

## SUPPLICES

Chorus:

Zeus, who guard suppliants, look graciously  
Upon our band as we put out to sea,  
Leaving the outlets of the Nile's fine sand,  
For we have said farewell to Zeus's land,  
That borders Syria. We've take flight,  
But not because we're guilty of the blight  
Of murder, but because each one of us  
Must shun our marriage, for it's impious,  
We must allow, to think of marrying  
Aegyptus' sons. Our father, pondering                   10  
Our course, thought that, of all iniquity,  
The best that we could do would be to flee  
Quickly across the sea so that the shore  
Of Argos will provide a haven for  
Us all. For it was thence that our whole race  
Began, when Zeus's breath caressed the face  
Of gnat-tormented Io. Ah, what land  
Could offer more goodwill when every hand  
We've furnished with wool-boughs? For we're aware  
They are the only weapons we can bear                   20  
As suppliants. Realm, land, clear waters! O  
You gods in Heaven and you powers below,  
Who keep the sacred tombs, and, thirdly, you,  
Lord Zeus, the saviour of all mortals, who  
Guard pious folk, receive this suppliant band  
With all the gentle spirit of this land!  
But if the thronging swarm of violent men  
Sets foot upon this land of marsh and fen,  
Drive them out to the sea, and when they've gone  
In their swift ship, send thunder down upon           30  
That ship that will whip up a cruel sea  
With lightning, winds and rain, and thus they'll be  
Eradicated so they'll never lay  
Their hands upon their cousins or essay  
To mount unwilling beds, so impious  
A deed! Epaphus, now give ear to us,  
You progeny of our own ancestress,  
The heifer Io, who felt the caress  
Of Zeus's breath! Your name is apt indeed,  
For she was touched. I hail him in my need.           40  
Now where our mother pastured long ago,  
While I recount the story of her woe,  
I'll show proof to those who inhabit here,  
And other evidence will yet appear  
That all may know the truth. If you can tell  
One bird call from another, you may well

Think you can hear the melancholy prey  
 Of hawks as she sings out her tragic lay  
 Of her child's death – Metis, the nightingale,  
 Tereus's wife; you'll hear her piteous wail 50  
 For slaying her own chick, a monstrous act.  
 In this same way I find myself distract:  
 I sing my grief in an Ionian strain,  
 My sunburnt face reflecting all my pain,  
 My heart untouched by tears; the flowers of grief  
 I gather, anxious to find some relief  
 From friendly kinsmen who'll espouse our band,  
 Which has escaped from this haze-shrouded land.  
 Gods of our race, hear me! Look graciously  
 Upon my right for objectivity! 60  
 Or, since you execrate presumption, stay  
 And help us with these marriages, I pray!  
 Even those who flee from warfare's devastation  
 May find an altar where they'll find salvation.  
 May we be granted this! But Zeus's will  
 Is hard to follow and may lead to ill -  
 Its lightning shines even in obscurity  
 And from high hopes it hurls humanity  
 To utter doom; no forces of his own  
 Has he, but, seated on his holy throne, 70  
 He works his will, unmoved, mysteriously.  
 So let him look at their indecency  
 In wooing us with thoughts of base intent,  
 Quite lunatic and with a frenzied bent.  
 I utter piteous strains of woe, now deep,  
 Now shrill, all blended with the tears I weep,  
 Fit for a funeral's wails; although I still  
 Am living, I am mourning all my ill.  
 I call on Apia, that hilly land -  
 O Apia, you clearly understand 80  
 My barbarous speech. My veil I frequently  
 Mangle. Our offerings unrestrainedly  
 Are given when all's well, as long as there  
 Is an escape from death. Alas, though, where  
 Will this grief lead me? Ah, the craft! The oar!  
 The windswept linen sails! See how they soar!  
 The salty wind! How pleasantly we go,  
 Thanks to the gods! I'll not complain – oh, no!  
 But when the time is ripe, may Zeus, who sees  
 All things, free us from all our miseries! 90  
 May we escape, unwed, victorious!  
 And may Queen Artemis look after us,  
 Zeus's pure daughter! To her, too, I pray,  
 That she may rescue us from the dismay  
 We feel at this unholy match! May she

Grant that our suppliant band, the progeny  
Of Io, who's so steeped in piety,  
Escape the sinful marriage! But if she  
Cannot, we sunburnt maids will put away  
Our beckoning branches and to Lord Zeus pray 100  
To take us to his chambers down below,  
A noose about our necks. It seems Io  
Has turned the gods against us. Ah, I see  
Queen Hera's hand in this, whose sovereignty  
Is great in Heaven! Zeus committed wrong  
In hating his own child, begotten long  
Ago, and now his face he turns away  
From us. But may he hear us as we pray! [enter Danaus]

