

PERSAE

Chorus:

We're loyal Persian dignitaries. We
Remained in Persia when our military
Went off to fight the Greeks. For here we stay
To guard King Xerxes' halls and the display
Of plenteous gold. Darius' royal son
Selected us for this since every one
Of us has earned the honour. Nonetheless
For him and those he leads I feel distress
And fear of what's to come, in spite of their
Sparkling accoutrements. From everywhere 10
In Asia people came here, murmuring
Dissent and censuring our youthful king.
No news has come of those who left behind
Their ancient walls with only war in mind.
Riding, in ships, on foot they went away,
Presenting to the foe a dense array
Of war – Anistres and Artaphenes,
Megabates as well as Astapes,
The Persian marshals, slaves of the Great King,
Yet kings themselves, a vast host governing, 20
Experts in horsemanship and archery,
A formidable sight for all to see
And valiant in war, Artembares
As well, a charioteer, and Masistres,
Noble Imaeus, skilful with the bow,
Pharandaces and Sosthanes, who know
The way to urge on steeds, Susiscanes,
Pegastagon from Egypt, Arsanes
The Great, Memphis's lord, Egyptian, too,
From ancient Thebes Ariomardus, who 30
Governed there, many oarsmen, very skilled,
Marsh-dwellers; following them, a throng well-filled
With splendid Lydians and those who hold
The mainland folk in thrall, those whom the bold
Arcteus and Metrogathes and the land
Of Sardis, rich in gold, had by command
Sent forth, in chariots in ranks of three
Or four horses abreast, dreadful to see.
Tmolus's neighbours wished to cast upon
The Greeks the yoke of slavery – Mardon, 40
And Thybris, too, stalwart enough to stand
A lance-blow, and those from the Mysian land,
Javelin-throwers. Babylon, well-supplied
With gold, sent troops arrayed both far and wide,

A varied host, both sailors and those who
 Were skilled in archery; the nation, too,
 That wears the sabre went from every part
 Of Asia with their king – the valiant heart
 Of Persian land. All of the Asian nation,
 Her foster-nurse, groan loud in lamentation; 50
 Parents and wives, as they count out each day,
 Shudder in panic at the long delay.
 Across the sea they've reached the Grecian land,
 For with a bridge of rope-bound boats they've spanned
 The Hellespont. Our wondrous host is led
 By Xerxes as against the world they spread
 By land and sea, trusting his company
 Of valiant and mighty chieftains; he
 Is like a god, sprung from a golden race
 With eyes that flash within his dark-browed face 60
 With deadly dragon-stare as on he led
 His infantry and mariners and sped
 His Syrian chariot against a foe
 Famed for dexterity with spear and bow.
 There is no force that can withstand this tide
 Of troops; there is no bar that can provide
 Protection from this constant human wave:
 We cannot be withstood with men so brave.
 For Fate has favoured us from time long past,
 Ordaining the pursuit of battle's blast 70
 Against the foe. Our soldiers have learnt well
 The ways of frothing seas, the ocean's swell
 Beneath the storm, and in their certainty
 Their well-wrought cables and machinery
 Will keep them safe. And yet the god's deceit -
 Who can escape it? Who with agile feet
 Can dodge its toils? For fair Perplexity
 Snares men, and there's no possibility
 To break free safely. Thus I feel dismay
 And sadness, for I fear my ears one day 80
 Will hear that Susa's void of men. For she
 Saw all her men-at-arms, both infantry
 And horsemen, leave her walls. Like bees they wind
 In swarms with Xerxes. They have left behind
 The cape and built a bridge of ships across
 The Hellespont. Our women mourn their loss,
 For they have sent their husbands to the war,
 Now weeping salty tears in longing for
 Their men. Come, Persians, let us sit upon
 The palace steps and ponder deeply on 90
 This matter, for this is a pressing need:
 We must learn how Xerxes, our race's seed,
 Is faring. Has the spear gained victory

Or our intrinsic skill in archery?
His mother now is coming into sight,
Her eyes aglimmer with a heavenly light.
I bow before her. Give her salutation! [enter Atossa]
Hail, highest lady of the Persian nation,
Both wife and mother of a god, if we
Are not renounced by ancient destiny! 100

Atossa:
That's why I've left the palace; for my heart
Is racked as well, and I have to impart
Something to you, my friends, for not at all
Am I unsure that growing means will fall
Upon the ground, stirring the dust, and cast
Away the wealth my husband has amassed
With heavenly aid. My worries are twofold -
First, when we have no men we should not hold
Riches in honour, second, I've no doubt
Success will never light on men without 110
Riches despite their strength. In any case,
We've opulence enough, but we must face
The prospect of an absent king, for he
Is our royal house's eye. Come, then, to me,
My aged, trusty servants – your advice
I value.

