

History of Ancient Greece

Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

Week 13: January 22, 2020

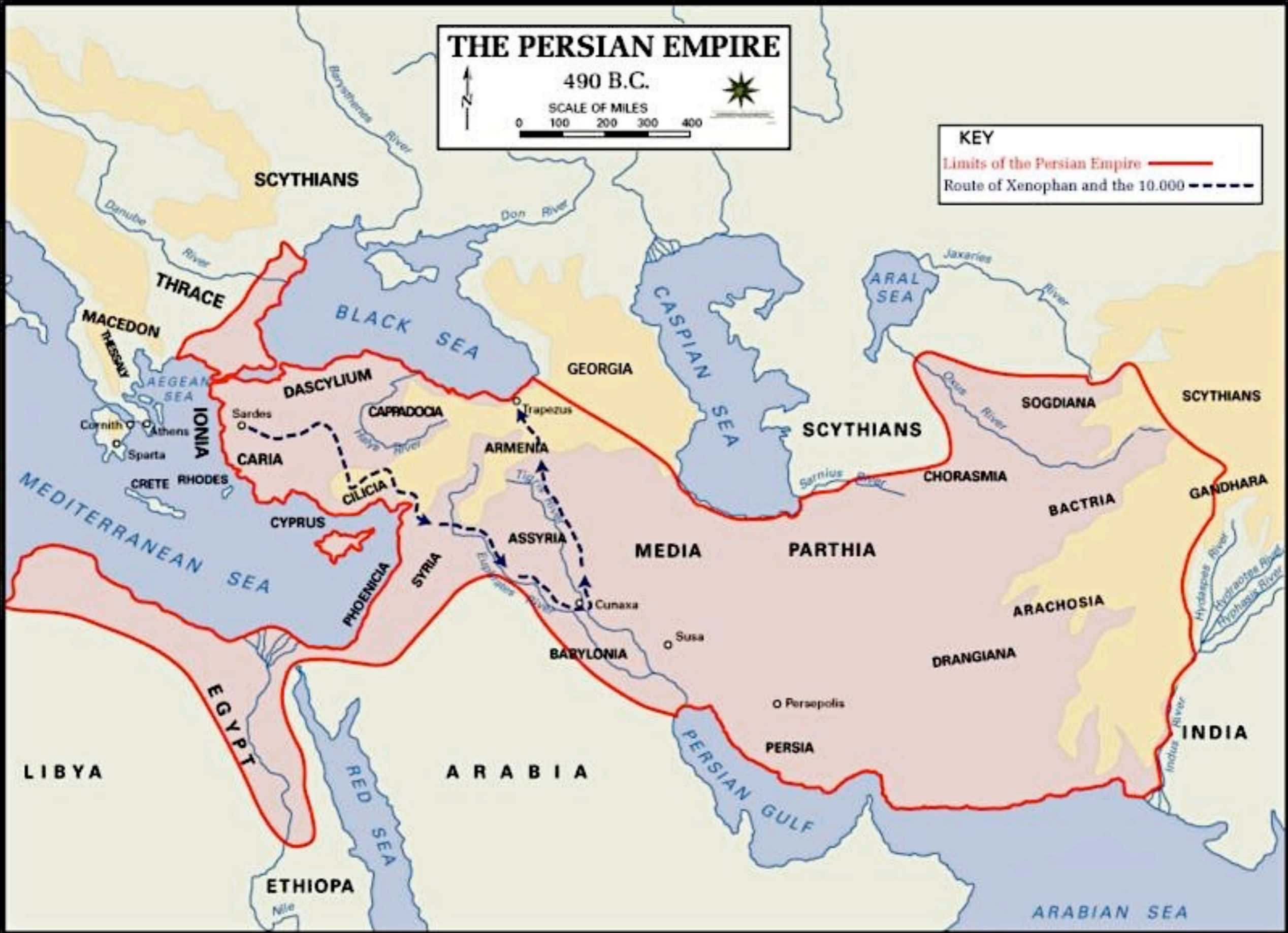
Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*





