Feast in the palace

25 to them now Alkinoōs spoke forth and addressed them:
‘Hear me, you leaders of the Phaiakians and men of counsel, 
while I speak forth what the heart within my breast urges.
Here is this stranger, I do not know who he is, come wandering 
uphant here to my house from the eastern or western people.

30 He urges conveyance, and entreats us for its assurance. 
So let us, as we have done before, hasten to convey him, 
for neither has any other man who has come to my house 
stayed here grieving a long time for the matter of convey. 
Come then, let us drag a black ship down to the bright sea, 
35 one sailing now for the first time, and have for it a selection 
from the district, fifty-two young men, who have been the finest 
before. Then, each man fastening his oar to the oarlock, 
dismembark, then come to my house and make yourselves busy 
for a present feast, and I will make generous provision 

40 for all. I say this to the young men, but also, you other 
sceptered kings, come to me in my splendid dwelling, 
so we can entertain the stranger guest in our palace. 
Let none refuse; and summon also the inspired singer 
Demodokus, for to him the god gave song surpassing 
45 in power to please, whenever the spirit moves him to singing.’
So he spoke, and led the way, and the others followed, 
as sceptered kings, but a herald went seeking the inspired singer, 
and also the fifty-two young men who had been selected 
went, as he told them, along the beach of the barren salt sea.

50 But when they had come down to the sea, and where the ship was, 
they dragged the black ship down to the deeper part of the water, 
and in the black hull set the mast in place, and set sails, 
and made the oars fast in the leather slings of the oarlocks 
all in good order, and hoisted the white sails and set them.

55 They anchored her deep enough in the channel, and then themselves 
made their way to the great house of wise Alkinoōs, 
and the porticoes and enclosures and rooms were filled with people 
sembling, there were many men there, both old and young ones, 
and for them Alkinoōs made a sacrifice, twelve sheep, eight 
pigs with shining tusks, and two drag-footed oxen. 
These they skinned and prepared and made the lovely feast ready.

The herald came near, bringing with him the excellent singer 
whom the Muse had loved greatly, and gave him both good and evil.

Demodokos sings about Odysseus at Troy

She refit him of his eyes, but she gave him the sweet singing 
art. Pontonoōs set a silver-studded chair out for him 
in the middle of the feasters, propping it against a tall column, 
and the herald hung the clear lyre on a peg placed over 
his head, and showed him how to reach up with his hands and take it 
down, and set beside him a table and a fine basket, 

70 and beside him a cup to drink whenever his spirit desired it. 
They put forth their hands to the good things that lay ready before them. 
But when they had put away their desire for eating and drinking, 
the Muse stirred the singer to sing the famous actions 
of men on that venture, whose fame goes up into the wide heaven, 
the quarrel between Odysseus and Peleus’ son, Achilles, 
how these once contended, at the gods’ generous festival, 
with words of violence, so that the lord of men, Agamemnon, 
was happy in his heart that the best of the Achaians were quarreling; 
for so in prophecy Phoibos Apollo had spoken to him 
in sacred Pytho, when he had stepped across the stone doorstep 
to consult; for now the beginning of evil rolled on, descending 
on Trojans, and on Danaans, through the designs of great Zeus. 

These things the famous singer sang for them, but Odysseus, 
taking in his ponderous hands the great mantle dyed in 
sea-purple, drew it over his head and veiled his fine features, 
shamed for tears running down his face before the Phaiakians; 
and every time the divine singer would pause in his singing, 
he would take the mantle away from his head, and wipe the tears off, 
and taking up a two-handled goblet would pour a libation 
to the gods, but every time he began again, and the greatest 
of the Phaiakians would urge him to sing, since they joyed in his stories, 
Odysseus would cover his head again, and make lamentation. 
There, shedding tears, he went unnoticed by all the others, 
but Alkinoōs alone understood what he did and noticed, 
since he was sitting next him and heard him groaning heavily. 

