and by night, anointed his body with rose-scented
ambrosial oil, so the dragging would not lacerate his flesh,
and Phoibos Apollo upon him projected a dark cloud,
from the heavens down to the plain, enshrouding the whole site
that the dead man occupied, to stop the strength of the sun
from shriveling the flesh that embodied his sinews and his limbs.

But the pyre of the dead Patroklos would not catch fire.
So now swift-footed Achilles had another idea:
standing away from the pyre, he prayed to two of the winds,
the north and west—Boreas, Zephyros—promised fine offerings,
implored them, while pouring libations from a golden goblet,
to come, help set the body quickly ablaze with fire,
by speeding the wood to its kindling. Iris, hearing his prayers,
lost no time, but carried his message on to the winds.
They were all met at the home of blustery Zephyros,
in the midst of a banquet. Iris came running, stopped
on the stone threshold. When they caught sight of her
they all jumped up, and each one wanted her by him.
But she wouldn't sit and join them, explained herself thus:
"I can't stay—I have to go back to the streams of Ocean,
to the land of the Aithiōpians: they're making fine sacrifices
to the immortals, and I am to share in their sacred feast!
But Achilles is praying that Boreas and blustery Zephyros
will come—and promising them fine offerings if they do—
to fan the flames of the pyre on which there lies
Patroklos, for whom the Achaians are all making loud lament."

So she, having thus spoken, went on her way; they rose
with a marvelous clamor, stampeding the clouds before them,
and quickly reached the deep sea, blowing on it: the waves surged up
before that shrill blast. They came to rich-soiled Troy,
and swooped on the pyre: loud roared a wondrous conflagration!
So the whole night through they fanned the flames of the pyre,
blowing shrilly; the whole night through swift Achilles, clutching
a two-handled cup, took wine from a golden bowl
and poured it out on the ground, till the earth was drenched,
calling upon the spirit of the unlucky Patroklos.
As a father mourns for a son while he's burning his bones—

a son just wed, whose death has shocked his unlucky parents—
so Achilles wept for his comrade as he burned his bones,
dragging himself round the pyre, and ceaselessly sobbing.

At the hour that the morning star goes heralding light on earth,
followed by Dawn, saffron-clad, spreading over the deep,
then the funeral pyre died down, and ceased to flame.
Now the winds set out back on their homeward journey,
over the Thracian sea—at their coming it surged and thundered—
and the son of Pēleus withdrew from the smoldering pyre
and lay down, exhausted, and sweet sleep swept over him.
But when Atreus's son and his people all assembled together,
the clamor and noisy tread of their coming awoke him:
He sat up and called out to them, saying: "Son of Atreus,
and you other lords and chieftains of all the Achaians,
first quench the still-smoldering pyre with fire-bright wine,
in each part that the fire's force reached. When that's accomplished,
let us collect the bones of Patroklos, Menoitios's son,
sorting them carefully—they're easy enough to distinguish:
he lay at the heart of the pyre, while the rest had to burn
at its edges, horses and men all mingled together—then
lay them up in a golden bowl, with a double layer
of fat as cover, until I too am vanished to Hādēs.
But you're not to toil at raising a huge grave mound now,
just one that's befitting: though afterwards you Achaians
can make it broader and higher—those of you, that is,
still left among the benched vessels when I myself am gone."

So he spoke, and they heeded Pēleus's swift-footed son.
They quenched the still-smoldering pyre with fire-bright wine
in each part that the fire's force reached, where the ash had settled.
Weeping, they gathered their kindly comrade's white bones
into a golden bowl, with a double layer of fat:
this they laid up in his hut, put a soft cloth to cover it.
They marked out the grave-mound's circle, laid a base of stones
upon it around the pyre, then piled on loose earth,
and, the mound once raised, began leaving; Achilles however
kept them all where they were, made them sit in broad assembly,
fetched out prizes then from his ships: cauldrons and tripods,
horses and mules and sturdy heads of oxen,
and women with elegant sashes, and ingots of grey iron.

First, for swift charioteers he set out splendid prizes:
a woman to take away, one skilled in fine handiwork,
an eared tripod of twenty-two measures—these for the winner;
for the runner-up, he provided a six-year-old mare,
unbroken, and pregnant with a mule foal; for third place
he set out a cauldron as yet untouched by fire,
a fine one, four measures capacity, new, bright, polished;
for the fourth, two talents of gold was the prize allotted,
for the fifth, a two-handled bowl, as yet untouched by fire.
Then he stood up and spoke as follows among the Argives:
"Son of Atreus, and all you other well-greaved Achaians,
here are the prizes awaiting the horsemen in this contest.
If we Achaians were now competing in honor of someone else,
then I'd surely win first prize, and bear it away to my hut;
for you know by how much my horses surpass all others,
being immortal: Poseidōn bestowed them as a present
on Pēleus, my father; and he bequeathed them to me.
But I shall remain here: I, and my whole-hoofed horses.
So great the renown of the charioteer that they've lost—
a kindly man too, who'd frequently work soft oil
into their manes, when he'd washed them with shining water!
Now both of them stand and mourn him: low on the ground
their manes are trailing; they stand still, grieving at heart.
But you others in camp here, get ready—any Achaian
with confidence in his horses and his dovetailed chariot!"

