

David Rogers

Brother Williams

Socratic Discussion Class

3 Nov 2009

## **Ajax**

Long ago there lived a mighty man who was esteemed as a hero. He accomplished many feats and was greatly feared in battle. This account will go over in greater detail these things as well as some back background information on the man Ajax. Ajax, also known as Aias, was a Greek mythological hero. His story can be found throughout in the Iliad, The Odyssey, and The Epic Cycle.

### **Family and Early Life**

Ajax's father Telamon befriended King Cychreus of Salamis and married his daughter Periboea. Ajax was their only child. Telamon later married Hesione, a Trojan princess, and she bore Teukros by him.

Ajax trained under the centaur Chiron, who also trained Achilles and both their fathers. Through Chiron's instruction Ajax grew most swiftly in might, which prepared him to face the trials that awaited him later in life.

## Accomplishments

Due to his courtship of Helen, Ajax was obligated to take part in the Trojan War on the side of the Greeks. He was known to be second only to Achilles in might and displayed many feats of valor during this time. Ajax often fought alongside his half-brother Teukros, who wielded a bow with greater skill than any Greek.

Near the end of the Trojan War Ajax fought one-on-one with Hector. The duel was fierce for both were accomplished fighters, but eventually Ajax gained the upper hand. Before he could slay Hector however, the heralds by direction of Zeus called a draw. They exchanged gifts, Hector receiving a belt and Ajax a sword. As they parted, Ajax felt like a starving man tasting meat briefly, and then being immediately dragged away before his appetite was satisfied. He eagerly awaited meeting Hector again, feeling sure he wouldn't twice miss the chance to slay him.

The second encounter between the two occurred when Hector attacked the Greek ships and attempted to burn them. Ajax wounded Hector severely, but once again failed to kill him. His efforts were not in vain however, for Hector was able to do minimal damage and many Trojans were killed in the battle.

Later after Achilles was killed, it was a high priority for the Greeks to retrieve his body and magical armor. Ajax and Odysseus together managed to accomplish this under a shower of projectiles from the Trojans. There are inconsistencies among different accounts as to which personally accomplished this and which drove off the Trojans.

## Death

After Achilles was slain and his body brought back to the Greek camp, a contest took place to determine who would receive the armor of Achilles and the associated prestige. Ajax competed with Odysseus, both delivering a speech, but due to Odysseus's far superior eloquence, he was favored by the judges and Ajax lost the contest. This so maddened Ajax that he was determined to kill his comrades, but under the influence of Athena he went mad and perceived a nearby herd of cattle as his fellow Achaeans. After slaughtering the herd and realizing what had happened, he slew himself with the sword given to him as a gift by Hector after the duel.

Perhaps his extreme despair was due to a realization that his life was perpetually violent and spiteful. Perhaps, covered in the gore of the cattle, he was reminded of the long Trojan War and his own chaotic nature and this caused him to believe he could never change.

## Conclusion

After an adventurous and warlike life, the potentially successful Ajax slew himself out of envy. Certainly lessons can be learned from this tale, for example: to be esteemed highly of men for worldly deeds does not guarantee happiness and indeed tends to cause the opposite when not kept in check by sufficient humility. The most trying battles happen inside a man's mind.

### Works Cited

Homer. *The Odyssey (Barnes & Noble Classics Series) (Barnes & Noble Classics)*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003. Print.

Parada, Carlos "Ajax 1 - Greek Mythology Link." *Greek Mythology Link*. Web. 21 Oct. 2009.  
<<http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Ajax1.html>>.

Redfield, James. *The Iliad of Homer*. Print.