At once he spoke aloud to the oar-loving Phaiakians: 
‘Hear me, you leaders of the Phaiakians and men of counsel. 
By this time we have filled our desire for the equal feasting 
and for the lyre, which is the companion to the generous 
feast. Now let us go outside and make our endeavor 
in all contests, so that our stranger can tell his friends, after 
he reaches his home, by how much we surpass all others...
in boxing, wrestling, leaping and speed of our feet for running.

So he spoke, and led the way, and the rest went with him,
and the herald hung up the clear lyre on its peg, and taking
Demodokos by the hand he led him out of the palace
and set him on the start of the way, where all the other
best men of the Phaiakians went, to gaze at the contests.
They went to the place of assembly, with an endless multitude
following, and many and excellent young men stood forth.
Akroneos stood up, and Okyaleos and Elateus,
Nauteus and Prymneus, Anchialos and Eretmeus,
Ponteus and Proreus, Thoön and Anabesineos,
Amphialos, son of Polyneos, the son of Tekton,
and Euryalos stood up, Naubolos' son, a man like murderous
Ares himself, and he was best of all the Phaiakians
in build and beauty, only except for stately Laodamas.
Also there stood forth three sons of stately Alkinóös,
Laodamas and Halios and godlike Klytoneos.

First of all they held a contest for speed in running.
The field strung out from the starting scratch, yet all at the same time
flew on together, turning up the dust of the plain. Of these
stately Klytoneos was far the best in the running,
and was out in front by the length of a furrow for mules plowing
a field, and came back first to the crowd, with the rest behind him.
Next these tried each other out in the painful wrestling,
and in this Euryalos surpassed all the best among them.
In the jump it was Amphialos who outdid all others,
while with the discus far the best of them was Elateus,
and in boxing it was Alkinóös' fine son, Laodamas.

But after all had enjoyed their hearts with athletic contests,
Laodamas the son of Alkinóös spoke forth among them:
'Come, friends, let us ask the stranger if he has skill and knowledge
for any kind of contest. In his build he is no mean man,
for the lower legs and thighs he has, and both arms above them,
for the massive neck and the great strength, nor is it that he lacks youth,
but the crush of many misfortunes has used him hardly.
For I say there is no other thing that is worse than the sea is
for breaking a man, even though he may be a very strong one.'

Then in turn Euryalos spoke forth and answered:
'Laodamas, this word you spoke was fair and orderly.

Go yourself then, and say it to him, and invite him to try it.'
Then when the excellent son of Alkinóös heard this answer,
he went and stood in the midst of them and spoke to Odysseus:

'Come you also now, father stranger, and try these contests,
if you have skill in any. It befits you to know athletics,
for there is no greater glory that can befall a man living
than what he achieves by speed of his feet or strength of his hands. So
come then and try it, and scatter those cares that are on your spirit.

Your voyage will not be put off for long, but now already
your ship is hauled down to the sea, and your companions are ready.'

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him:
'Laodamas, why do you all urge me on in mockery
to do these things? Cares are more in my mind than games are,
who before this have suffered much and had many hardships,
and sit here now in the middle of your assembly, longing
to go home, entreating your king for this, and all of his people.'

Euryalos answered him to his face and spoke to him roughly:
'No, stranger, for I do not see that you are like one versed
in contests, such as now are practiced much among people,
but rather to one who plies his ways in his many-locked vessel,
master over mariners who also are men of business,
a man who, careful of his cargo and grasping for profits,
goes carefully on his way. You do not resemble an athlete.'

