

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore

AESCHYLUS • II

THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

Translated by S. G. Benardete

THE PERSIANS

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SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Translated by David Grene

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated by David Grene

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THE PERSIANS

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INTRODUCTION TO *THE PERSIANS*

The Persians was produced at Athens in 472 B.C., eight years after the naval battle at Salamis, which the play celebrates. We learn from its Argument that it was modeled on a lost play, *The Phoenissae* of Phrynichus, but that Phrynichus had announced at once the defeat of Xerxes, whereas Aeschylus presents a chorus of old men who voice their hopes and fears, by themselves and with Xerxes' mother, before the news of the defeat comes. This delay of course makes the Persians' defeat so much the greater, as it heightens the magnificence of their doom. The Queen then invokes her dead husband Darius (at whose tomb the scene is laid), who had led an unsuccessful expedition against Greece ten years before. He consoles the Queen and Chorus but predicts another disaster at Plataea (479 B.C.). Soon afterward, Xerxes, his garments torn, returns alone, and he and the Chorus conclude the play with a lament.

The Persians is unique in several ways. It is the only extant Greek tragedy that is not mythical but based on a contemporary event. The daring of such a presentation is easy to imagine. To show sympathetically, *sinè ira et studio*, on the stage at Athens the defeat of her deadliest enemy testifies to the humanity of Aeschylus and the Athenians. No other tragedian we know of, of any country at any time, has ever dared to go so far in sympathizing with his country's foe. It is the more remarkable when we consider that Aeschylus himself and almost all of his audience fought at Salamis or Plataea and that the war, moreover, was between freedom and slavery. Here are the Persians, having started an unjust war and suffering a deserved defeat, presented not as criminals but rather as great and noble, dying deaths that are to be as much pitied as the deaths of Athenians. To praise the Athenians at Athens, Socrates remarks, or the Spartans at Sparta is not very difficult; but to praise the Atheni-

« THE PERSIANS »

ans at Sparta or the Spartans at Athens demands great rhetorical skill; and for Aeschylus to praise before their conquerors the Persians, the enemies of all Greece, is without precedent and without imitation.

Although *The Persians* is historical in substance, Aeschylus deliberately introduced what the entire audience must have known to be false. He makes up Persian names, very few of which correspond to the generals we know to have been at the battle; his figures for the size of Xerxes' fleet at Salamis are greatly exaggerated; the Persians call upon Greek gods, though everyone knew that their gods were different; the Queen performs a Greek sacrifice at the tomb of Darius; neither the Chorus (except once) nor Darius mention the Persians' defeat at Marathon only ten years before; and perhaps what is most striking, Aeschylus invokes from the past Darius, so that his presence, being both ghostly and real, might transform an ugly reality into a poetic past. By thus changing many details of the real story, Aeschylus removes the Persian War to the realm of myth, where the memory of his audience is prevented from confirming or denying at every point the truth of what he says.

The contemporary is almost perforce untragic, for excessive attention to detail (and the contemporary must be shown accurately) stifles poetry and does not allow the poet to alter his subject; whereas tragedy, being abstracted from the present, is given a free rein, unhampered by what the audience knows to be so, to mold the story to its own demands. Just as verse is an abstraction from prose, reducing it to order, so tragedy abstracts from history and brings necessity out of chance.

If Aeschylus addressed his play specifically to his Athenian countrymen, how can he also speak to us, who are not Athenians, across the reach of time? This certainly must be said. The Persian War was not merely one parochial war among others, in which the issues of right and wrong are ambiguous, as was the case in the Peloponnesian War. The Persian War was a war of liberty versus despotism, and all free men of all times in reading *The Persians* will identify their cause with the cause of the Greeks. In this sense, then, we are

« A B S C H Y L U S »

Athenians ourselves, and thus our sympathies and understanding become sufficiently enlarged to comprehend the merits of our foes.

Since the doom of the Persians is impressed upon us by the regular meters of the chorus, which convey even to our ears the effect of marching or lament, I have tried, so far as English would allow, to reproduce them in such a way that the reader can "hear" the mood of each song. I hope that, after a little practice on his part, the rhythm will become clear.

CHARACTERS

Chorus of Persian elders

*Queen of Persia, wife of Darius,
mother of Xerxes*

Persian Herald

Ghost of Darius

Xerxes

THE PERSIANS

SCENE: *In the background the palace of Xerxes at Sousa, in the center foreground the tomb of Darius.*

Chorus

Of the Persians gone
To the land of Greece
Here are the trusted:
As protectors of treasure
And of golden thrones
We were chosen by Xerxes—
Emperor and king,
Son of Darius—
In accord with age
Guards of the country.

For the king's return
With his troops of gold
Doom is the omen
In my heart convulsed,
As it whines for its master;
For all Asia is gone:
To the city of Persians
Neither a herald nor horseman returns.

And some Agbatana
And some Sousa and
Ancient Kissa leaving,
Both on horse and on ship
And on foot displayed
Legions of battle:
Artaphrenes, Megabates,
Astaspes, Amistres,

10

20

Leaders of Persians, kings,
Who are slaves of the greatest of kings,
Guarding the legions they rush,
And as bowman and knight,
With their temper resolved,
Fearful in aspect,
Dreadful in battle.

And exultant in horses
Artembares, Masistres,
The brave archer Imaeus,
And Pharandakas,
And the driver of horses
Sousthenes.