So spoke Pēleus's son, and the horsemen quickly gathered.
The first of all to come forward was Eumēlos, lord of men,
Admētos's dear son, a man highly skilled in horsemanship.
Next there stood up Tydeus's son, the mighty Diomēdēs,
leading beneath the yoke Trōs's horses,[3] that he'd earlier
taken by force from Aineias (himself rescued by Apollo).
Next up was Atreus's son, the fair-haired Menelaös,
scion of Zeus, who yoked a speedy team of horses—
Agamemnōn's mare Aithē, and his own Podargos.
Echepōlos, son of Anchīsēs, gave Agamemnōn the mare
as a bribe, to avoid going with him to windy Ilion,
so he'd get to stay home and enjoy life—since he'd been granted

3. On these horses, see 5.222–23 and note, 263–74, 319–27; on the rescue of Aineias, 5.344–46, 443–50.

vast riches by Zeus—in broad Sikyon, where his home was.
This mare Menelaös now yoked: she was straining to race.
Antilochos was the fourth to ready his fine-maned horses—
the splendid son of Nestōr, that high-spirited king,
and grandson of Nēleus: Pylos-bred were the swift-foot steeds
that drew his chariot. His father stood there beside him,
with well-meant advice for a son who knew plenty himself:
"Antilochos, young though you are, you've been befriended
by Zeus and Poseidōn, who've taught you every aspect
of horsemanship—no great need, then, for me to instruct you—
you know just how to wheel your horses round the turn mark!
But since yours are the slowest, I think you'll have some trouble.
Still, their horses may be swifter, but your competitors can't
match you in clever planning, so it's up to you, dear boy—
get your mind round every kind of cunning contrivance,
don't let those prizes slip away out of your grasp!
Shrewdness serves woodcutters better than mere brute force;
it's through shrewdness a steersman, out on the wine-faced deep,
can control a swift ship when it's battered by gale-force winds;
shrewdness is what lets one driver edge out another.
Some are content to rely on their horses and chariot,
will carelessly take turns wide on this side and that,
let their team swerve over the track, not keep them in hand;
but the man who knows every trick, though driving worse horses,
will keep his eye on the turn, hug it close;—he never forgets,
from the start, to maintain taut control of his oxhide reins,
but steadily holds them in hand, one eye on the team ahead.
Now I'll tell you about a clear marker: you cannot miss it.
There's the dried wooden stump of a tree, about six feet high—
of oak or pine: it doesn't rot in the rain—
with two white stones set against it, on either side,
at the track's turning point, with smooth driving all round it.
A memorial, maybe, of some mortal long since dead,
or perhaps set up as a race mark by men in olden times—
and now swift-footed Achilles has made it his turning post.
Steer tight round this, driving horses and chariot close,
and yourself, at the taut leather rail, lean a touch to the left
of your team, while you also cheer on your offside horse,
give it the goad, let the rein run loose in your hand!
But have the nearside horse run close to the turning post—

so close, that the crafted wheel's hub seems to graze its surface
yet doesn't in fact touch the stone: do that, and you risk
having your horses maimed and your chariot wrecked!
A delight for your competitors that would be, but for you
a disaster. So, my dear boy, use your wits, be on your guard;
for if at the turning post you get ahead of the others,
there's no one who'll catch or pass you in a final spurt,
not even were he to chase you driving noble Arīōn,
Adrēstos's swift horse, divinely sired, or the team
of Laomedōn, fine thoroughbreds brought up in these parts."

With that, Nestōr, Nēleus's son, sat down again in his place,
having instructed his son how to master every last detail.

Mērionēs was the fifth to ready his fine-maned horses.
Then they mounted their chariots, threw in their lots.[4]
Achilles shook them: out flew the lot of Nestōr's son
Antilochos. Lord Eumēlos drew the place next to him,
followed by Atreus's son, famed spearman Menelaös.
The next starting place fell by lot to Mērionēs;
last place went to Tydeus's son, far the best of them all.
So they lined up, and Achilles showed them the turning post
far off on the level plain: he set an observer by it,
the godlike Phoinix, his father's old deputy,
to umpire the race, give a true report of its outcome.

Then they all at once raised their whips above their horses,
started them with the reins, drove them on with urgent commands,
and they swiftly advanced across the plain, at full gallop,
moving away from the ships; and from under their breasts
the dust, kicked up, rose high, like a cloud or a whirlwind,
and with the blast of the wind their manes streamed out.
At times the wheels would run smoothly over the nurturing earth,
but at times were bumped into the air, while their drivers, standing,
held on, and each man's heart beat fast with excitement
as they all strove to win, and kept urging their horses on,
and the horses flew forward, raising the dust on the plain.

4. Lots are drawn to determine the starting position in the lineup: presumably the luckiest competitor in the draw would, like Antilochos, choose the "inmost place on the left, giving an advantage at the turn" (Richardson 213). For the practice of shaking the lots out of a helmet, see 7.175–83.

