

The Iliad of Homer,
Books XIII-XXIV
(Volume 2)

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Translated by

Barry Nurcombe

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BOOK XIII

THE BATTLE AT THE SHIPS

Zeús turns his attention from the battle, confident no other Gods will interfere, but Poseidōn takes pity on the Akhaíans. He comes down from Mt. Ídē and, in the form of Kálkhas the seer, encourages the two Aíantes to stand and rally the Argives against the Trojan host. The Argives interlock their spears and overlap their shields. Héktōr is stopped short. Mēriónēs shatters his spear on Deíphobos' shield. Teúkros kills Ímbrios. Héktōr hurls a javelin that misses Teúkros but kills Amphílokhos after Ímbrios' corpse is beheaded by the lesser Aías.

Poseidōn exhorts Idomeneús to stand firm. Mēriónēs, his squire, returns to Idomeneús' tent to get a new spear. Idomeneús meets him and implies that Mēriónēs is slacking. Mēriónēs hotly denies this and Idomeneús reassures him. The two return to the left of the Akhaían line where it is weakest. Idomeneús causes panic among the Trojans, killing Orthryoneús. Aineías and Idomeneús exchange javelin throws and Idomeneús retires, exhausted. Mēriónēs wounds Deíphobos and slays Adámas and Peísandros. Hélenos is wounded by Menélaos and withdraws. Harpaliōn attempts to avenge Peísandros but is killed by Meriónēs. Aléxandros slays Eukhénor with an arrow.

The Trojans to the right are being cut down by the Akhaíans. The Lókrian peltasts with the lesser Aías loose a hail of stones and arrows, shattering the Trojan ranks. Polydámas advises Héktōr to withdraw. Héktōr visits the front and learns that many of his finest warriors are dead or wounded. He finds Páris on the left and rebukes him for these heavy losses. Páris calms him down and the two warriors go to where the battle is most fierce. Héktōr rallies the Trojans and their serried ranks test the Akhaíans.

Aías son of Telamón challenges Héktōr. As he speaks, an eagle soars above, on the right, a propitious omen for the Greeks. Héktōr answers Aías with a chilling threat. He says that the day will be disastrous for the Greeks and that Aías' flesh will glut the Trojan dogs and birds of carrion. Héktōr

leads the Trojans with a mighty roar. The Greeks shout their warcry and await the Trojan onslaught.

1 When Zeús brought Héktōr and the Trojan host
2 Up to the ships, He left them all to pain
3 And misery without a pause and turned
4 His shining eyes a long way off from them.
5 He looked down on the land of Thracians who
6 Herd horses, and upon the Mysoí who
7 Fight hand to hand, the Hippomolgoí who
8 Subsist upon the milk of mares, and on
9 The Abioí, most virtuous of men.
10 He did not turn His shining eyes at all
11 Toward Troy, for He did not expect that any
12 Of the Deathless Ones would dare to aid
13 The Trojan or the Dánaan warriors.
14
15 But Poseidōn Earthshaker was keeping (10)
16 A careful watch; for He was seated on
17 The highest summit of Samothraké,
18 The wooded isle, in wonder at the war,
19 As all of Ídē could be seen from there—
20 The city of King Príamos and the
21 Akhaían ships. Lord Poseidōn had come
22 Out of the sea to sit up there, and He
23 Took pity on the Akhaíans who were

24 Invested by the Trojan host, for He
25 Felt great resentment at the Lord of Gods
26 And men. At once, He came with rapid strides
27 Down from the rocky mountain top—the hills
28 And woods were shaken underneath the feet
29 Immortal of the coming Poseidōn.
30 Three steps He took and on the fourth He reached
31 His goal Aigai, where there had been prepared (20)
32 For Him, within the plummet of the sea,
33 A gleaming, indestructible palace.
34 He harnessed on his chariot two steeds
35 Both fleet of hoof and shod in bronze, whose manes
36 Were long and gold. He donned a golden cloak
37 And grasped a well-wrought golden whip, got up
38 Upon on his chariot, and left to drive
39 Upon the waves. The dolphins in the sea
40 Disported from their lairs on every side
41 Beneath, nor did they fail to recognize
42 Their Lord. The ocean parted with delight—
43 They flew so swiftly that the bronzed axle
44 Underneath did not get wet, but took (30)
45 Him to the ships of the Akhaian host
46 Upon his bounding steeds.

