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The *Iliad* of Homer

Course Guidebook

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PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

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Printed in the United States of America

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Elizabeth Vandiver did her undergraduate work at Shimer College, Mt. Carroll, Illinois, where she matriculated in 1972 as a 16-year-old “early entrant.” After receiving her B.A. in 1975, she spent several years working as a librarian before deciding to pursue graduate work in Classics at the University of Texas at Austin. She received her M.A. in 1984 and her Ph.D. in 1990.

In addition to her current position at the University of Maryland (flagship campus at College Park), Professor Vandiver has held visiting professorships at Northwestern University, the University of Georgia, The Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies (Rome, Italy), Loyola University (New Orleans) and Utah State University.

In 1998 Dr. Vandiver received the American Philological Association’s Excellence in Teaching Award, the most prestigious teaching award available to American classicists. Other awards include the Northwestern University Department of Classics Excellence in Teaching award for 1998 and the University of Georgia’s Outstanding Honors Professor award in 1993 and 1994.

Dr. Vandiver has published a book, *Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History*, and several articles, as well as delivering numerous papers at national and international conferences. She is currently working on a second book, examining the influence of the classical tradition on the British poets of World War I.

Dr. Vandiver is married to Franklin J. Hildy, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Theatre, at the University of Maryland.

This course is dedicated to the memory
of Gareth Morgan,
teacher of Greek, lover of Homer.

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The *Iliad* of Homer

Scope:

This set of twelve lectures introduces the student to the first of the two great epics of ancient Greece, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. During the course, the student should read the *Iliad* in its entirety to gain the maximum benefit and enjoyment from the lectures, which provide careful, detailed examinations of the most important episodes, address various critical and interpretative issues, and give background information on the cultural assumptions contained in the *Iliad*.

The first lecture sets the stage for our reading of the *Iliad* (and, subsequently, the *Odyssey*) by providing an introduction to the plan of the course and summarizing the mythological background assumed by the Greek epics. The second lecture addresses the question of the 400- to 500-year gap between the events described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and the time when they were written down. It describes the epics' relationship to traditional orally transmitted poetry, and considers the implications of that oral tradition for the question of who "Homer" was.

Lectures Three through Twelve address the plot, characters, and interpretations of the *Iliad* itself. Each of these lectures focuses on a particular scene, character, or theme as we read through the *Iliad*. Lecture Three introduces the cultural concepts of *kleos* (glory) and *timê* (honor) and explains their significance for understanding the wrath of Achilles. Lecture Four moves inside the walls of Troy to discuss Homer's presentation of the Trojans as sympathetic characters, not as stereotypical enemies. In Lecture Five, we look in detail at Book IX of the *Iliad*, where three of Achilles' comrades try to persuade him to return to battle; we discuss how the concepts of *kleos* and *timê* factor into his refusal to do so. The concept of *kleos* is given a fuller discussion in Lecture Six, which demonstrates that it is one of the key elements in the *Iliad*'s examination of the human condition. In Lecture Seven, we turn to examining the gods in Homer, discussing what types of beings they are and what their presence in the narrative adds to the *Iliad*. Lectures Eight and Nine give a detailed reading of the most important events of the day of Hektor's glory and Patroklos' death, the *Iliad*'s longest day, which lasts from Book XI through Book XVIII; Lecture Eight focuses on Hektor and Lecture Nine, on Patroklos. Achilles' return to battle is covered in Lecture Ten, which discusses the implications of his actions, his divinely made armor, and his refusal to bury

the dead Patroklos. Lecture Eleven examines Hektor and Achilles together, highlighting the contrasting elements in their characters and the inevitability of their final encounter in battle. Finally, in Lecture Twelve, we discuss the resolution of the *Iliad*, which is brought about by Achilles' encounter with his dead enemy, Hektor's aged father, King Priam. Throughout these lectures, we will visit again and again the overriding theme of what it means to be human and what the *Iliad* has to say about the human condition.