Chorus:
Queen, you need not ask us twice
For any word or deed we have for you,
Of that you may be certain. We will do
Our best as counsellors in this affair.
You may rely on us to show our care. 120

Atossa:
So many dreams have haunted me each night
Since Xerxes with his army left my sight
To slaughter Greeks. But never did I see
So clear a sight as that which came to me
Last night. I will describe it all to you.
I dreamed two women came into my view
In lovely clothes, the one in Persian dress,
The other Dorian – such loveliness
And stature greater than our women here
Can boast about: their beauty had no peer, 130
Both of the same race. Fate, though, had by lot
Set one of them in Greece, the other not.
The two, it seemed, provoked a mutual feud,
And, seeing this, my son tried to intrude
And settle them and end their rivalry.
He yoked them to his chariot, then he
Placed collar-straps upon their necks. Thus tied,
One of those women bore herself with pride,

Obedient to the rein; the other strained
And tore apart the harness and, unreined, 140
Dragged it alongside with her violently
And snapped the yoke in two. Then instantly
My son fell to the ground, while, also there,
His father stood, filled with paternal care.
But Xerxes, when he saw him, tore away
His garments. When I rose at break of day,
I dipped my hands in water flowing clear
From a spring and then with incense I drew near
A shrine to offer sacrificial cake
To all the gods above that they might take 150
Away all evil, those for whom that rite
Was due. But then an eagle in full flight
I noticed as it sought security
At Phoebus' shrine. I stood there speechlessly
In fear, my friends. Thereat a falcon sped
And with his talons tore the eagle's head:
The eagle, though, did nothing, cowering
And to his enemy surrendering.
These things for you to hear and me to see
Were dreadful. If my son reaps victory, 160
It would turn out remarkable indeed,
But if he's vanquished, he will have no need
To answer to the state; if safely he
Returns, in Persian land his sovereignty
Will yet survive.

Chorus:

Mother, we've no desire
To worry you or raise your hopes much higher,
But what you've seen is ominous, and so
Entreat the gods to cast aside this woe
And give their blessing to your family
And to yourself and to the monarchy 170
And all that you hold dear. It's right that you
Both to the earth and the departed, too,
Give offerings. Address auspiciously
Darius, who was in your reverie:
Ask him to send up to the light of day
Boons for your son and you and sweep away
From earth all evil, keeping it below
In darkness. This advice, Queen, we bestow
On you in kindness, for your reverie
Bodes well and all things will propitiously 180
Turn out.

Atossa:

My first interpreter, indeed
The meaning of the dream I dreamt you read
As opportune to us. May this be true!

Returning to the palace, I will do
All that you counsel. But hear my request -
Where's Athens?

Chorus:

It is in the distant west,
The region where the sun sets finally.

Atossa:

And does Xerxes, my son,, desire to be
This city's predator?

Chorus:

Oh yes, indeed,
For then to Persia all of Greece will cede. 190

Atossa:

And is their host with soldiers well-supplied?

Chorus:

They've caused us great disaster far and wide.

Atossa:

What else besides? Are they sufficiently
Furnished with wealth?

Chorus:

A multiplicity
Of silver fills their soil.

Atossa:

And is their bow
Well-suited when they stretch it wide?

Chorus:

Oh no:
Lances they use for fighting had-to-hand,
With shields for armour.

Atossa:

Who is in command?

Chorus:

They are nobody's slaves or vassals.

Atossa:

So
How can they hold back an invading foe? 200

Chorus:

Well, they have managed to annihilate
Darius' splendid army.

Atossa:

What you state
Is food for thought for parents who have sent
Their sons off to an alien continent.

Chorus:

You soon shall learn the truth, for it is clear
This is a Persian courier running here.
Whether the news is good or bad, he'll tell
Us everything.[enter Herald]

Herald:

We're ruined! We're in Hell!
One stroke has brought our great prosperity
To nought. The flower of Persia utterly
Has been destroyed. It's terrible indeed
To bring this dreadful news, and yet I need
To tell you all – our Persian host is gone!

210

Chorus:

Ah, what a grievous thing to think upon!
Weep, Persians!

Herald:

All is lost! I never thought
That I'd return myself.

Chorus:

The news you've brought
Has proved that we have lived too long, for we
Must hear this news of great calamity,
So unforeseen.

Herald:

My friends, I saw it all
With my own eyes and thus I can recall
For you each detail.

220

Chorus:

What good could there be
In sending troops to face hostility
In alien land?

Herald:

In Salamis, along
Her shoreline and beyond, there is a throng
Of corpses.

Chorus:

Our beloved men you say
Are tossing back and forth among the spray
Of ocean waves.

Herald:

Alas, our archery
Was useless: our whole host was utterly
Destroyed by Grecian ships.

