

Dusting off the Classics: Homer's *Iliad*

Richard Sacks – Spring 2022

Handout for session #2 (3/22/22)

Three passages from the catalog of ships in book 2 of the *Iliad*:

Nestor's contingent (2.591-601):

591 And those who dwelt in Pylos and lovely Arēnē;
592 and Thryon, the ford of Alpheios, and well-built Aipy,
593 who occupied Kyparisseis and Amphigeneia,
594 Pteleos, Helos, and Dorion—**where the Muses encountered**
595 **Thamyris the Thracian, and put an end to his singing,**
596 on his way from Oichalia, from the house of Eurytos
597 the Oichalian, for his boast that he'd win, even if the Muses,
598 themselves were to sing against him, the daughters of Zeus
599 of the aegis; but they in their fury maimed him, **deprived him**
600 **of his marvelous singing, made him forget his skill with the lyre—**
601 of these the Gerēnian horseman, **Nestor**, was leader...

Prōtesilāos' contingent (2.695-704):

695 Those who held Phylakē and flowery Pyrasos,
696 Dēmēter's precinct, and Iton, mother of flocks,
697 and seaside Antron and turf-bedded Pteleos: of them
698 warlike **Prōtesilāos** was the commander
699 while he still lived; **but by then black earth already held him.**
700 **His wife, cheeks torn in grief,** was left there in Phylakē
701 with a half-built house, **for a Dardanian slew him**
702 **as he leapt from his ship; the very first of the Achaians.**
703 Yet his men did not go leaderless, though they missed their leader,
704 being mustered by **Podarkēs**, offshoot of Arēs...

Philoktētēs' contingent (2.716-727):

716 Those who dwelt in Mēthōne and Thaumakia,
717 who held Meliboia and rugged Olizon,
718 were commanded by **Philoktētēs**, an experienced archer,
719 with their seven ships, in each of which were embarked
720 fifty rowers, well skilled at hard fighting with the bow.
721 **But he himself lay on an island, racked by violent pains:**
722 **sacred Lēmnos, where the Achaians' sons had left him**
723 **afflicted with a bad wound from a vicious water-serpent.**
724 **There he lay in his agony; but soon the Argives beside**
725 **their ships would have King Philoktētēs very much in mind.**
726 Yet his men did not go leaderless, though they missed their leader,
727 being mustered by Medōn, Oileus's bastard son...

Passages with traditional mythic contexts (from Apollodorus' *Library*):

Thamyris (1.3.3)

"*Thamyris, who excelled in beauty and in minstrelsy, engaged in a musical contest with the Muses, the agreement being that, if he won, he should enjoy them all, but that if he should be vanquished he should be bereft of what they would. So the Muses got the better of him and bereft him both of his eyes and of his minstrelsy.*" Note that as the poet makes clear in the invocation of the Muses immediately preceding the catalog of ships, "I could not report or name them, / not even were ten tongues mine; all in ten mouths, /an unbreakable voice, and a brazen heart within me, / had I not the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus of the aegis, to remind me of all those who came below Ilion" (*Il.*2.488-492). Lattimore elegantly captures this crucial reliance on the Muses for a poet's memory in his translation of lines 599-600: "and [Thamyris'] voice of wonder / they took away, and made him a singer without memory...."

Prōtesilāos (E.3.30):

"*Of the Greeks the first to land from his ship [at Troy] was Protesilaus, and having slain not a few of the barbarians, he fell by the hand of Hector. His wife Laodamia loved him even after his death, and she made an image of him and consorted with it. The gods had pity on her, and Hermes brought up Protesilaus from Hades. On seeing him, Laodamia thought it was himself returned from Troy, and she was glad; but when he was carried back to Hades, she stabbed herself to death.*" Note that Protesilāos is replaced as leader of the Phylakians by Podarkēs whose name means "strong-/swift-footed," a word used in Homer only in the phrase *podarkēs dios Akhilleus* (see item #4 on last week's handout).

Philoktētēs (E.3.23-27 and E.5.8):

"*After putting to sea from Aulis they touched at Tenedos. It was ruled by Tenes...[who] saw them and tried to keep them off by throwing stones, but was killed by Achilles,... though Thetis had forewarned Achilles not to kill Tenes, because he himself would die by the hand of Apollo..., and as they were offering a sacrifice to Apollo, a water-snake approached from the altar and bit Philoctetes; and as the sore did not heal and grew noisome, the army could not endure the stench, and Ulysses, by the orders of Agamemnon, put him ashore on the island of Lemnos, with the bow of Hercules which he had in his possession; and there, by shooting birds with the bow, he subsisted in the wilderness.... [After Achilles' death] Calchas prophesied...that Troy could not be taken unless they had the bow and arrows of Hercules fighting on their side. [So] Ulysses went...to...Lemnos and by...craft...persuaded him to sail to Troy."*