But when the swift teams were completing the final stretch,
back towards the grey sea, then each one's true quality
became clear, as the horses were stretched to the limit. The racing
mares of Pherēs' grandson, Eumēlos, moved into the lead,
and, next, Diomēdēs' stallions, the horses of Trōs,
were not far behind—indeed, so close upon their heels
that they seemed on the point of mounting Eumēlos's chariot,
and with their breath his back and his broad shoulders
grew warm, so close they bent their heads as they sped;
and now Tydeus's son would have passed or dead-heated him,
had he not stirred up resentment in Phoibos Apollo,
who struck the shining whip clean out of his hand.
Then from his eyes there started tears of fury
as he saw Eumēlos's mares going still faster than before,
while his own pair were handicapped, running without a goad.
But the trick played on Tydeus's son by Apollo had not escaped
Athēnē: quickly she chased after the shepherd of men,
returned his whip to him, put power into his horses;
then in her fury she went for the son of Admētos: his team's
yoke was smashed by the goddess: the mares both bolted
off-track, and the yoke pole slipped to the ground. Eumēlos
was flung headlong out of the chariot, by the wheel,
stripping skin from his elbows and mouth and nose, and leaving
his forehead above the eyebrows all bruised, while both his eyes
were brimming with tears, and his strong young voice was stilled.
Tydeus's son then swerved his whole-hoofed horses round him,
and led the field, far ahead of the rest—for Athēnē
had put strength in his horses, bestowed on him great glory—
with Atreus's son, fair-haired Menelaös, the next behind him.

Antilochos now called out to his father's horses:
"You two, get moving as well! Put your full strength into it!
I'm not asking you to compete with those up front there—
Tydeus's warlike son's horses, those to which Athēnē
has just given strength, and on him bestowed great glory—
no, overtake Atreus's son's team, don't be left behind!
So, *move it!* Unless you both want to be put to shame
by Aithē, and her a mare? You champions, why so slow?
For I'll tell you this, and it will certainly be fulfilled:

No care will you get from Nestōr, the people's shepherd—
rather he'll kill you at once with the keen-edged bronze—
if through your lack of spirit all we win is a lesser prize!
So get in pursuit, gallop after them at full stretch,
and what I'll contrive and work to achieve is this:
we'll pass them where the track narrows—I'll not miss it!"

So he spoke; and they, terrified by their master's reproof,
quickened their pace for a little. Then, almost at once,
steadfast Antilochos sighted the narrow point where the road
ran hollow: a gully had formed, where winter floods, collecting,
had torn away part of the track, deepened the whole stretch—
and here steered Menelaös, to avoid teams jostling abreast.
But Antilochos now took his own whole-hoofed pair off-track,
and began to overtake him, driving close in, side by side,
and Atreus's son, in alarm, shouted out to Antilochos:
"This is crazy driving, Antilochos! Rein in your horses!
Here the track's narrow: it'll soon be wider for passing—
This way you'll run into my chariot, wreck us both!"

So he spoke; but Antilochos pressed on still more fiercely,
urging his team with the goad, as though not hearing. About
as far as the range of a discus swung from the shoulder,
that a young man throws when making trial of his strength,
so far they ran thus—but then the mares of Atreus's son
dropped back, as he decided he'd race them hard no longer,
to avoid their whole-hoofed horses colliding on the track
and upsetting the well-strapped chariots, and themselves
being thrown out in the dust, through their great lust to win.
Then fair-haired Menelaös cried out in stern reproof:
"Antiochos, no other mortal's more malignant than you!
Keep on, then—we Achaians were mistaken to think you wise!
Even so, you won't get the prize without a challenge on oath."[5]

So he spoke, and then called out to his horses, saying:
"Don't hold back, don't stop now, through grief at heart! Their feet

5. Menelaös indeed has it in mind to challenge Antilochos to take an oath that he has not cheated by using an improper trick to secure the victory, and in fact does so at 581–85. Antilochos (with good reason) prefers to yield gracefully, youth respecting age, rather than to take an oath that would in fact involve him in perjury.

and laboring knees will tire out long before yours do—
old nags, age deprives them of their youthful vigor."

So he spoke; and they, terrified by their master's reproof,
quickened their pace, and soon came up close behind the others.

Now the Argives were sitting assembled, watching out
for the horses as they flew onward, raising the dust on the plain;
and Idomeneus, Krētan chieftain, perched away from the crowd,
high up on a lookout point, was the first to glimpse them.
When he heard a man's distant voice urging his horses on
he recognized that, and spotted a horse way out ahead,
all chestnut in color, except for its forehead, and there
it had a round white blaze resembling the full moon.
Up he stood, and addressed the Argives in these words:
"My friends, rulers and leaders of the Argives,
am I the only one who can actually see these horses,
or can you see them too? Other horses now seem to leading,
and a different driver's in sight! The mares that were in front
on the first stretch, must have tripped up at some point:
I certainly saw them reach the turning post in the lead,
but now I can nowhere discern them, although my eyes
have searched for them everywhere, all over the Trojan plain.
Did the driver perhaps drop his reins, was he unable
to hold his course well round the post? Did he fail on the turn?
He must, I fear, have been thrown there, his chariot wrecked,
and his mares, in a wild frenzy, must have bolted from the track.
But stand up and look for yourselves—I myself cannot
recognize
anything clearly; to me, the man looks as though he is
an Aitōlian by birth, a ruler among the Argives—
Tydeus the horse-breaker's son, the mighty Diomēdēs."

