

# Requiem for Achilles

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## Summary

An attempt to transform mythological figures that have served as the pillars of European culture for thousands of years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the subject of this paper. Achilles is one of the oldest European male heroic figures. The articulation of his character in an artistic and highly influential novel from 2011 casts him in a 'different' light worldwide. Works of art that sensitise people to accept and appreciate otherness are also triggering attitudinal changes in Europe's cultural roots. Using ancient myths and their influences as arguments, this paper seeks to argue that the most ancient elements of European culture should not be changed in the interests of a contemporary ideology. It is illustrated with images, some of which have been processed by AI (artificial intelligence).

## Introduction: the ideal European man

Achilles<sup>2</sup> is the central hero of Homer's Iliad. The plot of the Iliad takes place more than 3,000 years ago<sup>3</sup>, when the first 'world war' recorded in European culture was fought between the confederation of city-states on what is now the Greek Peninsula and Archipelago and Troy, built in the straits of the Dardanelles, which controlled the Black Sea trade, and its allies in Asia Minor. The epos is one of the earliest and most significant works of European culture, based on Judeo-Christian, Celtic-Germanic and Greco-Roman pillars, and still influential in European literature, visual and performing arts.



*Achilles, the hero of the Trojan War, the European male idol - through three millennia*  
Image source in background: Richard Westmacott, Wellington Monument, 1822, Hyde Park, London; foreground right: MI MagicStudio

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<sup>2</sup> Ancient Greek: Αχιλλεύς whose origin is 'achos' = pain, mourning and 'laós' = nation, people; thus, the one who causes sorrow to the people, covers them in mourning, i.e. the enemy.

<sup>3</sup> According to archaeological research, the destruction of Troy, the city sung about by Homer, took place between 1260 and 1180 BC.

According to the central theme of the Iliad, the Greek military alliance led by King Agamemnon of Mycenae can only conquer Troy and subjugate the peoples of the coast of Asia Minor if Achilles, the greatest hero of the age, is part of the enterprise. The epic focuses on the feud between Agamemnon and Achilles over a captured Trojan priestess in the ninth year of the Trojan War, which leads to Achilles's withdrawal from the battle. As a result, the Trojan army grows in strength and, under the leadership of its commander-in-chief, Hector, is on the verge of overwhelming the Greeks when, at the request of Achilles's friend Patroclus, he agrees to drive the Trojans, carrying his weapons, away from the Greek ships that have been beached and which they have already begun to burn. Hector, however, kills Patroclus, and Achilles, overcoming his anger towards Agamemnon, goes into battle and kills Hector. The death of Achilles himself and the conquest and sacking of Troy are not mentioned in the epic, but were recorded by later Greek dramatists.

Achilles is the first European human hero after Heracles, who was endowed with superhuman strength and also born in Greek prehistory, and was chosen as a role model by Alexander the Great of Macedon, who is known in history for building a world empire. Thanks to Homer's epos, Achilles is the first European male hero, a handsome, cultured youth, and a fearless and invincible warrior, but also a man driven by emotion, whose figure appeared regularly in European arts until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## The ideal of masculinity in the spirit of otherness

American author *Madeline Miller*, who is also a teacher of Latin and Greek, spent ten years working on her novel *The Song of Achilles*, which became a bestseller and has been translated into many languages and has turned the spotlight back to ancient European history in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



*American writer Madeline Miller's world-successful novel, which follows the life of Achilles in ancient detail, as told by his friend Patroclus, was published in 2011 (left); its Hungarian translation was published in 2021 (centre); the novel clearly portrays Achilles and Patroclus as a homosexual couple (right)*

Image source: [MI vocal.media/history](https://ml.vocal.media/history)