And others were sent
By the flourishing Nile:
Egyptian-born Sousiscanes,
Pegastagon, great Arsames
Ruler of sacred Memphis;
And Ariomardus
Governing ancient Thebes;
And who dwelling by marshes
Are rowers of ships,
Skilful and countless.

And the Lydians soft
Who inhabit the coast
Follow commanders and kings:
Metrogathes and brave Arkteus,
And golden Sardis send
Many charioteers,
Horses by threes and by fours,
Fearful the sight to behold.

And the neighbors of Tmolus—
They threaten to yoke

In servitude Hellas;
And the Mysian lancers,
Tharybis, Mardon,
Anvils of battle.
And golden Babylon
Pours forth her crowds—
Borne by their ships—
Who in drawing the bow
Rely on their boldness.
And the tribes from all Asia
Who carry the sword
Follow beneath the
Awesome parade of their king.
Thus of the Persian land
Of her men the flower is gone,
Nursed by the earth, and all Asia
Laments, consumed by desire;
And parents and wives
Counting the days
Tremble at lengthening time.
The destroyer of cities now,
That kingly army, has gone
Over the strait to the land
On linen-bound pontoons—
Tightly was clamped the way—
Helle of Athamas crossing,
Yoking the neck of the sea.—
And the furious leader the herd
Of populous Asia he drives,
Wonderful over the earth,
And admirals stern and rough
Marshals of men he trusts:
Gold his descent from Perseus,
He is the equal of god.=

In his eyes lazuli flashing
Like a snake's murderous glances,
With his mariners, warriors, many,
And his Syrian chariot driving,
Hard on the glorious spearmen
The archer Ares he leads.—

To the great torrent of heroes
There is none worthily equal,
Who resist, by defenses secured,
The unconquerable billows of ocean:
Persians are never defeated,
The people tempered and brave.=

For divine fate has prevailed since
It enjoined Persians to wage wars,
Which destroy towers and ramparts,
And the glad tumult of horsemen,
And cities overthrown.—

When the vast ocean was foaming,
By the winds boisterous whitened,
Then they learned, trusting to cables
And to pontoons which convey men,
To scan the sacred sea.=

Deceitful deception of god—
What mortal man shall avoid it?
With nimbleness, deftness, and speed,
Whose leaping foot shall escape it?
Benign and coaxing at first
It leads us astray into nets which
No mortal is able to slip,
Whose doom we never can flee.

Thus sable-clad my heart is torn,
Fearful for those Persian arms,

Lest the city hear, alas!
That reft of men is Sousa;—

And lest the city Kissa shall,
When the crowds of women cry,
Sing antiphonal, alas!
And rend their garb of mourning.=

All the horse and infantry
Like a swarm of bees have gone
With the captain of the host,
Who joined the headlands of either land,
Crossing the yoke of the sea.—

Beds with longing fill with tears,
Persian wives in softness weep;
Each her armed furious lord
Dismissed with gentle love and grief,
Left all alone in the yoke.=

But come, Persians,
Let us in this ancient palace sit,
And deep and wisely found our thoughts:
How does King Xerxes fare, Darius' son,
How fare his people? Has arrows' hail
Or strength of spear conquered?
But lo! she comes,
A light whose splendor equals eyes of gods,
The mother of our king, I kneel.
Now all must address and salute her.

(Enter Queen.)

O most majestic Queen of Persians
In ample folds adorned,
Hail, aged Xerxes' mother,
Consort of Darius, hail!
Mistress of the god of Persians,
Mother of a god thou art,

Unless the fortune of their arms
Now at last has altered.

Queen

Leaving my gold-clad palace, marriage-
Chamber of Darius, and my own,
His queen I'm come. Care quite grates my heart;
I fear, my friends, though not fearful for myself,
Lest great wealth's gallop trip prosperity—
Exalted by Darius and some god—
In its own dust. But, unexpectedly,
That dread has doubled: sums of cowardly
Wealth do court contempt, and indigence
Quenches ambition's flame, even if there's strength.
Though wealth we have unstinted; yet fear
Is for mine eye, Xerxes, whose presence here
I count the palace-eye. So things stand thus.
Advise my reason, Persians, old sureties:
All my gains with your counsel lie.

Chorus

O Queen of Persia, be assured that never
Twice hast thou to tell us word or deed,
Which our willing strength can guide; for we
Are loyal, whom thou dost call thy counselors.

Queen

With frequent, constant, and nocturnal dreams
I have lived, as soon as my son, gathering
His host had gone, his will to pillage Greece;
But never a more vivid presence came
Than yesternight's.
Two women as an apparition came,
One in Persian robes instructed well,
The other Doric, both in splendor dressed,
Who grand and most magnificent excelled
Us now, their beauty unreproached, spotless;

Sisters they, who casting for their father's land,
She Greece received, she Asia, where to dwell.
Then strife arose between them, or so I dreamed;
And my son, observing this, tries to check
And soothe them; he yokes them to a chariot,
Bridles their necks: and one, so arrayed, towers
Proud, her mouth obedient to reins;
But the other stamps, annoyed, and rends apart
Her trappings in her hands; unbridled, seizes
The car and snaps its yoke in two;
My son falls, and his father, pitying,
Stands by his side, but at whose sight Xerxes
Tears his robes. Thus in the night these visions
Dreamed: but when, arisen, I touched the springs'
Fair-flowing waters, approached the altar, wishing
To offer sacrifice religiously
To guardian deities, whose rites these are,
Then to Phoebus' hearth I saw an eagle fleeing:
Dumb in dread I stood: a falcon swooped
Upon him, its wings in flight, its claws plucked
At his head: he did no more than cower, hare-like.
Those were my terrors to see, and yours to hear.
My son, should he succeed, would be admired;
But if he fails, Persia cannot hold him
To account. Whichever comes, safe returned, sovereign
He shall rule.