Then looking at him darkly resourceful Odysseus answered:
'Friend, that was not well spoken; you seem like one who is reckless.
So it is that the gods do not bestow graces in all ways
on men, neither in stature nor yet in brains or eloquence;
for there is a certain kind of man, less noted for beauty,
but the god puts comeliness on his words, and they who look toward him
are filled with joy at the sight, and he speaks to them without faltering
in winning modesty, and shines among those who are gathered,
and people look on him as on a god when he walks in the city.
Another again in his appearance is like the immortals,
but upon his words there is no grace distilled, as in your case
the appearance is conspicuous, and not a god even
would make it otherwise, and yet the mind there is worthless.
Now you have stirred up anger deep in the breast within me
by this disorderly speaking, and I am not such a new hand
at games as you say, but always, as I think, I have been
among the best when I still had trust in youth and hands' strength.
Now I am held in evil condition and pain; for I had much
to suffer: the wars of men; hard crossing of the big waters.
But even so for all my troubles I will try your contests,
for your word bit in the heart, and you have stirred me by speaking.'
He spoke, and with mantle still on sprang up and laid hold of a discus
that was a bigger and thicker one, heavier not by a little
than the one the Phaiakians had used for their sport in throwing.
He spun, and let this fly from his ponderous hand. The stone
hummed in the air, and the Phaiakians, men of long oars
and famed for seafaring, shrank down against the ground, ducking
under the flight of the stone which, speeding from his hand lightly,
overflew the marks of all others, and Athene, likening
herself to a man, marked down the cast and spoke and addressed him:
'Even a blind man, friend, would be able to distinguish your mark
by feeling for it, since it is not mingled with the common
lot, but far before. Have no fear over this contest.
No one of the Phaiakians will come up to this mark or pass it.'
She spoke, and much-enduring great Odysseus rejoiced, happy
to find one friendly companion in the assembled company.
Again he spoke to the Phaiakians, in language more blithe:
'Now reach me that mark, young men, and then I will make another
throw, as great as this, I think, or one even better.
Let any of the rest, whose heart and spirit are urgent for it,
come up and try me, since you have irritated me so, either
at boxing or wrestling or in a foot race, I begrudge nothing;
any of the Phaiakians, that is, except Laodamas
himself, for he is my host; who would fight with his friend? Surely
any man can be called insensate and good for nothing
who in an alien community offers to challenge
his friend and host in the games. He damages what is his. No,
but I refuse not one of the rest, nor do I scorn him,
but I am willing to look in his eyes and be tested against him.
I am not bad in any of the contests where men strive.

I know well how to handle the polished bow, and would be
first to strike my man with an arrow aimed at a company
of hostile men, even though many companions were standing
close beside me, and all shooting with bows at the enemies.
There was Philoktetes alone who surpassed me in archery

when we Achaians shot with bows in the Trojan country.
But I will say that I stand far out ahead of all others
such as are living mortals now and feed on the earth. Only
I will not set myself against men of the generations
before, not with Herakles nor Eurytos of Oichalia,
who set themselves against the immortals with the bow, and therefore
great Eurytos died suddenly nor came to an old age
in his own mansions, since Apollo in anger against him
killed him, because he had challenged Apollo in archery. I can
throw with the spear as far as another casts with an arrow.
Only in a foot race I fear one of the Phaiakians
might outpass me; I have been through too much and shamefully battered
on many rough seas, since there could be no orderly training
on shipboard; because of this my legs have lost their condition.'

So he spoke, and all of them stayed stricken to silence.

Only Alkinoo's spoke up and gave him an answer:
'My friend, since it is not graceless for you to speak thus among us,
but you are willing to show that excellence you are endowed with,
age and a man came up to you in our assembly
and belittled you, in a way no man would properly find fault
with your excellence, if he knew in his heart how to speak sensibly:
come then, attend to what I say, so that you can tell it
even to some other here after this, when in your palace
you sit at the feasting with your own wife and children beside you,
remembering our excellence and what Zeus has established
as our activities, through time, from the days of our fathers.
For we are not perfect in our boxing, nor yet as wrestlers,
but we do run lightly on our feet, and are excellent seamen,
and always the feast is dear to us, and the lyre and dances
and changes of clothing and our hot baths and beds. Come then,
you who among all the Phaiakians are the best dancers,
do your dance, so that our guest, after he comes home
to his own people, can tell them how far we surpass all others
in our seamanship and the speed of our feet and dancing and singing.
Let someone go quickly and bring Demodokos his clear-voiced
lyre, which must have been set down somewhere in our palace.'

So godlike Alkinoo's spoke, and the herald rose up
to bring the hollowed lyre out of the king's house, and now
stewards of the course stood up, nine in all of them, chosen
Demodokos sings:

out of the people, who on every occasion set in good order
the grounds for games, and they smoothed the dancing floor and set right
all the ground, and the herald came bringing with him the clear lyre
for Demodokos, who moved into the middle, and about him stood forth
young men in the first of their youth, well trained in dancing,
and beat the wonderful dancing floor with their feet. Odysseus
gazed on the twinkling of their feet, his heart full of wonder.

