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Telemachus with Nestor

Book Three

Sent on by Athene, Telemachus comes to Pylos and the court of old Nestor, wisest of the Greeks who fought at Troy. Here, amid sacrifice and feasting, he meets hospitality as it should be – and hears the dark tale of Agamemnon, murdered on his own homecoming, and of the son who avenged him. But of his own father, Nestor can tell him nothing, and points him on to Sparta.

NAME

SET

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BOOK THREE

Telemachus with Nestor

Pylos, the well-ordered kingdom of old Nestor, reached after a night's sailing under Athene's guidance.

WHAT HAPPENS

- Telemachus and Athene (as Mentor) arrive to find Pylos sacrificing to Poseidon, and are welcomed into the feast at once.
- Nestor's son Peisistratus shows perfect *xenia*, seating the strangers and handing the wine-cup to the elder guest first.
- Nestor recalls the war at Troy and Odysseus' unmatched cunning, but has no news of his return.
- He tells the story of Agamemnon's murder and Orestes' revenge, urging Telemachus to be brave like Orestes.
- Athene departs in the form of a bird, revealing her divinity; Nestor sends Telemachus on to Sparta by chariot with his son.

WHO WE MEET

Nestor

the model wise elder, a kingdom at peace

Peisistratus

his courteous son, now Telemachus' companion

Agamemnon, Aegisthus, Orestes

the shadow-story of murder and revenge

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Pylos is the first model household: *xenia* performed correctly, a kingdom at peace, father and sons in harmony – the opposite of the disorder in Ithaca. Nestor's Agamemnon-and-Orestes story plants the revenge parallel that runs through the whole poem. **Unprescribed**: read for the story and its essay background, not examined in context.

Telemachus With Nestor

— ARRIVAL AT PYLOS

Leaving the waters of the splendid East, the Sun leapt up into the brazen firmament to bring light to the immortals and to mortal men on the fruitful earth. The travellers now came to Pylos, the stately citadel of Neleus, where they found the people on the sea-shore

5 **sacrificing jet-black bulls to Poseidon**, Lord of the Earthquake, god of the sable locks. There were nine companies seated there, with five hundred men in each; and every company had nine bulls to sacrifice. They had just tasted the victims' entrails and were burning the thigh-bones in the god's honour, as the travellers brought their

10 trim ship to land. The crew brailed up and furled the sail, moored their vessel, and disembarked with Athene leading the way; Telemachus was the last to leave.

— ATHENE ENCOURAGES HIM

The goddess with the flashing eyes turned to him now and said: 'Telemachus, you must forget your diffidence: there is no occasion

15 for it here at all. Why have you crossed the seas, if not to find out where your father's bones lie buried and how he met his end? Go straight up, then, to **Nestor, the tamer of horses**; we are here to learn the wisdom hidden in his heart. But you yourself must appeal to him to tell you the honest truth, though a man as wise as he is will

20 not lie.'

'But, Mentor,' the thoughtful Telemachus asked, 'how am I to go up to him? How shall I greet him? I have had no practice in making speeches; it is embarrassing for a young man to question one so much his senior.' 'Telemachus,' replied bright-eyed Athene, '**where**

25 **your own intelligence fails, a god will inspire you**. For I think the gods have blessed both your birth and your progress to manhood.'

With this, Pallas Athene led off quickly, and Telemachus followed in the steps of the goddess till they reached the place where the people of Pylos were assembled. There sat Nestor with his sons; their

30 followers around them were piercing meat with skewers or roasting it in preparation for the banquet. But as soon as they caught sight of the strangers they all made a move in their direction, took them by the hand and invited them to join them.

— A WELCOME AT THE FEAST

Nestor's son, **Peisistratus**, who was the first to reach them, **took**

35 **them both by the hand** and gave them places at the banquet on downy fleeces spread over the sandy beach, near his brother Thrasymedes and his father. Then he helped them to the victims'

LINE 5

sacrificing jet-black bulls to Poseidon

Telemachus lands at Pylos to find the whole city holding a huge public sacrifice to

Poseidon, the god of the sea. A sacrifice meant killing animals as an offering to a god and then feasting on the meat.

LINE 17

Nestor, the tamer of horses **Nestor** is the old king of Pylos – the oldest and wisest of all the Greek leaders who fought at Troy. Telemachus has come to ask him for news of his father.