Chorus

Queen mother, excessive fear
Or confidence we do not wish to give thee.
If thy dreams were ominous, approach
The gods with supplications; pray that these
Be unfulfilled, and blessings be fulfilled
For thee, thy son, thy city, and thy friends.
Next thou must libations pour to Earth

And dead; and beg Darius, of whom thou didst dream,
Send thee those blessings from the nether world
To light, for thee and for thy son; and hide
In darkness evils contrary, retained
Within the earth. Propitious be thy prayers.
We, prophetic in our spirit, kindly
Counsel thee: all will prosper.

220

Queen

Ah, loyally have answered the first expounders
Of my dreams. May these blessings ripen!
And all, as you enjoin, I'll sacrifice
To nether gods and friends, as soon as I
Return. But one thing more I wish to know:
My friends, where is Athens said to be?

230

Chorus

Far toward the dying flames of sun.

Queen

Yet still my son lusts to track it down?

Chorus

Then all Hellas would be subject to the king.

Queen

So rich in numbers are they?

Chorus

So great a host
As dealt to Persians many woes.

Queen

Are bow-plucked shafts their armament?

Chorus

Pikes wielded—close and shielded panoplies.

Queen

What else besides? Have they sufficing wealth?

240

Chorus

Their earth is veined with silver treasures.

Queen

Who commands them? Who is shepherd of their host? W

Chorus

They are slaves to none, nor are they subject. W

Queen

But how could they withstand a foreign foe?

Chorus

Enough to vanquish Darius' noble host.

Queen

We mothers dread to calculate—

Chorus

But soon thou'lt know all: a Persian runner comes,
Bearing some fresh report of weal or woe.

(Enter Herald.)

Herald

O cities of Asia, O Persian land,
And wealth's great anchorage!
How at a single stroke prosperity's
Corrupted, and the flower of Persia falls,
And is gone. Alas! the first herald of woe,
He must disclose entire what befell:
Persians, all the barbarian host is gone.

250

Chorus

O woe! woeful evil,
Novel and hostile.
Alas! Persians weep
Hearing this woe,—

Herald

How all has been destroyed, and I behold
The unexpected light of my return.

260

Chorus

Oh long seems our aged
Life to us elders,

Alas! hearing woe
Unexpected. =

Herald

And since I was witness, deaf to rumor's tales,
I can indicate what sorrows came.

Chorus

Woe upon woe, in vain
The crowd of arrows, massed,
Came on the hostile land. —

270

Herald

The lifeless rotting corpses glut the shore,
And adjacent fields of Salamis.

Chorus

Woe upon woe, of friends
The sea-dyed corpses whirl
Vagrant on craggèd shores. =

Herald

The bow protected none, but all the host,
Defeated in the naval charge, was lost.

Chorus

Raise a mournful, doleful cry
For Persians wretched:
All they made all woe.
Alas! the host destroyed. —

280

Herald

O most hateful name of Salamis!
O woe! how I mourn recalling Athens.

Chorus

Athens hateful to her foes.
Recall how many
Persians widowed vain,
And mothers losing sons. =

Queen

Long am I silent, alas! struck down
By disasters exceeding speech and question.
Yet men perforce god-sent misfortunes must
Endure. Speak, disclose entire what
Befell, quietly, though you grieve.
Who did not die? For whom of the captains
Shall we lament? Whose sceptered death drained his ranks.
Manless?

290

Herald

Xerxes lives to behold the light, but—

Queen

O for my palace a greater light,
And after blackest night a whiter day.

300

Herald

Artembares, captain of ten thousand
Horse, was dashed against Silenia's
Rugged shore; and satrap Dadakes,
Spear-struck, did lightly tumble from his ship;
And native-born Tenagon, the bravest
Bactrian, still haunts sea-buffeted
Ajax' isle; and Lilacus, Arsames,
And Argestes, conquered near the island
Where doves do thrive, beat a stubborn coast;
And neighbors of Egyptian Nile-waters,
Adeues, Arkteus, and, third, shielded
Pharnouchus, from a single ship
Were drowned; and Matallus, satrap of Chrysa,
Dying, leader of a thousand horse,
Changed to richest red his thickset flowing
Beard, and dipped his skin in crimson dyes;
And Magian Arabus and Bactrian
Artabes, all aliens in a savage
Country, perished; Amphistreu, who wielded

310

The much-belaboring spear, and Amistris,
Brave Ariomardus, all made Sardis weep;
And Mysian Seisames, Tharybis,
Commander of five times fifty ships,
His race Lyrnaean, fair to look upon
(His fortune was not), dead he lies;
And the leader of Cilicians single-handed
Taxed the enemy with toil, and nobly
Died. So many of the rulers I
Recall, but of the many woes, report
But few.

320

Queen

Alas! I hear the greatest
Of misfortunes, shame of Persians, and shrill
Lament. But tell me, returning to your tale,
What was the number of the Grecian ships,
That thought themselves a match for Persian
Arms in naval combat?