The novel redraws the character of Achilles from the perspective of his friend Patroclus – from a homosexual point of view. It does so in a noble spirit of the acceptance of otherness, masterfully portraying the feelings and processes that lead to love in the minds of homosexual men. It does so despite the fact that in the 'basic work', Homer's Iliad, there is not a single line

to suggest that there was any feeling other than friendship and kinship between the two men, Patroclus and Achilles. The author argues that the choice of characterisation is based on the fact that pederasty<sup>4</sup> was accepted as a social morality in ancient Greece, and could therefore exist between two friends, even though Patroclus was not much older than Achilles, if at all. He also explains that when Patroclus falls at the hands of Hector, Achilles forgets his anger towards Agamemnon; he mourns his friend in an extraordinary way; he sacrifices Trojan boys and girls on his grave, kills Hector in a duel, then drags him behind his chariot, leaving his body unburied for a long time. According to *Miller*, this exaggerated revenge suggests that there must have been an intimate relationship between the two men, in addition to friendship and kinship. Despite the fact that neither Homer nor most European artists until the 21<sup>st</sup> century attempted to depict homosexual attraction between them, at least on the part of Achilles.

In order to shade or even question the characterisation of this worldwide success novel, let us mention five female names that are associated with Achilles *as a European male figure*: Deidameia, Iphigenia, Briseis, Penthesilea and Polyxena.

### 1. Deidameia – in the spirit erotica



*Deidameia and Achilles – dressed in women's clothes  
(MI: [MagicStudio.com/ai-art-generator](https://www.magicstudio.com/ai-art-generator))*

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<sup>4</sup> Pederasty = homosexual relationship between an adult man and an adolescent boy



Achilles is known to have been the son of Peleus, king of the Greek city-state of Phthia, but his mother was immortal, one of 50 mermaids, also known as Nereides, who lived in a green crystal palace in the depths of the Adriatic Sea, the daughters of the sea sage Nereus and Doris, the ocean goddess who embodied the gift. Thetis was the most beautiful, she was the mermaid who personified the balance of the sea, and Zeus himself wanted to seduce her, but the prophecy said that the son of Thetis would surpass the glory of his father. Under these circumstances, Zeus gave Thetis in marriage to a mortal – Peleus. Zeus was in debt to Thetis, for once, when the gods rebelled against Zeus' tyrannical rule and bound the arch-god in fetters, it was Thetis who brought a giant with 100 arms from the Underworld to free Zeus.

Understandably, the 'silver-footed' Thetis wanted to protect her mortal child, so she took him down to the Underworld after birth and plunged him into the icy waters of the 'hateful' River Styx – holding him by the heels. This made Achilles invulnerable – except for his heels. His mother entrusted his education to the wise centaur, Kheiron, who taught him not only how to fight, but also humanity, music and medicine. Meanwhile, Peleus's brother, Menoetius had a son named Patroclus, who, in a fit of impetuosity, accidentally killed one of his playmates and was exiled to the cave of the centaur Kheiron, where the two cousins, Achilles and Patroclus, were raised together under the centaur's tutelage.



*Reflections of Achilles's past in some works of art. From left to right: the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (Joachim Wtewael, 1612, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts); The Judgement of Paris (Peter Paul Rubens, 1636, National Gallery, London); Achilles's immersion in the River Styx (Thomas Banks, 1789, Victoria and Albert Museum, London); Kheiron teaching Achilles to play the lute (1<sup>st</sup> century fresco, Herculaneum, Ercolano, Campania); Teaching Achilles (James Barry, 1772, English Art Centre, Yale, New Haven).*

The goddess Thetis knew (see **note 1**) that mankind's first great world war, the forthcoming Trojan War, would bring her son eternal, immortal glory, but he would have died young, if he had gone. So, she hid him on the island of Scyros, away from the recruiting kings of the Greek army Odysseus and Diomedes, among the daughters of Lycomedes, the local king. In order to conceal his identity, he had to dress in women's clothes and assume the role of a girl – as Lycomedes himself believed. Before Odysseus found him and exposed Achilles, by a clever trick (see **note 4**), Achilles, as a young man living among the many daughters, could not resist the erotic temptation of the situation, as one can easily imagine and so he had a child with the king's most beautiful daughter, Deidameia. Their son, who later, as an immature man, unworthy of his father's heroic reputation, went on to commit atrocities against the defeated Trojans. On his way to Troy, Achilles left Deidameia on Scyros to raise their son, Neoptolemus.



