

The Iliad Book 1 & 2
Study Guide
European Classical Literature
Core Course II
Semester 1 (English Hons.)

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The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- The narrative begins after the nine years have passed.
- The Trojan war is fought is between the Greeks and Trojans.
- Several different names have been used for the Greeks.
 - • Danaans
 - • Achaeans
 - • Argives
 - • Pelasgians
- • It is evident that there is no unified Greece at this point in History.
- The Epical invocation sets the tone properly.
- The Book 1 is primarily concerned with the anger(rage) of Achilles.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- There are other alternate names used by Homer:
- • He often calls Menelaus and Agamemnon the **Atreides**(**Atreidai**), i.e. the “sons of Atreus”.
- • Troy is often referred to as **Ilium**(**Ilion**)
- • The Trojans are called **Dardanians**.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- • *The Iliad* leaps **in medias res** (“into the middle of things,” Horace)
- • The epic begins nine years into the war.
- • The Greeks are fighting among themselves as much they are fighting the Trojans.
- • The first word is “**Anger**. . .”

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- The Greeks have captured two beautiful maidens **Chryseis** and Briseis as war prizes.
- • Agamemnon has taken **Chryseis** as “spear-prize” .
- Achilles has possessed Briseis as his reward.
- **Chryseis** is the daughter of the **Chryses** , who is a priest of Sun-God Apollo.
- • This is a grave offense against the god .
- • Chryses tries to reclaim his daughter .
- The Priest offers enormous ransom to free his daughter.
- Agamemnon as a commander of the Greek army has pride in him and thus rebuffs the priest.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- Agamemnon's insult enrages Chrysees very much .
- As a dutiful father he must take action for revenge and to free his daughter.
- Chryses goes down to the beach and prays for help from Apollo.
- The God is pleased and gave ears to his prayer.
- The god sends a plague of “arrows” on the Greeks.
- Greek men and animals begin to die off in large numbers.
- As a result of the Plague , the Greek Camp suffers terribly .

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- ▶ The Greek are at a loss what to do .
- ▶ The Greek chieftains call a council meeting to deliberate over their next move.
- ▶ They Consult Calchas.
- ▶ He is the Prophet and Soothsayer.
- ▶ Calchas reveals the cause of the plague upon the Greek people.
- ▶ It is because of the abduction of Chryseis and the rejection of her father by the Commander Agamemnon.
- ▶ Calchas advises Agamemnon to return Chryseis back to her father .
- ▶ Agamemnon is enraged and unwilling to do that .
- ▶ With the priest Calchas' backing, Achilles blames Agamemnon for the plague.
- ▶ He insults the general, calling him all sorts of names, e.g. "Sack of wine, you with your cur's eyes and your antelope heart!"

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- Agamemnon is adamant and does not calm down himself.
- Achilles , a dutiful warrior , must not bow himself down .
- The clash between Agamemnon and Achilles creates an unnecessary and dismal situation in the Greek Camp.
- The aged **Nestor** counsels that they both should calm down.
- The quarrel resumes between themselves.
- In the end, Agamemnon agrees to return Chryseis to her father .
- But Agamemnon demands Briseis, one of Achilles' spear-prizes in recompense .

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- Stripped of his spear-prize and dignity, Achilles feels himself insulted and must take suitable action.
- He refuses to fight for Agamemnon or the Greek cause any longer.
- He also withdraws his special forces, the **Myrmidons**(“Ant-men”), from the war.
- The meeting breaks up and **Odysseus** leaves to return Chryseis to her father.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- Achilles goes down to the seashore and he is very much depressed.
- He is thinking on the possible way out .
- Thus he decides to convey the matter to his mother.
- Achilles's mother is the sea-nymph Thetis.
- She appears from the mist to listen to the plea of his son .
- Achilles tells her all that has happened, especially how Agamemnon dishonored him by taking Briseis.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- Thetis promises to defend Achilles' cause to Zeus and leaves for Mount Olympus.
- Thetis owes a promise to Zeus , which would force himself to listen to the cause of Achilles.
- In oral poetry, this sort of **recapitulation** is useful .
 - It reminds the listener of what's happening there .
- Odysseus delivers Chryseis to her father.
- Chryses is very happy to get back his daughter.
- The reunion is of father and daughter is very pleasant from the dramatic perspective.
- The Priest requests the Sun-God Apollo to lift the plague from the Greek Camp.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- On Mount Olympus, Thetis finds the gods holding a feast .
- She pulls Zeus aside and beseeches him to help the Trojans against the Greeks.
- Zeus agrees , though reluctant at the very beginning.
- Hera is on the part of the Greek Camp.
- Hera sees her husband speaking in private with Thetis and nodding to her.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- ▶ Hera accuses Zeus of plotting against the Greeks whom she favors over the Trojans (the Judgment of Paris!)
- ▶ Zeus threatens to “lay his inexorable hands upon her,” if she doesn’t “sit down, be still” and obey him
- ▶ • Hera sulks.
- ▶ Like the father –daughter relationship , the mother –son relationship is significant.
- ▶ Like Human Beings , the Gods also do take part.
- ▶ We see the humanization of the Gods.