330

Herald

Had numbers counted,
The barbarian warships surely would have won;
The Greeks but numbered thirty tens, and ten
Apart from these a chosen squadron formed;
But Xerxes, and this I know full well, a thousand
Led; and seven and two hundred ranked
As queens in swiftmess. The count stood so.
Seemed we unequal? Some deity destroyed
Our host, who weighing down the balance swung
The beam of fortune. The gods saved the city
Of the goddess.

340

Queen

What? Athens still
Stands unsacked?

Herald

As long as there are men
The city stands.

Queen

What was the beginning
Of disaster? Tell me. Who began?
The Greeks? My son—exultant in his numbers?

350

Herald

Either an avenger or a wicked
God, my Lady (whence it came I know not),
Began the whole disaster. From Athenian
Ranks a Greek approached, addressing Xerxes
Thus: "When the gloom of blackest night
Will fall, the Greeks will not remain, but leap
To rowing-bench, and each by secret course
Will save his life." And he your son, upon
His hearing this, in ignorance of Greek
Guile and the jealousy of gods,
Harangued his captains publicly: "As soon
As sunlit rays no longer burn the earth,
And darkness sweeps the quarters of the sky,
Rank the swarm of ships in three flotillas,
Guard they the entrances, the straits sea-pound,
And girdle others round Ajax' isle;
But if the Greeks escape their evil doom,
Contriving secret flight, all your heads
Will roll. I warrant it." So he spoke
In humored pride: of the god-given future
Nothing he knew. And, having supped, they set
Themselves in order, each heart obedient;
And sailors bound a thong about each oar.
When the glare of sunlight died, and night
Came on, every man was at his oar,
Every man at arms who knew them.

360

370

Rank encouraged rank, and long-boats sailed
 To stations each had been assigned.
 All night the captains kept the fleet awake;
 And night ran on. No Grecian army set
 Secret sail: but when the steeds of day,
 White and luminous, began to cross
 The sky, a song-like, happy tumult sounded
 From the Greeks, and island rocks returned
 The high-pitched echo. Fear fell among us,
 Deceived in hope; for they (and not as if to flee)
 A solemn paean chanted, and to battle
 Rushed with fervent boldness: trumpets flared,
 Putting every Greek aflame. At once
 Concordant strokes of oars in dissonance
 Slapped the waters' depths: soon we saw
 Them all: first the right wing led in order,
 Next advanced the whole armada;
 A great concerted cry we heard: "O Greek
 Sons, advance! Free your fathers' land,
 Free your sons, your wives, the sanctuaries
 Of paternal gods, the sepulchers
 Of ancestors. Now the contest's drawn:
 All is at stake!" And babel Persian tongues
 Rose to meet it: no longer would the action
 Loiter. Warships struck their brazen beaks
 Together: a Grecian man-of-war began
 The charge, a Phoenician ornamented stern
 Was smashed; another drove against another.
 First the floods of Persians held the line,
 But when the narrows choked them, and rescue hopeless,
 Smitten by prows, their bronze jaws gaping,
 Shattered entire was our fleet of oars.
 The Grecian warships, calculating, dashed
 Round, and encircled us; ships showed their belly:
 No longer could we see the water, charged

380

390

400

410

With ships' wrecks and men's blood.
 Corpses glutted beaches and the rocks.
 Every warship urged its own anarchic
 Rout; and all who survived that expedition,
 Like mackerel or some catch of fish,
 Were stunned and slaughtered, boned with broken oars
 And splintered wrecks: lamentations, cries
 Possessed the open sea, until the black
 Eye of evening, closing, hushed them. The sum
 Of troubles, even if I should rehearse them
 For ten days, I could not exhaust. Rest
 Content: never in a single day
 So great a number died.

420

430

Queen

Alas! a sea of troubles breaks in waves
 On the Persians and barbarian tribes.

Herald

But what we've told would scarcely balance woes
 Untold: misfortune came upon them, which
 Swung the beam to weigh them double these.

Queen

But what greater hatred could fortune show?
 What misfortune came upon the soldiers,
 Swinging the beam of troubles to greater woes?

440

Herald

All the Persians, who were in nature's prime,
 Excellent in soul, and nobly bred to grandeur,
 Always first in trust, met their death
 In infamy, dishonor, and in ugliness.

Queen

Oh, wretched am I, alas! What doom
 Destroyed them?

Herald

There is an island fronting Salamis,

Small, scarce an anchorage for ships,
Where the dancer Pan rejoices on the shore;
Whither Xerxes sent those men to kill
The shipwrecked enemies who sought the island
As a refuge (easily, he thought,
The Grecian arms would be subdued);
He also bid them rescue friends. He conned
The future ill. For when a god gave Greeks
The glory, that very day, fenced in bronze,
They leaped ashore, and drew the circle tight
At every point: mewed up, we could not turn.
Many rattled to the ground, whom stones
Had felled, and arrows, shot by bowstring,
Others killed; and in a final rush,
The end: they hacked, mangled their wretched limbs,
Until the life of all was gone.
Xerxes mourned, beholding the lowest depths
Of woe; who, seated on a height that near
The sea commanded all his host, his robes
Destroying (and his lamentations shrill),
Dispatched his regiments on land: they fled
Orderless. Now you may lament their fate,
Added to the others' summed before.