Demodokos struck the lyre and began singing well the story
about the love of Ares and sweet-garlanded Aphrodite,
how they first lay together in the house of Hephaistos
secretly; he gave her much and fouled the marriage
and bed of the lord Hephaistos; to him there came as messenger
Helios, the sun, who had seen them lying in love together.
Hephaistos, when he had heard the heartsore story of it,
went on his way to his smithy, heart turbulent with hard sorrows,
and set the great anvil upon its stand, and hammered out fastenings
that could not be slipped or broken, to hold them fixed in position.
Now when, in his anger against Ares, he had made this treacherous
snare, he went to his chamber where his own dear bed lay,
and spun his fastenings around the posts from every direction,
while many more were suspended overhead, from the roof beams,
thin, like spider webs, which not even one of the blessed
gods could see. He had fashioned it to be very deceptive.
But when he had spun about the bedstead all of his treacherous
device, he started for Lemnos, the strong-founded citadel,
which, of all territories on earth, was far dearest to him.

Nor did Ares of the golden reins keep a blind watch on him,
as he saw Hephaistos the glorious smith go away, but he then
took his course so he entered the house of glorious Hephaistos,
lusting after the love of sweet-garlanded Kythereia.
She had lately come in from the house of her father, the powerful
son of Kronos, and sat there when Ares entered the house. Then
he took her by the hand and spoke to her and named her, saying:
'Come, my dear, let us take our way to the bed, and lie there,
for Hephaistos is no longer hereabouts, but by this time
he must have come to Lemnos and the wild-spoken Sintians.'

So he spoke, and she was well pleased to sleep with him. These two
went to bed, and slept there, and all about them were bending
the artful bonds that had been forged by subtle Hephaistos,
so neither of them could stir a limb or get up, and now
they saw the truth, and there was no longer a way out for them.

The glorious smith of the strong arms came and stood near. He had
turned back on his way, before ever reaching the Lemnian country,
for Helios had kept watch for him, and told him the story.
He took his way back to his own house, heart grieved within him,
and stood there in the forecourt, with the savage anger upon him,
and gave out a terrible cry and called to all the immortals:
'Father Zeus and all you other blessed immortal
gods, come here, to see a ridiculous sight, no seemly
matter, how Aphrodite daughter of Zeus forever
holds me in little favor, but she loves ruinous Ares
because he is handsome, and goes sound on his feet, while I am
misshapen from birth, and for this I hold no other responsible
but my own father and mother, and I wish they never had got me.
Now look and see, where these two have gone to bed and lie there
in love together. I am sickened when I look at them, and yet
I think they will not go on lying thus even for a little,
much though they are in love, I think they will have no wish
for sleeping, but then my fastenings and my snare will contain them
until her father pays back in full all my gifts of courtship
I paid out into his hand for the sake of his bitch-eyed daughter.
The girl is beautiful indeed, but she is immoderate.'
So he spoke, and the gods gathered to the house with the brazen
floor. Poseidon came, the shaker of the earth, and the kindly
Hermes came, and the lord who works from afar, Apollo,
but the female gods remained each at her home, for modesty.
The gods, the givers of good things, stood there in the forecourt,
and among the blessed immortals uncontrollable laughter
went up as they saw the handiwork of subtle Hephaistos.
And thus they would speak to each other, each looking at the god next
him:
'No virtue in bad dealings. See, the slow one has overtaken
the swift, as now slow Hephaistos has overtaken
Ares, swiftest of all the gods on Olympus, by artifice,
though he was lame, and Ares must pay the adulterer’s damage.'
This was the way of the gods as they conversed with each other,
but the lord Apollo son of Zeus said a word to Hermes:
'Hermes, son of Zeus, guide and giver of good things, tell me,
Ares and Aphrodite concluded

would you, caught tight in these strong fastenings, be willing
to sleep in bed by the side of Aphrodite the golden?"