47 There is a grotto
48 In the soundings of the sea, between
49 Ímbros and Ténedos, where Poseidōn,
50 The Earthshaker, reined in his steeds and loosed
51 Them from the chariot. He threw beside
52 Them, as their food, ambrosial fodder while
53 Around their hooves he fastened hobbles made
54 Of gold, unable to be broken or
55 Undone, so they would wait there for their Lord.
56 And then he journeyed to the army of
57 The Greeks.
58 The men of Troy were eager to
59 Be led by Héktōr, son of Príamos. (40)
60 As though they were a wildfire or a squall,
61 They all joined in the noisy battlecry,
62 Expecting they would take the Argive ships
63 And slaughter all the bravest warriors.
64 But Poseidōn, the Earthshaker and Mover
65 Of the Earth, emerged out of the soundings
66 Of the sea, assuming Kálkhas' form
67 And tireless voice, and first addressed the brave
68 Aíantes who were both on fire for war.
69

70 *O Aiantes, if you can heed your strength*
71 *And not the icy chill of panicked flight,*
72 *You'll save the Akhaians. The Trojan throng*
73 *Have swarmed across the mighty wall. In any (50)*
74 *Other place, I'd not be so concerned*
75 *About the prowess of the Trojan host,*
76 *Because the well-greaved Greeks would block them all;*
77 *But I'm concerned that we shall suffer a*
78 *Defeat right here where Héktōr rages like*
79 *A fire with lust for battle, for he vaunts*
80 *That he's the scion of Almighty Zeús.*
81 *May One of the Almighty Gods inspire*
82 *The two of you to stand fast here and rally*
83 *All the rest. And then, however eager*
84 *He may be, it's possible you'll force*
85 *Him from the ships—despite the fact that Zeús*
86 *Olympian is rousing him.*

87

88

And then

89 The Earth-Shaker touched both of them with his (60)
90 Sceptre, filled both of them with strength, and lightened
91 Their two feet below and arms above.
92 Then Poseidōn, himself, rose up to go.

93

94 —And as a fleet-winged hawk takes flight from off

95 A soaring, barren rock to chase another

96 Bird across the plain—

97

98 Just so the God

99 Who Shakes the Earth swooped off away from them.

100 Lord Aías, fleet-foot son of Oïleús,

101 Was first to recognize the God. At once,

102 He spoke to Aías, son of Telamón:

103

104 *Aías, one of the Gods has come to us,*105 *As though He were a soothsayer, to urge*106 *The two of us to fight beside the ships.*107 *But He is not the seer Kálkhas—no— (70)*108 *I saw the traces of his gait as He*109 *Went off, and it's not hard to recognize*110 *A God. The spirit in my chest incites*111 *Me all the more to go to war and fight;*112 *My feet and arms below are quivering*113 *With zeal.*