45

460

470

Queen

O hateful deity! how the Persians
You deceived! Bitter was the vengeance
Which my son at famous Athens found:
She could not sate her appetite with those
Whom Marathon had made the Persians lose.
For these my son, exacting as requital
Punishment (or so he thought)
Called on himself so numerous
A train of woes. Tell me, what ships escaped?
Where are they now? Can you clearly tell?

Herald

Who captained the remaining ships set sail
Before the wind, fleeing in disorder;
But the army perished in Boeotia: some,
In want of precious water, were racked with thirst,
And some, gasping emptily on air,
Crossed to Phocis, Locria, the Malian
Gulf, where Spercheian waters kindly drench
The plain; and thence Achaea and Thessaly
Received us, wanting: there most died
In hunger and in thirst: both we felt.
To Magnesia and Macedonia we came,
The River Axius, the reedy marsh
Of Bolba, the mountain Pangaeon,
And Thrace. There in the night a god
Roused winter out of season: all, who had
Believed the gods were naught, sang their chants,
To earth and sky obeisance made.
When we ceased invoking gods, we tried
Waters that had turned to ice:
Whoever started before Apollo's rays
Spread and scattered in the sky, he
Was saved. Soon the brilliant orb of sun,
Its rays aflame, melts the river's midst:
One falls upon the next: happy he whose life
Was first cut short! The rest did make their way
But painfully through Thrace: not many fled
To hearth and home. Thus the city of Persians
May lament, regretting the loss of youth.
Truthful I have been, but omit many
Of the woes a god has hurled against
The Persians.

480

490

500

510

(Exit Herald.)

Chorus

O toilsome deity! how heavily
You leaped upon all Persia!

Queen

Alas! woe is me, the host destroyed.
O bright night's spectacle of dreams,
How clearly you foresaw my woe,
And you, my counselors, how poorly judged.
But yet, as you counseled thus,
First to the gods I'll offer prayer; and then
To Earth and dead I'll come to offer gifts,
A sacrificial cake. I know I pray
For what is done and gone, but a brighter
Fortune, in time to come, may there be.
And you, worthy of trust, exchange worthy counsel;
My son, should he return before my own
Return, comfort and escort him home:
I fear to woes he'll add more woe.

520

(Exit Queen.)

530

Chorus

O! royal Zeus destroyed
The multitudinous, proud
Host of the Persian men,
And the cities of Sousa
And of Agbatana
Concealed in the darkness of grief.

Many with delicate hands
Rending their veils,
Drenching their breasts,
Swollen with tears,
Sharing their woe,
Ladies of Persia
Softly are weeping,
Desiring each

540

Him to behold
Wedded but lately,
Couches forsaking,
Soft as their coverlets
(Youth was voluptuous),
Their sorrows, insatiate woe.
And I the paeon's song recite,
Doom of the gone,
Woe upon woe.

Now all Asia
Desolate, void,
Sighs lament:
Xerxes led,
Alas,
Xerxes lost,
O woe,
Xerxes heedless all discharged
With ocean argosies.
Why was Darius so long without harm,
Archery's captain of citizens,
Loved Sousa's lord?—

550

Armies, navies
Lazuli-eyed,
Linen-winged
Warships led,
O woe,
Warships rammed destructively
By Grecian arms.
Scarcely escaped was the leader alone
(So we have heard) in the Thracian
Plains, bitter ways. =

560

They of the first death,
Alas,

Left by necessity,
Woe,
Round by Kychraean shores,
Oh,
Moan in your anguish,
Cry to the heavens your grief,
Oh,
Wail long-weeping
Mournful cries.—

570

Torn in the sea-swirl,
Alas,
Mangled by voiceless,
Woe,
Fish of the unstained sea.
Oh,
Houses deprived grieve,
Sonless, to heavens their grief,
Oh,
Elders mourning,
Hear all woe.=

580

They throughout the Asian land
No longer Persian laws obey,
No longer lordly tribute yield,
Exacted by necessity;
Nor suffer rule as suppliants,
To earth obeisance never make:
Lost is the kingly power.—
Nay, no longer is the tongue
Imprisoned kept, but loose are men,
When loose the yoke of power's bound,
To bawl their liberty.
But Ajax' isle, spilled with blood
Its earth, and washed round by sea,
Holds the remains of Persia.=

590

(Enter Queen.)

Queen

My friends, whoever's wise in ways of evil
Knows how, when a flood of evil comes,
Everything we grow to fear; but when
A god our voyage gladdens, we believe
Always that fortune's never-changing wind
Will blow. As my eyes behold all things
As fearful visitations of the gods,
So my ears already ring with cureless songs:
Thus consternation terrifies my sense.
Therefore I departed from the palaces,
Alone returning, unaccompanied
By chariots, by pomp and ceremony.
To the father of my son I bring
Propitious offerings, libations
For the dead: a milk-sweet draught of sacred kine
Unblemished; and resplendent liquors of the honey-
Working bee, with liquid droplets of a maiden
Stream are mingled; and this elixir
Of an antique vine, whose mother is
The wild fields; and golden-green the fruit
Of fragrant olive trees, always flourishing
Their leafy age; and plaited flowers, children
Of the fecund earth. My friends, recite
Your chants and threnodies; recall
Darius, daemon over these libations
To the dead, sepulchral honors, which
I lavish on the nether gods.

600

610

620

Chorus

O Queen of the Persians,
To the dark chambers
Libations pour;
While, kindness imploring
Of the gods, the conductors,

We offer prayer:
Ye sacred divinities,
Earth and King Hermes,
Conduct him to light
Up from the dead,
Who alone of all mortals,
A remedy knowing,
May show us the end.