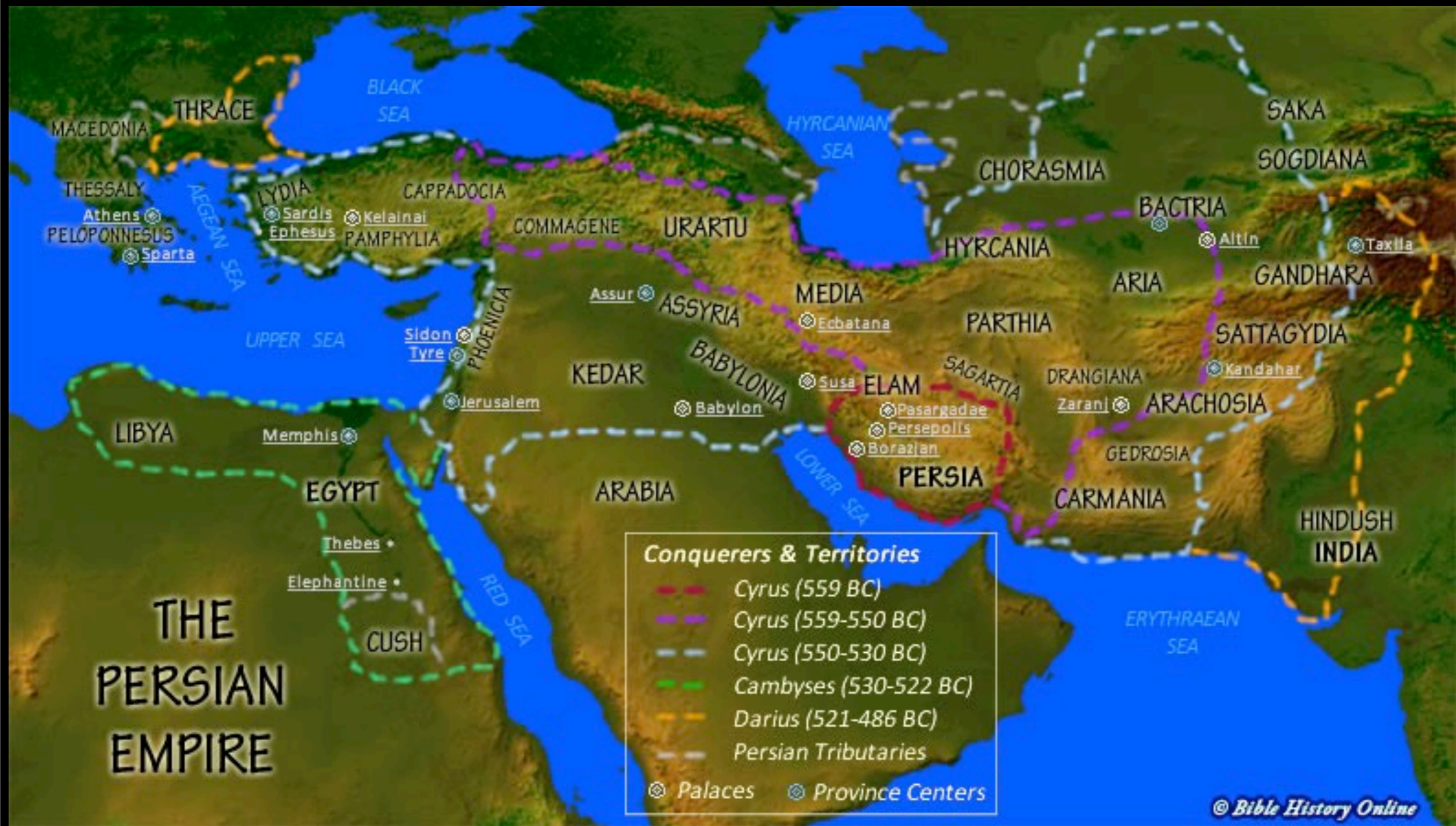
AESCHYLUS

525 BC to 455 BC



CYRUS THE GREAT 576-530 BC







The Ionian Coast
of Asia Minor
700-500 BC

Smyrna
Colophon
Ephesus
Samos
Miletus
Halicanarsus
(World of
Homer)



