

The Persians

By Aeschylus

Translated by

Andrew Wilson

Characters

Chorus of Old Men

The Queen, widow of Dareios and mother of

Xerxes A Messenger

The ghost of King Dareios

King Xerxes

Scene

Susa, the capital city of the Persian Empire 480 BC

THE PERSIANS

CHORUS

Left by the Persians now departed¹ anapaests
For the land of the Hellenes, we're known as "The Faithfuls",
Guards of the rich and the gold-paved palaces,
Through seniority due to our age, whom
His majesty Xerxes the king himself, 5
Son of Dareios,
Chose as overseers of his country².
Concerning the coming home of the king
And of the army the great and golden,
Now my heart - too prone to sense evil – 10
Pesters me, deeply.
All of the strength that was nurtured in Asia:
Is departed, while she whimpers alone,
The Woman missing the man that was hers.³ 13a
Not a messenger nor any horseman
Has arrived at the Persians' citadel. 15
And those who leaving Susa and Agbatan
And the ancient fortress of Kissia⁴,
Went away, some on their horses and
Others on warships: the foot-soldiers marching,
Completing the dense mass of men for the war. 20
Such as Amistres and Artaphrenes
And Megabates and Astaspes:
Persian grandees,

¹ Believed to be a tribute to Phrynichus' play of the same name produced earlier. "Il miglior fabbro"

² Xerxes chose Artabanus for this role – acc to Herodotus 7.52.

³ Page (OCT 1972) proposes a lacuna, to be filled with something of the sort. West (Teubner) has no lacuna, but reads νέον (young) for ἐόν (his/her own). I don't see how the army could whine, howl or bark a young/new someone.

⁴ Susa was in Kissian territory. Agbatana= Ecbatana (Avestan Hagmatana), now Hamadan.

Vassal kings of the Great King of kings,
 Sprang forth, leading the mighty army, 25
 Masterful bowmen and knights on horseback
 Fearsome to look at and awesome in battle,
 With unshakable courage inside them.
 Artembares chariot warrior,
 Masistres the deadly archer 30
 Brave Imaios and Pharandakes;
 Driving his horses, Sosthanes.
 Others the mighty mother of much life,
 Neilos,⁵ provided: Sousiskanes,
 Pegastagon nurtured in Egypt,
 And too the monarch of holy Memphis.
 Mighty Arsames, and the governor,
 Ariomardos, of ancient Thebai,
 And from the marshes the oarsmen of warships,
 Awesome – a number too great to be counted. 40
 Next a contingent of Lydians living in luxury
 Followed, the overlords of the tribes who live
 On the mainland, whom Metrogathes,
 And Arkteus the splendid, captains royal,
 And Sardis brimming with gold mustered; they
 In their thousands and mounted on chariots,
 Some of them four-horse, while others were six-horse⁶,
 Terrible sight to be looked-upon facing you.
 Those who have homes around holy Tmolos
 Are set to fit slavery's yoke upon Greece, 50
 Mardon, Tharybis impervious to spears;
 Javelin-masters, the Mysians; Babylon,

⁵ The Nile

⁶ Aeschylus says "two-poled or three-poled": A pole links a pair of horses.

Bursting with gold, despatches a diverse
 Straggling multitude, sailors on board ships,
 And those who clasp their infallible bows,
 And the multiple tribes from all over Asia
 Are flocking to join,
 Under the powerful leadership of the king.
 Such was the flower of men who've departed
 The land of the Persians.

60

They are whom all of the Asian continent
 Which nursed them misses and achinglly mourns,
 Parents and wives are shaking with terror,
 Counting the days as time stretches endlessly.

Strophe 1

ionic a minore⁷

It has crossed now, the destroyer of the cities,
 Has the army of the Great King to the land next to the sea-strait,
 Which it bridges with a floating string of barges -
 Helle's passage⁸ they call it -
 Tied together, using flax-rope, like a road- yoke on the sea's neck.

3 io

4 io

3 io

an io 70

4 io

Antistrophe 1

In his fury, the commander over Asia's
 Populations, is propelling his divine flock to all countries,
 Split in two forces, for sea-battles or land-fights;
 He can count on to lead them
 Men of rough strength, - the divine one with the bloodline rich in gold.

80

Strophe 2

⁷ - - -

⁸ The Hellespont, fancifully named after Helle, who crossed trying to escape being sacrificed by her father Athamas.

From his eyes flashing the deep stare	2 io
Of the dark serpent so blood-soaked,	2 io
All his soldiers, all his sailors,	2 io
In his chariot – it's from Syria –	2 io
In the hunt leading the bow-lord against spears, the war-god Ares.	2 io, an, ia, macron

Antistrophe 2

There is no one so courageous	
Who can hold up such a strong shield	
At the great deluge of warriors	
At the invincible floodtide.	90
For the army of the Persians can't be beaten, nor its people.	

Strophe 3

Given control by the gods, Fate, long ago told	3 io
Them, the Persians when she gave them her permission:	3 io
They may wage war to destroy walls,	2 io
Letting loose squadrons of horsemen and turning the city to heaps of dust.	2 io, 2 an, ia

Antistrophe 3

But they learned to fix their vision on a precinct`	109
That was sanctioned - of the sea which has the broad routes	
And the white foam, and its fierce winds –	
They relied on clever cables and devices that could transport their men across.	

Mesode

For a god's devious deceptions	2 io
What defence has a mere mortal?	2 io
Who has footspeed quick enough to be the master of evasion?	4 io
She is friendly to begin with, is Delusion to us mortals, so she seems,	3 io, an

Then she traps us in her net-snare, 2 io
 Out of which no man is able to escape and get away. 3 io, an

Strophe 4

That is why my heart wears black robes of black now torn through fear. 2 lec
 “O a! Persian army you are doomed”. May the city never hear 2 lec
 Such a cry, “Susa’s emptied of its men!” cr lec

Antistrophe 4

And the town of Kissia shall be singing in response ` 121
 “O a! “This the sound that shall ring out from the women’s teeming throng ,
 Loud and clear, as they tear their linen robes.

Strophe 5

All of them, all the horse, all of those who march on foot, 2 cr lec
 Like a swarm, swarm of bees, all are gone, gone with him, the army’s chief. 3 cr lec
 They all crossed where the yoke - the boat-bridge over an arm of the sea - ba cr ba hem
 Linked the lands together, ith

Antistrophe 5

Marriage beds wet with tears; women longing for their men
 Persian wives - softly sad, each in pain longs to hold the man she loves,
 Her missing warrior man her partner, him who she waved off to battle,
 Left without a yokemate.⁹ 139

But come on, Persians, taking our seats here, anapaests
 In this time-honoured place,
 Let us contrive some wise well-ordered

⁹ Probable intentional echoes between the yoke-bridge and the marriage yoke. The yoke linking two oxen to the plough was of course very familiar.