Then in turn the courier Argeiphontes answered:
'Lord who strike from afar, Apollo, I wish it could only
be, and there could be thrice this number of endless fastenings,
and all you gods could be looking on and all the goddesses,
and still I would sleep by the side of Aphrodite the golden.'

He spoke, and there was laughter among the immortals, only
there was no laughter for Poseidon, but he kept entreating

Hephaistos, the famous craftsman, asking him to set Ares
free, and spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words:
'Let him go, and I guarantee he will pay whatever
you ask, all that is approved among the immortal deities.'

Then in turn the renowned smith of the strong arms answered:
'Shaker of the earth, Poseidon, do not urge this on me.
The business of wretches is wretched even in guarantee giving.
To what could I hold you among the immortal gods, if Ares
were to go off, avoiding both his debt and his bondage?'

Then in turn Poseidon, shaker of the earth, answered:
'Hephaistos, if Ares goes off and escapes, not paying
anything he may owe you, then I myself will pay it.'

Then in turn the renowned smith of the strong arms answered:
'It cannot be, and it is not right, that I should deny you.'

So mighty Hephaistos spoke and undid the fastenings. Straightway
the two of them, when they were set free of the fastening, though it
was so strong, sprang up, and Ares took his way Thraceward,
while she, Aphrodite lover of laughter, went back to Paphos
on Cyprus, where lies her sacred precinct and her smoky altar,
and there the Graces bathed her and anointed her with ambrosial
oils, such as abounds for the gods who are everlasting,
and put delightful clothing about her, a wonder to look on.

So the famous singer sang his song, and Odysseus
enjoyed it in his heart as he listened, as did the others
there, Phaiakians, men of the long oar, famed for seafaring.

Then Alkinoös asked Halios and Laodamas to dance
all by themselves, since there was none to challenge them. These two,
after they had taken up in their hands the ball, a beautiful
thing, red, which Polybos the skilful craftsman had made them,
one of them, bending far back, would throw it up to the shadowy

Dancing—apology from Euryalos

375 clouds, and the other, going high off the ground, would easily
catch it again, before his feet came back to the ground. Then
after they had played their game with the ball thrown upward,
these two performed a dance on the generous earth, with rapid
interchange of position, and the rest of the young men standing
about the field stamped out the time, and a great sound rose up.
Then great Odysseus spoke a word to Alkinoös, saying:
'O great Alkinoös, pre-eminent among all people,
truly, as you boasted your people were the best dancers,
so is it done before me. Wonder takes me as I look on them.'

385 He spoke, and Alkinoös the hallowed king was pleased,
and at once he spoke aloud to the oar-loving Phaiakians:
'Hear me, leaders of the Phaiakians and men of counsel,
I think this stranger is a man of discretion. Therefore
come, let us give him a gift of friendship, as is becoming.

390 For here are twelve who are marked out as kings in our country
with power, and they act as leaders, and I myself am the thirteenth.
Then let each of you who are such contribute a well-washed
robe, and a tunic, and a talent of precious gold. Then
we shall assemble it all together, so that our stranger
may have it in his hands and be pleased as he goes in to supper.
But Euryalos shall make amends to him with a spoken
word and a gift, for having spoken out of due measure.'

395 So he spoke, and they all approved what he said and urged it,
and each one sent his herald away to bring the gifts back.

400 Then Euryalos spoke in his turn and answered Alkinoös:
'O great Alkinoös, pre-eminent among all people,
certainly I will make amends to our guest, as you urge me.
I will give him this sword, which is all bronze, but the handle
on it is silver, and there is a scabbard of fresh-sawn ivory
cut in rings to hold it. He will find that it is of great value.'

405 So he spoke, and put the sword with the nails of silver
into his hands, and spoke to him and addressed him in winged words:
'Farewell, father and stranger, and if any word was let slip
that was improper, may the stormwinds catch it away and carry it
off, and the gods grant you safe homecoming to your own country
and wife; since here, far from your own people, you must be suffering.'

410 Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him:
'Farewell also to you, dear friend, and may the gods grant you