

## The Cypria

The *Cypria*—in eleven books by Stasinus or Hegesias<sup>1</sup>—told about the events leading up to the *Iliad*. Exactly where, in Greek mythology, the *Cypria* began can only be surmised. In all probability, it began by interweaving new narrative threads into the fabric of pre-existing tales. The story of the marriage of Thetis, the sea nymph and daughter of Neleus (the “Old Man of the Sea”), was extant long before the *Cypria* was fashioned. This belonged to the narrative tradition concerning the heroic king Peleus, her husband. In the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, Hera (the Olympian wife and sister of Zeus) reminds Thetis of the event:

Do not forget, Thetis,  
how it was I that reared you from infancy, and loved you  
more than all other sea nymphs that dwell in the salt depths  
because you would not bed, for all his urgent longing,  
with Zeus—oh, I know him, that’s what he’s always up to,  
sleeping around with women, mortal or immortal—  
but out of respect for me (*and* because you were scared silly)  
you kept him at bay; and he then swore a tremendous  
oath, that no deathless god would ever call you wife.  
Yet he still, even so, kept at you, very much against your will,  
till reverend Themis spelled out the truth of the matter to him,  
telling how he [Thetis’s husband] was destined to sire a son of better  
stuff than his father. So then, even though he still wanted you,  
fear made him give over, scared lest some rival oust him  
as king of the gods: he wanted to keep his rule forever.  
But I gave you for husband the best of earthly men,  
to let you enjoy a marriage that pleased your heart  
and bear children; I asked to your wedding feast the whole  
company of the gods, with my own hands I lifted  
the bridal torch, all because of that kind respect you showed me.

(4.790-809)<sup>2</sup>

At their wedding feast, the gods brought Peleus gifts. Cheiron, the Centaur, gave a stout ash spear, which Athena had polished and Hephaestus had fitted with a bronze head. Poseidon gave immortal horses. Zeus himself, however, did not attend, but rather—as the first thread in the *Cypria* tells us—he sent down Eris (goddess of strife and discord) with a golden apple, upon which was written “For the Fairest.” Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite each contended for this recognition, but Peleus refused to bestow it. At Zeus’s command, Hermes took the apple and led the three goddesses to a shepherd on Mount Ida.

Years earlier, when queen Hecuba was about to give birth to her second son<sup>3</sup>, she dreamed that he would be the cause of Troy's destruction. To prevent this from happening, Priam, the king of Troy, gave the new-born baby to Agelaus, a servant, to expose on Ida. Agelaus, however, named the child Paris, and raised him to be a shepherd. When grown, he married the mountain nymph Oenone and discovered his true identity.

On Ida, Hermes gave Paris the apple and demanded that he give it to the fairest of the three goddesses. Each goddess promised Paris precious gifts. Hera promised a vast kingdom; Athena promised great victories in battle; Aphrodite promised the most beautiful woman in the world as his wife. Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite and, in doing so, brought upon himself the resentment of Hera and Athena.

Some time later<sup>4</sup> Aphrodite commanded Paris to build ships and set sail with her son (who is also the son of Anchises), Aeneas. First, she brought Paris to Lacedaemon, where he was entertained by Castor and Polydeuces (or Pollux), the sons of king Tyndareus and brothers of Helen. When Paris and Aeneas again set sail, they were joined by Helen's cousins, Idas and Lynceus. Together, they arrived at the home of Menelaus, king of Sparta, and his wife Helen. On the tenth day of their visit, Menelaus was summoned to Crete on urgent family business, and in his absence, Helen was left in charge of entertaining the guests. Idas and Lynceus, however, soon decided to return home,<sup>5</sup> leaving Helen alone with her Trojan guests. Aphrodite then inflamed the passions of Helen and Paris and caused them to fall in love. Taking advantage of Menelaus's absence, Paris robs him, taking from his home his greatest treasures, including Helen herself.

Although Hera, in resentment against Paris, brought a storm against his ships and pushed them off course, eventually, he and Helen arrived at Troy, where their marriage was celebrated.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Zeus had sent Iris to Menelaus to inform him of what had transpired at his home. In haste, he returned to Sparta, but only to confirm the awful truth. Together with the king of Mycenae, his brother Agamemnon, Menelaus planned an assault on Ilium.<sup>7</sup> All the Achaean warlords, with their crews, met at Aulis. From this port, the armada set sail and arrived at Teuthrania, in Mysia, south of Ilium. Mistaking this city for Troy, the Achaeans

destroyed it. The king of Teuthrania, Telephus, son of Heracles, killed Thersander, son of Polynices, before being himself wounded in his thigh by a spear thrown by Achilles. When the Achaeans, having become aware of their error, depart from Mysia, a storm scattered their fleet. The “Myrmidons” (descendants of the Thessalian patriarch Myrmidon) disembarked at Scyros, where Achilles married Deidameia, the daughter of the king of Scyros, Lycomedes. Here Achilles fathered a son, Neoptolemus.<sup>8</sup>