LINES 24–25

where your own intelligence fails, a god will inspire you

A common idea in Homer: when a person needs it most, a god will quietly give them the courage or the right words. Help from the gods often arrives as a sudden thought.

LINE 34

Peisistratus **Peisistratus** is Nestor's young son. He welcomes the visitors, and later travels on with Telemachus as his companion all the way to Sparta.

LINES 34–35

took them both by the hand This is *xenia*, the hospitality code, done properly: the strangers are welcomed and given a place at the feast before anyone even asks who they are. (The exact opposite of the Suitors back home.)

inner parts, filled a gold cup with wine and welcomed Pallas Athene, Daughter of Zeus who bears the aegis, with these words: 'Pray to the
 40 god, my friend. This feast that you find us holding is in the Lord Poseidon's honour. When you have made your drink-offering and your prayer, as our rites dictate, pass on the cup of mellow wine to your companion here, so that he may do the same. For he too must be a worshipper of the immortal gods of whom all men stand in need.
 45 But since he is the younger, in fact a man of my own age, **I hand this golden beaker to you first.**' And he placed the cup of sweet wine in Athene's hands.

The goddess was delighted at the good manners which the young man had shown in giving her the golden beaker first, and at once
 50 began an earnest prayer to the Lord Poseidon: 'Hear me, Poseidon, Sustainer of Earth, and do not grudge us, your suppliants, the fulfilment of our wishes. First of all, grant glory to Nestor and his sons. Consider next these others, and recompense all in Pylos for their sumptuous offerings. Grant, lastly, that Telemachus and I may
 55 successfully accomplish the task that brings us here in our swift black ship and afterwards reach home safely.'

So the goddess prayed, and as each petition left her lips she herself made its fulfilment sure. Then she passed the fine two-handled beaker to Telemachus, and Odysseus' son repeated her prayers. The
 60 outer flesh from the victims was now roasted and drawn off the spits, portions were carved for all, and they began their sumptuous feast.

— NESTOR'S QUESTION

When they had satisfied their appetite and thirst, Nestor, the Gerenian charioteer, said: 'Now that our visitors have eaten well, **it is the right moment to put some questions** to them and enquire who
 65 they are. Who are you, friends? From what port have you sailed over the highways of the sea? Is yours a trading venture; or are you sailing the seas recklessly, **like roving pirates**, who risk their lives to ruin other people?'

Telemachus, inspired by Athene, who was anxious for him to
 70 question the king about his father's disappearance and so win a good name among men, now plucked up the courage to make him a spirited reply:

— TELEMACHUS' APPEAL

'Nestor son of Neleus, great glory of the Greeks, you ask where we come from. I will tell you. We are from Ithaca, which lies at the foot of
 75 Mount Neion. We have come on private, not on public, business. I am searching through the length and breadth of the land for news of my noble father, the long-suffering Odysseus, who, it is said, fought by

LINES 45–46

I hand this golden beaker to you first

Peisistratus offers the wine-cup to the older guest first. Serving the senior person before anyone else was a mark of good manners.

LINES 63–64

it is the right moment to put some questions

The polite order was food first, questions afterwards – you never quizzed a guest before feeding him.

LINE 67

like roving pirates Nestor asks straight out whether they're traders or pirates. It sounds rude, but it was the normal thing to ask strangers arriving by sea – piracy was a genuine danger.

your side years ago at the sack of Troy. We can account for all the others who took part in the war. We know where each man met his
 80 pitiful death. But Zeus has wrapped even the death of Odysseus in utter mystery; and no one can tell us for certain when he died, whether he was the victim of some hostile tribe on land, or whether he was lost at sea in Amphitrite's waves. So I have come here to plead with you in the hope that you will tell me the truth about my father's
 85 unhappy end, if by any chance you witnessed it yourself or heard the story from some wanderer like him. For if ever a man was born to suffer, it was he. Do not soften your account out of pity or concern for my feelings, but faithfully describe the scene that met your eyes. I beseech you, if ever my good father Odysseus in the hard years of
 90 war at Troy gave you his word and kept it, remember what he did and tell me all you know.'