Danaus:

Daughters, be sensible! You have come here  
Through my advice, and now I'll further steer 110  
You on your course. Look over there! I see  
Dust swirling – surely there's the emissary  
Of an approaching army. Ah, how loud  
The axles sound! Can you not see a crowd  
Of soldiers? They are armed with shield and spear.  
They drive their horses on. They're coming here  
In chariots. The rulers of this land  
Have heard about us, as I understand,  
Wishing to see us now with their own eyes.  
Therefore I think it right that I advise, 120  
Whether it's good or bad that they intend  
For you, my daughters, that you all should wend  
Your way up to that sacred mount where you  
Should sit as suppliants. It's surely true  
A towering castle is much weaker than  
A shrine, which is a steadfast shield for man.  
Wool-branches in your hands, with adoration  
Go quickly thither, bringing great elation  
To kindly Zeus! Invite from them compassion  
For your requirements, and deftly fashion 130  
Your words that they might understand, and say  
The reason why you all have run away,  
No spill of blood involved. And do not show  
A trace of arrogance, but let them know  
You're calm, serene and civil. Do not be  
Too eager to speak up or, conversely,  
Too loath! Both of these traits the people who  
Dwell here think very rude. Remember, too,  
To know your place! You're each a refugee  
And need help. Those with no authority 140  
Should not be brazen.

Chorus:

Father, you advise

Us well. We'll take due care and keep your wise  
Instructions in our hearts. Zeus, our forebear,  
Look down on us and grant us all your care!

Danaus:

Be gracious, too!

Chorus:

May I sit by you?

Danaus:

Yes,

Be quick!

Chorus:

Zeus, pity our distress

Or we will be destroyed!

Danaus:

If he agrees,

That will conclude all of your miseries.

Chorus:

Look over there! A form of bird I see.

Danaus:

It's Zeus's bird – invoke its name!

Chorus:

Ah, we

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Summon the sun, the saviour of us all.

To sacred Loxias we also call,

An exile from the gods. Our destiny

He understands and feels great sympathy

For mortals.

Danaus:

May he help our cause indeed!

Chorus:

What other deities do I have need

To call?

Danaus:

Poseidon's trident I can see.

Chorus:

He brought us hither in security.

May he receive us kindly in this land!

Danaus:

Hermes's symbol, too, is close at hand.

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Chorus:

May he, too, keep us free!

Danaus:

You must revere

Them all before this shrine, and sit down here

Upon this sacred ground, just like a flock

Of doves that fear the hawk who taints their stock.

No bird should feed on other birds. Thus he

Who spurns a woman's father's stern decree

And weds her notwithstanding is impure.

For even Hades will not be secure  
For him, for Zeus brings judgment even there  
On evil deeds. And therefore stay aware 170  
Of what I said! Be careful how you speak  
To them! [enter the King of Argos]

King:

Strangers, your garments are not Greek.  
This fabric's finely wrought - they don't appear  
Like ours at all. No women living here  
In Greece wear clothes like that. You must indeed  
Be brave, thus unannounced, with none to lead  
You hither. On the shrine and by your sides  
I see your wool-bound branches – this provides  
Me with the proof that you, as suppliants, seek  
My custody, but that is all a Greek 180  
May know. The rest, though, I must presuppose  
Unless in your own words you should disclose  
Your tale.

Chorus:

You're right about our clothes, but, sir,  
Who are you? Are you some shrine's messenger,  
A common citizen, the king, maybe?

King:

You may address me, ladies, openly.  
I am Pelasgus, son of Palaechthon,  
Earth-born, the king, and those who live upon  
This land are named for me. This fertile ground  
They cultivate, and everywhere around 190  
Where Strymon flows far to the west am I  
The ruler. This includes the regions by  
The Perrhaebi, and many more as well,  
Beyond Pidmus, to where Paeonians dwell  
And mountainous Dodona. Ocean's sea  
Defines my borders: thus my monarchy  
Is set within these limits. Here you are  
In Apia, named for a healer far  
In ancient times, Apollo's son, a seer  
And healer from Naupactus, far from here. 200  
This colony of snakes he expiated  
Of cruel monsters, which originated  
From earth, curses from murders long ago:  
Earth sprouted them to satisfy and show  
Her rage. These slithering serpents were a scourge  
That none would dare approach. He, as a purge,  
Concocted deadly herbs and drugs and thus  
Cleansed all of Argos of this impious  
Evil. Therefore we keep his memory  
Alive in all our prayers. Accordingly, 210  
Tell us your background and whatever more

You wish to add, though we have no love for  
Long tales.

Chorus:

Our tale is short, your majesty,  
And clear. We are proud of our pedigree -  
We're Argives, Io's own, and we can show  
You proof of this.