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- The Human traits are visible in the Gods .
- As the gods' party breaks up and they go to bed, a peace of sorts settles over Olympus and earth.
- Thus, the Book 1 ends on this note of uneasy resolution.
- It is very different from the prayer and plague with which it started .
- The rage of Achilles is the driving force and the guiding spirit in the Iliad Book 1 .

The Iliad(Book 1) at a Glance

- The book is arranged in **ring composition** A B C D C B A
- The first (A) and last (A) element echo each other.
- The elements inside those (B) do also, and so on.
- Ring composition serves several purposes:
 - The symmetrical balance imitates nature and is artistically satisfying
 - The return to A at the end of a section signals closure to the audience.
 - Probably most important, using ring composition helps an oral poet remember where he is in the story.

The Iliad(Book II) at a Glance

- The Book 2 of The Iliad is concerned with the dream of Agamemnon, followed by the testing of the Greek army and the cataloguing of both the forces.
- Zeus sends false dream to Agamemnon in the form of Nestor.
- He Convinces Agamemnon that The Greeks may succeed if they launch a full scale assault on the Trojans.
- Agamemnon wants to test the morale of the Greek army.
- Thus he tells a lie to them he thinks of giving up the war .
- To his dismay, the Greek army eagerly run towards their ship.

The Iliad(Book 2) at a Glance

- Odysseus, the most eloquent of the Greeks, calls them back .
- He reminds them of the past Greek glory and also the prophecy made by Calchas that the Greeks would be victorious.
- Nestor now gives a speech inspiring the Greek army .
- Nestor plays an important part both in Book 1 & II .
- Nestor advises Agamemnon to arrange the Greek army by cities.
- Cataloguing of the Greek army follows.
- The poet singles out the bravest of the Greeks.

The Iliad(Book 2) at a Glance

- Zeus , as promised to help the Trojans, sends a messenger to the Trojan Court.
- The Trojans muster their own troops under the command of Priam's son Hector.
- Cataloguing of the Trojan forces follows.
- Agamemnon musters the Greek troops and marches into battle.
- As the army marches forth, Homer recites a "Catalogue of Heroes," all the various men and tribes fighting at Troy.
- Catalogues are impressive in oral poetry.
- Thus the ending of Book II marks a new beginning for both sides.
- The Greek army's flight to the ships giving up the battle as it was falsely said by Agamemnon, serves many important dramatic purposes.

Probable Questions on The Iliad (Book 1 & II)

- Critically evaluate Homer's The Iliad as an Epic .
- Write an essay on the role of gods in The Iliad.
- Give a character portrayal of Achilles as you find in The Iliad.
- Write a note on the character of Agamemnon.
- Do you think the clash between Agamemnon & Achilles serves a dramatic purpose ? Give reasons with the close reference to the text .
- Attempt a short note on the narrative technique of Homer's The Iliad.
- Do you think the epic invocation sets the tone rightly? Elucidate.
- How would you describe Nestor? What dramatic purpose does he serve ?
- Write briefly on the character of Calchas.
- Describe the dream of Agamemnon in Book 2 of The Iliad.
- Describe the cataloguing of Greek troops in Book 2 of The Iliad.
- Write a note on the Cataloguing of Trojan forces in Book 2 Of The Iliad.

Suggested Readings/ References

- ▶ Howatson, M. C. Ed. *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- ▶ Homer, *The Iliad*. Trans. E. V. Rieu. Ed. Peter Jones. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- ▶ Kirk, G.S. *The Iliad: A Commentary: Volume I, Books 1–4*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.