— NESTOR REMEMBERS TROY

'Ah, my friend,' exclaimed Nestor, the Gerenian charioteer, 'what memories the name of Troy brings back! The miseries we fierce Achaeans endured there – raid after raid across the misty seas in
 95 search of plunder wherever Achilles led, fight after fight around the very walls of royal Priam's town! There our best men fell. There warlike Ajax lies. **There lies Achilles**, there Patroclus, wise in counsel as the gods. There too Antilochus, my own dear son, as strong as he was handsome, a fast runner, and what a fighter too! Nor
 100 is that the full sum of what the noble Achaeans endured at Troy. There is no man on earth who could unfold to you the whole disastrous tale, not though you sat and questioned him for half a dozen years, by which time you would have grown weary and gone home. For nine years we struggled to bring them down by every
 105 stratagem we could devise – but Zeus made it very difficult for us to achieve victory. And all the time there was not a man that dared to match his wits against the admirable Odysseus, who in every kind of strategy proved himself supreme – your father, if you really are his son. Indeed, I cannot help looking at you in awe: you talk exactly as
 110 he did, and I should have sworn no young man could so resemble him in speech. In all those years, whether at the general assembly or in the council of the kings, not once did Odysseus and I find ourselves speaking on opposite sides. We seemed to share a single mind, so well did we agree when, with our good sense and judgement, we
 115 advised the Argives on the best policies.'

— THE SCATTERED FLEET

After we had destroyed Priam's towering city we left in our ships , but then **the gods scattered the fleet**. Zeus planned disaster for our homeward journey because we had not all behaved sensibly and honestly, and many came to grief through **the fatal anger of the**

LINE 97

There lies Achilles Nestor names the greatest Greek warriors who died at Troy – **Achilles** (the mightiest of all), the giant **Ajax**, and **Patroclus**, Achilles' closest friend.

LINE 117

the gods scattered the fleet The journeys home of the Greek army (their *nostoi*, or homecomings) went disastrously wrong, and the gods were behind it. That's the same subject as the whole *Odyssey*.

LINES 119–120

the fatal anger of the bright-eyed Daughter 'The Daughter' is **Athene**. During the sack of Troy the Greek army committed crimes in her temples, so she turned against them and made their voyages home a nightmare.

120 **bright-eyed Daughter** of that mighty Sire. It happened like this. She began by making **the two sons of Atreus quarrel**. Acting on the spur of the moment and with no regard for procedure, they summoned the whole Achaean army to assemble at sunset, so that the troops arrived drunk, and told them the reason for the assembly. Menelaus

125 put it to them all that their first concern should be to get to their distant homes across the seas. But this was not at all to Agamemnon's liking. He was for keeping them there and making ceremonial offerings to Athene, in the hope of appeasing her terrible wrath, not realizing in his folly how implacable she would prove; for it

130 is not so easy to divert the immortal gods from their purpose. Well, the pair of them stood there exchanging hard words, till the soldiers, themselves divided in opinion, broke up the assembly in indescribable uproar. That night we rested, nursing vindictive feelings against our comrades-in-arms; for Zeus was making ready

135 to strike us the fatal blow. In the morning half of us ran our ships down into the tranquil sea, and stowed in them our spoils and the captive women in their low-girdled dresses. Then, though the rest still held back and stayed where they were with Agamemnon the commander-in-chief, our party embarked and set out.

140 Our ships sailed fast, for a god had levelled the deep swell of the sea. We soon reached Tenedos, and there, eager to be home, we sacrificed to the gods. But Zeus had no intention of letting us reach home so soon, and he mercilessly stirred dissension among us once more. As a result, one squadron swung the curved prows of their

145 vessels round and turned back towards Troy. These were the followers of Odysseus, that wise and subtle king, falling in once more with the wishes of Agamemnon son of Atreus. But I, well aware of the god's sinister designs, fled with the massed ships that formed my company. Warlike Diomedes did the same, bringing his party with

150 him, and later on auburn-haired Menelaus followed too. He caught us up at Lesbos, where we were pondering over the long sea journey, whether to sail north of the rugged coast of Chios and by way of Psyria, keeping that island on our left, or to sail south of Chios past the windy heights of Mimas. We prayed for a sign, and the god made

155 it clear that we should cut straight across the open sea to Euboea to get out of harm's way as quickly as possible. A whistling wind blew up, and our ships made splendid running down the teeming sea-ways, reaching Geraestus during the night. And many a bull's thigh we laid on Poseidon's altar after spanning that weary stretch of

160 water.