Pelasgus:

You are from Argos? No!

I can't believe this. Not in any way  
Are you like us. You're Libyans, I might say -  
Only the Nile could bring forth such a breed  
As yours. Or Cyprus! Yes, I see a seed                    220  
Of Cyprus in you, like those who I hear  
Wander on camels on their borders near  
The Aethiop land. If you were armed with bows,  
I would have thought that all of you were those  
Amazons who eat meat and live apart  
From those of the male sex. Therefore impart  
Your family line in Argos!

Chorus:

Did Io

Serve Hera in Argos some time ago?

Pelasgus:

She did. The story's gained a wealth of fame.

Chorus:

Then tell me further – does the story claim                    230  
That Zeus lay with a mortal?

Pelasgus:

Yes, that's true -

It does, but it's well known that Hera knew  
Of it.

Chorus:

How did they fix the situation?

Pelasgus:

Lord Zeus's wife performed a transformation -  
She turned the girl into a cow.

Chorus:

But say,

Did Zeus approach her then?

Pelasgus:

Yes, in a way,

But as a lusty bull.

Chorus:

But what did she

Do then?

Pelasgus:

She chose a watchful beast to be

Her sentinel.

Chorus:

But who?

Pelagus:

Argos, the son

Of Earth, by Hermes slain.

Chorus:

What else was done 240

To her by Hera then?

Pelagus:

She sent a fly

That stings all cattle.

Chorus:

Yes, those who dwell by

The Nile call it a gadfly.

Pelagus:

Far away

It drove her out of Argos.

Chorus:

What you say

Matches my tale. She moved from place to place -

Canobus and then Memphis. Face-to-face

Zeus met her and, with just a touch of one

Of his own hands, she gave birth to a son.

Pelagus:

Who claims to be that son?

Chorus:

Epaphus, such

A fitting name - "Produced from Zeus's touch". 250

Pelagus:

And whom did he beget himself?

Chorus:

The land

Of Libya which reaped the fruit that spanned

The widest region of the entire earth.

Pelagus:

And were there others to whom she gave birth?

Chorus:

Belus, my father's father, from whom came

Two sons.

Pelagus:

Tell me – what was their father's name?

Chorus:

Danaus. His brother was the father to

Full fifty sons himself.

Pelagus:

I beg of you,

What was his name?

Chorus:

Aegyptus. Now you see  
How far in time extends my ancestry. 260  
Please save our links to Argos!

Pelasgus:

Yes, you share  
Old bonds with Argos, but what happened where  
You live to make you flee?

Chorus:

Men's destinies  
Are multifarious, for no-one sees  
Two quite alike, for who could have forecast  
That we would flee back to our ancient past,  
Hating to wed?

Pelasgus:

Why have you hither come  
As suppliants?

Chorus:

Due to our odium  
Of King Aegyptus' sons.

Pelasgus:

You hate them, then?  
Or do you think that they are impious men? 270

Chorus:

What woman is there who would willingly  
Marry a cousin?

Pelasgus:

She whose family  
She wants to grow in strength.

Chorus:

Your observation  
Ignores the hornet's nest of separation.

Pelasgus:

How can I help you, then?

Chorus:

Do not restore  
Us to Aegyptus' sons.

Pelasgus:

This would mean war.

Chorus:

But we will be kept safe by Equity.

Pelasgus:

Yes, if she's been with you primarily.

Horus:

Respect the wreath-bound altars here, my king!

Pelasgus:

The sight of them sets me to trembling. 280

Chorus:

Zeus, our protector, can be merciless.

Accept me, mighty king, with kindness!



Pelasgus:

Chorus:

Pelasgus:

Chorus:

Pelasgus:

Chorus:

But if your laws state that the progeny

Of King Aegyptus will be rightfully  
Your husbands once they have proclaimed that they  
Are your own relatives, who could gainsay  
Their claim? Defend the laws of your own land  
To show they have no license of command!

Chorus:

O may I not find the authority  
Of those of the male sex imposed on me!  
I'd rather choose to run away and trace  
My journey by the stars than have to face 330  
A match I loathe. Have Justice on your side,  
Then what the gods consider right – abide  
By that!

Pelasgus:

A tough decision! Don't ask me  
To render judgment, though I previously  
Asked that of you, although the king, before  
I speak to my own people lest there's more  
Trouble and they should say, "You showed respect  
To foreigners and thereby you subject  
Argos to sabotage."

Chorus:

Zeus equally  
Will judge this fairly, swinging evenly 340  
Between both sides, delivering punishment,  
The just deserts for the malevolent,  
Rewarding honest men. With issues thus  
Assessed whyever not be virtuous?