Strategy – certainly that’s what’s needed.
How are things going for Xerxes, Great King,
Son of Dareios?
Is it drawing the bow¹⁰ that has conquered?
Or has the power
Of the points of the spearheads won the day?

The Queen’s and her magnificent entourage are seen approaching

But here bright as the eyes of the gods comes 150
Radiance, as the king’s mother approaches,
And my queen. I fall down on my knees.
We must all greet her as it is fitting.
Speaking the words of salutation.

Queen, the highest-ranked of Persian women in their finery, trochaics¹¹
Bed-choice of the Persians’ god-king, and the mother of a god,
If, that is, no ancient daimon¹² has reversed the army’s luck. 158

THE QUEEN¹³

That is why I’ve come here leaving my apartments and their gold, trochaics
And the chamber where Dareios and I shared our marriage bed. 160
Apprehension frets my heart: a saying I shall tell you, friends,
Not that I’m the first to say it, but it makes me feel afraid:
“Wealth that’s great creates a dust-storm blotting out prosperity.”¹⁴
Wealth as Dareios created, aided by one of the gods.

¹⁰ As frequently in the play, bows are Persian, spears are Greek.

¹¹ Specifically trochaic tetrameter catalectic: a metre found in tragedy, in Aristophanes and in Roman verse, and very much alive in English (“Lo he comes with clouds descending, once for favoured sinners slain”)

¹² ¹²daimon – ie an unspecified god. Probably Aeschylus was unaware of the “demons” in Darius’ religion (Mazdaism – not yet full-on Zoroastrianism) – destructive forces that served Ahriman, the embodiment of Evil.

¹³ For how she entered see lines 607 -8.

¹⁴ The saying is otherwise unknown, and obscure in meaning! The Greek says “overturns with a foot” not blots out.

These things cause a double worry, which my heart is loth to share,
That the people lose respect for money not backed up by men:
And on men who've lost their money, well-earned honour no more shines.
We possess sufficient wealth: my fear is whether we still shine.
Presence of its master is the light a house depends upon.
As this is the state of things, then, help by giving me advice, 170
Be here for me in this crisis, Persians, old dependables!

CHORUS

Queen of Persia, know this well: there is no need to mention twice
Anything that we can say or do to guide you, in our power.
We you're calling to assist you are your loyal counsellors.

THE QUEEN

I've constantly been plagued by dreams, each night iambics
Since when my son leading his army, left
So eager to despoil¹⁵ Ionian¹⁶ lands.
But never did I have so clear a dream,
As that I had last night. I'll tell it you. 180
Two women, as it seemed to me well-dressed
The one attired in Persian clothes, the other
Dressed like a Greek, appeared before my eyes.
In stature they were far more striking than
Women today, stunningly beautiful –
Sisters of one family, though one's homeland
Was Greece, the other's the barbarian land.
These two, as I believed I saw, began
To quarrel with each other, and my son,
Aware, stopped them and tried to calm them down. 190
He yoked them to his chariot, put straps

¹⁵ Greek *persai*, to sack – identical to *Persai*, the Persians.

¹⁶ The Persians actually used **Ionian** to refer to all Greeks (Yauna on Behistun inscr.)

Around their necks. One stands there proud, tower-like,

And, quietly obedient, accepts the reins.

The other bucks, and with her hands tears at

The chariot-gear, escapes the harness, drags

It forcibly, smashing the yoke in two.

My son falls out, while Dareios his father

Stands there distressed. When Xerxes sees this he

Begins to rip the robes that covered him.

This then is what I saw last night, I say.

200

When I got up, I washed my hands and stood

Beside the altar with my sacrifice

In hand, wanting to give a libation

To the gods whose role is to avert bad things.

I see an eagle making for Phoebus'

Altar. I froze. I could not speak, my friends.

And in a while I see a falcon - wings

Swept back, fast stooping, claws outstretched

To strike the head. The eagle merely cowered

And gave up. Seeing this made me afraid,

210

As hearing it will you. Know if my son

Succeeds, he would become a special man;

But if he fails, he's not accountable:

If he survives, he's still the country's king.

CHORUS

Mother, we don't want to cause you too much fear in what we say, trochaic tetrameters

Nor to give you too much hope. If what you saw was untoward,

Take them offerings, the gods, and ask them to prevent these things,

Pray the outcome may be good for you and for your son, and your

Children, country, all your friends. Then next it is your duty to

Pour libations to the earth and to the dead. Respectfully

220

Beg Dareios your late husband, whom you say you saw last night,

Send you and your son up good things from below into the light,

Hold in dark obscurity below whatever is not so.

What my heart prompts me to offer, this I offer with respect:

Everything for you will turn out well - that is what we believe.

THE QUEEN

Truly you, the first to clarify my visions, show by this

You are loyal to my son and to my family as well.

May the outcome be as good! And all the things that you advised,

I shall set in motion for the gods and friends below the earth,

When I get back to the house. But what I need to know is this,

230

Where, my friends, is Athens said to be located in the world?

CHORUS

Far away and near the sinking of the sun god's final rays.

THE QUEEN

And my son wanted to make this city quarry of his hunt?

CHORUS

Yes, for then the whole of Hellas would be subject to the king.

THE QUEEN

I assume they have an army very large in terms of men?

CHORUS

Large enough you may be sure; it did the Persians serious harm¹⁷.

THE QUEEN

Is there more besides their manpower? Ample wealth within the halls?

CHORUS

Silver wells up like a spring – their treasure-chamber in the soil.¹⁸

THE QUEEN

Skilled in bending bows and aiming arrows with experienced hands?

CHORUS

No. They stand and fight with spears, and no more armour than their shields.

240

¹⁷ ie at Marathon in 490 BC, where 6,400 Persians died acc to Herodotus.

¹⁸ Refers to the new vein of silver discovered at Laureion in 482 – which paid for their fleet.

THE QUEEN

Who's the shepherd over them, their master when they go to war?

CHORUS

They are labelled slaves to no one, nor subjects to any man.

THE QUEEN

How could they then hope to fight off enemies invading them?

CHORUS

How? The way they trounced Dareios' huge and well-appointed force.

THE QUEEN

Dreadful things, you say, the soldiers' parents have to contemplate.

CHORUS

Soon it seems to me though you shall have a full and true account;

Someone running – Persian by the looks of him – the way he runs –

He is bringing news for certain: we'll hear if it's good or bad.

MESSENGER

O cities throughout all the Asian lands,

iambics

O Persian realm, warehouse of affluence,

250

How at a single blow your mighty wealth

Is lost, the flower of Persia cut down, gone.

