

The Trojan War: Main Characters

Trojan War, legendary conflict between the early Greeks and the people of Troy in western Anatolia, dated by later Greek authors to the 12th or 13th century BCE. The war stirred the imagination of the ancient Greeks more than any other event in their history and was celebrated in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, as well as a number of other early works now lost, and frequently provided material for the great dramatists of the Classical Age. It also figures in the literature of the Romans (e.g., Virgil's *Aeneid*) and of later peoples down to modern times.

In the traditional accounts, Paris, son of the Trojan king, ran off with Helen, wife of Menelaus of Sparta, whose brother Agamemnon then led a Greek expedition against Troy. The ensuing war lasted 10 years, finally ending when the Greeks pretended to withdraw, leaving behind them a large wooden horse with a raiding party concealed inside. When the Trojans brought the horse into their city, the hidden Greeks opened the gates to their comrades, who then sacked Troy, massacred its men, and carried off its women. This version was recorded centuries later; the extent to which it reflects actual historical events is not known.

Priam, in Greek mythology, the last king of Troy. He succeeded his father, Laomedon, as king and married first Arisbe and then Hecuba who bore Priam's favorite sons, Hector and Paris. Homer described Priam at the time of the Trojan War as an old man, powerless but kindly. The death of Hector, which signified the end of Troy's hopes, also broke the spirit of the king. When Troy fell, Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, butchered the old king on an altar. Both Priam's death and his ransoming of Hector were favorite themes of ancient art.

Hecuba, Greek Hekabe, in Greek legend, the principal wife of the Trojan king Priam, mother of Hector, and daughter, according to some accounts, of the Phrygian king Dymas. When Troy was captured by the Greeks, Hecuba was taken prisoner.

Hector, in Greek legend, the eldest son of the Trojan king Priam and his queen Hecuba. He was the husband of Andromache and the chief warrior of the Trojan army. In Homer's *Iliad* he is represented as an ideal warrior and the mainstay of Troy. Hector's character is drawn in most favorable colors as a good son, a loving husband and father, and a trusty friend. His leave-taking of Andromache in the sixth book of the *Iliad*, and his departure to meet Achilles for the last time, are movingly described. He is an especial favorite of Apollo, and later poets even described him as son of that god. During the Trojan War, Hector's demise occurs at the hands of Achilles.

Andromache, in Greek legend, the daughter of Eëtion (prince of Thebe in Mysia) and wife of Hector. All her relations perished when Troy was taken by Achilles. When the captives were allotted, Andromache fell to Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, whom she accompanied to Epirus and to whom she bore three sons. Neoptolemus was slain at Delphi, and he left Andromache and the kingdom as well to Helenus, the brother of Hector. After the death of Helenus, Andromache returned to Asia Minor with her youngest son, Pergamus, who there founded a town named after himself.

Cassandra, in Greek mythology, the daughter of Priam and Hecuba. According to Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon*, Cassandra was loved by the god Apollo, who promised her the power of prophecy if she would comply with his desires. Cassandra accepted the proposal, received the gift, and then refused the god her favors. Apollo revenged himself by ordaining that her prophecies should never be believed. She accurately predicted such events as the fall of Troy and the death of Agamemnon, but her warnings went unheeded. During the sack of Troy, Ajax the Lesser dragged Cassandra from the altar of Athena and raped her. For this impiety, Athena sent a storm that sank most of the Greek fleet as it returned home.

Paris, also called Alexandros (Greek: "Defender"), in Greek legend, son of King Priam and Hecuba. A dream regarding his birth was interpreted as an evil portent, and he was consequently expelled from his family as an infant. Left for dead, he was either nursed by a bear or found by shepherds. He was raised as a shepherd, unknown to his parents. As a young man he entered a boxing contest at a Trojan festival, in which he defeated Priam's other sons. After his identity was revealed, he was received home again by Priam. His seduction of Helen (the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta) and refusal to return her was the cause of the Trojan War. Menelaus would have defeated Paris in single combat, but Aphrodite rescued him, and the war continued. Near the end of the war, Paris shot the arrow that, by Apollo's help, caused the death of the hero Achilles. Paris himself, soon after, received a fatal wound from an arrow shot by the rival archer Philoctetes.

Helen of Troy, Greek Helene, in Greek legend, the most beautiful woman of Greece and the indirect cause of the Trojan War. She was daughter of Zeus, either by Leda or by Nemesis, and sister of the Dioscuri. As a young girl, she was carried off by Theseus, but she was rescued by her brothers. She was also the sister of Clytemnestra, who married Agamemnon. Helen's suitors—including Odysseus—came from all parts of Greece, and from among them she chose Menelaus, Agamemnon's younger brother. During an absence of Menelaus, however, Helen fled to Troy with Paris. When Paris was slain, Helen married his brother Deiphobus, whom she betrayed to Menelaus once Troy was captured. Menelaus and Helen then returned to Sparta, where they lived happily until their deaths.

Menelaus, in Greek mythology, king of Sparta and younger son of Atreus, king of Mycenae. During the Trojan War Menelaus served under his elder brother Agamemnon, the commander in chief of the Greek forces. After the fall of Troy, Menelaus recovered Helen and brought her home never actually executing her as promised in the play, *Trojan Women*.

Talthybius (Ancient Greek: Ταλθύβιος) was herald and friend to Agamemnon in the Trojan War. In *The Trojan Women*, Talthybius seems to always be the bearer of bad news including the allocation of the women as slaves and the murder of Andromache's son, Astyanax. Talthybius was committed to the interests of the Greek commanders and takes care to avoid their disapproval. In his dealings with the captive women he is felt in the main to be a sympathetic figure.

Odysseus, Latin Ulixes, English Ulysses, hero of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey* and one of the most frequently portrayed figures in Western literature. According to Homer, Odysseus was king of Ithaca

and responsible for bringing Achilles to Troy because a prophecy suggested that the Trojan War would not be won without Achilles. Perhaps Odysseus' most famous contribution to the Greek war effort is devising the stratagem of the Trojan Horse, which allows the Greek army led by Odysseus to sneak into Troy under cover of darkness.

Sources: Britannica.com and Wikipedia