It was on the fourth day that the company of Diomedes, son of Tydeus, the tamer of horses, brought their fine craft to anchor in Argos. But I held on for Pylos, and the breeze never dropped from the moment when the god made it blow. Consequently, dear child, I got

LINE 121

the two sons of Atreus quarrel The 'sons of Atreus' are the two Greek commanders and brothers, **Agamemnon** and **Menelaus**. Here they fall out over when to sail home, and the argument splits the whole army.

165 back without any news of the men we had left behind, and have no idea who escaped or who was lost. But all the news that has come to me as I sit here at home you shall have, as is only right, and I'll keep nothing back. In the first place, they tell me that the Myrmidon spearmen reached home in safety under the great Achilles' noble son; and that Poias' son, the brilliant Philoctetes, fared equally well. 170 Again, Idomeneus brought all his men to Crete, all, that is, who had survived the war. The sea got none from him.

— AGAMEMNON AND ORESTES

As for Agamemnon, though you live far away, you must have heard how he had no sooner got back than he fell [a wretched victim to Aegisthus' plot](#). And a grim reckoning there was for Aegisthus! 175 Which shows what a good thing it is, when a man dies, for a son to survive him, [as Orestes survived to take revenge](#) on the treacherous Aegisthus who had killed his noble father. So you, my friend – and what a tall and splendid young man you have become! – be as brave as 180 Orestes. Then future generations will sing your praises.'

The thoughtful Telemachus replied: 'King Nestor son of Neleus, great glory of the Achaeans, that was revenge indeed! Orestes' fame will travel throughout Achaean lands and live in song for generations. Ah, if the gods would only give me strength like his to exact revenge for 185 the Suitors' vicious crimes, their wilful disregard of what is right, and the ways they have humiliated me. But they have no such happiness in store for me, nor for my father. I must just endure.'

— NESTOR ON THE SUITORS

'My friend,' said Nestor the Gerenian charioteer, 'now that your own remarks have put me in mind of it, they do say a whole crowd of your 190 mother's Suitors are wreaking havoc in your house as uninvited guests. Tell me, do you tamely submit to this, or have the people of Ithaca been listening to some rumour inspired by a god that has turned their hearts against you? Who knows whether some day Odysseus may not come back, alone perhaps, or with all his followers, 195 and pay these Suitors out for their violence? I only wish that bright-eyed Athene could show towards you some of the loving care she devoted to your illustrious father in the course of our hard campaigns at Troy. For never in my life have I seen the gods display such open affection as Pallas Athene showed in her championship of Odysseus. 200 Ah, if only she would love and care for you like that, some of those gentlemen would soon have all thoughts of courtship knocked out of their heads for ever.'

'Venerable Lord,' said the thoughtful Telemachus, 'I see no hope whatever of your words proving true. You speak of the impossible. 205 You amaze me. For all my hopes, that will never happen, even if the

LINES 174–175

[a wretched victim to Aegisthus' plot](#) This is the story the poem keeps coming back to: King **Agamemnon**, the leader of the Greeks, was murdered the moment he got home from Troy by **Aegisthus**, the man who'd taken up with his wife Clytaemnestra while he was away.

LINE 177

[as Orestes survived to take revenge](#) **Orestes** is Agamemnon's son. He grew up and killed his father's murderer, Aegisthus – becoming the model of a son who does his duty and avenges his father.

gods were to will it.'

'Telemachus,' the goddess of the flashing eyes exclaimed, 'what are you saying? A god who wills it can bring anyone safely home however far away he may be. And for myself I would rather live
210 through untold hardships to reach home in the end and see that happy day, than come straight back and die at my own hearth, as Agamemnon died by the wiles of his wife and Aegisthus. But it is our common lot to die, and the gods themselves cannot rescue even one they love, when Death that stretches all men out lays its dread hand
215 upon him.'