Oimoi! ¹⁹How bad to be the first to tell bad news,

But I must show the full catastrophe,

Persians. The whole barbarian force is lost.

CHORUS metres are VERY loosely iambic in character!

Strophe 1

Agony, so bad I cannot believe it²⁰.

11 Short syllables

Evil too! *Aiaiai!* Time to cry,

3cr

Persians, hearing of this tragedy.

3cr

¹⁹ I've kept the exclamations in Greek, as written English (outside comic books) offers little beyond "ouch!" and "alas!". Choruses looking for inspiration should attend a few football matches.

²⁰ "unheard of bad things"

MESSENGER

Yes, everything of theirs is finished, done.

260

Myself? I never thought I'd get back home.

CHORUS

Antistrophe 1

We've been allowed lives that are too long,
We old men, if we must live to hear
Of this blow no one could have foreseen.

MESSENGER

And I was there – I heard no others' news -
I'll tell you, Persians, just how bad it was.

CHORUS

Strophe 2

Otototoi! In vain
Hundreds of weapons of every kind
Came from all of the lands of Asia! *Aiai!*
To Hellas' enemy country.

2ia

hipponactean

pherecratean

MESSENGER

Salamis' shores, and all the coast nearby
Are piled with corpses cruelly done to death.

CHORUS

Antistrophe 2

Otototoi! Our loved ones'
Bodies you say are floating dead
Wave-crushed, soaked by the cruel sea-swell,
Drifting meshed in their fine robes.

MESSENGER

No use were bows: the sea-force, all of it,
Has perished, overwhelmed when ship rammed ship.

CHORUS

Strophe 3

Let out despairing cries of death 280

And misery for the doomed!
How the gods have harshly ended all
Crushed is the Persian force, everything's lost. *Aiai!*

MESSENGER

I so hate to hear the name of Salamis!
I cannot bear to think of Athens, *pheu!*

CHORUS

Antistrophe 3

Indeed, her enemies must not
Forget detested Athens,
How she left so many Persian
Women with empty beds, robbed of their men

THE QUEEN

I have been silent for so long, distraught,
And devastated by this tragedy,
Too much to even speak, or ask how bad.
But men must stomach torments which the gods
Bestow on us. Spell out the full calamity.
So, steel yourself – speak though you hurt inside.

Who has not died? And who must we weep for
From our commanders? Of the senior ranks,
Who's died and left his group with none in charge?

MESSENGER

Xerxes himself still lives and sees the light.

THE QUEEN

What you have said brings light to me and mine,
Brightness of daylight after darkest night.

MESSENGER

Artembares, of countless horsemen chief,
Is bumping the Silenian shore's hard rocks,
And Dadakes, the general, hit by
A spear, plunged from his vessel gracefully;
Tenagon, true born, best of the Bactrians,
Is drifting round Aias's sea-lashed isle.

Lilaïos, Arsames and Argastes,

Defeated, off the island breeding doves,

Together butt the rigid rocks like goats.

310

He grew up near the streams of Egypt's Nile:

Pharnoukhos, dead. And three who all fell from

One ship: Adeues, Arkteus and Pheresseues.

Chrysean Matallos, major-general, in death,

Stains his corn-gold, thick, majestic beard,

Changing its colour with a crimson dye.

Magian Arabos, Artabes the Bactrian,

The leader of the thousands-strong Black Horse,

Died there, new resident of this harsh land.

Amistris²¹, Amphisteus – whose spear dealt pain -

320

Noble Ariomardus too who brings

²¹ There no main verb in this sentence. Maybe it is just a list, or perhaps there's a lacuna (Porson).

Sorrow to Sardis²², Seisames the Mysian,
Tharybis who led five times fifty ships,
From Lyrna, admiral, good-looking man,
Lies dead poor wretch – his luck was not so good.
Syennesis, Cilician captain,
Outstanding for his bravery, who most
Troubled the foe, died a heroic death.
I've said enough for now about the chiefs;
I've only told a small part of the loss.

330

THE QUEEN

Aiai! Though what I hear is terrible indeed,
Persian disgrace! Reason to howl with grief.
But please go over it again, explain,
The number of their ships, how large, to think
They could confront the Persian fleet, engage
Our ships by ramming them with theirs?

MESSENGER

In terms of number know the Persian fleet
Would have prevailed. For the entire strength
Of the Greek navy was but ten times thirty
Ships, plus a special squadron of ten more.
But Xerxes, I know as a fact, had under him
A thousand, two hundred and seven of which
Were extra fast. Such their respective strengths!
You surely cannot think that's why we lost!
No. What destroyed the army was a god²³,
Who loaded unfair weight on to fate's scales.
The gods keep safe the goddess Pallas' city.²⁴

340

²² Or could be with his arrows (ἄρδσει rather than Σάρδσει)

²⁴ Strangely, the only reference in the play to Athena's role in saving Athens.

THE QUEEN

Then Athens city still has not been sacked?²⁵

MESSENGER

A wall surrounds it while there still are men.

THE QUEEN

What was it made the ships engage? Explain.

350

Who started it, the fray, was it the Greeks?

Or did my son, smug with so many ships?

MESSENGER

The start, your majesty, of all the rout,

Was when an evil spirit²⁶, some avenger,

A Greek, appeared from the Athenian fleet,

And gave this message to Xerxes your son:

That when the darkness of black night arrived,

The Greeks would not stay put, but rushing to

Their rowing seats, some one way some another,

Would save their lives by quietly making off.

360

The moment he heard this – no inkling of

The Greek man's wiles, nor gods' malignity –

His orders were to all his captains this:

Immediately the sun's rays ceased to light

The earth, and darkness captured its domain,

To split the mass of ships into three lines,

The rest to circle round Aias's isle,

Blocking the exits and the rough-sea straits.

But if the Greeks should dodge their sorry fate,

Finding a route to sneak out with their ships,

370

He ruled the captains all would lose their heads.

He said all this in cheerful confidence:

²⁵ It had been.