Pelasgus:

But here we need advice that's sure and wise,  
Just like a deep-sea diver with his eyes  
Lustrous in order that we'll be content  
And nought will happen to the detriment  
Of Argos, and I'll have no enemy  
Take you as hostage. No, you came to me 350  
And we won't yield you up out of this place,  
The seat and sanctuary that holds the grace  
Of all the gods, or send down retribution  
Which won't, even to the dead, bring absolution.

Pelasgus:

Do you need counsel, then?

Chorus:

We do indeed,  
So prove the sacred champion that we need!  
Do nor betray the fugitive that's cast  
Out of this sanctuary, you who hold fast  
All power in this land! I'm led away,  
Abducted from this shrine. Think of the sway 360  
Of villains! Guard against the deities

And don't see Justice lost! Your refugees,  
Your suppliants, are being dragged away  
From all these statues in an unjust way,  
Just like a horse with straps upon its head,  
Hauled off by godless hands, each delicate thread  
Of finely-woven clothes torn clean away.  
Your children and your house will have to pay,  
Whatever you decide. So keep in mind  
The good that Zeus intends for all mankind! 370

Pelagus:

I do. But now I must fight on one side  
Or the other – its a choice that has been tied  
As firmly as a ship's hull. There's no way  
To settle this concern without dismay.  
If one is burgled of one's property,  
Zeus, our protector, may most graciously  
Restore what has been lost. A tongue may speak  
Foul words that rouse the heart to grief and pique,  
But soothing words can ease what has been said.  
However, so that we may never shed 380  
Our kindred's blood, we surely will have need  
To offer sacrifices that will feed  
The many gods to quell our suffering.  
I have no wish for all this wrangling.  
I'd much prefer to have no misery  
To cloud my future life than to foresee  
It clearly. So godspeed! May all this prove  
That I was wrong!

Chorus:

Once more I hope to move  
Your heart with my appeals.

Pelagus:

I'll lend an ear.  
Speak up! I am unlikely not to hear. 390

Chorus:

I have a band and belts around my breast.

Pelagus:

Yes, that is how a woman should be dressed.

Chorus:

As you can see, this is an excellent way...

Pelagus:

What do you mean? What are you trying to say?

Chorus:

If you don't promise...

Pelagus:

How will what you wear

Assist you?

Chorus:

Then these statues here will bear

New votive plaques.

Pelasgus:

You're speaking cryptically.

Speak more directly!

Chorus:

We immediately

Will hang ourselves upon them.

Pelasgus:

*That* I hear,

And how it hurts my heart!

Chorus:

Ah, now it's clear? 400

Pelasgus:

How hard you make it! Torrents everywhere -

A flood of ruin, bearing here and there

On me! No-one can navigate this sea -

It's bottomless, full of calamity.

There is no refuge from these storms that spout

Around me. If I do not carry out

My obligations to you, you have said

That you'll commit an act that will bring dread

And taint the state. But if I stand before

Our city walls and move to fight a war 410

Against your kinsmen, how can that not cost

Us bitterly? The blood of men is lost

To aid a woman's cause. But I revere

The wrath and majesty of Zeus, since fear

Of that among all of humanity

Deserves the highest awe. [to Danaus] Come, speedily,

Old Danaus, collect more branches and

Set them on other altars in this land

So that the citizens may clearly see

That these are suppliants who came to me 420

And no-one denigrates me. It's a fact

That often folk find fault with those who act

As rulers. Maybe those who cast their eyes

Upon these suppliants may well despise

Those brash young suitors and feel sympathy

For these maids and extend more charity

To them; when someone's cause is tenuous

We pity them.

Danaus:

It means a lot to us

To find someone who feels compassion, who

Will be the patron for our cause. But you 430

Should send some of this country's men to be

Our escorts and our leaders so that we

May find those holy shrines and travel through

The streets with safety. We don't look like you -

Those dwelling in the land of Inachus  
Are in appearance different from us  
Nile-dwellers. Thus we always should take heed  
Not to be over-confident – indeed  
A friend may kill a friend unwittingly.  
Pelagus [to attendants]:  
Go with him, men, for he speaks peerlessly! 440  
Conduct him to the shrines, but do not say  
Too much to those you meet upon the way.  
He's seeking refuge.

Chorus:

He listened to you,  
And now he's gone. But what am I to do?  
What can you offer in encouragement?

Pelagus:

Set down the tokens of your discontent!

Chorus:

I will.

Pelagus:

And now move round that level space,  
Just over yonder!

Chorus:

But how will that place  
Protect me? For it is not sacred ground.

Pelagus:

Those birds of prey you see flying around 450  
We won't let seize you.

Chorus:

What if they are worse  
Than any hateful serpent and averse  
To us?

Pelagus:

I meant to make your fears subside,  
So be content!

Chorus:

But we are terrified.