630

Hearest thou, blessed king
Equal to god,
As I proclaim now
Chantings unpleasant
Barbarous mournful
Clear and diverse?
Miserable sorrows
I shall cry out.
Below dost thou hearken?—

Earth and the other gods
Leaders of dead,
Glorious demon
Him let arise thence,
God of the Persians
Sousa his mother;
Send up the man whom
Never surpassed
The Persian land buried. =

640

Loved is the man, loved his tomb
Hiding his loving ways.
Aedoneus conductor,
Would that Aedoneus send
Lord Darius alone:—

650

Never by war wasted his men,
Never infatuate,

Called a god in wisdom,
God in wisdom he was,
Ruled his people well. =

Padshah, ancient Padshah,
Appear on the height of thy tomb,
Raise thy slipper saffron-dyed,
Flash the lappets of thy crown:
Father Darius, Oh hither come, woe. —

660

Hear the recent sorrows,
O master of masters appear.
Stygian gloom doth flit about;
All the youth hath perished now.
Father Darius, Oh hither come, woe. =

670

Oh, alas, Oh!
O much-lamented by his friends in death:
The ships with triple banks of oars are gone.

680

(The Ghost of Darius rises.)

Darius

O faithful followers, companions
Of my youth! O Persian counselors!
What burden's burdening the city, which
In lamentation moans, and makes the plains
Tremble? And terrified I saw my wife
Beside my tomb, and graciously received
Her offerings; and you lamented, standing
Near my tomb, with cries of resurrection
Calling piteously. Ascent is not easy.
The chthonic deities more readily
Receive than give; but I, a potentate
Among them, came: be quick, that I be un-
Reproached for being late. What recent woe
Upon the Persians weighs?

690

Chorus

I'm shamed to behold thee,
I'm shamed to address thee,
Who was anciently feared.—

Darius

Since I have risen obeying
Lamentations, lengthen not
Your tale, but speak succinctly,
Recounting all. Lay aside your
Reverence toward me.

Chorus

I tremble to please thee,
I tremble to tell thee
What is loth to be told.=

700

Darius

As an ancient fear obstructs your sense,
You, agèd consort of my marriage,
Noble Queen, cease your weeping; tell me
Clearly: many woes arise by sea, many
Come by land, the longer life is racked.

Queen

O King, exceeding mortal happiness
By happy fate! How, as long as you beheld
The eyes of sun, you spent, how envied! a blessed
Life like god's; and now I envy you
Your dying, ere you saw this depth of woe.
Everything, Darius, you will hear
Succinctly: Persia is destroyed.

710

Darius

How? A lightning-bolt of hunger? Civil
Strife within the city?

Queen

No, but all
The host's destroyed at Athens.

Darius

Who among

My sons was general? Tell me.

Queen

Furious Xerxes, who drained the plain manless.

Darius

By foot or warship was his vain attempt?

Queen

By both: a double front of doubled hosts.

720

Darius

But how did so great an army cross the strait?

Queen

Devices, yoking Helle's strait, a path
Afforded.

Darius

He accomplished this? To close

Great Bosphorus?

Queen

So it was; some god

Contrived it.

Darius

Alas! a great divinity

Deceived his sense.

Queen

The evil end he made

Is present to the eye.

Darius

What befell them

That you thus lament?

Queen

The naval host,

Destroyed, destroyed the landed host.

Darius

Thus all the people spears destroyed.

Queen

Thus Sousa groans desolate.

730

Darius

Alas! the goodly host! Alas! defenders!

Queen

All the Bactrians destroyed, no youth remains.

Darius

O woe! the youth of allies gone.

Queen

Xerxes

Alone with few they say.

Darius

Perished how?

Perished where?

Queen

To the joyous bridge

They came, the yoke of continents.

Darius

He was saved? Can this be true?

Queen

Yes, a clear report without dispute.

Darius

Alas! that prophecy was quick to act!

Zeus hurled against my son its lightning-end,

While I expected after many years

The gods would make an end; but when a man's

Willing and eager, god joins in. The spring

Of evil's found: my son in ignorance

Discovered it, by youthful pride; who hoped

To check the sacred waters of the Hellespont

By chains, just as if it were a slave. He smoothed

His way, yoking Neptune's flowing Bosphorus

With hammered shackles. Mortal though he was,

740

By folly thought to conquer all the gods

And Neptune. Had not my son diseased his sense?

750

I fear my labored wealth will fall the prey

Of conquerors.

Queen

Wicked men counseled this, furious

Xerxes learned; saying you acquired wealth

By spear, while he, in cowardice, played

The warrior at home, and multiplied

By nothing his ancestral wealth. So often

These wicked men reproached him, until he

Did plot his martial way toward Greece.

Darius

So their great, eternal deed is done!

Never had anyone before made this

760

Sousa so empty and so desolate,

Since Zeus, our Lord, bestowed that honor:

One man to wield his rod's authority

Over all of Asia, rich in flocks.

First was Medus leader of the host;

Next his son fulfilled the office well,

Whose reason was the helmsman to his spirit;

Third was Cyrus, fortunate, whose rule

Brought peace to all: the Lydian people

And the Phrygian he acquired,

770

And marched his might against Ionia:

No god resented him, for he was wise;

And fourth was Cyrus' son, who shamed his country

And ancestral throne; but Artaphrenes

(Aided by his guile) and his friends,

Whose task this was, slew him in his palace.