²⁶ or daimon, if you prefer. See n8, p7

He did not know the intentions of the gods.
 They, though with discipline, obediently,
 Prepared their supper while the naval crews,
 Looped oars against the tholes for rowing, then
 Just as the sun's bright light began to fade
 And night came on, each master of his oar
 Sped to his ship, as did each armed marine.
 Bank²⁷ spurred on bank with cheers along the ship: 380
 And off they set, each just as ordered to.
 Throughout the night the commodores made sure
 That all the fleet kept moving to and fro.
 Soon Night was in retreat; the Greek fleet still
 Had made no stealthy break-out anywhere.
 However, when white horses of the Day
 Took charge of all the world – a brilliant sight –
 At first a sound rose from the Hellenes, like
 An anthem, triumphal, together with,
 Rebounding from the island's rocky crags, 390
 Its echo. Fear gripped all barbarians,
 Their project now upended. It did not suggest
 Retreat, Greeks chorusing this sturdy chant,
 More like a cry from brave men keen to fight.
 A trumpet's blast ignited them; at once
 Their oars catching²⁸ the water made it foam,
 Striking the sea in unison as bid.
 Immediately they all were clear to see.
 The right wing first beautifully organised
 Fronted the orderly advance, and then 400

²⁷ Taxin – probably refers to the three banks of oarsmen in a trireme, thranites, zygians and thalamians (nearest the sea).

Maybe “tiers” would be better than banks?

²⁸ Technical term for the first oar-stroke, the “catch”.

Emerged the whole flotilla, everywhere
Was heard the mighty call: "Come, sons of Greece,
Come liberate your land, and liberate
Your children, wives, the temples of your gods,
Graves of your ancestors! You fight for all!"
And then from us a torrent in the Persian tongue
Answered them back. No more the waiting game.
Straight off, with clashing bronze, ship battered ship.
The first to score a hit was a Hellenic ship:
It smashed the bows of a Phoenician ship. 410
Each aimed their vessel at an enemy's.
Flooding ahead, the Persian fleet, at first
Held firm. But with the crush of ships packed tight
Inside the straits, they could not help each other,
As they got rammed by their own ships' bronze-tipped prows -
Whole banks of oars were shattered and ripped off.
The Greek ships seized their opportunity,
Encircling them, they struck all round, while ours
Turned upside down; the sea in view no more,
Surfaced with wreckage and with human death. 420
As corpses decked the coasts and offshore reefs.
Each ship was rowing wildly to escape,
Each ship, that is, of the barbarian fleet.
Like tuna or like fish trapped in a net,
The enemy kept hacking them, cracking
Their spines with broken oars, flotsam from wrecks.
The noise of screams mastered the open sea,
Till Night's black features hid the scene from view.
Such suffering! Not if I had ten days could I
Give every detail, tell you the tale in full. 430
Be sure of this, though: never in one day

Have human lives been lost on such a scale.

THE QUEEN

Aia! A mighty sea of suffering has engulfed
Persians and all barbarian peoples.

MESSENGER

Be sure of this: trouble's not halfway through.
A blow of pain came after this, enough
To weigh the scale down twice as much again.

THE QUEEN

Could there be fate more vicious yet than this?
Tell me, what tragedy befell the army,
And heaped the scale with troubles greater still?

440

MESSENGER

Those Persians, they the physical elite
Bravest in battle, from the finest families,
Foremost in loyalty to the king himself,
Have died, in shame and ignominiously.

THE QUEEN

My friends, I'm desolate. It's shocking news.
Exactly how did these men meet their fate?

MESSENGER

An island sits in front of Salamis,
It's small, no mooring there for ships, where Pan,
The dancer haunts the beach's breaking waves.
He sends them there, so when the enemy,
Ships lost, tried to find safety on the isle,
They'd kill them easily, the helpless Greeks,
And rescue friends from waters of the strait:
He read the future wrong. For when a god
Gave glory in the sea-fight to the Greeks,
That very day, they, bodies well-encased

450

In armour made of bronze, leapt from their ships,
And made a cordon round the isle, to make
Escape impossible. Showers of stones,
Bombarded them, and arrows from taut Greek
Bow-strings rained down and crippled them.
And finally they made a concerted assault,
Hacking, and slicing them to bits like meat,
Till they had quenched the life of every one.
Xerxes cried out in pain, seeing the scale
Of loss: a hillside seat near to the shore
Had given him a clear view of his fleet.
He tore his robes, and gave a piercing scream:
He issued orders to his infantry,
And sent them off with no control. New shock,
New grief for you to add to that before!

460

470

THE QUEEN

Daimon²⁹ detestable, you stole the Persians'
Wits. Bitter was my son's revenge, the one
He found in famous Athens. Not enough
Were those barbarians'³⁰ deaths at Marathon!
Intending to pursue revenge for them,
My son has heaped more woes upon himself.
But tell me, though: the ships that weren't destroyed,
You left them where? Can you give clear details?

MESSENGER

The captains of the ships still left, in panic
Fled wildly where the wind would carry them.
The army that survived? In Boeotia

480

²⁹ See note 8 page 7

³⁰ Barbarians – The Queen seems to use the term to refer to her own people quite unconsciously – but the audience will read the repeated message.

They began to die, some close to sparkling springs
Struck down by thirst, others just breathed their last.

We moved on next into the Phocians' lands,
The Dorian country and the Malian gulf,
Where Spercheios freely irrigates the land;
From there Akhaia's plain and Thessaly's
Cities received us, running desperately short
Of food, and there it was that most were killed
By thirst and hunger. Both lay in wait.

490

We reached Magnesia and the countryside
Round Macedon; the Axios's ford,
The reeds of Bolbe's Marsh and Mount Pangaion,
Edonian territory. That night a god
Launched winter early: the whole watercourse
Of holy Strymon froze. And anyone
Who'd previously thought nothing of the gods,
Prayed hard, prostrate, to Earth and to the Sky.
And when they'd spent time calling on the gods,
The force began its march across the ice.

500

And those of us who had set out before
The god could spread his rays got safely over:
The sun's disc blazing bright with fiery shafts,
Thawed with its intense heat the exposed ice:
They sank, each on another: lucky he,
The quickest to give up the breath of life.

Those who were left – not many – made it, just,
Through Thrace - hard work it was - and came,
Survivors, to find safety in the land

510

That's home to them, so that Persians might
Grieve for the city's young they loved and lost.
What's said is true, though I've left out much bad

The god inflicted on the Persian race.

CHORUS

You vicious god, too brutally you stamped

On all the Persians, trod them underfoot!

THE QUEEN

It breaks my heart. The army all wiped out!

The visions last night that my dreams revealed,

How unmistakably you showed me truth.

And very poorly **you** deciphered them!

520

However, since this is what your advice

Decreed, first thing I shall pray to the gods,

And then I shall go taking gifts for Earth

And for the dead - a cake brought from my home.

I realise what's past cannot be changed:

For the future – may something better come.

The current situation asks that you

Gather the trusted ones, make plans to trust.

My son, if he returns before I do,

Console him, and escort him to the house,

530

Lest he do something bad and make things worse.

CHORUS

O sovereign Zeus, now have you destroyed

anapaests

The Persians' army strong in its pride,

Huge in its manpower.

