

## BACKGROUND

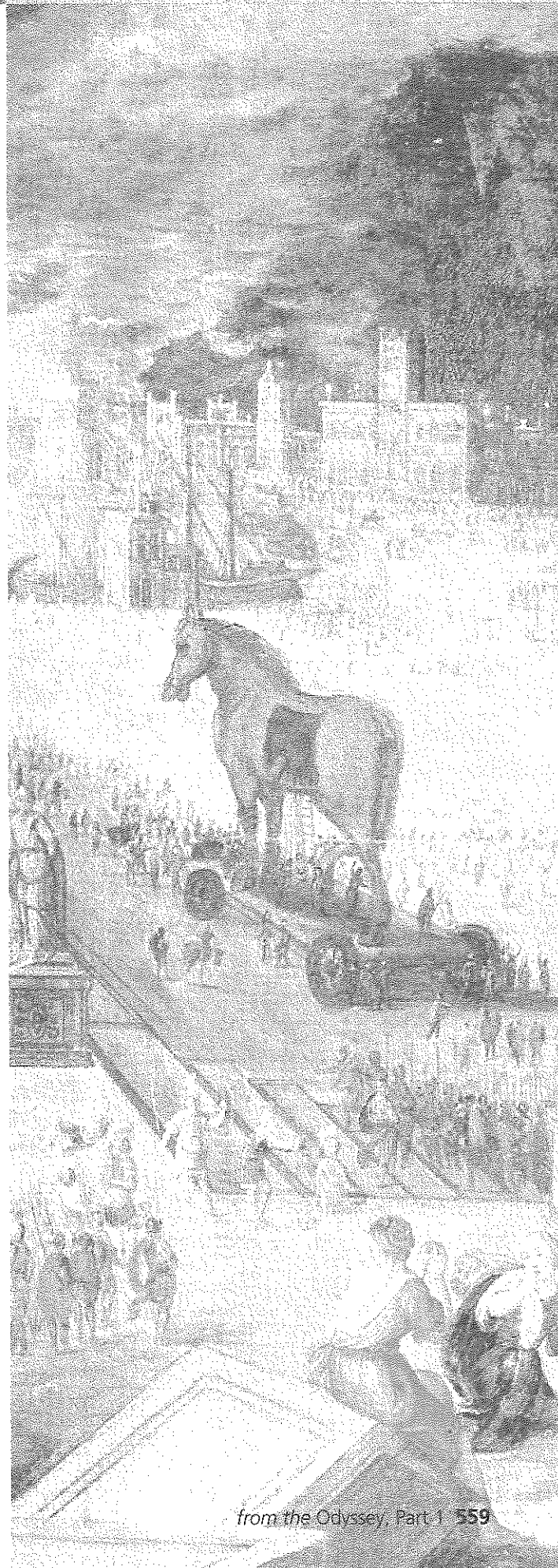
### The Trojan War

In the *Iliad*, Homer focuses on the final year of the Trojan War; in the *Odyssey*, he tells what happened to one of the key warriors afterward.

**It Begins With Strife** According to legend, the Trojan War began when Eris, goddess of strife, brought among the gods a golden apple inscribed “To the fairest.” Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite all wanted that apple. They asked Paris, son of the king of Troy, to decide which of them deserved it. Each tried to bribe him: Hera offered power; Athena, wisdom; and Aphrodite, the world’s most beautiful woman. The famous Judgment of Paris was that Aphrodite was the fairest. Soon, on a diplomatic mission to Sparta, Paris met Helen, the world’s most beautiful woman and Sparta’s queen. With Aphrodite’s help, the two fell in love and eloped. When Menelaus (mehn uh LAY uhs), king of Sparta, could not persuade the Trojans to send his wife, Helen, back, he went to his brother Agamemnon, who called on all the Greek rulers to honor a pact and go to Troy to fight to bring Helen home. The Greeks agreed and sailed to Troy. They laid siege to the city but for ten long years could not breach its impregnable walls.