Pelagus:

And one cannot control excessive fear.

Chorus:

Then ease our troubled hearts! Give us some cheer!

Pelagus:

Your father, though, will not be long away.  
I'll call my people and try to allay  
Their feelings, and I urge you to remain  
Right here and beg our gods that you attain 460  
Your wishes. I will see what I can do,  
And may my words succeed in saving you! [exit]

Chorus:

O blessed lord of lords, Zeus, hear our plea!

Protect your race from sensuality  
 And arrogance! And from their black ship drown  
 Those cruel suitors! Favour us! Look down  
 On us! Recall the tale of long ago,  
 The story of our ancestor, Io,  
 Who lay with Zeus. We maintain that our race  
 Is from Zeus and one who dwelt in this place. 470  
 We see our mother's footprints – here she grazed  
 In flowery meadows – here's where she was crazed  
 By that gadfly, the place where Argos spied  
 On her and whence in frenzy she then hied  
 Through many lands and many a narrow strait  
 Out to the shores, as was declared by Fate,  
 Through Phrygia, rich in flocks, and Mysia, too,  
 Beneath Teuthras's jurisdiction, through  
 Lydia's fields and mountains bordering  
 Cilicia and Pamphylia, travelling 480  
 Through streams and Aphrodite's fertile ground.  
 Stung by the oestrus, onward she would bound,  
 To Zeus's grounds. Beaten by Typho's spleen,  
 Through valleys full of snow would she be seen,  
 Across the Nile immune to malady,  
 And driven mad by shameful agony,  
 Turned Maenad by Hera's tormenting sting.  
 Those who observed her felt a shivering  
 Of dread. A horrid sight was this to see -  
 Half-maid, half-cow! Then they asked finally, 490  
 "Who was it, then, who cured the wretched maid?"  
 Lord Zeus through many years came to her aid.  
 He touched Io with his almighty hand,  
 Thus soothing her, and his divine breath fanned  
 Her face and cured her pain, as her tears fell  
 To end her shame. And then, as it was well  
 Reported, she took in his seed and bore  
 A blameless son, who has been honoured for  
 An age. Throughout the land a cry rang out,  
 "This race is sprung from Zeus." There is no doubt 500  
 That none but Zeus could end the misery  
 Devised by Hera. It was surely he  
 Who did so. Thus to whom else should we plead  
 Than Zeus for each and every honest deed  
 That he's committed? For with his own hand  
 He made us grow – we're under his command.  
 His wisdom spans the breadth of time, for he  
 Breathes everywhere life and prosperity.  
 His throne is his alone, he reigns supreme,  
 No other can from us claim such esteem. 510  
 His deeds are realized as soon as he  
 Has uttered them. [enter Danaus]

Danaus:

    You must show bravery,  
Daughters! The Argives favour us, and they  
Are powerful.

Chorus:

    Father, tell us, we pray,  
Your splendid news!

Danaus:

    The Argive votes are clear.  
With one united voice they've given cheer  
To this old soul. A multiplicity  
Of arms shot up to honour the decree,  
And now we're free to settle in this land,  
Not apprehended at someone's command       520  
Or carried off as hostages. We're free  
From any citizen's authority,  
Or any foreigner's. Should someone try  
To hurt us, then an Argive who would shy  
Away from us shall be disgraced and sent  
By public verdict into banishment.  
Thus said the Argive king in aid of us;  
He claimed this land would not be prosperous  
Should that occur, for Zeus, the deity  
Of suppliants, would lash out angrily.       530  
The curse would double – such was his command -  
Since we are strangers and yet from this land.  
Before the city this curse would appear,  
A feast of evils that would have no peer.  
The Argive people then immediately  
Held up their hands in solidarity,  
And once they heard the speaker's argument,  
They were convinced about the settlement.  
But Zeus brought the result.

Chorus:

    Come, do not shirk  
To chant a prayer for all this blessed work!       540  
And let us hear these foreigners extol  
Lord Zeus, and may they truly reach their goal.  
Our blessings for our Argive kin now hear,  
You Zeus-born gods! And may we never fear  
Ares, the war-god, who incessantly  
Oppresses enemy with enemy  
In foreign fields! For we are pitied here,  
Sad suppliants now given words of cheer.  
And they did not repudiate our plight  
And favour men, but upon Heaven's height       550  
They saw vengeance in Zeus's sleepless eyes,  
And that's a vengeance that no-one can rise  
Above. What house would scorn at his decree?