Cities of Susa and Agbatana

Have you clouded in murky misery,

So many women are hurting their gentle

Hands as they tear their veils,

Making their bosoms all wet with their weeping,

As they take their share in the general grief.

540

Soft are the cries of the Persian ladies
 Longing to see again newlywed husbands,
 Missing the soft linen sheets of their beds,
 Those joys and the luxuries youth can bestow,
 In misery, anguish and limitless grieving.
 I join in bewailing the fate of the lost,
 Honestly, deeply and truly.

Strophe 1

iambic variations

For indeed now there's grief everywhere
 Through all of Asia, stripped of men.
 Xerxes led them away - (*popoi!*)³¹
 Xerxes took their lives - (*totoi!*)
 Xerxes in folly staked it all on ships,
 Riverboats to sail the sea.
 How did he, Dareios, then flee disaster with no pain?
 Bow-lord, archers to serve him
 Leader, Sousa's beloved.

macron 2ia

2ia

sp ia 550

sp ia

sp 2ia

cr (paeon) ia

2 lec

pher

pher

Antistrophe 1

For, the infantry, the sailors too -
 With linen wings, blue-painted eyes
 The ships have led away - (*popoi!*)
 The ships have robbed of life - (*totoi!*)
 The ships with lethal impact of the deadly rams,
 Ships Ionian hands propelled.
 News is that the king himself has just managed to escape
 Through the byways of Thrace, route

560

³¹ These exclamations in brackets represent varying cries of grief and anguish> English (alas!) has only one archaic word – or maybe two (alack!). Neither of these will do – the actors must improvise non-verbal noises to build up the intensity of the overwhelming feelings of grief and loss expresses in the choral singing.

Made worse thanks to the winter.

Strophe 2

Those who were first to confront death (<i>pheu!</i>)	2 da sp
Those they had to abandon (e e!)	pher
Swept round Salamis' shoreline (<i>o a!</i>)!	pher 570
Cry out loudly and gnash your teeth; shout for your utmost sorrow,	glyc; arist
Reach up to the skies (<i>o a!</i>)	- - - -
Let out your deepest feelings; scream to show your true emotion.	arist; sp ith

Antistrophe 2

Corpses are ground by the cruel sea (<i>pheu!</i>)	
Flesh ripped, food for the silent (e e!)	
Shoals that people the clean depths. (<i>o a!</i>)	
Houses robbed of their man lament; parents bereft and childless -	580
Pain sent by a god – (<i>o a!</i>)	
Old and alone they whimper; they hear only pain and anguish.	

Strophe 3

No more will those here in Asia	2da sp
Live in obedience to Persia	2da sp
Nor will they bring in their tribute.	2da sp
Forced by the rule of their masters,	2da sp
There'll be no more prostrating	pher
Themselves down on the earth, for	pher
Power of the king is finished.	arist 590

Antistrophe 3

No more will men guard their language,
Watch what they say, for the people
Will have the freedom to speak out,

Now that authority's yoke's gone.
For that soil that is blood-soaked,
sea-washed Salamis Island
Holds the remains of Persia.

THE QUEEN

iambics

My friends, someone who is familiar with
Bad news, knows how, for humans, when a wave
Of bad news comes to shore, all turns to fear, 600
But when the god brings calm, they are convinced
The same soft wind of fate will always blow.
To me now everything seems full of dread,
Gods' enmity now strikes me in the face;
The shouts I hear are not for victory:
Shocked by bad news, this panic grips my heart.
Therefore, without my chariot, without
The usual carry-on, I've walked back from
My house³², with offerings to please the dead, 610
To win favour from the father of my son:
Milk, white, delicious, from a sacred cow,
And honey, clear, the flower-worker's dew,
And water bubbling from a virgin spring,
And this, neat wine, sourced locally,
The splendid product of an ancient vine,
And, too, there's olives, aromatic, green,
And sprays of flowers birthed by the bounteous earth.
But, friends, enhance these offerings for the dead:
Chant holy songs, helping to summon up 620
The god Dareios; I myself shall see

³² Her original entrance was therefore by chariot, with multiple attendants, with full display of Persian wealth and luxury.

Earth drink her gifts to honour gods below.

CHORUS

Queen, the Persian people's icon, anapaests
You see the offerings poured for the underworld,
And we shall demand with our holy songs
That the escorts of the dead
Below ground look on with sympathy.
You, blessed gods of the realm beneath,
Earth, Hermes, and you, king of the dead,
Send up from below a soul to the light. 630
For if he knows of a cure for our troubles,
He alone among men would say what to do.

Strophe 1

Does he, the king, sanctified, blest, equal of gods, recognise me, 4 cho
Uttering my barbarous³³ da ba
Sounds so awkward to understand, cries harsh, painful and agonised? 2 glyc
Wretchedness, distress – - u u u -
Will it affect him? u u u - -
From below, can he hear me? cr ion (a min)

Antistrophe 1

Please, for me, Earth, you others too, rulers of those dwelling below,
Show him your approval,
For his leaving your house, the god, Susa's pride of the Persian race.
Send him on up,
Such a man never
Persia's soil did envelop.

³³ Two syllables

Strophe 2

Loved is the man, loved is his grave-mound macron, 2 ion (a min)
And beloved his interred standards³⁴ anacreontic
Aïdoneus³⁵, be his escort, send him up here, Aïdoneus: 4 ion (a min) 650
Leading us, god-like, divine, Dareios. (e e!) da arist

Antistrophe 2

He never lost men he was leading
With a war that sowed destruction,
For the Persians he was seen as an advisor like the gods are
Counsellor, guiding his people wisely. (e e!)

Strophe 3

Padshah, former Shahanshah³⁶, come up, come here,
Come to your grave-mound's topmost point glyc B
As you rise up with your saffron-coloured giveh³⁷ 3 ion (a min)
On your royal feet, displaying your tiara's tall peak. lo ba an ba
Come father Darius the one without blame! (oi!)³⁸

Antistrophe 3

So that you may hear of news, and of new pain.
Master of masters now appear!
For a Stygian miasma flies above us.
For the young men, are all dead, all the young men are dead now. 670
Come father Darius the one without blame! (oi!)

Epode

³⁴ I.e. his character strengths which lie buried with him.

³⁵ Four syllables – ionicus a minore. A name for Hades (Aïdes) lord of the Underworld.

³⁶ Aeschylus uses a unique word Balen (or Ballen) presumably a title from an unknown oriental language.

³⁷ Giveh are Persian slippers.

³⁸ A series of short syllables impossible in English!

Aiai! aiai!