Chorus:

Raise a lament
For wretched Persia's total ravagement!

230

Herald:

Foul Salamis! I hate the very word.
How you must wish that you had never heard
Such news!

Chorus:

Foul Athens, too! Keep ever green
Remembrance of our women who have been
Made widows!

Atossa:

I have long in misery
 Kept silent, dismayed by calamity
 So great that one can't question or express
 One's thoughts about its scale. Nevertheless,
 One must endure one's fate. Be pacified
 And, even though you sorrow at this tide 240
 Of tragedies, speak out once more! Relay
 Your whole report! Who has survived the fray?
 Whom should we mourn? What leader's day is done?
 Herald:
 The light of day yet shines upon your son.
 Atossa:
 Your words bring to my house a wondrous light
 Of joy, and bright day follows gloomy night.
 Herald:
 But on Silenia's shore Artembares,
 Who was commander of the companies
 Of full ten thousand horse, is being tossed
 About, and Dardaces we've also lost - 250
 He was the leader of a thousand men:
 He nimbly leapt down from his ship and then
 A spear went through him. Noble Tenagon,
 The Bactrian chieftain, now is floating on
 The surf around Aegina. Arsanes,
 Lilaesus and a third man, Argestes,
 Are buffeting against the rugged shore
 Around dove-breeding Salamis. What's more,
 Egyptian Arceus and Pharnuchus, who
 Wielded a mighty shield, Adeus, too, 260
 Were all hurled from one ship into the sea.
 And he who governed the Black Cavalry
 Of thirty thousand men and also led
 Ten thousand more, Matallus, now lies dead,
 His thick beard stained with blood, a crimson hue.
 And Arabus, the Megian, died there, too,
 And Bactrian Artabes, who now must dwell
 In that harsh region, Amistis, as well,
 And Amphisteus, the spearsman, and the brave
 Ariomardus, grief for whom is grave 270
 In Sardis, Seisanes, the Mysian,
 The admiral Tharybis, who had command
 Of five times fifty ships, in Lyrna bred,
 A handsome man, is sadly also dead,
 No longer favoured with a handsome fate.
 The governor of the Cilician state,
 Syennesis, foremost in bravery,
 Whose pluck gave most harm to the enemy,
 Died gloriously. Thus I've announced to you
 The chiefs in my report: they are but few 280

Though countless more are dead.

Atossa:

The tale you tell

Has put the very crown upon the hell

We bear. Retell it, but this time recount

As clearly as you're able the amount

Of Grecian ships that heartened them to go

To fight a battle with their Persian foe!

Herald:

Had numbers been the only factor, we

Would have prevailed and gained the victory.

They had three hundred and, added to these,

An extra fleet of ten. But your Xerxes 290

Headed a thousand, plus those built for speed -

Two hundred and seven. That's the sum indeed.

Were we outnumbered? No. Some scale of fate

Sent by the gods with its unequal weight

Destroyed our host. The gods perpetuate

Athens's safety.

Atossa:

Has no adverse fate

Despoiled her?

Herald:

While her men yet see the light,

Her walls stay safe.

Atossa:

But tell me how the fight

Began! Was it the Greeks? Was it, maybe,

My son, rejoicing in his quantity 300

Of vessels?

Herald:

It was neither side, my queen.

No, some pernicious power must have been

The reason. For a Greek came to your son

And said that, when the light of day was done

And night prevailed, their army would not stay

But seek their rowing-seats and sail away

To save themselves through slyness. But when he

Heard this, your son, blind to the trickery

Of Greeks nor knowing of the bitterness

The gods held for his possible success, 310

Ordered his captains that, after the sun

Had ceased to beam and murkiness had won

The sky, they should align in rows of three

The dominant section of their argosy,

Thus barring all the exits, stationing

The ships around Aegina in a ring.