Oïleus's son, swift Aias, now shamefully rebuked him:
"Idomeneus, always the big-mouth! Those high-stepping mares
are still a long way off, racing over the broad plain!
You're nowhere near the youngest among the Argives,
nor are the eyes in your head by far the sharpest,
yet your big mouth's forever yapping! You've no right
to be such a blabbermouth—others here are better than you!

The same mares are in the lead now as were before—
those of Eumēlos, and he's the driver, holding the reins."

Growing angry at him, the Krētan leader retorted:
"Aias, peerless at insults, dim-witted, in all other ways
you lag far behind the Argives: your mind is so rigid!
Come on then, let's wager a tripod or a cauldron,
and both accept Atreus's son Agamemnōn as the judge
of which horses are in the lead: you'll learn that when you pay!"

So he spoke; and swift Aias, Oïleus's son, at once
jumped up, in a fury, to answer him with hard words;
and their quarrel would certainly have gone still further,
had not Achilles himself stood up and made this speech:
"No more of these angry insults to and fro between you,
Aias, Idomeneus! This is bad talk, most improper—
You'd reprimand anyone else who behaved that way!
Sit down now in the assembly, both of you, keep a watch
for the horses—they're going flat out to win, they'll be here
any moment now! Then you'll know, each one of you,
which Argives' horses are lagging, and which are in the lead."

While he was speaking, Tydeus's son drove up at speed,
plying his whip from the shoulder; and his horses,
high-stepping, came lightly skimming down the track,
while the raised dust kept blowing against their charioteer,
and the chariot itself, decorated with gold and with tin,
ran behind the swift-footed team, and barely a trace
of the wheel rims' passage was left behind in the powdery
dust as the pair sped onward. Then at last he pulled up
in the midst of the place of assembly, the sweat still coursing
down from his horses' necks and chests to the ground.
To the ground he too sprang from his gleaming chariot,
and propped his whipstock against the yoke. Nor did sturdy
Sthenelos waste any time, but briskly claimed the prize—
the woman, the eared tripod—which he gave to his high-hearted
comrades to carry off, and himself unyoked the horses.

Next to bring in his team was Antilochos, Nēleus's grandson,
having outstripped Menelaös not by speed, but by cunning guile.
Yet even so Menelaös had his own pair right behind him—

as near as a horse to the wheel, a horse that draws its master
over the plain, straining hard at his chariot, with the outermost
hairs of its tail just brushing the wheel's rim, since it runs
very close in front, and there's only the narrowest space
between horse and wheel as it gallops over the wide plain—
by so little was Menelaös behind peerless Antilochos
now—though at first it had been as far as a discus throw—
having quickly caught up with him, since Agamemnōn's mare,
fine-maned Aithē, kept finding and using yet greater power;
and if the course for the two of them had been much longer,
then he'd have passed him, and not left the outcome in dispute.
Mērionēs, Idomeneus's excellent henchman, came in
a spear's flight behind illustrious Menelaös,
for his fine-maned horses were the tardiest of them all,
and he himself the least skillful at racing a chariot.
The son of Admētos arrived long after the rest,
dragging his splendid chariot, driving his team before him.
At the sight of him swift-footed noble Achilles felt pity,
and stood up among the Argives, and spoke winged words to
them:
"Driving his whole-hoofed horses now comes in, last of all,
by far the best man: so let's give him a prize, as is proper—
for second place: the first let Tydeus's son carry off."

So he spoke, and they all approved his proposal; and now,
with the Achaians' backing, he'd have given Eumēlos the mare,
had Nestōr's high-spirited son, Antilochos, in response
not risen to lodge an appeal with Pēleus's son Achilles:
"Achilles, you'll anger me deeply if you persist
with this proposal: you'll be robbing me of my prize
through dwelling on his misfortune—horses and chariot wrecked,
and him too, for all his skill. But if he had made a prayer
to the immortals, he wouldn't have ended last in the race!
Look, if you feel sorry for him, if he's so dear to you,
back in your hut there's gold in abundance, there's bronze,
and sheep too, and handmaids, as well as whole-hoofed horses!
Choose from among these later, and give him a better prize—
or right now, if you want some applause from the Achaians—
but the mare I will not give up: let any man who wants her
make trial of me now in a hand-to-hand engagement."

So he spoke, and swift-footed noble Achilles smiled,[6]
enjoying Antilochos, since he was his dear companion,
and in response addressed him with winged words:
"Antilochos, if you want me to find from my own possessions
some extra gift for Eumēlos, I'll be glad to do so.
I'll give him the corselet I stripped off Asteropaios—
it's of bronze, with an inlay of shining tin all round it
in circles: this will be a most valuable gift for him."