After him, I, willing, drew the lot

To rule, and often led a mighty host;

780

But never did I cast so great a woe

Upon my city. Xerxes, my son, as young
In age as sense, ignored my wisdom. Know
This well, my comrades old as I, all of us
Who held these powers, never wrought so many
Woes.

Chorus

To what end, my Lord Darius, dost thou
Harp on this? How could we, the Persian
People, fare the best?

Darius

If you lead
No expedition to the land of Greece,
Not even if the Median host be more;
For Grecian soil is their own ally.

790

Chorus

What dost thou intend by that, "their own ally"?

Darius

It starves to death excessive numbers.

Chorus

But, be sure, we'll raise a well-equipped
And chosen host.

Darius

But even they, who now
Remain in Greece, shall find no safe return.

Chorus

What? Shall not all the host return
Across the strait of Helle?

Darius

Few of many,
If the oracles of gods are credited:
As we gaze at what has passed, no halt
Prophecy succeeds, but either all
Or none. If we credit them, he leaves

800

Behind, his empty hopes persuading, chosen
Numbers of his host, who now are stationed
Where Asopus floods the plain, its rich sap
Kind to Boeotia; here await them
The lowest depths of woe to suffer, payment
For his pride and godless arrogance.
They, invading Greece, felt no awe,
They did not hesitate to plunder images
Of gods, and put temples to the torch;
Altars were no more, and statues, like trees,
Were uprooted, torn from their bases
In all confusion. Thus their wickedness
Shall no less make them suffer:
Other woes the future holds in store,
And still the fount of evils is not quenched,
It wells up, and overflows: so great will be
The sacrificial cake of clotted gore
Made at Plataea by Dorian spear.
And corpses, piled up like sand, shall witness,
Mute, even to the century to come,
Before the eyes of men, that never, being
Mortal, ought we cast our thoughts too high.
Insolence, once blossoming, bears
Its fruit, a tasseled field of doom, from which
A weeping harvest's reaped, all tears.
Behold the punishment of these! remember
Greece and Athens! lest you disdain
Your present fortune, and lust after more,
Squandering great prosperity.
Zeus is the chastener of overboastful
Minds, a grievous corrector. Therefore advise
Him, admonished by reason, to be wise,
And cease his overboastful temper from
Sinning against the gods. And you, aged
Mother of Xerxes, go to the palace;

810

820

830

Gather up rich and brilliant cloths, and go
To meet your son; for he, in grief, has rent
His embroidered robes to shreds. Gently soothe
Him with your words: to yours alone he'll listen.
Now shall I descend to nether gloom.
Elder counselors, farewell, and though
In time of troubles, give daily pleasures
To your soul, as wealth cannot benefit
The dead.

840

(The Ghost of Darius descends.)

Chorus

Alas! the woes upon us and the woes
To come have grieved me hearing them.

Queen

O god! how many sorrows move against me!
But one torment has the deepest fang,
Hearing that dishonor folds about my son
Its robes. But I shall go to gather up
Adornments, and try to meet my son.
When evils come on those we dearly love,
Never shall we betray them.

850

(Exit Queen.)

Chorus

Oh! alas, Oh! what a great and a good life was ours,
Civilly ordered, as long as the agèd
Ruler of all,
Mild, unconquerable king,
Equal to god,
Darius ruled the land.—

Glorious arms we displayed, and the bulwarks of custom
All they did guide. And returning from battle
Grief had we none,
Victors, unburdened of all,
Happy and glad,
To home again we came.=

860

For many the cities he sacked never crossing the Halys,
Nor leaving his hearth in a rush:
At the mouth of the River Strymon,
Near Thracian places,
The islands of Achelous;—

Both cities beyond the Aegean, surrounded by towers,
Obeyed him our lord, and who round
The broad strait of Helle boasting,
And recessed Propontis,
And gateway of Pontus, Bosphor;=

870

And the isles along the headland washed by sea
Lying close to shore:
Samos and Chios and Lesbos the olive-planted,
Paros and Naxos and Mykonos,
And Tenos the neighbor of Andros.—

880

And the islands in the midst of sea he ruled:
Ikaros and Lemnos,
Rhodus and Knidos and cities of Aphrodite,
Paphos and Solus and Salamis,
Whose founder's the cause of these sorrows.=

890

Thus the wealthy and populous lands,
The Ionian province, he ruled;
And the strength of his helmeted men
Was unwearied, innumerable allies.
But now we bear god-routed fortunes,
Overcome by the blows of the sea.

900

(Enter Xerxes alone.)

Xerxes

Oh, hateful this doom, woe is me,
Wretched alas, without augury.
How savagely swooped the deity.
What will befall me? I swoon
Beholding these citizens agèd.

910

Zeus! would that fate had covered me
With the Persians gone!

Chorus

Oh alas, King, for a brave host,
For the great honor of Persian rule,
For the ranks of men whom a god has slain.

920

Nations wail their native sons,
Who by Xerxes stuffed up hell;
Many heroes, Persia's bloom,
Archers, thick array of men,
Myriads have perished.
Woe, O King of noble strength.
Cruel! Cruel! Asia kneels.

930

Xerxes

Here am I, alas, O woe:
To my native and ancestral land
Woe is the evil I've become.