Just like an evil bird's impurity,  
Vengeance will fall with its prodigious weight  
Pressing down hard. But these men venerate  
Their kindred relatives. Their shrines remain  
In favour with the gods without a stain.  
So let my words of prayer be uttered through  
These suppliant boughs! May famine not subdue 560  
These people! May Ares not slice away  
Our young men in their finest bloom, and may  
Shrines blaze with sacrifices that were sent  
To the elders so that Argive government  
Rules wisely! For these men worship the might  
Of Zeus who guides Fate by an ancient right.  
May new kings always bring security  
To Argos! And may Artemis-Hecate  
Guard women giving birth! And keep from us  
The god of war, cruel and murderous, 570  
For he is one who'll never patronize  
Music or dance but rather stirs up cries  
For civil strife. May every foul disease  
Shun us, and may Apollo always please  
The young! May Zeus allow the earth to yield  
Its fruits year after year in every field!  
May grazing herds thrive with new progeny!  
May mortals, too, live in prosperity!  
And may each shrine seem to reverberate 580  
With hopeful songs! May pure lips venerate  
The gods to tuneful lyres! May all those here  
Who form the government firmly adhere  
To guarding people's rights with prudent views  
For public good, and may they always choose  
To grant to foreigners the civic right,  
Before they arm themselves to face the blight  
Of war, of arbitration with no pain!  
And may they worship the gods who maintain  
This land's security by holding high  
Their native country's laurels and supply 590  
Their sacrificial bulls, as in the past  
Their fathers did, because a law was passed  
To honour parents, third upon the list  
Of laws of Justice, all which they insist  
Must be obeyed.

Danaus:

Daughters, splendidly said,  
Wisely and righteously! But feel no dread  
To hear the sudden news that I'm about  
To tell you! But from here, as I look out,  
I clearly see a ship – I could not fail  
To track its leather hide, its length of sail, 600



Its prow obeying much more skilfully  
Its guiding helm than any enemy.  
I see its men, their white clothes standing out  
On their dark limbs. And now all round about  
Is her flotilla. Now the foremost craft  
Has furled her sails – the oarsmen fore and aft  
Keep time. She's heading here. Now you must stay  
Serene and face them in a tranquil way.  
Do not forget these gods! I'll come again  
When I can find our friends and other men           610  
To plead our cause. Perhaps there'll be someone,  
A herald or an envoy, who will run  
You off as stolen property, but they  
Will not succeed – therefore feel no dismay!  
But if help's slow in coming, keep in mind  
The gods, whose aid cannot be far behind.  
Therefore have courage and, eventually,  
The godless man will bear the penalty  
For his irreverence.

Chorus:

                                I feel such fear  
To see these rapid vessels coming here.           620  
I'm in a lamentable state of fright,  
Father, that after such a lengthy flight  
We'll still be helpless.

Danaus:

                                Since the Argive show  
Of hands was so decisive, I well know  
They'll fight for you. Be brave!

Chorus:

                                It's clear to us  
Aegyptus' sons, vile and lascivious,  
Are eager for a war. You know this, too.  
And in their dark-eyed ships across the blue  
They're coming here, a huge black host. Now we  
Are caught up in their animosity.           630

Danaus:

Sun-toughened, here they come, a force of men  
Both lean and strong.

Chorus:

                                Father, don't leave us, then,  
We beg! A woman left alone is naught  
Because she does not give a single thought  
For war. These men are gross and devious  
In their intent, and they are blasphemous,  
Like ravens.

Danaus:

                                Children, if the gods abhor  
These men as you do, that is helpful for

Our cause.

Chorus:

But sacred objects they don't fear -  
No trident will stop them from coming here 640  
And taking us. No, they're presumptuous  
And full of anger and iniquitous,  
Like shameless curs.

Danaus:

But, as is often said,  
Papyrus fruit is not a match for bread  
And wolves can conquer dogs.

Chorus:

They have the mind  
Of beasts, profane and rash. Quick! We must find  
Protection!

Danaus:

When a ship sets out from land  
Or when it's anchoring upon the strand,  
It's slow, for ropes must be hauled up onshore  
And helmsmen don't feel safe till they have more 650  
Time after that, especially when the night  
Approaches and no harbour is in sight.  
If they are wise, this breeds anxiety  
In them. Besides, they cannot properly  
Arrange to disembark the troops before  
The ship is confident and they can moor  
It safely. Be alert, despite your fear,  
And keep in mind your gods! I'm leaving here  
To search for help. I'm sure Argos will heed  
My words, for though I'm old my heart indeed 660  
Is that of a much younger man. [exit]

Chorus:

O land  
Of mountains, how well do I understand  
Why you're revered! What is our destiny?  
Whither in Apia's land are we to flee?  
Is there some deep dark cave that's out of sight  
Where we may hide? I wish to Zeus's height  
To fly like black smoke with my wings outspread,  
And, like invisible dust motes vanish – dead!  
I can no longer flee this evil thing -  
My heart is turning black and trembling, 670  
And I am shaken by the dreadful sight  
My father saw. I'm overwhelmed with fright.  
I'd rather hang myself than ever see  
A foul and loathsome man approaching me!  
Let Hades be my lord! O for a seat  
Up high where watery clouds turn into sleet!  
O let me find a barren crag where I