— THE WHOLE STORY ASKED

'Mentor,' the thoughtful Telemachus replied, 'let us not discuss these painful matters any more. We can no longer count on my father's return. The gods who never die have already set his feet on the dark path that leads to death. But there is something else I would like to
220 ask Nestor, whose knowledge of men's ways and thoughts is unrivalled. They tell me he has been king through three generations, and when I look at him I seem to gaze on immortality itself. Nestor, son of Neleus, tell me what really happened. How did imperial Agamemnon, son of Atreus, meet his end? Where was Menelaus, and
225 by what cunning snare did that treacherous Aegisthus contrive to kill a man far braver than himself? Was Menelaus away from Achaean Argos and wandering abroad? Is that why Aegisthus plucked up the courage to strike?'

— THE MURDER OF AGAMEMNON

'My child,' Nestor, the Gerenian charioteer, answered, 'I will tell you
230 the whole story. You can imagine for yourself what would have happened had Agamemnon's brother, auburn-haired Menelaus, come back from Troy and **caught Aegisthus in the house alive**. No mound would have honoured his remains! Flung on the plain outside the city walls, he'd have made meat for the dogs and birds of prey, and there's
235 no woman in Achaea who would have shed a tear for him. His was indeed no petty crime. While we who were besieging Troy toiled at heroic tasks, he spent his leisured days, right in the heart of Argos where the horses graze, busy charming Agamemnon's wife with his seductive talk.

At first **Queen Clytaemnestra turned a deaf ear** to his dishonourable schemes. She was a sensible woman, and besides, she had a minstrel with her, to whom Agamemnon when he left for Troy had given orders to watch over his queen. But when the fatal day came, appointed by the gods for her to yield, Aegisthus took this minstrel
245 to a desert isle, left him there as carrion for the birds of prey, and carried Clytaemnestra off to his own house, fond lover, willing lady.

LINE 232

caught Aegisthus in the house alive In this world, taking revenge for a murdered relative wasn't seen as a crime at all – it was a sacred duty.

LINE 240

Queen Clytaemnestra turned a deaf ear Before he left for Troy, Agamemnon set a loyal poet-minstrel to keep an eye on his wife Clytaemnestra. She held out against Aegisthus until he got the minstrel out of the way.

After this great achievement he heaped the holy altars of the gods with thigh bones, and hung the temple walls with fine fabrics and gold, thank-offerings for a success beyond his wildest dreams.

— MENELAUS IN EGYPT

250 Meanwhile we were sailing together over the sea from Troy, Menelaus and I, the best of friends. But when we were abreast of the sacred cape of Sunium, where Attica juts out into the sea, Phoebus Apollo shot one of his painless arrows at Menelaus' helmsman and killed him, with the tiller of the running ship still in his hands. This
255 man, Phrontis son of Onetor, had been the world's best steersman in a gale, and Menelaus, though anxious to journey on, was kept at Sunium till he could bury his comrade with the proper rites. But when he too had got away over the wine-dark sea in those great ships of his and had run as far as the steep headland of Malea, far-
260 seeing Zeus brought disaster on their journey, and sent them a howling gale with giant waves. Then and there he split the fleet in two.

He drove one group towards Crete. Meanwhile Menelaus with the remaining five vessels of his blue-prowed fleet was driven on by
265 wind and wave to Egypt. And so it was that he was cruising in those foreign lands, amassing a fortune in goods and gold, while Aegisthus schemed this wickedness at home. After he had killed Agamemnon, the usurper reigned in golden Mycenae and kept the people in subjection for seven years. But the eighth brought him disaster, in
270 the shape of Orestes; for that brave youth, returning from Athens, killed Aegisthus, his noble father's murderer, and so the slayer was slain. When Orestes had done the deed, he invited his friends to a funeral banquet for his hateful mother and the cowardly Aegisthus; and on the selfsame day he was joined by Menelaus of the loud war-
275 cry, bringing in all the treasures that had filled his holds.

— A WARNING TO TELEMACHUS

Be warned yourself, my friend! Don't stray too long or too far from home, nor leave your wealth unguarded with such a set of arrogant brutes in the place, unless you want them to share it out, to eat up all you have, so making your journey futile. I do urge you, however, to
280 pay Menelaus a visit. For he has only just returned home from a region so remote that one might well give up all hope of return once the winds had blown one astray into that wide expanse of sea. So set off now with your ship and crew; or, if you prefer to go by land, I have a chariot and horses at your disposal and my sons are at your service
285 too, to escort you to lovely Lacedaemon where auburn-haired Menelaus lives. Appeal to him in person if you want the truth from his lips, though as wise a man as he is will not lie.'