114

115 And Aías, son of Telamón,

116 Replied:

117

118 *I feel the same. My lusty hands*

119 *Pulsate with eagerness around the spear;*

120 *My power surges; down below my legs*

121 *Are strong; and I am ready to do battle*

122 *Single-handedly, against the eager, (80)*

123 *Staunch Héktōr, the son of Priamos.*

124

125 While they were talking in this way, their hearts

126 Instilled by Poseidōn with lust for war,

127 The God meanwhile spurred on the Akhaïans

128 Who sought to rest beside the rapid ships.

129 Their limbs had been undone by painful toil (85)

130 While those who saw the Trojans swarm across

131 The wall were sorely grieved and wept because

132 They did not think that they'd escape their doom.

133 The Earthshaker went rapidly to them

134 And spurred the mighty battle lines. He first (90)

135 Urged Teükros, Léitos, Penéleōs,

136 The warrior Thóas, Dēípyros,

137 Mērionēs, and bold Antilokhos,

138 All masters of the battle cry. He called

139 On them with wingéd words:

140

141 *For shame, Argives—*

142 *Mere boys! It is your fighting spirit that*

143 *I trusted in to save our ships. If you*

144 *Forsake this battle then the day has come*

145 *For you to be defeated by the foe.*

146 *Alas, this is a dire calamity*

147 *I see with my eyes. I never thought*

148 *That this would come to pass: the Trojan host (100)*

149 *Has come upon our ships.*

150

151 *—The Trojans used*

152 *To be as timid and as cowardly as deer*

153 *Who roam the woods so fearfully and have*

154 *No will to fight, and who are quarry to*

155 *The leopards, jackals, and the wolves —*

156

157 *Just so,*

158 *The Trojans in the past did not have heart*

159 *To stand against the Argive strength of arms—*

160 *No, not at all—but now they fight so far*

161 *From Ílios, against the hollow ships,*

162 *Because our leader is inept. Our troops*
163 *Are so bereft of heart and trust that they*
164 *Prefer to die beside the ships than ward*
165 *The foe from them. But even if the fault (110)*
166 *Belongs entire to Agamémnōn, Lord*
167 *Of men, who treated Akhilleús with such*
168 *Disdain, **that** is no reason for us all*
169 *To quit the battlefield. So let us mend*
170 *Our ways as soon as possible, because*
171 *The hearts of brave men are redeemable.*
172 *So do not jettison your manliness,*
173 *You men who are the finest in the force.*
174 *For my part I would not rebuke a man*
175 *So cowardly that he deserts the fight.*
176 *But I feel just resentment at you in*
177 *My heart. You weaklings, you will soon make something (120)*
178 *Shameful even worse, because you are*
179 *Remiss. Come, each of you must nurse a sense*
180 *Of honour and of righteous rage because*
181 *The fierce clash of armies has begun.*
182 *The mighty Héktōr, master of the cry*
183 *Of battle, now has wrecked the mighty gate*
184 *And smashed the wooden bar to smithereens,*

185 *To bring the struggle up to you.*
186
187 So when
188 The Earthmover exhorted and spurred on the Greeks,
189 Their sturdy ranks stood dense and fast around
190 The Aíantes. And if the dread Árēs
191 Had come among them, he'd have found no fault;
192 Nor would have Athénē who drives men on
193 To war. Their finest warriors stood fast
194 And waited for the godlike Héktōr and
195 The Trojan charge, all interlocking targe
196 With targe, and shield with overlapping shield. (130)
197 So shield pressed shield, and helm pressed helm, and man
198 Pressed man. The nodding helmets, horsehair-decked,
199 Made contact with their neighbours' gleaming side-
200 Plates as the close-packed men stood firm beside
201 Each other. Pushing forth their interlocking
202 Spears, their minds were fixed upon attack—
203 So eager were they for the clash of arms.
204
205 The Trojans led straight on by Héktōr in
206 His eagerness advanced en masse.
207

208 —And as
209 A rolling stone, thrust from a beetling rocky
210 Cliff face by a river swollen from
211 A storm and melted snow, shears off the grip
212 Of stones upon the river bed, and woods
213 Resound as, leaping from above, the rock (140)
214 Flies off unchecked until it reaches level
215 Ground and, though still eager, rolls no more—
216
217 Just so, Lord Héktōr threatened for a time
218 That he would easily advance through to
219 The sea and sack the Argive camp and ships.
220 But he was stopped short when he came upon
221 The close-set line of battle where the sons
222 Of the Akhaíans brandished sword and spear
223 To thrust their foe away. Rebuffed and shaken
224 He withdrew but gave a piercing cry
225 For all the Trojan host to hear:
226
227 *Trojans,*
228 *Lýkians and Dárdanoi who battle*
229 *Hand to hand, stand fast by me! The Greeks (150)*
230 *Won't hold me up for long. They dress their ranks*

