

BACKGROUND

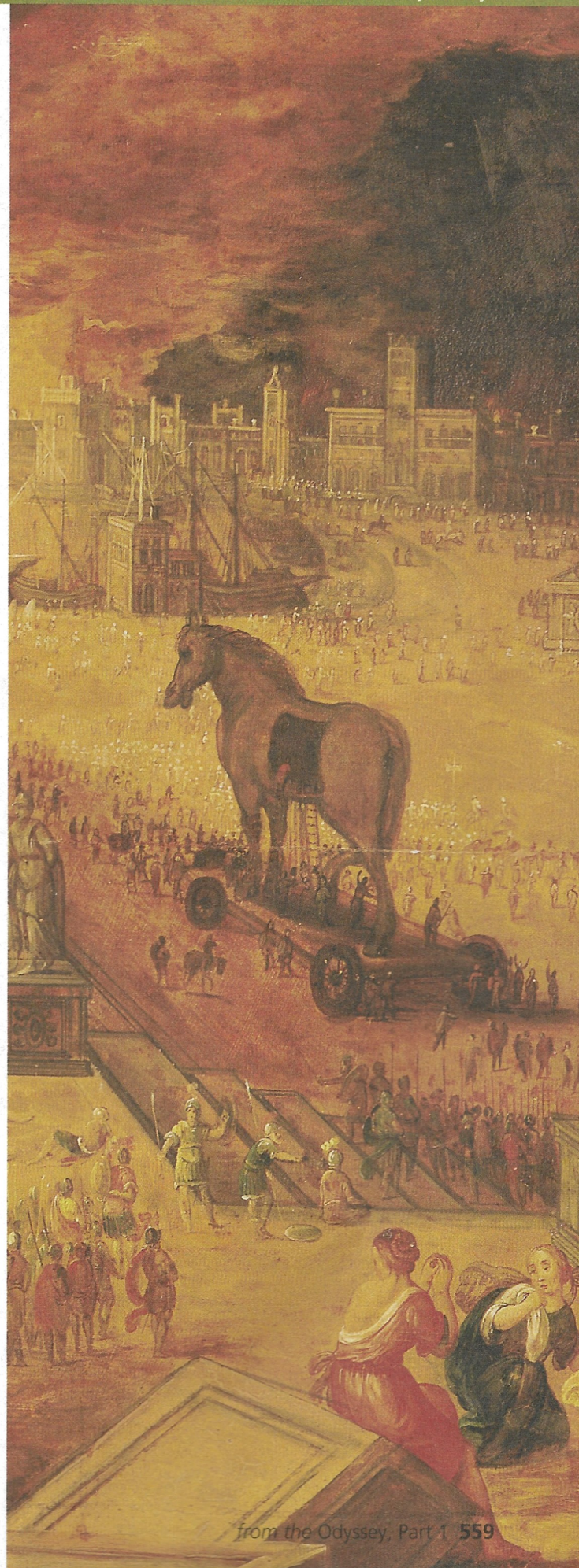
The Trojan War

In the *Iliad*, Homer focuses on the final year of the Trojan War; in the *Odyssey*, he tells what happened to one of the key warriors afterward.

It Begins With Strife According to legend, the Trojan War began when Eris, goddess of strife, brought among the gods a golden apple inscribed “To the fairest.” Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite all wanted that apple. They asked Paris, son of the king of Troy, to decide which of them deserved it. Each tried to bribe him: Hera offered power; Athena, wisdom; and Aphrodite, the world’s most beautiful woman. The famous Judgment of Paris was that Aphrodite was the fairest. Soon, on a diplomatic mission to Sparta, Paris met Helen, the world’s most beautiful woman and Sparta’s queen. With Aphrodite’s help, the two fell in love and eloped. When Menelaus (mehn uh LAY uhs), king of Sparta, could not persuade the Trojans to send his wife, Helen, back, he went to his brother Agamemnon, who called on all the Greek rulers to honor a pact and go to Troy to fight to bring Helen home. The Greeks agreed and sailed to Troy. They laid siege to the city but for ten long years could not breach its impregnable walls.

War Crimes and Punishment Agamemnon might have been a more powerful king and Achilles (uh KIH L eez) a superior warrior, but Odysseus, king of Ithaca, was cleverest of them all. He devised a scheme in which the Greeks left a great wooden horse outside the walls of Troy and tricked the Trojans into taking it inside. That night, the Greeks hiding inside the horse—Odysseus among them—slipped out, unlocked the gates of the city, and allowed their fellow warriors to come swarming in to defeat the Trojans and sack the city. The fighting was brutal and destructive. King Priam (PRY uhm), Paris’s father, for example, was killed while he was praying. The Greeks’ behavior angered many of the gods, who made their voyages home very difficult.

Odysseus was no exception. Following the Greek victory, he set sail for Ithaca but encountered a series of perilous misadventures that made his journey last ten years. It is this difficult, adventure-filled journey that Homer’s *Odyssey* recounts.



from the *Odyssey*, Part 1 559