With that he commanded his dear comrade Automedōn
to fetch it out of the hut: he went off and came back with it,
and presented it to Eumēlos, who received it with pleasure.

Now there also stood up among them Menelaös, sore at heart,
with implacable rage at Antilochos. A herald placed the scepter
in his hand, and called out for silence among the Argives.
Then Menelaös, that man of godlike mien, addressed them:
"Antilochos, once so sensible, consider what you've done!
You insulted my manhood, and you thwarted my horses
by driving your own ahead, though they're far inferior.
Come now, you leaders and rulers of the Argives,
make a fair judgment between us, not favoring either man,
lest one day some bronze-clad Achaian may declare:
"Menelaös defeated Antilochos with his lies, went off
taking the mare, because, while his own horses were nags,
he himself carried all the weight in prestige and power."
I myself will offer a ruling, and I don't think any other
Danaän will find fault with it: it will be rightful.
As is the proper custom, Antilochos, Zeus's nursling,
come here, and, standing before your horses and chariot,
take the lithe whip with which you were lately driving,
and, touching your horses, by the Earth-Encircling Earth-Shaker
swear that you never meant to block my chariot by deceit."

To him then astute Antilochos offered this response:
"Wait a moment! Remember that I'm a good deal younger

6. Richardson notes (229) that this is the only time in the whole of the *Iliad* when Achilles is reported as smiling. He is, we are led to believe, delighted by his young aristocratic friend's frankness. What are we meant to infer from this unique instance? More, surely, than pleasure at the smart discomfiture of Agamemnōn's brother? But just what remains obscure.

than you, my lord Menelaös: you're my elder and better,
you know what a young man's transgressions are likely to be—
his mind's over-hasty, his judgment lacks real substance.
So bear with me in your heart: the mare that I won
I'll willingly give you, and if you want something better
from my house, I'd be only too glad to provide that as well,
here and now, Zeus's nursling, rather than spend my life
out of favor with you, and at fault in the eyes of the gods."

With that, great-hearted Nestōr's son now led up the mare,
and gave her to Menelaös, whose heart grew warm
and melted like morning dew that coats the ears of grain
where the plowland bristles with its ripe crop of tall wheat:
just so, Menelaös, did the heart melt in your breast.
Then he addressed him, speaking in winged words:
"Antilochos, now I myself will yield, and freely abandon
the anger I felt, since you were neither deranged nor foolish
before, though this time your youth outweighed your sense.
From now on take care to avoid outwitting your betters!
Indeed, no other Achaian would so soon have won me over,
but you've suffered much and done a great deal of work—
you, your excellent father, your brother—on my behalf;
so I'll yield to your entreaties—and, though the mare is mine,
I'll give her to you, so those present may recognize
that my spirit is never arrogant or unbending."

With that
he gave the mare to Noēmōn, Antilochos's companion,
to lead away, and then himself took the gleaming cauldron,
while Mērionēs, for fourth place, picked up the two gold
talents,
just as he'd driven. But the fifth prize went unclaimed—
the two-handled bowl: this Achilles gave to Nestōr,
took it over to him through the Argive assembly, and said:
"Something, old sir, for you too: let this bowl be your keepsake,
a memento of the funeral of Patroklos, whom nevermore
will you look on among the Argives. I give you this prize
without contest, for never again will you box or wrestle
in competition, or hurl the javelin, run a footrace,
since oppressive old age now weighs heavily upon you."

So saying, he gave it to Nestōr, who received it with pleasure,
and addressed him, speaking with winged words: "Yes, indeed,
all you just said, my child, was right and proper:
my limbs are no longer strong, friend, nor can my arms
still thrust out lightly and fast from either shoulder.
Would I were as young again, my strength still undiminished,
as on that day when the Epeians were burying lord Amarynkeus
at Bouprasion, and his sons gave prizes in the king's honor!
Then no man was my equal, neither of the Epeians,
nor of the great-hearted Aitōlians, nor of the Pylians themselves.
In boxing I beat Klytomēdēs, the son of Ēnōps,
and at wrestling Ankaios of Pleurōn, who stood against me;
in the footrace I outran Iphiklos, fine athlete though he was,
and at spear throwing I defeated both Phyleus and Polydōros.
In the chariot race alone did Aktōr's two sons[7] defeat me,
overtaking by force of numbers, begrudging me victory
because the best prizes were kept for this last contest.
Twin brothers they were: the one held the reins full-time—
held the reins full-time!—while the other drove with his whip.
That's how I once was; now it's time for younger men
to take on such tasks, while I must resign myself to wretched
old age, though then I stood out among the heroes.
So now honor your comrade too with funeral rites and contests!
This gift I accept with pleasure: my heart rejoices
that you think of me still as a friend, and do not forget
the honor that's proper for me to receive among the Achaians.
May the gods in return for this grant you bountiful favors."