231 *In very close array, but I predict*
232 *They will be forced to fall back from my lance—*
233 *If it is true the noblest of the Gods,*
234 *The Thunderer and Husband of Hērā,*
235 *Has urged me on.*

236

237 And with these words he stirred
238 The strength and heart of every man. And then
239 Dēíphobos, the son of Príamos,
240 Came boldly out among the host. He held
241 In front a light round shield and skilfully
242 Advanced behind the screen. Mēríonēs
243 Took aim and hurled his gleaming javelin. (160)
244 Although he did not miss the oxhide shield,
245 The bronze lance did not penetrate right through—
246 The shaft snapped at the socket of the spear.
247 The bold Dēíphobos held out his shield
248 At arm's length, for he feared the javelin
249 Of warlike Mēríonēs. But the hero
250 Mēríonēs, deeply vexed at both
251 His lack of triumph and the breaking of
252 His spear, fell back among his company
253 Of friends and set out by the Argive huts

254 And ships to fetch the long spear he had left
255 Behind inside his tent.
256 The others went
257 On fighting and a never-ending roar
258 Arose. Then Teûkros son of Telamón
259 Was first to kill his man, the spearbearing (170)
260 Lord Ímbrios the son of Méntōr who
261 Was rich in horses, and who had his home
262 In Pédaion before the sons of the
263 Akhaíans came. Lord Ímbrios was wed
264 To Mēdesikástē, an out-of-wedlock
265 Child of Príamos. But when the Dánaan
266 Ships arrived he went back to the town
267 Of Ílios, was honoured as a noble
268 By the populace, and dwelt within
269 The palace of King Príamos who treated
270 Him as one of his own family.
271 But now the son of Telamón struck him
272 Below the eardrum with his long-shade lance.
273 And when he drew the weapon out he fell
274
275 —As though he were an ash tree on a peak
276 Seen far away, that has been cut down with (180)

277 A bronze axe in an open space, and brings
278 Its tender foliage to earth—
279
280 And as
281 He fell the iridescent bronze of his
282 Cuirass rang out. Then Teûkros rushed to strip
283 His corpse but Héktôr hurled a javelin
284 At Teûkros who remarked it on its way
285 And dodged the bronzed missile by a hair.
286 It hit Amphímakhos, the scion of
287 Ktéatos the son of Aktôr, on the chest,
288 As he was coming on. He thudded as
289 He fell, the armour ringing on his corpse.
290 Then Héktôr rushed to rip the fitted helmet
291 Off the temples of Amphímakhos,
292 The lionhearted warrior. Lord Aías
293 Thrust his shining spear as Héktôr came, (190)
294 But did not reach his flesh at any point,
295 For no skin could be seen since it was all
296 Protected by his fearsome bronze cuirass.
297 He struck the central boss of Héktôr's shield
298 And knocked him back with brutal force. Héktôr
299 Retired from the two dead bodies and

300 The Argives dragged them out— Lords Stikhíos
301 And Menestheús, commanders of the Greeks,
302 Bore off the body of Amphimakhos.
303 The Aíantes, imbued with lust for war,
304 Bore Ímbrios back to the Argive host
305
306 —As two lions snatch a goat from saw-toothed dogs
307 And carry it across the thick brushwood
308 By holding it on high above the earth (200)
309 Between their jaws—
310
311 Just so, the Aíantes
312 Held Ímbrios aloft and stripped him of
313 His arms. While, angered at the killing of
314 Amphímakhos, the son of Oíleús
315 Beheaded Ímbrios and, whirling round,
316 Propelled the skull as if it were a ball
317 Down through the throng. It landed in the dust
318 At Héktōr's feet.
319 Poseidōn was enraged
320 Because his grandson had been killed in deadly
321 Battle strife. He went beside the tents
322 And ships to buoy the Akhaíans and stir