He warned that, should the Greeks by some deceit

Avoid their doom, escaping with their fleet,

It was decreed each chief should lose his head
He'd total confidence in what he said, 320
Not knowing what the gods had got in mind.
Our crews, therefore, harmoniously aligned,
Obeyed, and, since it was now eventide,
They cooked their evening meal. Each sailor tied
His oar about the tholes so finely made,
But when the sunbeams had begun to fade,
Each oarsman and each sailor went aboard.
The galleys, line by line, raucously roared
Encouragement; obeying the decree,
All through the night the captains constantly 330
Cruised back and forth across the strait. Although
The night was waning now, the Greeks made no
Attempt to flee. But when bright day appeared
With her white horses, the whole Greek host cheered
In triumph, and at once an echoing sound
Went ringing out in answer all around
The island crags. This caused anxiety
For us to find our plans had fruitlessly
Been made. From out the Grecian army then
A grave paeon was heard, not as of men 340
In flight but rushing bravely to the fray.
They were impassioned by their trumpet's bray
And, at the shouted orders, instantly
With even cadence struck the briny sea.
Swiftly we could observe them. Their right wing,
Well-marshalled, led their army, hastening
Against our troops, and, simultaneously,
They shouted out, "You Grecian soldiers, free
Your land, wives, children, tombs and temples – yes,
You're fighting now for all that you possess!" 350
We answered them in Persian; straightaway
Ship battered ship. A Greek ship led the fray
By chopping off in its entirety
A curved Phoenician stern. Initially
We held our own, but when a mass of sail
Clogged up the straits and no chance of avail
Was evident, our own ships then would crash
Against each other, causing oars to smash.
The Greek ships battered us on every side,
Hemming us in, nor could we see the tide 360
For upturned ships and wrecks and slaughtered crew.
The shoreline and the reefs were crowded, too,
With corpses. In disordered flight we all
Took to our oars; as if seeking a haul
Of fish, with oars and wreckage constantly
The foe struck at us. All across the sea
Wild shrieks and groans were heard until the night

With blackness covered all the men from sight.
If I had ten full days to specify
The whole extent of what we suffered, I 370
Would fail. However, it's a certainty
That never such a multiplicity
Of men has died before in just one day.

Atossa:

Upon the Asian race a vast array
Of griefs has broken.

Herald:

 But I must unfold
Much more, for less than half has yet been told -
A tragedy so dire as to outweigh
Twice over what befell them.

Atossa:

 What dismay
Is yet to come? What crisis greater still
Has sunk the scale to greater weight of ill? 380

Herald:

Those bravest, noblest Persians, at the peak
Of youth, always the first of all to speak
Their loyal dedication to the crown,
Were by a most inglorious doom brought down.

Atossa:

My heart is broken, How came their demise?

Herald:

In front of Salamis an island lies,
A tiny one and hazardous for those
Who sail the sea. Pan, as the story goes,
Loves to cavort there. Thither Xerxes sent
His choicest troops, for it was his intent 390
That, when wrecked from their ships, the enemy
Might thither flee to find security.

Then would we slaughter them, an easy prey,
And rescue all our comrades from the bay.

But he misjudged the issue grievously -

The day they won through some divinity
The battle they leapt down upon the sand,
Well-armed, then circled round the island's strand

So that our men were left with not one way
Of circumventing their attack. For they 400

Were often struck by stones the enemy threw,
From whose bow-strings many an arrow flew.

Then finally the Greeks, with one loud yell,
Hacked them to pieces until they all fell,

Slaughtered. And once your son had seen the scale
Of this disaster, he let out a wail,
For he had seen the entire tragedy
Upon a headland by the open sea.

He tore his robes and roared, then gave command
To all the companies that were on land, 410
Then fled in disarray. The news I tell
Is yet another you must grieve as well.

Atossa:

O hateful gods, you've thwarted our intent,
And to my son such vengeance have you sent.
How cruelly you brought retaliation
For his designs upon the famous nation
Of Greece! What you have wrought at Marathon
Was not enough – the vengeance that my son
Meant to exact on that defeat was how
He reaped such misery. But tell me now 420
How Persian ships were saved! Come, tell to me
Of those that have escaped calamity!
Do you have news that may be clearly said?

Herald:

Their admirals in great disorder fled
Wherever they were blown. The soldiers, though,
Were sadly in Boeotian land brought low,
Some faint with thirst beside a cooling spring.
The rest of us, breathless and staggering,
To other regions made our weary way -
To Phocia, Doris or the Melian bay, 430
Where friendly Spercheus fills the thirsty ground.
From there, badly in need of food, we found
A welcome in Achaean valleys and
From people who lived in Thessalian land.
And it was there that many of us passed
Away from thirst and hunger, so harassed
By both was every one of us. Then we
Came to Magnesia and the territory
Of Macedonia, the Axios
And Bolbe's quagmire and Mt. Pangaeus 440
In the Edonian land. But on that night
Before its time the god roused winter's blight
And froze the stream of sacred Strymon, shore
To shore. So many men who had before
That night not held the gods in veneration
Would now petition them in supplication,
Praying to heaven and earth, and finally
When all the men had finished praying, we
Then crossed the frozen river. Those who got
Across and reached the bank before the hot 450
Rays of the sun began to penetrate
The stream were safe, but those who were too late
Fell through and drowned. The lucky ones were they
Who perished soonest. We then made our way
Through Thrace with many hardships, and those who

Came safely to their homes were very few.
Now, Persians, our beloved youth lament!
My words are true, but of the misery sent
By Heaven much remains to be disclosed.

Chorus:

Alas the crushing weight that's been imposed 460
Upon us all!