Can rest, where no goats roam or vultures fly,  
Unseen below, before I'm forced to wed  
And live in abject misery! Instead, 680  
From now on I will choose to be the prey  
Of carrion dogs and birds, for death will stay  
All ills, so let it come, for thus will I  
Avoid the marriage-bed! How can I fly  
From it? Pray to the gods! O Zeus, fulfil  
Somehow what we desire and drive this ill  
Away and find for us tranquillity!  
May you see no delight in savagery!  
Now guard your suppliants as you guard this land!  
Those men, whose bluster I can barely stand, 690  
Are after us to take us for their own  
With lustful cries. Lord Zeus, it's you alone  
Who hold the scales of Justice. Without you,  
Lord Zeus, what could we mortals ever do? [enter a Herald]

Chorus:

My ravisher approaches from the sea.  
Ah, may you die before you capture me!  
I'm crying out my agony and my woe:  
They'll take me off by violence, I know.  
Move off! Run to our shrine, our sanctuary!  
From savage insolence on land and sea 700  
Protect us, lord of Earth!

Herald:

Come down from there!

Quick! To the ships! Or we'll rip out your hair  
Or stab you or decapitate you all.  
A curse on you! Get moving! Now! Don't stall!

Chorus:

Would you had died upon the great salt sea,  
You and your masters' rash effrontery!

Herald:

Someone who has no honour here gets no  
Respect from me.

Chorus:

O may you never go

Back home and see the stream that gives nutrition  
To beasts and men! Old man, know my position! 710  
I am an Argive from an ancient stock.

Herald:

I'm telling you to get down to the dock,  
Willing or not. If I am forced to lay  
My hands upon you, you'll regret it.

Chorus:

May

You perish, all of you, no help at hand!  
May you be driven onto shoals of sand

Beside Sarpedon's grave!

Herald:

Keep up those cries  
Of yours, those prayers! But you will not devise  
A plan for your escape. So wail and scream  
Away!

Chorus:

Ah, may that great Egyptian stream                   720  
That nurtures you dissolve your pride away  
And kill you!

Herald:

Get down to our ship, I say,  
As quickly as you can! We do not fear  
To grab your hair and haul you out of here.

Chorus:

These sacred images aren't helping me -  
This creeping spider drags me out to sea.  
This is nightmare, though it's clearly day.  
Alas! O Mother Earth, avert, I pray,  
His shouts!

Herald:

Your Argive gods don't ruffle me.  
They did not raise me in my infancy,                   730  
Nor will they succour me in my old age.

Chorus:

This two-legged snake is closing in his rage  
Upon me. Turn his fearful words away,  
O Mother Earth!

Herald:

If you will not obey  
The orders that I give, that dress you wear  
You will not wear for long, for we will tear  
It up.

Chorus:

We're lost! This pain we must endure.

Herald:

Then, after all, it seems we must for sure  
Drag you off by your hair, whose tardiness  
Demands such action – I must do no less!                   740

Chorus:

Leaders, they're taking us by force!

Herald:

You'll see  
A lot of leaders, women, presently. [enter Pelasgus]

Pelasgus:

Hey, you! Why do you mortify our land?  
You think this city's managed by a band  
Of women? You an alien as well!  
By such behaviour I can surely tell

That you are brainless.

Herald:

What is that you say?

Pelasgus:

Well, you're a guest and so behave that way!

Herald:

I'm here to take back what I recently

Have found again, that's all.

Pelasgus:

Alright, tell me 750

Which of our leaders did you tell?

Herald:

Hermes,

God of lost things.

Pelasgus:

You talk of deities

But show them no respect.

Herald:

Respect I show

Only to the gods of the River Nile.

Pelasgus:

And so

Our gods do not deserve it?

Herald:

If no man

Makes some objection to it, then my plan

Is to remove these women.

Pelasgus:

If you do,

You soon will find that I will punish you.

Herald:

That's hardly friendly!

Pelasgus:

Why, though, should I show

Friendship to godless men?

Pelasgus:

I now will go 760

And tell Aegyptus' sons what's happened here.

Pelasgus:

As if I cared!

Herald:

But let us both be clear,

For that befits my task – what can I say

About the man who takes these maids away

From their own cousins? For the god of war

Does not bring witnesses or silver for

A case like this. No, many men will die

Before that happens here.