*Some of the works of art depicting Achilles's stay on the island of Scyros. From left to right: Achilles and Deidameia (Joseph Michel-Ange Pollet, 1854, Luxembourg Palace, Paris); Achilles among the daughters of King Lycomedes (Nicolas Poussin, 1656, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond); Odysseus discovering Achilles among the daughters of King Lycomedes (Peter Paul Rubens, 1635, Prado Museum, Madrid).*

## **2. Iphigenia – in the spirit of a noble character**

Agamemnon, the ambitious commander-in-chief of the Greek allied army, was severely tested by fate – by the gods – at Aulis, when the favourable winds needed to bring the army to Troy were delayed, and he was blamed for this, namely for having insulted Apollo's sister, the goddess Artemis, by killing one of her favourite stags. For this he was forced to sacrifice one of his daughters – Iphigenia. The only way he could get his wife, Clytemnestra, to bring their daughter from Mycenae to Aulis, was to lie to her and send her a message that he intended to marry Iphigenia to Achilles, the pride and the greatest warrior of the Greek army.

Clytemnestra took Iphigeneia to Aulis, where, as we know from Euripides's drama<sup>5</sup>, the truth was revealed. After his initial surprise, Achilles was ready to marry the girl, so pleased was he with her beauty and noble character. And when he found out why she had been lured into the camp, he was ready to fight the whole Greek army alone to protect her. This is not the reaction of a homosexual man. On the other hand, Iphigenia volunteered to make the sacrifice for the success of her father and the Greek national enterprise, so there was no open conflict yet between Achilles and Agamemnon at that time.



*Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Achilles*  
(MI: [MagicStudio.com/ai-art-generator](https://www.MagicStudio.com/ai-art-generator))

Achilles

*Daughter of Agamemnon,  
if I could have won you as my wife,  
it would have been a blessing from the gods.  
I envy our country for having you,  
and you for having our country.  
Your words are beautiful, worthy of Achaea.  
You have given up your battle against the gods,  
realizing their power, and instead chosen  
the most beneficial and necessary path.  
But now that I have seen your noble nature,  
I want to be your husband even more. Listen.  
I want to save you and take you home with me.*

Source of quote Euripides: Iphigenia in Aulis (translated by Edward Einhorn).

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<sup>5</sup> Iphigeneia in Aulis



### 3. Briseis – under the sign of love

Achilles arrived on the shores of Troy, and for years he heaped glory upon glory in the Greek army, capturing, conquering and plundering city-states allied with Troy along the coast of Asia Minor. Briseis, a priestess of a sacked temple of Apollo, also became a captive of Achilles, and they gradually fell in love. It happened on one occasion that in the distribution of the spoils, much of which Achilles had obtained, Agamemnon, who was very jealous of Achilles' success, wanted to make an example of him by showing off his position as commander-in-chief.

What happened was that he had taken a priestess as a slave for himself when he raided another temple of Apollo. Her father had brought a generous ransom for the girl, but he refused to pay it. The god Apollo then struck the Greek army with the arrow of plagues. The oracle – Chalcas – who had already caused Agamemnon terrible pain in Aulis by demanding the sacrifice of his daughter, now, with the encouragement and protection of Achilles, revealed the cause of the plague to the army. Therefore, Agamemnon had to return the daughter to her father, the priest of Apollo, so that the plague would pass over the heads of the Greek army. Agamemnon's anger was now turned against Achilles, and – to hurt him – he took Briseis from his tent for himself. The question is, if Achilles and Patroclus were truly in love, would Agamemnon have taken Briseis when he wanted to inflict emotional loss on Achilles?