- 323 Up trouble for the Trojan men-at-arms. (210)
324 The famous spearman, Idomeneús,
325 Had just come from the tent of a comrade
326 Who had been speared behind the knee—His friends
327 Had borne him in, still eager for the fray.
328 Idomeneús enjoined the healers as
329 He left.
330 The Earthshaker assumed the voice
331 Of Thóas, son of Andraimṓn, who ruled
332 The Aitōloí in all Pleurṓn and lofty
333 Kalydṓn where he was honoured by
334 The people as a God:
335
336 *Idomeneús,*
337 *The Kretan counsellor, where are your threats—*
338 *The threats the sons of the Akhaïans used*
339 *To fling upon their Trojan enemy? (220)*
340
341 Idomeneús, the leader of the men
342 Of Krētē, spoke straightforwardly to Him:
343
344 *Thóas, so far as I can see, nobody*
345 *Is to blame for our default. We all*

346 *Of us know how to fight and none of us*
347 *Is paralyzed by fear or without heart,*
348 *And none of us has fallen back to turn*
349 *From this grim war. But somehow the*
350 *Almighty Son of Krónos wanted it*
351 *To be like this—to waste the nameless sons*
352 *Of the Akhaïans, far from home. Thóas,*
353 *Until this time you've stood your ground against*
354 *The foe, and spurred the others on if you*
355 *Should see them wavering. So don't stop now (230)*
356 *From urging everyone.*

357

358 *And Poseidōn*359 *The Earth-Shaker replied:*

360

361 *Idomeneús,*

362 *May that man who, this day, would willingly*
363 *Refuse to fight, never get home from Troy*
364 *But rankle here a plaything for the dogs.*
365 *So come now, bring your armour here. Though we*
366 *Are only two, if we are quick we'll make*
367 *A difference. Concerted valour strikes*
368 *A telling blow when enemies are weak,*

369 *And we two know the art of war against*

370 *The noblest foe.*

371

372 And, with these words, the God

373 Plunged back into the throng of fighting men.

374

375 When Idomeneús got back to his tent (240)

376 He donned his handsome armour, took two spears

377 And left. And like a bolt of lightning brandished

378 By Almighty Zeús on Ólympos

379 As portent for mankind, the rays of light

380 Flashed from the bronze on Idomeneús' chest

381 As he rushed off to fight—

382

383 Mēriónēs,

384 His noble henchman, met him by the tent

385 When he'd come back to fetch a javelin.

386 The mighty Idomeneús spoke to him:

387

388 *O fleet of foot Mēriónēs, the son*

389 *Of Mólos, dearest friend, why ever did*

390 *You leave the battleground to come back here? (250)*

391 *Have you been injured by a missile, or*

392 *Do you bring me a message? For I long*
393 *Not to sit idle in the tent but rather*
394 *To join battle once again.*

395

396 His squire

397 Mēriónēs, a prudent man, replied:

398

399 *Idomeneús, the counsellor of bronze-*
400 *Clad Krétan warriors, I came to find*
401 *A missile in your tent for, as it is,*
402 *The one I had before I shattered when*
403 *It struck the solid shield of arrogant*
404 *Deíphobos.*

405

406 Idomeneús replied

407 To him:

408

409 *Of weapons that you seek you'll find*
410 *Not one but twenty in my tent—against (260)*
411 *The wall that faces to the sunlit front—*
412 *They're Trojan spears that I stripped from the men*
413 *I killed. I never think to stand and fight*
414 *Afar off from the enemy, and so*