Pelasgus:

But why should I  
Tell you my name? For you and your whole crew  
Will know it soon enough. But I need you 770  
To tell me that these women wish to go  
With you before you take them. You must know  
That all of Argos was unanimous  
That, should these women be wrested from us  
By force, we'll take them back. This proposition  
Is nailed down hard and fast, and its position  
Is rooted. Though not written anywhere,  
You'll hear the people speak it everywhere.  
Now go, quick as you can, out of my sight!

Herald:  
A brand-new war we seem about to fight. 780  
May we be granted strength and victory!

Pelasgus:  
Our men are known for their virility -  
The alcohol they drink is never beer! [exit Herald]  
Move off, you women, and be of good cheer!  
With your faithful handmaidens go inside  
Our massive walls, which are well-fortified.  
Now, there are many homes where you may stay.  
I have a house, built with no small outlay,  
Where you may live together or, maybe,  
If you prefer, in others' company. 790  
We will protect you, for we're all you need -  
The votes are cast! Why should you want to heed  
Others?

Chorus:  
Great king, you have been courteous,  
And, in return for what you've granted us,  
May you be blessed! Be kind enough to send  
For Danaus, for we always attend  
To his wise words, because especially  
It is his duty to advise where we  
May lodge, for foreigners are an easy game  
For anybody to rebuke and blame. [exit Pelasgus]800  
May all go well, and may our reputation  
Still flourish here and cause no provocation!  
Stand by your mistress, maids, for you all know  
To whom you've been assigned! [enter Danaus]  
Danaus:

Daughters, we owe  
A thankful prayer to people of this nation.  
We to the gods must offer a libation -  
They truly are our saviours, there's no doubt  
Of that. They listened as I spoke about  
Your cousins and their bitter rage was clear.  
I have been given by the Argives here 810

A guard of spearsmen, granting me a place  
Of honour in the Argive land, in case  
I'm killed in secret unexpectedly,  
Thus cursing Argos for eternity.  
Since they have shown us so much kindness,  
We should respect and honour them no less.  
Now put this further counsel in your mind! -  
A foreigner's true nature Time will find,  
Although at first all people show disdain,  
To him, and evil words sometimes remain. 820  
Be careful, though! Do not embarrass me!  
You're in your youth now, a commodity  
Pleasing to men and hard to guard. We all  
Crush it, both men and beasts that fly and crawl  
Upon the earth. Once love has ripened, then,  
Immersed in passionate desire, all men  
Cast lustful eyes on girls as they pass by.  
Take care! We must not suffer what we try  
To shun, when we have ploughed that spacious sea.  
With shame we must not please our enemy. 830  
You have two choices now where to abide -  
The palace or what Argive folk provide.  
Both come without a cost – so generous  
A gift! Obey your father's words, and thus  
More than your life you'll honour modesty.  
Chorus:

In other ways may we be favourably  
Treated by all the gods! Dear father, you  
May rest assured, unless there's something new  
Planned by the gods, I will not change my ways -  
My heart's still as it was in former days. 840  
Let's praise the Argive gods and those who dwell  
Along the Erasinus – you, as well,  
Handmaidens, join us all now as we sing!  
Let's praise the land, no longer honouring  
The Nile. Sing to the tranquil brooks that gush  
Throughout the land! Enrich its soil with lush  
And fertile streams. Queen Artemis, may we  
Earn your compassion! May we never be  
Forced into marriage! May that prize be for  
The sort of people whom I most abhor! 850

Handmaidens:  
We praise Queen Cypris, for she is the peer  
Of Hera, and together they are near  
To Zeus. She's well-loved by humanity  
For her last rites and strange chicanery.  
Her darling mother's standing by her side,  
And sweet Persuasion, not to be denied;  
Desire's here as well, and Harmony,

Who has a share in Cypris' whispery  
Love practices. I fear what lies ahead -  
The winds of evil, agony, bloodshed. 860  
How did they travel here so easily?

Whatever Fate decides by her decree  
Will come to pass. Zeus' infinite mind is great  
And can't be overcome. This marriage Fate  
May cause, as many have since long ago  
Been destined, bringing many women woe.

Chorus:

Zeus, save us from this match!

Handmaidens:

That would be best,

I think.

Chorus:

Now you are putting to the test  
A changeless mind!

Handmaidens:

Ah, but what lies in wait

You do not know.

Chorus:

How can I penetrate 870

The mind of Zeus?

Handmaidens:

Temper your prayers!

Chorus:

What way

Can I do that?

Handmaidens:

You must not ever pray

For too much from the gods.

Chorus:

Zeus, liberate

Me from a marriage with a man I hate,  
As you brought Io back with gentle might  
And thus released her from the stinging bite  
Of pain! And may he make the women strong!  
I will accept a mix of right and wrong,  
Much better than outright calamity!  
Let Justice now deliver her decree  
And judge our cause! And may our supplication  
To Heaven bring about our liberation!