*Achilles and his great love Briseis*  
(MI: [MagicStudio.com/ai-art-generator](https://www.magicstudio.com/ai-art-generator))

This sensitive loss was so great that Achilles simply withdrew from the war and let the Trojans win. One of *Miller's*, main arguments is that the proof of the love between Achilles and Patroclus is that Achilles mourned Patroclus's death by the unusual shaming of the corpse of his murderer, Hector, and the cruel sacrifice and killing of young Trojan slaves. According to her, this is not a simple revenge for the loss of a friend, but implies an intimate, emotional, sexual relationship. What kind of affection does it imply then that Achilles, because of the loss of Briseis, allowed hundreds of Greeks to perish for a long time at the hands of Hector and the Trojans who wanted to drive the Greeks into the sea? This is the story of Homer's epos, the *Iliad*: the wrath of Achilles caused by the loss of Briseis. Obviously, it also implies an intimate, emotional and sexual relationship.

It should be noted that *Wolfgang Petersen's* 2004 film *Troy*, also a worldwide success, starred *Brad Pitt* as Achilles, and in contrast to *Madeline Miller's* novel, emphasises Achilles's apparent heterosexuality in the sex scenes with *Rose Byrne*, who plays Briseis, at the beginning of the film and later; and there is not even a hint of any concern for the safety of his younger nephew, other than that of Patroclus (played in the film by *Garret Hedlund*).



*The separation of Briseis from Achilles – the cause of the conflict in Homer's Iliad – and her return in art. From left to right: Briseis is led away from Achilles's tent (Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbain, 1773, Kunsthalle, Hamburg); Briseis is led away from Achilles's tent (Jean-Baptiste-Henri Deshayes, 1761, Augustins Museum, Toulouse); Briseis is taken from Achilles to Agamemnon (Pompeii mural, National Archaeological Museum, Naples); Nestor brings Briseis back to Achilles (Peter Paul Rubens, 1635, Prado Museum, Madrid).*



*The portrayal of the relationship between Achilles and Briseis (Wolfgang Petersen: Troy, 2004) by Brad Pitt and Rose Byrne*





*Lamentation of Patroclus in art. From left to right: Menelaus rescues the dead body of Patroclus from the battle (4 BC Roman copy of ancient Greek sculpture, Loggia della Signora, Florence); Achilles laments Patroclus (Gavin Hamilton, 1763, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh); The returning Briseis sees the body of Patroclus (Léon Cogniet, 1815, Museum of Fine Arts, Orleans); Achilles laments Patroclus (Nikolai Ge, 1855, Belarus National Art Museum, Minsk)*

#### **4. Penthesilea – under the sign of attraction**



*Achilles and Penthesilea, the Amazon  
(MI: [MagicStudio.com/ai-art-generator](https://www.magicstudio.com/ai-art-generator/))*

After the Iliad, there is another event in the last year of the Trojan War, the tenth year, which does not support Achilles's supposed homosexuality. To reinforce the Trojan army, the legendary Amazons, the female warriors, arrived from the Caucasian coast of the Black Sea.<sup>6</sup> Their queen decides to fight Achilles, challenging fate against herself. Achilles, of course, defeats Penthesilea.

When he sees the mortally wounded Amazon queen up close, he falls instantly, one might say 'immortally' in love with her in a way that is uncharacteristic of 'other' men; and he is so sorry that he has killed his truly matching, an excellent warrior, a beautiful young woman that he cannot hide his tears. Seeing this, a Greek leader, Thersites, makes a mocking remark about necrophilia, and pierces the dying Amazon's eyes with his spear. In response, the supposedly homosexual Achilles, who is said to be insensitive to women in Miller's novel, displays such a strong emotional arousal that he leaps to his feet and strikes his comrade on the chin with his fist so hard that 'all his teeth fall out and his soul rushes to the Underworld', according to Virgil.<sup>7</sup>



*Achilles and Penthesilea's legendary duel under Troy: clips from the masterful VR animation 'Warriors Legends of Troy'*

Download from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS45uEa\\_5Us](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS45uEa_5Us)