415 *I have collected shields, and spears, and helms,*
416 *And gleaming corselets.*

417

418 His prudent squire

419 Mēriónēs replied:

420

421 *I too have Trojan*

422 *Weapons in my hut and blackened ship,*

423 *But not at hand. I do not think myself*

424 *Bereft of strength—I take my stand beside*

425 *The foremost ranks of men in war that brings*

426 *Renown, whenever battle strife has come. (270)*

427 *In doing so, perhaps I'm overlooked*

428 *By others of the bronze-clad Akhaians,*

429 *But this I think you know for sure yourself.*

430

431 Idomeneús, the Krétan leader said:

432

433 *I know you to be brave. Why is there need*

434 *To speak of this? If now beside the ships*

435 *Brave men were chosen for an ambushade*

436 *In which the manliness of warriors*

437 *Is put to test, and when it is revealed*

438 *Just who is cowardly and who is brave.*
439 *—The coward's face turns now one colour then*
440 *The next; his craven spirit's not constrained*
441 *To keep him still; and so he fidgets and (280)*
442 *Rocks from one foot onto the other while*
443 *His heart beats wildly in his chest because*
444 *He senses the approach of Doom; his teeth*
445 *Begin to chatter—But the brave man's skin*
446 *Does not change hue, nor is he much alarmed*
447 *When first he takes his place in ambushade,*
448 *Because he longs to join the clash of arms—*
449 *No man could criticize **your** strength of arm,*
450 *For if in battle you were harmed, the wound*
451 *Would not be on the nape of neck or back,*
452 *But on your foremost chest or belly as (290)*
453 *You charged ahead in company with the front-*
454 *Line warriors. But come, let's speak no more*
455 *Of this like little boys, lest one of us*
456 *Become resentful. Up, my friend! Go to*
457 *My tent and choose yourself a mighty spear!*
458
459 *When he said this, Mēriónēs, a man*
460 *On par with fleet Árēs, at once retrieved*

461 A bronze-tipped spear out of the tent and followed

462 Idomeneús against the foe.

463

464 —As Árēs, city-sacker, bane of men,

465 Will go in quest of war, and His dear Son,

466 The mighty, fearless Rout, accompanies him

467 And puts to flight the staunchest warrior. (300)

468 The two are armed to come from Thrace to fight

469 The Ephýrans or stalwart Phlégyans—

470 They give renown to one side and a deaf

471 Ear to the other—

472

473 Just so Mēriónēs

474 And Idomeneús, the leaders of

475 Their men, went into battle helmetted

476 In gleaming bronze. Mēriónēs was first

477 To speak:

478

479 *O son of Deukalíon, where*

480 *Is it that you desire to join the fray?*

481 *Toward the right, or in the middle, or*

482 *Upon the left? For on the left is where*

483 *I reckon that the long-haired Greeks are most*

484 *Exposed.*

485

486 Idomeneús replied to him: (310)

487

488 *Others are at hand to guard the ships*

489 *Toward the middle of the Argive line —*

490 *The Aíantes and Teûkros, finest archer*

491 *Of the Akhaians and steadfast in*

492 *A fight. They'll give the rampant Héktōr, son*

493 *Of Priamos, his fill of war, despite*

494 *His overwhelming might. It will be hard*

495 *For him, however eager he may be,*

496 *To overwhelm their strength and fortitude*

497 *And set the ships on fire unless, indeed,*

498 *The Son of Krónos hurls a flaming bolt*

499 *Of lightning down upon the fleet. Aías, (320)*

500 *The son of Telamón, will never yield*

501 *To anyone who eats Dēmētēr's corn*

502 *And could be cut to shreds with bronze-tipped spears*

503 *And mighty stones. For though in speed of foot*

504 *He can't compete, he'd never yield in close*

505 *Combat to Akhilleús himself, the breaker*

506 *Of the ranks. So let us keep like this*