**War Crimes and Punishment** Agamemnon might have been a more powerful king and Achilles (uh KIHL eez) a superior warrior, but Odysseus, king of Ithaca, was cleverest of them all. He devised a scheme in which the Greeks left a great wooden horse outside the walls of Troy and tricked the Trojans into taking it inside. That night, the Greeks hiding inside the horse—Odysseus among them—slipped out, unlocked the gates of the city, and allowed their fellow warriors to come swarming in to defeat the Trojans and sack the city. The fighting was brutal and destructive. King Priam (PRY uhm), Paris’s father, for example, was killed while he was praying. The Greeks’ behavior angered many of the gods, who made their voyages home very difficult.

Odysseus was no exception. Following the Greek victory, he set sail for Ithaca but encountered a series of perilous misadventures that made his journey last ten years. It is this difficult, adventure-filled journey that Homer’s *Odyssey* recounts.



## CHARACTERS

**Alcinous** (al SIHN oh uhs)—king of the Phaeacians, to whom Odysseus tells his story

**Odysseus** (oh DIHS ee uhs)—king of Ithaca

**Calypso** (kuh LIHP soh)—sea goddess who loves Odysseus

**Circe** (SUR see)—enchantress who helps Odysseus

**Zeus** (zoos)—king of the gods

**Apollo** (uh POL oh)—god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine

**Agamemnon** (ag uh MEHM non)—king and leader of Greek forces

**Poseidon** (poh SY duhn)—god of sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea

**Athena** (uh THEE nuh)—goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare

**Polyphemus** (pol ih FEE muhs)—the Cyclops who imprisons Odysseus

**Laertes** (lay UR teez)—Odysseus' father

**Cronus** (KROH nuhs)—Titan ruler of the universe; father of Zeus

**Perimedes** (pehr uh MEE deez)—member of Odysseus' crew

**Eurylochus** (yoo RIHL uh kuhs)—another member of the crew

**Tiresias** (ty REE see uhs)—blind prophet who advises Odysseus

**Persephone** (puhr SEHF uh nee)—wife of Hades

**Telemachus** (tuh LEHM uh kuhs)—Odysseus and Penelope's son

**Sirens** (SY ruhzh)—creatures whose songs lure sailors to their deaths

**Scylla** (SIHL uh)—sea monster of gray rock

**Charybdis** (kuh RIHB dihs)—enormous and dangerous whirlpool

**Lampetia** (lahm PEE shuh)—nymph

**Hermes** (HUR meez)—herald and messenger of the gods

**Eumaeus** (yoo MEE uhs)—old swineherd and friend of Odysseus

**Antinous** (ant IHN oh uhs)—leader among the suitors

**Eurynome** (yoo RIHN uh mee)—housekeeper for Penelope

**Penelope** (puh NEHL uh pee)—Odysseus' wife

**Eurymachus** (yoo RIH muh kuhs)—suitor

**Amphinomus** (am FIHN uh muhs)—suitor

SCAN FOR  
MULTIMEDIA 

*In the opening verses, Homer addresses the muse of epic poetry. He asks her help in telling the tale of Odysseus.*

Sing in me, Muse,<sup>1</sup> and through me tell the story  
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,  
the wanderer, harried for years on end,  
after he plundered the stronghold  
5 on the proud height of Troy.<sup>2</sup>

He saw the townlands  
and learned the minds of many distant men,  
and weathered many bitter nights and days  
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only  
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.  
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them.  
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—

## NOTES

1. **Muse** (myooz) any one of the nine goddesses of the arts.

**plundered** (PLUHN duhrd) v. took something by force

2. **Troy** city in northwest Asia Minor; site of the Trojan War.

NOTES

3. **Helios** (HEE lee ohs) sun god.

4. **Zeus** (zoos) king of the gods.

children and fools, they killed and feasted on  
the cattle of Lord Helios,<sup>3</sup> the Sun,  
and he who moves all day through heaven  
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return.  
Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,<sup>4</sup>  
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.