Achilles did this with a Greek leader, Thersites, who, when Agamemnon and Achilles clashed, took a sided with Achilles against Agamemnon. The body of Penthesilea was thrown into the River Scamander by the strongest leader of the Greek army, Aias (Latin Ajax), in a rage because Thersites was his cousin, where Achilles managed to rescue the dead body and gave her a

<sup>6</sup> The word Amazon means 'breastless' in ancient Greek, referring to the fact that one of their breasts was burnt off in childhood, not to prevent them from using their shoulder-strapped sword and bows. In the legend of the Amazons, the cult of the Mediterranean cult of matriarchy, female domination and mother goddesses lived on with the ancient Greeks.

<sup>7</sup> Virgil's epic poem Aeneas



decent, proper burial. Again, this emotional attraction to a woman, and a hostile woman at that, who had previously killed several of his comrades, is not the behaviour of a homosexual man.



*Achilles kills Penthesilea in arts. A vase (530 BC British Museum); relief (Bertel Thorvaldsen, 1836, Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen); the Vulcan vase painting (BC 460, Staatliche Antikensammlungen Museum, Munich); part of the relief of the Temple of Apollo in Bassae (400 BC, British Museum, London); painting (Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, 1823, Eutin-Palace, Eutin)*

## 5. Polyxena – under the spirit of redemption

Finally, just before Odysseus's trick with the Trojan Horse, Achilles tries to override his destiny, namely that he must perish under Troy. He decides to end the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, which has lasted almost ten years, by marrying Polyxena, a beautiful daughter of King Priam of Troy. He meets her in secret at a shrine to Apollo outside Troy. However, Paris, the cause of the war, Polyxena's brother, is also secretly hiding in the shrine, watching them to make sure Achilles does not kidnap or entrap her.

Yes, but Achilles was also being followed in secret: Odysseus and Diomedes suspected that Achilles was going to the sanctuary alone because he was negotiating with the enemy. When Paris noticed armed Greeks approaching the temple, he thought they were trying to capture Polyxena, so he shot an arrow at Achilles and accidentally hit him on his only vulnerable spot, his heel. This is how Achilles, the greatest European hero at the border of ancient mythology and history, died. Polyxena's fate was a terrible one, for after Achilles's death, his powerful, fierce teenage son, Neoptolemus arrived in Troy and after the castle fell, he killed her on Achilles's tomb (see **note 5**).





*Polyxena, Trojan Princess and Achilles (MI: MagicStudio.com/ai-art-generator)*



*Polyxena's tragic fate in the arts. On the two sides: Neoptolemus snatching Polyxena from her mother, Hecuba, Queen of Troy (Pio Fredi, 1865, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence); Middle: Polyxena's sacrifice at the tomb of Achilles (above: Giovanni Battista Pittoni, 1734, Louvre, Paris; below: Nicola Prevost, 1666, Museum of Fine Arts, Orleans)*

## Destruction of cultural roots?

You could say that in the art of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Madeline Miller's* and *Wolfgang Petersen's* bestselling, internationally acclaimed bestselling novel (*Song of Achilles*) and the film (*Troy*), balance each other in terms of Achilles's sexuality. While *Troy* portrays Achilles as a heterosexual 'macho' man, the *Song of Achilles* masterfully explores the emotional underpinnings of male homosexuality. Yet, as Achilles is the ideal of the European, white, heterosexual, handsome, educated, emotional, strong, even invincible man – someone who must have lived in the twilight of myth if his actions and character were to survive for over 3000 years. Perhaps the 21<sup>st</sup> century's acceptance of and sensitivity to 'otherness' should not – without any basis – change the 'other' image of characters who have survived for millennia! And here it is above all *Madeline Miller's* highly successful book, winner of several literary prizes<sup>8</sup>, which is reshaping the perception of a broad readership of a figure who has been a masculine ideal in the history of human civilisation for more than three millennia – a nimbus that hardly exists or has any equivalent in the history of European culture. It does so in the name of acceptance and the promotion of otherness, a theme that could have found several other – proven – homosexual figures in world history.