So he spoke. Back through the great crush of the Achaians
Pēleus's son now went—after hearing out this discourse
by the son of Nēleus—to set out prizes for painful boxing.
He brought to the place of assembly a working mule, tethered it there,
an unbroken six-year-old hinney, the toughest kind to break,
and for the loser set out a two-handled cup. This done
he stood up and spoke as follows among the Argives:

7. These were the twins Kteatos and Eurytos: officially Aktōr's offspring, but in fact sired by Poseidōn. They are also sometimes identified as descendants of Molos, their maternal grandfather (11.709 and note, 750—again, in a reminiscence of Nestōr's). In late tradition (*HE* 1: 28), they were pictured as Siamese twins.

"Son of Atreus, and all you other well-greaved Achaians,
we call on two men, the best, to compete for these prizes,
putting up their fists: the one whom Apollo endows
with strength to endure—something all the Achaians recognize—
can then return to his hut leading off the hardy mule,
while the loser will carry away the two-handled cup."

So he spoke;
and at once there stood up a tall and powerful man,
well skilled in boxing, Panopeus's son Epeios,
who, one hand on the working mule, now addressed them, saying:
"Come on then, the man who'll collect that two-handled cup!
But the mule, I declare, no other Achaian will carry off
by defeating me with his fists, since I tell you, I'm the greatest!
Does it not suffice that I fall short in battle? There's no way
a man can make himself expert in every activity!
For this I declare, and it will certainly be fulfilled:
Utterly will I both mangle his flesh and shatter his bones!
So it would really be best if his kinsmen all remain here,
to carry him out after he's been broken up at my hands."

So he spoke, and they all fell silent: in the hush
only Euryalos rose, a godlike man, to confront him—
the grandson of Talaös, the son of king Mēkisteus,
who long ago came to Thēbē when Oidipous had fallen,[8]
for his funeral, and there defeated all the sons of Kadmos.
As his second Euryalos had Tydeus's son, the famous
spearman, to cheer him on, very keen that he should win.
First he laid out a loincloth for him, and then produced
some well-cut leather thongs[9] from the hide of a field ox.
So the two of them girded themselves, stepped out in the center
of the place of assembly, put up their mighty fists,
and went at each other: their strong hands intermingled,

8. That Oidipous (Oedipus) died at Kolōnos, outside Athens, seems to have been an Athenian invention, perhaps by Sophoklēs; other sources, including the *Odyssey* (11.275–80) have him living on in Thēbē after the suicide of his mother and wife Epikastē (Jocasta) and dying a wealthy landowner (Hes. *WD* 162–63). Most of the best-known stories about him are of late occurrence. See *HE* 2: 594, Richardson 243.
9. Such supple leather thongs were worn by ancient boxers well into the classical period to protect their hands. Later they were replaced by *sphairai*, a harder type of glove, more liable to cause damage to one's opponent; thus the thongs (ἱμάντες, *himantes*) were known as "softer" or "gentle" (Richardson 244).

and fearsome the grinding of jaws, while the sweat streamed down
everywhere from their limbs. As Euryalos looked for an opening,
noble Epeios moved in, uppercut him. No time did he stay
on his feet: there and then his bright limbs gave beneath him.
As, caught by the ruffling north wind, a fish will leap up
from the wrack-strewn shallows, and then a dark wave hides it,
so, when struck, he jerked skyward; but great-hearted Epeios
grabbed him, set him upright. His comrades crowded round him,
led him off through the place of assembly dragging his feet,
spitting out blood clots, head lolling on one side.
They brought him, still dazed, sat him down there in their midst,
and themselves then went off to collect the two-handled cup.

Pēleus's son now displayed other prizes to the Danaäns,
for a third contest, that of painful wrestling. The winner
would get a great tripod, made to stand on the fire—
twelve oxen's worth, the Achaians figured amongst themselves;
while for the loser Achilles set in their midst a woman,
well skilled in much handiwork. Four oxen they priced her at.
Then he stood up among the Argives, and addressed them, saying:
"Up now, those who'd compete in this contest too!" So he spoke,
and thereupon there arose huge Aias, Telamōn's son,
and resourceful Odysseus also, that expert in crafty skills.
So these two girded up, strode out into mid-assembly,
and gripped each other's arms with their brawny fists,
like crossbeams that some skilled carpenter dovetails together
in a high house, with a view to resisting the gale-force winds.
Their backbones cracked under the violent to-and-fro tugging
of their powerful hands, their sweat poured down in streams,
clustering welts sprang up along their ribs and shoulders,
reddened with blood. They never let up the pressure
as they battled for victory and the well-wrought tripod:
Odysseus could not trip Aias and pin him to the ground,
nor Aias him, for Odysseus's great strength held firm.
But when this began to weary the well-greaved Achaians, then
to Odysseus huge Aias, the son of Telamōn, said:
"Zeus-sprung son of Laertēs, resourceful Odysseus,
you lift me, or I you: for the rest, let Zeus decide."