— THE FEAST CONCLUDES

As Nestor came to an end, the sun went down and darkness fell. It was the bright-eyed goddess Athene who spoke next: ‘Venerable

290 Lord, your tale was well told. But come, **cut up the victims’ tongues and mix the wine**, so that we can pour out offerings to Poseidon and the other immortals before we think of sleeping. It is time for bed, now that the light has faded into dusk. It is not right to remain any longer at this feast of the gods. We should return home.’

295 It was the Daughter of Zeus who had spoken; her words did not fall on deaf ears. And when they had made their offerings and drunk their fill, Athene and Prince Telemachus both made a move to return to their hollow ship. But Nestor stopped them, protesting loudly:

— NESTOR'S HOSPITALITY

‘**May Zeus and the other immortal gods forbid** that you should go to

300 your ship and turn aside from my house as though it belonged to some destitute pauper who hasn’t enough blankets and rugs for himself and his guests to sleep between in comfort! Indeed, I have good bedding for all; and I swear that the son of my friend Odysseus shall not lie down to sleep on his ship’s deck so long as I am alive or

305 sons survive me here to entertain all visitors that come to my door.’

‘Well said, my Lord,’ replied the goddess of the flashing eyes; ‘and it is right for Telemachus to accept your invitation. He will go with you now and sleep in your palace, while I return to the black ship to reassure the men and tell them everything. For I am the only senior

310 in the party; all the rest are young men who follow him out of companionship. I intend to sleep there by the black ship’s hull tonight, and in the morning to set out on a visit to the great-hearted Cauconians, who owe me a long-standing debt. But since Telemachus has become your guest, send him on in a chariot with

315 one of your sons.’

— ATHENE REVEALED

As she finished, bright-eyed Athene **took the form of a vulture and flew off**. They were all amazed. The old King marvelled at the sight. ‘Telemachus, dear boy!’ he exclaimed, seizing him by the hand. ‘There is no chance that you will ever be a coward or weakling when, young

320 as you are, you already have your guardian gods at your side. For of all that live on Olympus, this was no other than the Daughter of Zeus, **the august Lady of Triton**, who honoured your noble father too among the Argives. Goddess, be gracious and grant fame to me and to my sons and to my honoured wife. In return you shall have a

325 yearling heifer, broad in the brow, whom no one yet has broken in and led beneath the yoke. She shall be sacrificed to you with gilded

LINES 290–291

cut up the victims’ tongues and mix the wine

These are the proper closing rituals of a feast – burning the animals’ tongues and pouring out wine as offerings to the gods before everyone goes to bed.

LINE 299

May Zeus and the other immortal gods forbid

Nestor is appalled at the thought of guests sleeping on their ship instead of under his roof. Hospitality (*xenia*) placed real duties on the host, not just rights on the guest – he’d be ashamed to let them go.

LINES 316–317

took the form of a vulture and flew off

Athene leaves by turning into a bird. This half-glimpse of a god showing their true nature is called an **epiphany**, and it tells the watching mortals that a god has been among them.

LINE 322

the august Lady of Triton This is a title for **Athene**. Nestor now realises that the ‘Mentor’ who had been guiding Telemachus was really the goddess herself.

horns.'

— A SACRIFICE OF THANKS

That was his prayer, and Pallas Athene heard him; and now the Gerenian charioteer Nestor led the way towards his stately home, followed by his sons and his sons-in-law. When they came to the royal palace, they took their places on the seats and chairs, and the old man prepared a bowl of mellow wine for his guests, from a jar that had stood for ten years until the moment when the maid undid the cap and opened it. When the old King had mixed a bowl of this vintage, he poured a little out, with earnest prayers to Athene, Daughter of Zeus who holds the aegis. They made their libations and quenched their thirst, after which the rest went to their homes for the night. But Nestor arranged for the noble Odysseus' son Telemachus to sleep at the palace itself, on a wooden bedstead in the echoing portico, with the spearman Peisistratus, that leader of men, next to him.