Agamemnon and Achilles returned to Argos, perplexed as to how to find their way to Troy. This problem was resolved by the arrival of Telephus, the former king of Teuthrania. The wound that he had received from Achilles’s spear would not heal. Seeking aid, Telephus consulted an oracle of Apollo, which informed him that he would be healed when the one who had wounded him would turn physician. Telephus, therefore, disguised as a beggar, set sail for Argos in search of Achilles. There Telephus promised to direct the Achaean armada toward Ilium, if Achilles would heal him. This Achilles did by scraping some rust off of his spear into Telephus’s wounded thigh.

Ultimately, the fleet reassembled at Aulis.<sup>9</sup> There Agamemnon participated in a hunt. Shooting a stag, he boasted, “Artemis could not have done it better.” This angered the goddess, who retaliated by sending contrary winds that prevented the Achaean fleet from leaving the harbor. Calchas, the Achaean prophet, informed Agamemnon that Artemis could be appeased only by the sacrifice of his loveliest daughter. Agamemnon sent Odysseus and Talthybius as messengers to his wife Clytemnestra (Helen’s half-sister), at Mycenae, telling her to send Iphigeneia to Aulis in order that he might confer her upon Achilles as a wife in reward for his military service. According to one tradition, when Agamemnon was about to sacrifice his daughter, Artemis snatched her away, transporting her to Tauris (in the vicinity of what is now the port of Balaklava, in the Crimea), where she appointed Iphigenia as a priestess in her temple. (Some sources add that Artemis gave Iphigenia immortality.) The earlier tradition, however, is that Agamemnon did in fact sacrifice Iphigenia,<sup>10</sup> and in doing so appeased the anger of Artemis. In any event, the Argives certainly believed that Iphigenia had been sacrificed. This sacrifice having been made, the winds abated and the Achaean fleet prepared to set sail. It is, perhaps, at this time that the incident of the serpent and sparrows took place, which the prophet Calchas interpreted (*Iliad* 2.355-89).<sup>11</sup>

Before reaching Ilium, the fleet landed at Tenedos. Before landing, Thetis, the mother of Achilles, had warned her son that he must not harm Tenes, the king of Tenedos, for Tenes was a favorite of Apollo. However when Tenes saw the Achaean ships attempting to land, he stood on the shore and threw stones at them. Achilles, not knowing the identity of this person, killed him. Afterwards, the Achaeans sacrificed to Apollo; but, while gathering wood for the fire, Philoctetes was bitten by a snake. He was carried back onto his ship, but the stench of his wound became so odious that Agamemnon ordered Odysseus to remove Philoctetes from Tenedos and set him ashore on the island of Lemnos, leaving with him the bow of Heracles for protection and hunting.

Following this episode, Odysseus and Menelaus were sent as envoys to Ilium, where they addressed a Trojan assembly and demanded the restoration of Helen and other property of Menelaus. The Trojans not only refused, but threatened to kill the two envoys. Odysseus and Menelaus were saved only by the intervention of Antenor. When Agamemnon learned of the Trojans' response, he commanded the landing of the fleet at Ilium. Meanwhile, the Trojans had gathered on the shore to await the arrival of the Achaeans. Achilles, having been warned by his mother not to be the first to set foot upon Ilium—for the first Achaean to enter the fight would be the first to die—allowed Protesilaus this dubious honor. Protesilaus, having leaped ashore, immediately killed a few of the enemy, but was then himself killed by Hector. When Achilles had seen the fall of Protesilaus, he sat ashore with his Myrmidons and, throwing a stone, killed Cycnus—whom, as the son of Poseidon, the Trojans had supposed to be immortal. Amazed at the death of Cycnus, the Trojans were filled with fear and fled back into their city. The Achaeans pursued, killing many.

The Trojans, being outnumbered and afraid of Achilles, refused to meet the Achaeans in battle, but instead remained inside the gates of Troy. Achilles approached the city by night and captured Lycaon, whom he afterwards sold into slavery at Lemnos. Achilles also made his way to Mt. Ida, where he found and killed Mestor, a son of king Priam. Afterwards, he led his men in raids against many neighboring towns. Meanwhile, allies (perhaps, confederates in the Hittite empire) had arrived to aid the Trojans.