With that, he tried to lift him; but Odysseus had not forgotten
his cunning, and struck him sharply behind the knee joint,

loosened his limbs, threw him backward, and dropped on his chest,
so that those watching were struck with amazement; and then
much-enduring noble Odysseus attempted to lift him,
raised him just off the ground, yet couldn't heft him up.
He hooked his knee inside Aias's, and the two dropped back,
close-entwined, on the ground, and all begrimed with dust.
Then for the third time they'd have sprung to their feet and wrestled,
had Achilles himself not got up and restrained them:
"Break it up now! Don't strain till you hurt yourselves!
You're both the victors. You'll both get the same prizes.
Off with you now—so that other Achaians can compete."
So he spoke, and they listened, and were glad to obey:
they wiped off the dust, and got back into their tunics.

Pēleus's son now set out other prizes, for speed of foot:
a finely worked silver mixing bowl, of six measures only,
yet for beauty it far exceeded every last one on earth,
having been cunningly fashioned by Sidonian craftsmen.
Phoenician merchants ferried it over the misty deep,
and brought it to harbor, and made a present of it to Thoas;
and as ransom for Priam's son Lykaōn it was surrendered
by Eunēos, the son of Jason, to the hero Patroklos.
This bowl Achilles set out, in honor of his comrade,
for whoever might prove the speediest in the footrace.
For the runner-up he provided a big ox, rich with fat,
and for the contestant in last place a half-talent of gold.
Then he stood up and spoke among the Argives, saying:
"Up now, those who are ready to compete in this contest too!"
So he spoke: there then arose swift Aias, the son of Oïleus,
and resourceful Odysseus, and after them Nestōr's son
Antilochos, who as a runner beat all the youngsters.
They all lined up, and Achilles showed them the turning point.
Right from the start they ran at full stretch, but quickly
Oïleus's son moved ahead, with noble Odysseus behind him,
very close—as close as a weaving rod comes to the breast
of a fine-sashed woman, who deftly draws it tight with her hands,
pulling the spool past the warp, and holding the rod
right by her breast—so close ran Odysseus: his own feet
trod in Aias's footsteps before the dust had settled on them,
while down on Aias's head came Odysseus's panting breath

as he kept up the fast pace: all the Achaians were cheering
his struggle to win, urged him on to yet greater efforts.
But when they were running the final stretch, then Odysseus
made a quick prayer in his heart to grey-eyed Athēnē:
"Hear me, goddess! Come as a good helper to my feet!"
So he spoke in prayer, and Pallas Athēnē heard him,
and lightened his limbs, both his knees and his arms above them.
But as they went into their final sprint for the prize,
then Aias slipped as he ran—for Athēnē tripped him—
where the dung was spread from the slaughter of the bellowing
oxen killed for Patroklos by swift-footed Achilles,
and his mouth and nostrils were filled with this cattle dung.
So the bowl was won by noble and much-enduring Odysseus,
who came in first, and the field ox went to illustrious Aias.
He stood there, with one hand clutching his beast by its horn,
and spat out the dung, and addressed the Argives, saying:
"Oh, my, that goddess for sure tripped my feet—she always
stands by Odysseus and helps him, just like a mother."

So he spoke, and they all had a hearty laugh at him.
Antilochos then collected the prize for the last contestant,
smiling, and spoke among the Argives, saying:
"Something, my friends, you all know, but I'll say it now
just once more: even today the gods honor older men!
Aias may be only a little older than I am,
but Odysseus here belongs to an earlier generation—
men call his a green old age—yet it's hard for any
Achaian to match him at running, save only Achilles."

So he spoke, with a flattering word for Pēleus's swift-footed son.
To this Achilles responded, addressing him as follows:
"Antilochos, not in vain shall your praise have been expressed!
I shall add to your prize another half-talent of gold."

So saying, he handed it to him, and he took it with pleasure.
Then Pēleus's son brought out a far-shadowing spear,
set it down in the place of assembly, with a shield and helmet—
the battle gear of Sarpēdōn, that Patroklos took from him—
then stood up among the Argives, and addressed them, saying:
"We call on two men, the best, to compete for these prizes,
to put on their armor, to take the flesh-cutting bronze,

and make trial of each other in front of the troops assembled.
Whichever one's first to touch the other's handsome flesh,
gets through armor and black blood, pricks the body within,[10]
to him shall I give as prize this silver-studded sword,
a fine Thracian weapon I took from Asteropaios.
As for the armor, let the two men share it between them,
and we'll give them a splendid banquet here in the huts."

So he spoke. There then arose huge Aias, Telamōn's son,
and the son of Tydeus stood up, the mighty Diomēdēs;
and after arming themselves, on either side of the throng,
they converged at the midpoint, eager to start their fight,
exchanging fearsome glances: the Achaians were astonished.
So when, advancing, they closed in, the one on the other,
three times they attacked, three times fought hand to hand.
Then Aias, faced with that balanced buckler, thrust hard,
yet missed the flesh, for the corselet protected it, while
Tydeus's son kept aiming over Aias's great tower shield
with his gleaming spear point, going for his opponent's neck.
At this point the Achaians, in great alarm for Aias,
commanded them to break off, accept equal prizes.
But to Tydeus's son the hero presented the great sword,
complete with its matching scabbard and its well-cut baldric.