Atossa:

How this annihilation
That's been inflicted on the Persian nation
Distresses me! That nightly dream of mine
Displayed to me a clear and ominous sign. [to the Chorus]
But you made light of it! Yet I will fall
Upon my knees and pray, as you have all
Advised, and from the palace I will take
An offering of sacrificial cake,
A gift both to the earth and to those who 470
Have died. I know there's nothing I can do
To change the past, and yet I hope we'll see
Some favours sent by a divinity
In times that lie ahead. However, you
Should parley with your counsellors in view
Of what's occurred. If Xerxes should come here
Before I have returned, give him some cheer!
Escort him to the palace so that he
Will not inflict some further injury! [exit Atossa]

Chorus:

Lord Zeus, you have destroyed our country's proud
And massive army. You have cast a shroud 480
Of grief around our cities. With a share
Of all this woe, so many women tear
Their veils with trembling hands and, as they weep,
They drench their robes. The ones with husbands keep
On wailing for their consorts newly wed.
Each leaves the delicate coverlets of her bed,
The rapture of her youth, perpetually
Mourning. We, too, the cruel destiny
Lament. The companies that Xerxes led 490
Are through his dire mistake now lying dead.
Why was Darius, while he saw the light
Of day, always unscathed by ruin's blight,
Who ruled the men expert in archery,
Whom Susa's men admired devotedly?
The ships, with linen wings and dark-blue eyes,
Led land- and sea-troops both to their demise,
Under the deadly impact of the foe.
The king himself barely escaped, or so
We hear, to cross the icy plains of Thrace.
Those who perforce were first of them to face 500

Their doom along the Cychrean strand were swept.
Groan! Gnash your teeth! Let grievous tears be wept!
Let shouts of woe reach Heaven! Let your cry
Of misery and woe be lifted high!
Gashed by the water, simultaneously
They're gnawed by voiceless children of the sea.
The homes, reft of their head! In their old age
Parents who've lost their sons cry out and rage
Against their heaven-sent woes, now they're aware
Of their extent. The races everywhere 510
In Asia, now beneath the Persians' sway,
Will not for too long further tribute pay,
Forced by their lord, and they'll no longer bow
To him in loyal veneration, now
That we're destroyed. Now nobody will be
Obliged to hold his tongue, for he'll be free
To speak his thoughts at will, now that no more
Does Persia's sway exist. The wave-swept shore
Runs with our blood. My friends, whoever knows
Of misery regards a sea of woes 520
With fear, but when a tide of prosperousness
Appears, he thinks he'll always reap success.
Now everything seems full of dread to me -
Before my eyes there looms the enmity
Of all the gods. No note of jubilation
Rings in my ears, such is my consternation
At evil news. That's why I'm here today,
Without my chariot or a display
Of pomp. I offer to our former king
Pure milk and honey as an offering, 530
Spring-water and, pressed from an ancient vine,
The pride of its wild mother, unmixed wine.
Here also is the fragrant yellow-green
Olive that ever since its birth has been
Well-nurtured in abundant greenery,
And flower-wreaths, the rich earth's progeny.
But come, my friends, chant solemn songs while I
Make these libations to the dead and try
To call Darius' ghost, while I convey,
In honour of the gods to whom I pray, 540
These offerings.

Chorus:

Queen of the Persian nation,
Pour on the earth beneath us each libation,
While we chant solemn hymns and send a plea
To Hades that the gods act graciously
Towards us. You nether divinities,
Earth, Hermes and Lord of the Dead, Hades,
Send up his spirit from the halls below:

If there's some further treatment he may know
For our distress, then he must surely be
The only man to have a remedy. 550
Do you believe our blessed and holy king
Can understand my tearful sorrowing,
Uttered in Persian speech? Or must I yell
My woe that it might reach the halls of Hell?
Does he hear me? You earth-lords who hold sway
Beneath the ground, bring us our king, I pray,
The godlike child of Susa! I've not heard
Of any of his like who's been interred
In Persian earth. The man, his resting-place,
His soul were all loved by the Persian race. 560
He never through imprudent strategy
Lost any of his men, and splendidly
He led his troops. Our king of old, draw near!
Lift up your saffron sandal and appear
To us! Your royal coronet display!
Hear our unheard-of sorrows and dismay!
A gloom like that of Styx is hovering
Above us. All our youth is gone. Come, king!
Your death was mourned with bitter tears. Wherefore
Do all our three-tiered galleys sail no more 570
Upon the seas? [enter Ghost of Darius]
Darius:

O loyal friends I knew
When I was young, what is disturbing you?
The earth is groaning, beaten, torn apart.
Above my tomb such fear went through my heart
On noticing my wife – that's why I'm here,
For I took her libations. Standing near
The tomb, make your lament and piercingly
Summon the dead and call me piteously!
It is not easy to eke out a way
Out of the tomb and reach the light of day, 580
Particularly since the gods below
Are readier to seize than let me go.
However, since they listened to my plea,
I've made the journey. But speak speedily
In case I should incur disapprobation
By lingering! What overwhelms our nation?
Chorus:

I'm awed from gazing on you, sir, and do
Not dare to speak through my great dread of you
In former days.
Darius:

But since I have complied
With your laments, I bid you lay aside 590
Your dread and tell me all!