You who are dead, to the grief of your friends
What was this, majesty, majesty,
This error, this doubled-up error, the reason
The ships of your land with their three decks of oars
Are not ships, not ships anymore?³⁹

680

GHOST OF DAREIOS

O loyal beyond loyal, my boyhood friends,
Elders of Persia, what pain hurts the state?
The earth complains, it's battered, ripped apart,
When I observe my wife beside my grave,
I worry, but gladly accept the gifts.
But you stand by my tomb and wail with grief,
Stridently chanting the hymns rousing the dead,
Summoning me to misery. There is
No easy way to leave: the gods below
Are better at taking than letting go!
However, having status with these people,
I've come. Be quick. Too long, and I'll be blamed.
What is this new and heavy blow for Persia?

anapaests

690

CHORUS

Strophe

I feel awestruck to behold you
I feel awestruck to address you
Through the fear I always harboured.

ionic a minore

DAREIOS

trochaic tetrameter catalectic⁴⁰

³⁹ The epode is corrupt – neither metre nor meaning are certain.

⁴⁰ Aeschylus uses this more formal metre (except for the choral antistrophe) down to line 758. Still a staple of English verse (When the Saints go marching in, o when the saints go marching in ...)

Since though I have been persuaded to come up here from below,
Do not make your tale protracted, say your piece and keep it short.
Tell me all there is to tell, and set aside your fear of me.

CHORUS

Antistrophe

I am fearful to obey you 700
I am fearful to address you,
Tell things. hard things, to a loved one.

DAREIOS

[To Chorus] Since it seems that ingrained fear inhibits you from speaking out,
{To the queen} Noble lady, in the old days you once shared a bed with me,
Stop your mourning, cease this weeping, talk to me with honesty:
Human troubles, let me tell you, always must afflict mankind.
Many are there from the sea, and many from the land as well –
Mortal dangers threatening, to those whose lives are long enough.

THE QUEEN

You surpassed all mortal success with your fate so prosperous, 710
All the years you lived and saw the sunlight, people envied you,
You enjoyed a life so favoured Persians saw you as a god.
Now I'm jealous that you died and never saw this depth of woe,
You shall hear the tale in full, Dareios: it will not take long:
Everything the Persians stood for has been utterly destroyed.

DAREIOS

How? Was it some epidemic? or discord within the state?

THE QUEEN

Neither. Outside Athens our entire armed forces were wiped out.

DAREIOS

Which one of my sons was their commanding general, tell me please?

THE QUEEN

Hot-head Xerxes was the one who emptied Asia's land of men.

DAREIOS

As a soldier or as sailor did the fool make this mad plan?

THE QUEEN

Both. The force was double-headed – army navy, two combined.

720

DAREIOS

How though could so large a force of foot manage to get across?

THE QUEEN

Using smart devices Xerxes bridged the straits, the Hellespont.

DAREIOS

Meaning he achieved the closing of the mighty Bosphorus?

THE QUEEN

So he did, although a daimon helped conceive the plan, maybe.

DAREIOS

Powerful, sadly, was the daimon, author of this evil plan.

THE QUEEN

Yes indeed, the outcome shows what terrible advice it was.

DAREIOS

What then was it happened to them making you lament so much?

THE QUEEN

When the naval force was ruined, this destroyed the army too.

DAREIOS

So the army, all of it, was totally destroyed by war?

THE QUEEN

Hence how all of Susa city mourns its emptiness of men ...

730

DAREIOS (he cries out)

O popoi! Such the protection and defence the army gave!

THE QUEEN

Lost entirely is the Bactrian nation – not a man survives.

DAREIOS

Failure! What a generation of our friends you threw away!

THE QUEEN

Xerxes, though, alone, they say, abandoned with only a few...

DAREIOS

Perished! How, and where? Or is there any hope he is alive?

THE QUEEN

... Was relieved to get back to the bridge that linked between the two...

DAREIOS

Continents – he's safe in this one? Is that certain to be true?

THE QUEEN

Yes, a clear report confirms this. There's no room for any doubt.

DAREIOS

Wretched how the oracles so quickly came to be fulfilled!

On my son has Zeus unleashed the execution of his plans.

740

Somehow, I assumed the gods would do this at some future date

But when someone's in a hurry, god lends him a helping hand.

Now it seems a spring of pain's been found for all of those I love.

And my son unwittingly achieved this with a young man's zeal,

He who hoped to tame the holy roiling Hellespont with chains,

Treating Bosphorus. the stream of god, as if it were his slave;

He transformed the strait, and with wrought-iron shackles mastered it,

With a massive roadway built across it for his massive force.

He was mortal, yet through folly thought he could outdo the gods,

Yes, Poseidon, even him. A sickness of the mind, I'm sure,

750

Gripped my son? I worry that the wealth I laboured to amass,

Will be plundered by whichever people chance to get there first.

THE QUEEN

This is what he learned from keeping company with evil men,

Xerxes the impulsive. It is said that you, through waging war,

Built your sons a mighty fortune: he, through lack of manliness,

Stayed at home to have his war, not adding to his father's gains.

Hearing constant taunts of this kind passed around by his bad friends,

He resolved to build this bridge and lead an army into Greece.

DAREIOS

iambics

So, he has managed to achieve a thing

Never to be forgotten, so immense: 760

The first time Susa has been cleared of men.

Since Zeus the king granted this privilege:

One man should rule the whole of Asia, and

Its teeming flocks, wielding the sceptre of control.

For Medos was the first to lead the horde,

And after him his son took up the task.

Then third, came Cyrus, man favoured by god –

As ruler he brought peace to all his friends;

His common sense was rudder to his zeal.

He conquered Lydia and Phrygia, 770

And tamed all of Ionia by force.

God did not hate him, for he showed good sense.

Then Cyrus' son⁴¹ was fourth to guide the people,

And Mardos⁴² fifth, a blot upon his nation, 775

Its ancient monarchy. Artaphrenes

Good man, used cunning to assassinate

Him in the palace, helped by faithful friends –

[Sixth was Maraphis, Artaphrenes seventh⁴³]

Then me! I got the chance I coveted.

My army I led on many great campaigns, 780

But no disaster did I cause like this!

Son Xerxes, being young, has a young man's brain

⁴¹ Cambyses

⁴² Smerdis in Herodotus (Gaumata on Behistun inscr.) was the brother of Cambyses – acc to Hdt, but not apparently Aeschylus, he was replaced by an imposter who was then murdered by the Seven Conspirators who put Darius on the throne. But maybe there never was an imposter!

⁴³ Line 777 has been frequently deleted, on the grounds that Maraphis is otherwise unknown, and Artaphrenes was never king. The meaning of καὶ γώ (and I) in line 778 will change considerably if line 777 remains – as it will if there is no semicolon after (as in Page's OCT edition).

And failed to bear my directions in mind.
Be sure remember this, old friends of mine,
Not one of us who've exercised this power,
Would have been seen as cause of so much pain.