Next Pēleus's son set out a great mass of pig iron,
that Ēëtiōn, with his great strength, once used as a throwing
weight;
but him swift-footed noble Achilles had killed, and carried
this lump off aboard his ships with his other possessions.
Now he stood up and spoke as follows among the Argives:
"Up now, those who'd compete in this contest too! Even if
the winner's rich fields are far distant, he'll still enjoy
five full revolving seasons to satisfy his requirements—

10. The word I translate as "the body within" (ἐνδίνων, *endinōn*) occurs only here in surviving Greek literature, and from antiquity on there has been debate as to whether it means this, or, more specifically, the vitals or innards: see Richardson 260. Was there in fact a time when such a competitive fencing match was determined by a potentially fatal wound? Both Leaf (2: 429) and, more hesitantly, Richardson, think so. I am inclined to doubt this, not least since both verbs used, ὀρέγω (*oregō*) and ψαύω (*psauō*), are limited to touching, or at most pricking the surface. What we have here is a very slight modification (blood must be drawn) of the normal fencing "hit": so one scholiast. I translate accordingly.

it won't be for lack of iron that his shepherd or plowman
will need to go to the city: this will provide for them."

So he spoke: up jumped Polypoitēs, that staunch fighter,
and godlike Leonteus, a man of mighty strength,
and Aias, Telamōn's son, and noble Epeios.
They stood in line: noble Epeios first took up the weight,
swung it round, and let fly. The Achaians all laughed at him.[11]
Leonteus, scion of Arēs, was the next to take his shot,
and third to throw was huge Aias, Telamōn's son:
with his brawny fist, he got beyond both their marks.
But when Polypoitēs, staunch fighter, got the mass in his hands,
then—as far as an oxherd can fling his throwing stick,[12]
and away it flies, whirling, over the heads of his cattle—
so far, beyond the assembly, he cast it, to great cheering,
and the comrades of strong Polypoitēs rose to their feet
and bore off the prize of their king to the hollow ships.

Then for the archers Achilles offered dark iron:
ten double axes he brought and set out, and ten single,
and some way off set up the mast of a dark-prowed vessel
in the sand, and tethered a fluttering pigeon to it
by a thin cord attached to its foot, then told them that this
was their target. "Whoever hits the fluttering pigeon
will get all the double axes to take back home as prizes,
while the man who misses the bird, but hits the cord,
will win the single axes, since his shot's the less accurate."

So he spoke: up sprang lord Teukros, great in his strength;
up, too, Mērionēs, Idomeneus's worthy henchman.
They took the lots, shook them up in a bronze helmet,
and Teukros drew first place. He promptly let fly
a powerful shot, but had not promised to offer
a fine sacrifice of firstling lambs to the lord Apollo,
so missed the bird—Apollo begrudging him that—

11. From 670–72 it seems clear that shot-putting was yet another area in which Epeios's strength was not equaled by his skill.
12. Richardson (265) cites ancient commentators for the information that such a throwing stick "was equipped with a string for holding it, and a weight at the other end." A modern comparison (J. L. Myres, cited in *JHS* 27 [1907]: 5) is with "the *bolas*, a weapon consisting of a string with one or more stones attached to it, which is used in Spanish America for throwing at and catching cattle."

but struck the thin cord by the bird's foot, where it was tethered,
and the bitter shaft cut it clean through. The pigeon fluttered
high up into the sky, with the cord still hanging loosely
earthward, and all the Achaians gave a loud cheer.
Mērionēs then quickly snatched the bow from Teukros's hand—
he'd been holding an arrow ready while Teukros aimed—
and vowed on the spot to Apollo the deadly archer
that he'd make him a fine sacrifice of firstling lambs.
High up under the clouds he spotted the fluttering pigeon,
and as she circled he hit her in mid-breast under the wing.
The shaft passed clean through, dropped earthward, fixed itself
in the ground in front of his feet, while the bird alit
on the mast of the dark-prowed vessel, and huddled there,
her head hanging down. Her beating wings now drooped
as the life left her limbs, and then, far from the mast
she fell, as the crowd, in rapt amazement, watched.
So Mērionēs collected all ten of the double axes,
while Teukros took the single ones back to the hollow ships.

Then Pēleus's son brought out a far-shadowing spear,
and a flower-embossed cauldron, unfired still, worth an ox,
and set them by the arena, as javelin throwers stood up,
the son of Atreus among them, wide-ruling Agamemnōn,
along with Mērionēs, Idomeneus's worthy henchman.
Then swift-footed noble Achilles spoke up among them:
"Son of Atreus, since we know how far you excel us all,
how much stronger you are, as a spear thrower without rival,
take this prize now, bear it off to the hollow ships;
and the spear let us give to the hero Mērionēs—
that is, if you wish it: this is my suggestion only."

So he spoke: no dissent from the lord of men, Agamemnōn.
To Mērionēs the hero then gave the bronze spear; but his own
splendid prize he handed to the herald Talthybios.