Chorus:

I feel such fear
To tell to those I love news hard to hear,
As well as utter.

Darius:

Since you are restrained
From telling me your news by fear ingrained
So long within your minds, I turn instead
To the most noble partner of my bed.
Leave off your tears, dear wife, and honestly
Recount your news! We know that misery
Perforce befalls mankind. For mortal man
Suffers by sea and land if his fixed span 600
Of life is long.

Atossa:

In your prosperity
You had the most exalted destiny
Of all men, for, as long as you could view
Daylight, life was compassionate to you,
In Persian eyes a god, envied of all
Our race. And, therefore, once again I call
You fortunate in that you died before
You could behold our sorrow's entire store.
In brief, our Persian land's annihilated.

Darius:

How did this happen? Were we devastated 610
By blight or factional hostility?

Atossa:

Neither: the Persian troops were totally
Destroyed near Athens.

Darius:

Lady, tell me, then,
Which son of mine was leader of our men?

Atossa:

It was Xerxes, who in rash desperation,
Depopulated the whole Asian nation.

Darius:

By land or sea?

Atossa:

By both – a twofold force.

Darius:

How could so vast an army carve a course
To Greece?

Atossa:

He yoked the straits ingeniously
And thereby gained a passage.

Darius:

What? Did he 620
Block up the mighty Bosphorus?

Atossa:

Indeed.

Some deity must have helped him to succeed.

Darius:

And yet some other strong divinity

Must have appeared to stem his strategy

And dim his thinking.

Atossa:

Now we must recall

The ruin that he wrought and our downfall.

Darius:

How did they die?

Atossa:

Disaster that was brought

To our armada similarly wrought

Ruin on land.

Darius:

And was the entire force

Killed by the spear?

Atossa:

Indeed – it was the source 630

Of all of Susa's woe.

Darius:

Their bravery

Fills me with pride and yet distresses me.

Atossa:

All Bactria is lost – no-one is left,

Not even one old man.

Darius:

We are bereft

Of all our youth. Poor Xerxes, he who led

Them there!

Atossa:

Alone and desolate, it's said,

Xerxes with scanty train -

Darius:

Say how he met

His end and where he lies! Or is there yet

Hope of his safety?

Atossa:

Ah, to his delight

He reached the bridge of vessels.

Darius:

Is that right? 640

He's safe?

Atossa:

The news is true – there is no doubt.

Darius:

Fulfilment of the oracles came about

So swiftly, and Lord Zeus has cast descent
Upon my son. Yet I was confident
That these predictions would inflict their ill
Only in distant future days. But still
When one is keen to hasten his demise,
The god will aid him. Now I realize
A fountain of misfortune has been thrown
On all of those I love. One of my own 650
In ignorance and youthful recklessness
Has robbed the Persian race of its success.
The sacred Hellespont he would command
As though it were a slave, for he had planned
A new roadway with fetters, hammer-wrought,
For his great host. For foolishly he thought
To ape the gods, even Poseidon, though
He is but mortal. Was he, then, brought low
By some soul-sickness? By my honest toil
I gleaned my wealth to be an easy spoil 660
For others.

Atossa:

 Xerxes learned, unhappily,
From evil men – hence his audacity.
They told him you won riches with your spear
For those whom you have fathered; meanwhile here,
For his part, through his own faint-heartedness,
He did not add to your plenteousness
But merely played the soldier. Frequently
He heard these taunts from men of infamy,
Then planned his enterprise against the foe.

Darius:

So it was he who brought our nation low, 670
A dire calamity we won't forget,
A tragedy that never has beset
Susa since Zeus made all of Asia yield
To just one man who would his sceptre wield
Over them all. First Medus ruled this land,
And then his son took over the command,
A prudent ruler, then, successively,
Cyrus, a man blessed with prosperity
Who brought peace to his folk; he had subdued
Lydia, Phrygia and the multitude 680
Of all Ionia, and then his place
Was taken by Mardus, a great disgrace
To Persia and the ancient throne, but he
Was slaughtered through the clever trickery
Of noble Artaphrenes, aided by
Friends who had sworn an oath to him. Then I
Attained the lot that I was eager for.
With valiant forces I waged many a war,

But never have I brought calamity
 Like this upon the state. My progeny,
 My Xerxes, is a youth and can't recall
 My counsel. My old friends, be sure that all
 Of us who rule have never caused this land
 Such woe.