When Dawn came, fresh and rosy-fingered, Nestor the Gerenian charioteer got up from his bed, went out, and seated himself on a smooth white bench which stood, gleaming and polished, in front of his lofty doors. Here his father Neleus used to sit and give counsel as wise as the gods'; but he had long since died and gone to Hades' Halls. So now Nestor of Gerenia sat there in his turn, **sceptre in hand, a Warden of the Achaean race**. His sons all came from their rooms and gathered round him, Echephron and Stratius, Perseus and Aretus, and the noble Thrasymedes. The heroic Peisistratus came last and made the sixth. The godlike Telemachus was ushered to a seat at their side; and Nestor the Gerenian charioteer now made his wishes known:

'Quick, my dear sons, do what I want so that I can pay my devotions to Athene, who of all the gods has first claim upon them, since it was she who came in person to me at the god's sumptuous banquet. One of you go to the meadow for a heifer to be brought here as quickly as the cowherd can drive her. And one go down to great-hearted Telemachus' black ship and bring all his crew here except two; another summon the goldsmith Laerces to gild the heifer's horns. The rest of you stay with me here, and tell the servants indoors to prepare a feast in the palace and to fetch seats and firewood and fresh water.'

They all busily set about their tasks. The heifer came from the meadows; the smith came, equipped with the bronze tools of his trade; Athene also came, to accept the sacrifice. Then Nestor gave out the gold, with which the smith **gilded the heifer's horns** by way of embellishment to please the goddess's eye. The old charioteer

LINES 347–348

sceptre in hand, a Warden of the Achaean race The **sceptre** is the staff a leader holds as the sign of his lawful authority. Nestor holds it as he sits to give judgement to his people.

LINE 367

gilded the heifer's horns A goldsmith coats the sacrificial animal's horns with gold to make the offering more splendid – no expense was spared when honouring a god.

Nestor now started the ritual with the lustral water and the scattered
370 grain, and offered up his earnest prayers to Athene as he began the
sacrifice. When they had prayed and sprinkled the barley-meal,
Nestor's son, the high-spirited Thrasymedes, stepped up and struck.
The axe cut through the tendons of the heifer's neck and it collapsed.
At this, **the women raised their celebratory cry**. Then the men
375 lifted the heifer's head from the trodden earth, and Peisistratus cut
its throat. When the dark blood had gushed out and life had left the
heifer's body, they swiftly dismembered the carcass, burnt the thigh
bones on the firewood, and sprinkled red wine over the flames.

— TELEMACHUS HONOURED

The beautiful Polycaste, King Nestor's youngest daughter, now
380 bathed Telemachus. When she had bathed him and rubbed him with
olive-oil, she gave him a tunic and arranged a fine cloak round his
shoulders, so that he stepped from the bath looking like an immortal
god. He then went and sat down by Nestor, the shepherd of the
people.
385 When they had roasted the outer flesh and taken it off the skewers,
they sat down to dine, with squires to wait on them and fill their
golden cups with wine. After they had satisfied their appetite and
thirst, Nestor the Gerenian charioteer said: 'Now my sons, fetch
Telemachus a pair of long-maned horses and harness them to a

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the women raised their celebratory cry This is the *ololyge* – the ritual cry the women let out at the exact moment the animal is sacrificed.

390 chariot so that he can be on his way.'

— ON TO SPARTA

They obeyed him promptly and soon had a pair of fast horses harnessed to a chariot, in which the housekeeper had packed bread and wine together with delicacies of the kind that the favourites of the gods eat. Telemachus took his place in the handsome chariot, and
395 Nestor's son, that leader of men Peisistratus, got in beside him, took the reins in his hands, and flicked the horses with the whip to urge them forward. The willing pair flew off towards the plains, putting the high city of Pylos behind them, and all day long the yoke rose and fell on their necks.

400 The sun went down and all the ways grew dark. They reached Pherae, where they drove up to the house of Diocles, and there they spent the night and received the gifts that hospitality dictates.

As soon as Dawn appeared, fresh and rosy-fingered, they harnessed their horses once again and mounted the burnished chariot. Out past
405 the echoing portico and through the gates they drove. A flick of the whip to speed them on, and the pair flew on with a will. They came to the wheat plains and hastened on to their journey's end with all the speed of their thoroughbred horses. The sun went down and all the ways grew dark.