CHORUS

What then, king Dareios? What are you trying
To say? How, after this catastrophe,
May we the Persians find success again?

DAREIOS

If you do not invade the land of Greeks,
Not even if the Medes outnumber them.
The very land itself fights on their side.

CHORUS

What do you mean? An ally? In what way?

DAREIOS

It starves to death an army that's too big.

CHORUS

A force we'll send - controllable, select...

DAREIOS

But even the one that's now in Greece, that force
Will not be finding its way safely home.

CHORUS

What do you mean? That all the Persian force
In Europe will not cross the Hellespont?

DAREIOS

Only a few, if one may trust the gods'

Pronouncements – seeing what's occurred

So far. It isn't "Some are good, some not":

Since that is so, he leaves an elite force

Behind swayed by a hopeless optimism.

They're stationed where Asopos irrigates

790

800

The plain, enriching the Boeotian land,
 And where the worst of all their troubles waits:
 A payback for their pride, and godless schemes,
 Those who on reaching Greece were not afraid
 To steal gods' images or burn their shrines. 810
 Altars destroyed, statues uprooted or,
 Mid total mayhem, pulled down from their plinths.
 That's why, since they did so much harm, the harm
 They suffer is no less. More still: Evil's
 Not got his boots on yet, he wants them tight.⁴⁴
 So thick will blood be spilled on Plataea's soil -
 From carnage wrought by spears of Dorians,
 That mounds of corpses generations hence,
 Will send a visible yet silent sign,
 That schemes of man should not be overbold. 820
 Hybris first flowers then produces fruit:
 Ruin; when harvested, the crop is tears.
 You see the punishment for deeds like this:
 Remember Greece and Athens. Let no one
 Feeling his current luck is not enough,
 Obsessed with more, squander his ample wealth.
 For Zeus is there, a harsh examiner,
 To punish pride that goes too far.
 And so, address a caution to my son,
 Choose your words well: "Be sensible, 830
 Do not upset the gods through stubborn pride."

⁴⁴ A metaphor which has defied interpretation. Housman suggested κρηνίς (spring) for κρηπίς (boot). H's followers see a bubbling spring which has not dried up but will well up once more. Others take κρηπίς to mean foundation and see a metaphor from building insecurely on wet ground. I like to take κρηπίς in its more basic meaning, boot - the verb (ἐκπαιδεύεται) seems corrupt in any case and could easily be something derived from the adj ἔμπεδος, meaning safe, securely fixed.

You, Xerxes' mother, dear old thing,
Go home, and choose your son a decent robe
To go and meet him with. Anguished
By all he's suffered, he has ripped his clothes,
The elegant ones he wore, to utter shreds.
Talk to him tactfully, and calm him down,
Yours is one voice I know he likes to hear.
Old men, farewell to you. Though times are bad
Enjoy what pleasure every day may bring:
Wealth is no benefit to those who're dead.

840

CHORUS

I ache to learn the Persians' agonies,
So many here and now; more yet to come.

THE QUEEN

O god, already I'm affected by
Such dreadful pain, and now this extra blow
Wounds me: the extra shame to hear about
The clothes my son is wearing - the indignity!
But I'll go home; I'll fetch some clothes for him
And see if can go and meet my son.
I'll not let down my darling in distress.

850

CHORUS

largely dactylic

Strophe 1

<i>O popoi!</i> O what a great and amazing existence it	4da
Used to be that we enjoyed when that state was effectively led!	hexameter
In those days when a confident righteous invincible king,	sp da hem
God's mirror Dareios was ruling Persia.	da sp ith

Antistrophe 1

First of all, we made a show of our wonderful armies,

Then there were cities like forts keeping all-round control.

After our wars the return was a simple and painless affair,

860

Bringing our men back safely home victorious.

Strophe 2

What vast numbers of cities he captured without ever crossing the Halys. *sp hexameter*

Not once stirring from his hearth!

lec

For example, the ones on the coast ⁴⁵that are next to the waters of Strymon *sp hex*

Settlements of Thracians.

ithyphallic

Antistrophe 2

Those outside of the Lake⁴⁶ in their cities encircled by towers on the mainland

Looked upon this man as king.

So too those who were proud to be living by Hellespont's generous outlet,

And Propontis' bays, and Pontus' mouth.

Strophe 3

Then those islands as well near the headland that's sea-washed,

sp 3 da sp

Lying off this coast of ours,

lec

Such as olive-rich Lesbos and Samos and

sp 3da

Chios also Paros, Naxos, Mykonos;

anapaests

Adjacent to Tenos, Andros her good neighbour.

macron da sp ith

Antistrophe 3

In addition, he ruled over islands between the two land blocks

Lemnos and the home of Icaros⁴⁷,

890

Rhodes too and Cnidos and Cyprian

Cities like Paphos and Soloi; Salamis,

⁴⁵ The Acheloian cities: meaning unclear.

⁴⁶ Probably Propontis and the Sea of Marmara rather than Maeotis (Sea of Azov)

⁴⁷ The island of Ikaria

That town whose mother-city⁴⁸ is the root of all our woe.

Epode

Then as well were the wealthy and populous cities of Greeks in Ionia,	sp hex
Those which he oversaw and controlled with his wisdom.	sp 4da
He had the tireless support of his soldiers,	3da sp
Armed men, loyal allies – mixture of nations.	3sp da sp
So now there can be no disagreeing why we suffered so in this warfare:	sp hex
On god's orders completely beaten in the sea-fight.	sp da sp ith

XERXES

<i>Io!</i>	
How unlucky I am! What a terrible fate have	anapaests
I met with, and one that I never imagined!!	910 ⁴⁹
How pitilessly has the daimon attacked	
The race of the Persians. What more can I take?	
All strength has drained from my arms and my legs,	
When I see how old my people are now!	
How I wish, Zeus, as with the men who are gone –	
That final conclusion of death –	
Had blotted me out with them too.	

CHORUS

<i>Ototoi!</i> O my king! Brave was the army,	
Great was the pride in the Persian empire,	
In its subjects' allegiance:	920
Now though the god has been hacking it up.	
Our land is mourning our land's youth,	

⁴⁸ Athens – Cyprus' Salamis was founded according to myth by Teucer from "Athenian" Salamis, where the Persian fleet had been defeated.

⁴⁹ Inconsistency in the line-numbering is a result of editors dividing the lines differently, according their interpretation of the metres.

Taken by Xerxes to stuff Hades full
Of our Persians. From Agbatana
Many men joined him, flower of their nation,
Masterful bowmen: truly a vast crowd,
Men in their thousands, all of them perished.
Aiai, aiai! Power that we trusted!
Asia! Land that was sovereign of all lands,
Horribly, horribly now brought to your knees.