Chorus:

Darius:

Chorus:

Darius:

Chorus:

Darius:

Chorus:

Darius:

That's watered by Asopus' nourishing stream.
Because of impious thought and their extreme
Hubris, they'll meet their end. Once they had gained
The shores of Greece, instantly, unrestrained
By reverence, the gods' statues they cast
Down from their bases and with fire's blast
Destroyed the temples, and, since they have wrought
Such evil, evil equally is brought
To them, and other evils are in store,
Still unsubdued, for they will suffer more. 720

Yes, clotted blood and gore will surely rain
From Dorian spears on the Platean plain.
Three generations hence will yet display
The heaps of dead which silently will say
That mortals should not vaunt excessively,

For swagger, when it gains maturity,
Creates a harvest of calamities
And tears. Know that these are the penalties
Of deeds like these. So in your mind retain
Athens and Greece, and do not through disdain 730
Of present luck and lust for even more
Squander your overflowing bounty. For
Excessive pride is punished heavily
By Zeus. Be sure of that and hear my plea -
Now that my son was bidden to be wise
By voices from the heavens above, advise
Him not to incur Heaven's penalty
By showing his brazen effrontery.
Beloved wife and Xerxes' mother, you
Must find some clothes to dress our son anew, 740
Then greet him, for in sorrow he has torn
His clothes to pieces, which hang off him, worn
And tattered. Give him words of consolation -
Your voice alone invites his toleration:
I know that he will listen. Now I go
To greet the darkness of the earth below.
Elders, farewell! Rejoice, despite your grief,
While you yet live. For wealth brings no relief
For those who've died.

Chorus:

Oh, such calamity
Existing now and others yet to be 750
I grieve.

Atossa:

Such grief! And yet my greatest care
Concerns the shameful clothes he has to wear.
I'll try to meet him for I don't propose
Forsaking him I love so well whose woes
Are great.

Chorus:

A good and glorious life we led
As long as our old, powerful king was head
Of Persia. For he was a peaceful man,
Who did no wrong throughout his regal span.
So many towns he captured, even though
Beyond Hylas's stream he would not go, 760
Such as the cities on the Strymon's shore
Beside the Thracian dwellings, and, what's more,
The ones beside the lake, on the mainland,
Hemmed by a rampart, under the command
Of King Darius, and those who can boast
That they have been installed on either coast
Of Hellespont, the isles close to our land,
Lesbos, Chios, Paros, Mykonos and

Samos, so rich with olive-groves, Naxos
And Andros, bordering upon Tenos. 770
And there were islands over which his sway
Was held upon the sea-girt isles midway
Between the continents, Soli, Cnidos,
The settlement of Icarus, Paphos
And Salamis, who caused the grief we bear,
And, as he pleased, Darius ruled them there,
And stalwart men-at-arms at his command
He had and allied troops from every land.
But we've been crushed by ruin on the sea,
For Heaven caused a change of destiny 780
For us. [enter Xerxes]
Xerxes:

 This cruel doom has brought me down
So unexpectedly. Has Fortune's frown
Been so relentless on the Persian race?
What misery, then, am I yet to face?
There's no strength in my body now for me
To face these elders. Evil destiny!
O Zeus! Why has it not sent me as well
Down to the halls of Hades, there to dwell
Among my men?
Chorus:

 My king, how I bemoan
Our honourable troops, the Persian throne, 790
The splendour of our men annihilated
By Fate! We wail our youth, obliterated
For Xerxes, who has filled the land below
With Persian dead. Those masters of the bow,
So many warriors, our country's pride,
A veritable multitude, have died.
Our strength is gone. The Asian continent,
The leading power on earth, we must lament.
Xerxes:
Look at me here and weep, the very spring
Of Persian ruin!

Chorus:
 As a welcoming, 800
I now will send for an ill-omened cry,
My king, for you'll have dirges chanted by
A member of the Maryandrinian band
Of mourners.
Xerxes:

 Let it be discordant and
Plaintive, for Fortune now has turned around
Against me.
Chorus:

 Yes indeed. I'll wail a sound

Of lamentation for your suffering
And our well-manned armada, toppling
Among the waves; a plaintive strain you'll hear
That mourns our sons, and we'll shed many a tear.810

Xerxes:

Oh yes, it was Ionia's naval force
That turned the tide and stayed us in our course,
Roaming the dark sea and the doom-filled shore.

Chorus:

Of this disaster let us hear much more!
Where are the rest? Where is Pharandaces,
Susas, Pelagon, Doramas, Susiscanes,
Psammis, Agdabatas?