Chorus

Loudly shall I send, for your return,
An evil-omened shout, an evil-practiced cry:
A weeping wail of Persian mourners shall I sing.—

Xerxes

Send a wail of evil sound
Lamenting and grievous: now
Fortune again has changed for me.

940

Chorus

Mourning wail all-weeping shall I send,
In honor of your woes and sea-struck grief:
Again a wailing filled with tears I'll cry.=

Xerxes

Ionian Ares spoiled,
Protected by their ships,
Their partisan in war,

950

Reaping gloomy flats of sea
and demon-haunted shores.

Chorus

Oh alas!

Xerxes

Lament and ask for all.

Chorus

But where are the others?
Where is thy retinue,
Like Pharandakas,
Sousas, Pelagon, and Agabatas,
Dotamas, Psammis, Sousiscanes
Leaving Agbatana?—

960

Xerxes

The lost I deserted there,
Who from the ships of Tyre
To Salaminian shore
Vanished and were gone, their corpses
pounding stubborn shores.

Chorus

Oh alas! but where is Pharnouchus
And brave Ariomardus?
Where is Seualkes lord,
Or Lilaeus grand,
Memphis, Tharybis, and Masistres,
Artembares and Hystaechmes?
These I ask you about.=

970

Xerxes

Oh alas, woe,
Who all, beholding ancient, hateful Athens, gasp on shore,
Woe upon woe, wretched in a single sweep of oar.

Chorus

Did you leave that Persian there,
Your trusted universal eye,

980

Who made his count by myriads,
 Batanochus' son Alpistus?

 Of Sesames, of Megabates,
 Great Parthus and Oebares you left behind?
 O woe, O woe, O miseries.
 You tell of woes on woes.—

Xerxes

Oh alas, woe,
 The magic wheel of longing for my friends you turn, you tell
 Me hateful sorrows. Within my frame my heart resounds,
 resounds.

990

Chorus

And for the others still we long:
 The leader of ten thousand men
 Of Mardia, Xanthes, Angchares,
 And Diaexis and Arsamas,
 Masters of horsemen,
 And Dadakas and Lythimnas,
 And Tolmus who never slaked his spear.
 I see about the moving tents,
 I see no followers.=

1000

Xerxes

Gone are the hunters of the pack.

Chorus

Gone, alas, fameless.

Xerxes

Oh alas, woe.

Chorus

Woe, O gods
 Who brought these unexpected woes!
 How baleful gleams the eye of doom.—

Xerxes

Struck by woes perpetual.

Chorus

Struck by recent—

Xerxes

A recent woe.

1010

Chorus

Woe, alas,
 They met the men-of-war without success:
 How luckless was the Persians' war.=

Xerxes

Alas, in so vast an army I am struck.

Chorus

What is not lost, thou curse of the Persians?

Xerxes

Behold the remnants of my power.

Chorus

I see, I see.

Xerxes

And this receptacle.

1020

Chorus

What is this that is saved?

Xerxes

A treasure of arrows.

Chorus

How few from so many!

Xerxes

We are left of protectors.

Chorus

Greeks stand firm in combat.—

Xerxes

Alas, too firm! I scan an unexpected woe.

Chorus

You mean the host, routed and broken?

Xerxes
My garments I rent at my woe.

Chorus
Alas, O woe.

Xerxes
And even more than woe.

Chorus
Double and triple the woe.

Xerxes
Painful to us, but to enemies joy.

Chorus
And docked was our power.

Xerxes
I am stripped of escorters.

Chorus
Sea-dooms stripped us of our friends.=

Xerxes
Weep, weep, weep for the woe, and homeward depart.

Chorus
Alas, O woe, misery.

Xerxes
Shout antiphonal to me.

Chorus
To woebegone woeful gift of woes.

Xerxes
Raising a cry, join together our songs.

Xerxes and Chorus
Alas, O woe, woe, woe upon woe.

Chorus
Hearing this calamity,
Oh! I am pierced.—

Xerxes
Sweep, sweep, sweep with the oar, and groan for my sake.

1030

1040

Chorus
I weep, alas, woe is me.

Xerxes
Shout antiphonal to me.

Chorus
My duty is here, O master, lord.

Xerxes
Lift up your voice in lamenting now.

Xerxes and Chorus
Alas, O woe, woe, woe upon woe.

Chorus
Black again the blows are mixed,
Oh, with the groans.=

Xerxes
Beat your breast and cry Mysian songs.

Chorus
Woe upon woe.

Xerxes
Tear your whitened hair tightly clenched.

Chorus
Tightly clenched, plaintive.

Xerxes
Piercing cry.

Chorus
And so I shall.—

Xerxes
Full-fold garments with strength of hand rend.

Chorus
Woe upon woe.

Xerxes
Pluck your hair and pity the host.

Chorus
Tightly clenched, plaintive.

1050

1060

« ABSCHYLUS »

Xerxes

Drench your eyes.

Chorus

And so I weep. =

Xerxes

Shout antiphonal to me.

Chorus

Alas, O woe.

Xerxes

Wretched, homeward depart.

Chorus

O woe, alas.

1070

Xerxes

Through the city lamentation.

Chorus

Lament indeed.

Xerxes

Softly stepping, moan.

Chorus

O Persian land in hardness stepped.

Xerxes

O woe, woe, in triple banks of oars,

O woe, woe, in argosies destroyed.

Chorus

We shall escort thee

With mournful lament.

(*Exeunt omnes.*)