The *Cypria* leads up to the second part of the Epic Cycle of Troy, the *Iliad*. Following the *Iliad* is the *Aethiopis*, which tells of the Achaean struggle against additional Trojan allies, led by the Amazon Penthesileia and by the Ethiopian Memnon. It includes the death of and funeral games for Achilles, and concludes with the contest between Great Ajax and Odysseus for the armor of Achilles. The *Little Iliad* picks up the narrative with the madness of Ajax and tells of the arrival and deeds of Achaean heroes Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. It tells of the death of Paris, the apparent departure of the Achaeans, and the Trojan celebration after bringing the wooden horse into their city. In the *Sack of Ilium* we are given the fateful outcome of the decision to bring the horse within the gates of Troy, including the deaths of Laocoon and Polyxena. Following the *Sack of Ilium* is the account of the *Returns*, which—although it is given very brief consideration by Quintus of Smyrna—was comprised of at least two separate narratives, the *Return of the Atridae* and the *Odyssey*. The Epic Cycle concluded with the *Telegony*, an extension of the *Odyssey*, telling of Odysseus's journey to Thesprotia and of his inadvertent murder by an illegitimate son, Telegonus, followed by his deification.

## Notes

1. Some say that the *Cypria* was composed by Homer, who gave it to Stasinus as a dowry upon his marriage with Homer's daughter. None of its eleven books are extant. Fortunately, the whole account was read by Proclus, who wrote a summary.

2. Trans. Peter Green. Berkeley: U Calif. P, 1997. (Cf. Apollodorus, *Library* 3.13.4-5.) That the story of the expedition of the Argo antedates Homer may be inferred from Homeric allusion.

3. Hecuba's first-born son was Hector.

4. The number of years required for all of these events to transpire is uncertain; however, if we keep in mind that the son of Peleus and Thetis, Achilles, must (if we demand historical realism) be allowed to reach an age at which he can join Agamemnon's fleet, then we should imagine that several years pass before Paris's ships set sail. According to Apollodorus, Achilles was fifteen years old when the fleet first sailed from the port of Aulis (*Epitome* 3.16).

5. Meanwhile, in Lacedaemon, Helen's brothers had decided to take advantage of the absence of their cousins Idas and Lynceus by stealing and butchering their cattle. Upon returning to Lacedaemon, Idas and Lynceus discover the crime of Castor and Polydeuces. Castor is killed, but Polydeuces kills his cousins and escapes. According to Homer, both brothers are killed (*Iliad*, 3.280-91).

6. According to Herodotus, a storm drives Paris's ship to Egypt. There king Proteus discovers Paris's crime and, after taking Helen from him for safekeeping until she can be retrieved by Menelaus, banishes Paris from Egypt (*Histories* 2.112-20). A later tradition (made use of by Euripides)—in an apparent attempt to harmonize the accounts of Homer and Herodotus—suggested that either Hera or Zeus, with the help of Hermes, transported Helen from Sparta to Egypt, leaving Paris to run off with and marry a phantom Helen.

7. It is here important to know that, because of the great beauty of Helen, all of the Achaean kings and princes had sought her in marriage. Tyndareus, her father, who was then king of Sparta and Lacedaemon, wanted to give her to Menelaus, but was afraid of offending so many powerful rivals. Odysseus, in exchange for Tyndareus's aid in gaining Penelope in marriage, advised Tyndareus "to exact an oath from all the suitors that they would defend the favored bridegroom against any wrong that might be done him in respect of his marriage" (Apollodorus, *Library* 3.10.8).

8. Another tradition states that, when Achilles was nine years old, Thetis—having learned from prophecy that her son would be enlisted into a war against Troy—whisked him away to Scyros, where he lived in the court of Lycomedes and had an illicit affair with the king's daughter (Apollodorus, *Library* 3.13.8).

9. According to Apollodorus, eight years passed before the Achaean armada again assembled at Aulis (*Epitome* 3.18). This explains Helen's statement, "This, now, is the twentieth year for me / since I sailed her and forsook my native land" (*Iliad* 24.899-900), and—if accepted—makes impossible the theory that the "ten years" of the war begins from the time of the Achaean fleet's first assembly at Aulis. (See also note 11.)

10. It is now known that human sacrifice was practiced in the ancient Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations. The later Greeks regarded it as blasphemy to allege that the gods could demand such a sacrifice. (Such a development in the idea of God is seen also in the literature of the ancient Hebrews.) Homer mentions neither tradition, although some note that Iphigenia is not mentioned among Agamemnon's living daughters (*Iliad* 9.173-74). Other scholars read "Iphianassa" as a variant form of this daughter's name.

11. If we are to date the ten years' war from the time of this prophecy, the prophecy of Calchas must be regarded as an immediate antecedent to the embarkation of the second armada—perhaps, just after the affair involving Iphigenia.