Xerxes:

They all are lost -

Out of a Tyrian vessel they were tossed:
On Salamis' rough shores their corpses pound.

Chorus:

Scream, Persians, scream, and let me hear the sound 820
Of woe. Where is the well-loved Pharmachus?
Where is the stalwart Ariomardus?
Where's grand Lilaëus, where's Prince Seualces?
Where's Memphis, Tharybis, Artembares,
Masistras, Hystaechmus? All this, I pray,
Relate to me! I ask you, where are they?

Xerxes:

They gazed on Athens, hateful to us all,
In one convulsive struggle doomed to fall,
Gasping upon the shores.

Chorus:

Report to us

If your informer, trusty Alpistus, 830
Among the countless Persian dead, yet sees
Daylight. What of Parthus and Oebares?
You tell us of surpassing woefulness,
For noble Persians such unhappiness.

Xerxes:

A yearning for my gallant friends you stir
Within me with your dreadful grieving, sir.
This hateful loss I always shall recall -
With a full heart I sorrow for them all.

Chorus:

Yet there are others, too. Are they amiss? --
The Mardians' commander, stout Xanthis, 840
The cavalry commanders, Arsaces,
Diaexis and the warlike Anchares,
Cogdadas, Lythimnas, Tolmus, too,
Insatiate in war. I marvel you
Don't lead them back to us.

Xerxes:

They're not with me -

Brave chiefs, all slaughtered!

Chorus:

So ingloriously!

Xerxes:

Such woe!

Chorus:

What misery the gods have sent

To us! Such unexpected ravagement! 850

Xerxes:

Our ill luck will for many years endure.

Chorus:

Ill luck indeed, for that is starkly sure.

Xerxes:

This woe is strange.

Chorus:

Ill luck caused us to face

The Grecian sailors. Indeed Persia's race

Is cursed in combat.

Xerxes:

Oh yes, that is so.

So great an army's loss has dealt a blow

To me.

Chorus:

What's Persian that's survived?

Xerxes:

You see

This remnant of my robe?

Chorus:

Yes, certainly!

Xerxes:

This quiver, too?

Chorus:

That's all that's left, then?

Xerxes:

Yes,

An *empty* one!

Chorus:

From such plenteousness 860

So little's left.

Xerxes:

We're lacking friends to back

Us up.

Chorus:

The Greeks don't scruple to attack.

Xerxes:

They are a warlike race. I've lived to see

An unexpected, huge calamity.

Chorus:
Is it our loss of sailors that you mean?
Xerxes:
I do. I tore my garment at the scene.
Chorus:
A grim disaster, grim calamity!
Alas!
Xerxes:
 Indeed this dire tragedy
Merits more than 'Alas!'
Chorus:
 You say aright -
Twice or three times!
Xerxes:
 This conquest brought delight 870
To Greece but pain to us.
Chorus:
 Our strength is gone.
Xerxes:
My guards are dead.
Chorus:
 Our vanquishment upon
The sea has taken them away.
Xerxes:
 Ah, shed
Your tears for the profusion of our dead!
Go home!
Chorus:
 Ah, woe!
Xerxes:
 Cry in response to me!
Chorus:
From wretched folk a wretched tragedy
To wretches!
Xerxes:
 Tune your strain to mine! Cry out!
Chorus:
The loss we bear is grave beyond all doubt.
I share your grief.
Xerxes:
 Cry out for me and beat
Your breasts in mourning for our grim defeat! 880
Chorus:
I weep!
Xerxes:
 Cry out in your response to me!
Chorus:
Your misery, my lord, is equally
My misery.

Xerxes:

Cry out in lamentation!

Chorus:

With bruising blows and shrieks of tribulation

We'll mourn.

Xerxes:

Now beat your breasts and raise on high

The Mysian wail! Ah, let me hear you cry!

Chorus:

Such savage fate! The pain!

Xerxes:

Tear out the hair

From your grey beard!

Chorus:

My lord, my fists are there

Already. See how I am weeping, too!

Xerxes:

And make your weeping shrill!

Chorus:

My lord, we do. 890

Xerxes:

And tear your robe!

Chorus:

Alas for our despair!

Xerxes:

Lament our army's loss! Pluck out your hair!

Chorus:

I do so, sir.

Xerxes:

Let tears moisten your eyes!

Chorus:

I'm drenched with tears.

Xerxes:

And let me hear your cries

Answering mine!

Chorus:

Woe!

Xerxes:

Let your cries resound!

Go home!

Chorus:

Ah, woe!

Xerxes:

Let sorrow go around

The city!

Chorus:

Yes indeed!

Xerxes:

Cry out and go

With gentle steps!

Chorus:

My land, it causes woe

To walk on you.

Xerxes:

My ships were lost at sea.

Chorus:

I'll go with you with strains of misery.

900