*An image of a Greek Attic black and red jar from around 500 BC, showing Achilles tending the wounded arm of Patroclus by an arrow. It is the only ancient depiction of the two friends in 'close' contact – for Achilles was also a healer, or physician, thanks to his centaur tutor. It is clear from the depiction – as is also clear from Homer's work – that Patroclus was the elder, while both Miller's novel and Petersen's film portray him as the younger.*

Image source: Altes Museum, Berlin

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<sup>8</sup> In 2012: she won the *Orange Prize*, the most prestigious English literary award for women novelists; she was shortlisted in the ALA Rainbow Books 10 list in the USA, which is aimed primarily at gay, lesbian and bisexual young adults. Winner of the *Gaylactic Spectrum Award*, also in the USA, aimed specifically at LGBT, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender audiences.





*The painting, which exudes invincible masculine strength, youth, confidence, pride and power; is entitled: In Front of Alexander the Great. Alexander, the **European** conqueror of the world, also looked to Achilles as a role model.*

Image source: Tolnai's World History 3. History of Greece

## Notes

(Mythological curiosities about the stories)

### 1.

She knew this because the seeds of war were sown at her wedding to Peleus, to which all the gods were invited except Eris, the goddess of strife, because they wanted to avoid it. Eris then rolled a golden apple onto the wedding table, on which was engraved: *THI KALLISTHI*, meaning 'to the most beautiful'. As we know, this was claimed by three goddesses: Hera herself, the wife to Zeus and queen of the gods, for some inexplicable reason the radiant, virginal Athena, goddess of wisdom, and Aphrodite herself, goddess of beauty. Neither Zeus nor Hermes dared to make the decision which Hermes had entrusted to the most handsome mortal man of the age: the Trojan boy Prince Paris. The three goddesses, in human form (see **note 2**), appeared to Paris on Mount Ida near Troy, where Paris – who was only later revealed to be a Trojan prince – was grazing his flock. Hera



promised him that if he chose her, she would make him the ruler of Asia. Athena promised that Paris would become the wisest man in the world if she gave her the golden apple. With a mysterious smile, Aphrodite said only that she could give him the most beautiful mortal woman in the world. 'Who would that be?' asked Paris. 'Come closer' said the most enchanting goddess of beauty and love. Paris stepped closer shyly. 'Closer still', said Aphrodite. Paris timidly leaned quite close. 'Look into my eyes', said the goddess of beauty, 'and you will see the mortal daughter of Zeus'. Paris looked into the beautiful eyes of the goddess, and there he saw Helen the Fair, queen of Sparta in the distant land of Greece. Is it any wonder that after all this, in the presence of Hera and Athena, who watched the scene indignantly, Paris – the man – chose Aphrodite, and sealed the fate of his homeland, Troy.

## 2.

The Olympian gods were two-and-a-half-metre tall, dazzling humanoid apparitions who, in their original form, would have struck mortals with the strength of a thunderbolt. Zeus and one of his mortal lovers, Semele, demonstrate this. Zeus's wife, the jealous Hera in the form of old woman, made Semele get Zeus to swear in advance that he would grant her request. This request was that, if he was really Zeus, he should appear to her in his original, divine form. This was done, whereupon Semele was burnt to ashes, and only her unborn son – the future Dionysus, the mighty 'twice-born' god of wine and intoxication – could be saved by Zeus. One of Zeus's daughters, Aphrodite herself (see **note 3**), also once appeared in her original form to one of her mortal lovers. This handsome man was Anchises, whose son by Aphrodite, Aeneas, became the forefather of the Romans. The story of Aeneas, who fled from Troy to Italy in an adventure like the wanderings of Odysseus, was immortalised in European culture by Virgil's epos. Aphrodite had a promise from the Asia Minor prince, Anchises, who was allied to Troy that he would remain silent forever about their secret affair and the identity of Aeneas's real mother – that is, her. However, once in a tavern with his drunken friends, when asked who he would prefer to sleep with, the extremely pretty waitress there or the goddess Aphrodite herself, he found himself saying that since he had already had dealings with Aphrodite, he would choose the waitress. The outraged goddess appeared before him that very day to call him to account for his insulting remark, but in her anger, she forgot to assume her human form. Although Aphrodite's burning influence was not as strong as that of Zeus, the chief god, it was equal to a bolt of lightning striking Anchises, crippling the prince – who was later rescued from the burning Troy on the shoulders of his son Aeneas as the city fell.