930

*Strophe 1*⁵⁰

XERXES

Here I am, *oioi!* Abject wretch!
Useless to my family, and to my country,
Born to be no good.

CHORUS

To celebrate your home-coming,
I shall be letting out cries of misery,
Shouting disaster, screaming and weeping,
Like a Mariandynian⁵¹ mourner.

940

Antistrophe 1

XERXES

Let your, plaintive, melancholy
Voice ring out for ever: for this daimon
Has turned his back on me.

CHORUS

⁵⁰ The metre is hard to analyse – lots of short syllable!

⁵¹ A people famous for their uninhibited mourning rituals – down as far as Athenaeus (Depn14.11) c. AD200!

I shall indeed be letting my melancholy
Voice ring out, in tearful mourning : for I respect
The harsh fate the people suffer, beaten at sea,
The misery of the city I was born in.

Strophe 2

XERXES

Yes the wall of the Greeks' ships,	an io(a min)
Their aggression, changed the	io (a min) tr
Fighting and destroyed us,	io (a maj) sp
As it fell on the sea like the night,	3 an
Brought grief to the seashore.	io (a maj) sp

CJHORUS

<i>Oioioi!</i> Cry out! Realise the whole truth!	
Where are your friends? Where are the rest?	2 cho
Where are your comrades-in-arms?	lec
Such as was Pharandakes,	lec
Susas, Pelagon and Agbatas,	io (a maj), 5 macra
Dotamas, Psammis, Sousiskanes	macra
Who came from Agbatana?	

Antistrophe 2

XERXES

I abandoned the wretches,
The Phoenicians to their doom,
Swept off from their warships,
On to Salamis' shore, where they died
Battered on the rough rocks.

CHORUS

Oioioi! Cry out! Where is Pharnouchos?

Ariomardos, valiant man,

Where is Seualkes the king,

Where are noble Lilaïos,

970

Memphis, Tharybis and Masistras,

Artembares and Hystaichmas?

I ask the question once again.

Strophe 3

XERXES

Io! Io for me!

When they first had a prospect of Athens

Ancient and hated, like oars catching water together,

E he! E he! They all choked writhing on the shore.

CHORUS

Then what of the best of the Persians,

Your own ever-faithful Eye,

Who counted the countless myriads,

980

X⁵², fairest son,

Of Batachos,

Son of Sesames, son of Megabates?

And Parthos and great Oibares?

Did you leave them? Did you? O! o! o! How desparate!

You speak of pain beyond pain for the Persian nobility.

Antistrophe 3

XERXES

A magic spell, you make

me yearn for, missing my noble friends,

⁵² Name unknown, The ye was an actual official at the Persian court – there was also an Ear.

With your hateful talk I can't forget of pain and misery.

My heart cries out in distress, cries out.

CHORUS

And there's another we're missing,

Leader of ten thousand Mardian warriors,

Xanthes, and Anchaes the Arian,

And Diaixis, and Arsakes,

Kings of the Horse,

And Y and Lythimnas,

And Tolmos, perfectionist of warfare,

I am shocked, shocked to find they do not follow

1000

Behind your carriage – with its wheels and curtains.

Strophe 4

XERXES

They are gone, those leaders of the army

CHORUS

Gone, their names are no more

XERXES

le! le! lo! io!

CHORUS

lo! io! The daimons

Have wreaked unheard of harm,

Unprecedented. Ate has given us her look.

Antistrophe 4

XERXES

We've been struck down. Luck has deserted us.

CHORUS

Struck down! It is so clear...

XERXES

New pain! New pain!

1010

CHORUS

Ionian seamen!

To meet with them was not good news.

In war the Persians a luckless race.

Strophe 5

XERXES

It had to be. It was bad luck that I poor wretch was struck so hard.

CHORUS

What's not been lost, o you of Persians the most desolate?

XERXES

You see this? All that's left of my robes.

CHORUS

I do! I see!

XERXES

And my quiver here?

1020

CHORUS

It has survived. Why do you mention it?

XERXES

It was a storehouse of weapons. My treasury!

CHORUS

Little left; out of so many!

XERXES

I have been robbed of my defences.

CHORUS

The Ionian peoples do not run from spears.

Antistrophe 5

XERXES

Too fond of Ares! I witnessed a disaster I could not have foreseen.

CHORUS

You're talking of the trouncing of our naval force?

XERXES

It was because of that disaster that I ripped my robe.

1030

CHORUS

Papai, papai!

XERXES

No! More than *papai*!

CHORUS

Double, triple...

XERXES

...agony for us. And joy for our enemies!

CHORUS

What made us strong was cut away.

XERXES

I am naked, without my bodyguards ...

CHORUS

Thanks to the tragedy at sea our friends went through.

Strophe 6

XERXES

Let it soak in, let it soak, the tragedy, Go on towards the palace.

CHORUS

Aiai, aiai! The pain, the pain!

XERXES

Cry, then, in response to me.

1040

CHORUS

A bad response of bad to bad.

XERXES

Keep howling then along with me.

CHORUS

Ototototoi!

The tragedy is a heavy weight to bear.

Oi! So much pain! So much agony!

Antistrophe 6

XERXES

Beat your chests, beat them. In rhythm with my groans. That's good!

CHORUS

I'm soaked with tears of misery.

XERXES

Cry, then, in response to me.

CHORUS

Determined to, o sovereign lord!

XERXES

Louder voices in lament!

1050

CHORUS

Ototototoi!

Lamentation will be paired

With blackening bruises from our blows.

Strophe 7

XERXES

Yes, beat your breasts, and do the Mysian shout.

CHORUS

The torment! The torment!

XERXES

Pull out, for me, the grey hair of your beards.

CHORUS

Pulling it, pulling it – excruciating pain.

XERXES

So scream!

CHORUS

I shall!

Antistrophe 7

XERXES

And use your fingernails to rip your robes apart.

1060

CHORUS

The torment! The torment!

XERXES

Pullout your hair! Do it for the army!

CHORUS

Pulling it, pulling it – excruciating pain.

XERXES

Let tears flow from your eyes.

CHORUS

I'm wet with them.

Epode

XERXES

Cry, then, in response to me.

CHORUS

Oioi! Oioi!

XERXES

Keep weeping till you reach your homes

CHORUS

Io! io! So hard to step on Persian soil!

1070

XERXES

Io! All over the city!

CHORUS

Io! Yes indeed!

XERXES

Your lives were privileged – now wail!

CHORUS

Io! io! So hard to step on Persian soil!

XERXES

È! È! The triremes...

È! È! ...they died in the boats...

CHORUS

I shall go with you in grief and lamentation.

1078