## 3.

The story of Aphrodite, based on Apollodorus's *Mythology* and Hesiod's *The Birth of the Gods*, is that when the Titan Cronus (Saturn), the god of time, rebelled against his father Uranus, the god of the sky, he castrated him with a sickle and 'created' Aphrodite from the severed part of his body, which was thrown into the sea. Since the meaning of Aphrodite's name 'emerging from the foam'. (Aphrodite or Venus is not the goddess of love, but beauty. The god of love is Aphrodite's son, Eros, in Latin Amor.) If we accept that Aphrodite is the only one in the family of gods who had no father or mother, then she and Eros are the only ones who do not fit into the anthropogenic, human figures of Greek mythology, which is a mainstay of European culture. Homer himself did not accept this genesis, but according to him, as he says in the *Iliad*, Aphrodite's mother was Dione, the goddess of rain, and Aphrodite was still a 'foam-born' emerging from the sea in the shell of an oyster, as Sandro Botticelli's famous painting *The Birth of Venus* perpetuates in European culture. Her father is Zeus himself. It would have been surprising if Zeus had not made love to the most beautiful goddess of all, when he seduced almost all the beautiful girls and women, be they mortal women, nymphs or goddesses. The only exceptions were his own daughters, such as Athena, Artemis, Hebe, Persephone, the Hours, the Graces, and the Muses – and, by implication, Aphrodite. Homer refers to the 'natural' genesis of Aphrodite in the Trojan War, when Aphrodite's mortal son, Aeneas, bravely confronted one of the most powerful Greek kings, Diomedes, and the goddess Aphrodite – in her human form, as gods and goddesses usually did when they encountered mortals – tried to drag her wounded son from the battlefield, suddenly creating a mist around her. But the goddess Athena, who was helping the Greeks and also active on the battlefield, lifted the fog so that Diomedes could see the fugitives. With deadly accuracy, the Greek leader hurled a spear at Aeneas. Aphrodite then did what only a human mother would do to protect her child. With her bare hand, the palm of her hand, she averted the spearhead away from the unconscious, wounded Aeneas. The spear pierced through the palm of the human Aphrodite, who immediately fled wailing to Mount Olympus, the abode of the gods, where her mother Dione, the goddess of rain, healed the wound on her human body, according to Homer's *Iliad*. (Meanwhile, the god Apollo, who in turn was helping the Trojans, carried Aeneas onward, and Diomedes no longer dared to pursue him.)

#### 4.

Odysseus, suspecting that Achilles was hiding among the daughters of the king of Scyros, disguised himself as a merchant and offered the daughters clothes and beauty products, while placing weapons in another pile. The girls were all looking at the clothes and jewellery. But when Odysseus's men made a premeditated noise of battle outside the palace, as if the island had been attacked with weapons, only one 'girl' – Achilles – took up arms, thus exposing himself to Odysseus. Achilles had no choice but to live a short life, but one of eternal glory in Troy.

#### 5.

Neoptolemus, the teenage son of Achilles, was at the forefront of the upheaval in Troy and the murder of the Trojan royal family. For example, he swung Astyanax, the infant son of the other great hero of the Iliad, Prince Hector of Troy, by his feet over his head and threw him from a bastion and dragged off Hector's wife Andromache as a prisoner. Also, he sacrificed Polyxena, the Trojan Princess on the grave of his father Achilles as his last 'love' and the cause of his death, and he slit her throat.

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(with Achilles's character portrayal)

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