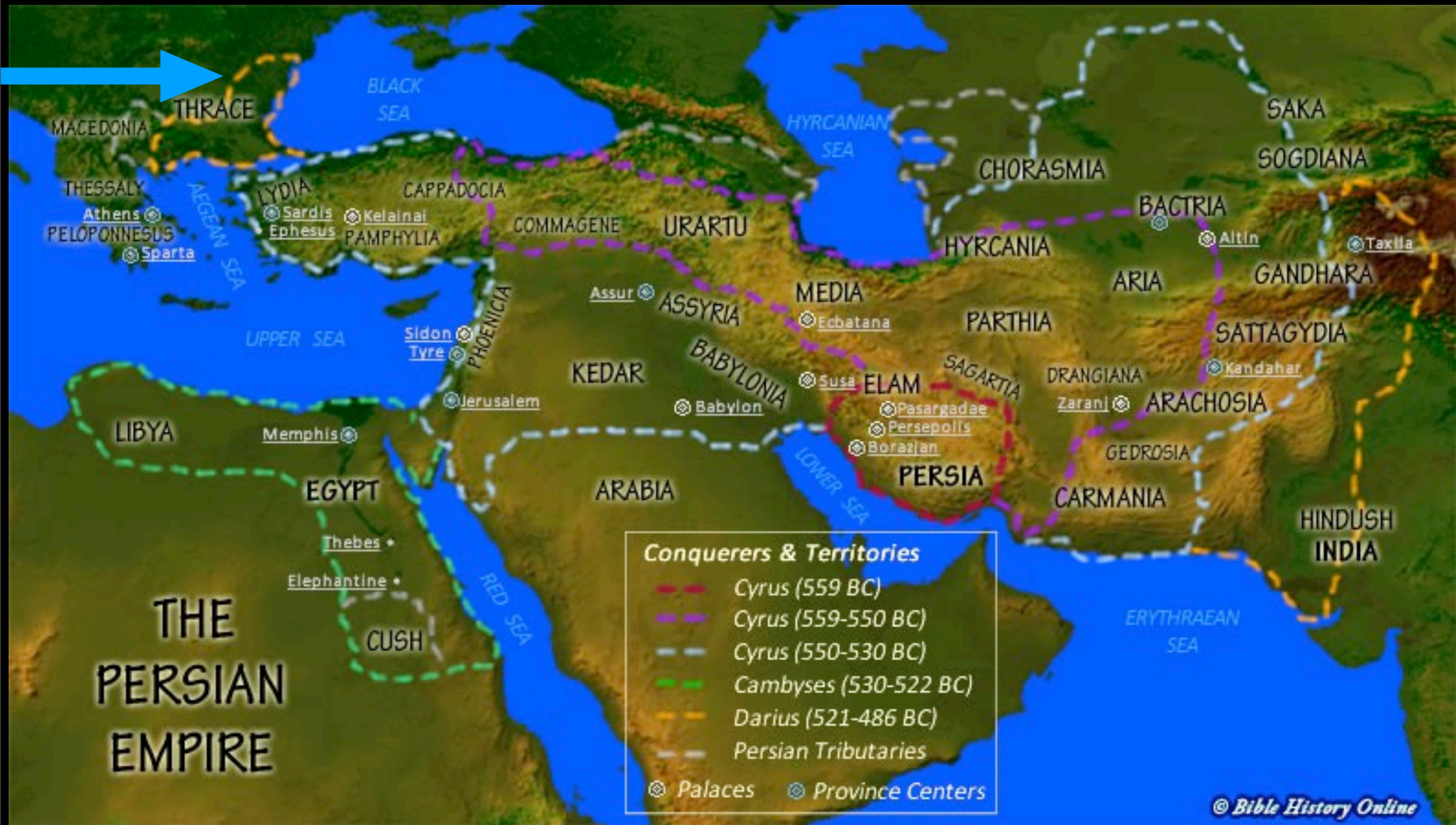
1. Expanding exploring commercial society.
2. Political Constitutional experimentation
3. Intellectual experimentation. Philosophy.
4. Alphabetic writing and papyrus.

IONIAN REVOLT

- **Persia took control of all Greek city-states along coast of Asia Minor in 547 BC**
 - **Region known as Ionia**
- **Ionian city-states rebelled against Persian rule in 499 BC**
 - **Sought aid from mainland Greece**
 - **Only Athens and Eretria responded**
 - **This aid allowed Ionia city-states to put up fierce resistance to Persians**
 - **But revolt was nonetheless defeated by 494 BC**



Darius, Greece, 490 BC







SEPTEMBER 8, 480 BC THERMOPYLAE

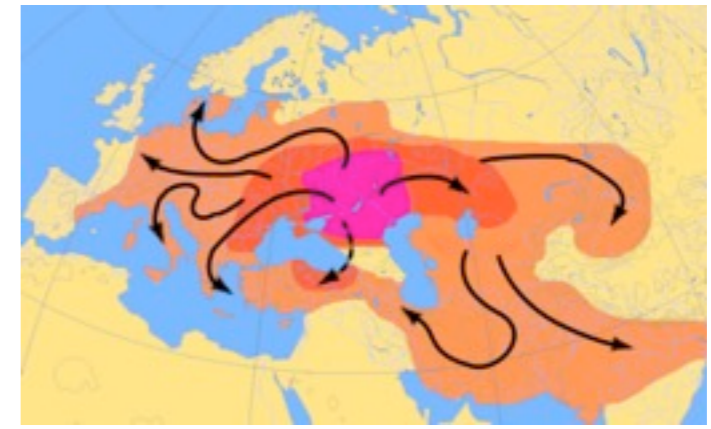


KING LEONIDAS OF SPARTA WITH THE SPARTANS



1500 BC

Mycenean
Civilisation



1000 BC

Dorians invade and settle
Sparta and Laconia

800 BC

Spartan expansion within
Laconia (5th village)

LYCURGUS Law giver

735 BC

Spartans invade Messenia
(1st Messenian War)

700 BC

Messenian Helots revolt
(2nd Messenian War)

650 BC

"Lycurgus" introduces radical
new Spartan system

600 BC

Peloponnesian League

500 BC

Spartan artefacts
'disappear'

490 BC

Persian Wars: Marathon

479 BC

Persian Wars: Thermopylae / Artemisium

Persian Wars: Plataea / Salamis



735 BC Spartans invade Messenia
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SEP 8, 480 BC THERMOPYLAE

490 BC Persian Wars: Marathon
479 BC Persian Wars: Thermopylae / Artemisium
Persian Wars: Plataea / Salamis

Peloponnesian War (vs
Athens)

400 BC Defeat at Leuctra: End

GREECE THE FIFTH CENTURY BC

528 Death of Athenian tyrant Peisistratus

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411 Oligarchic coup at Athens xt



Pisistratus of Athen

visionary who did much good

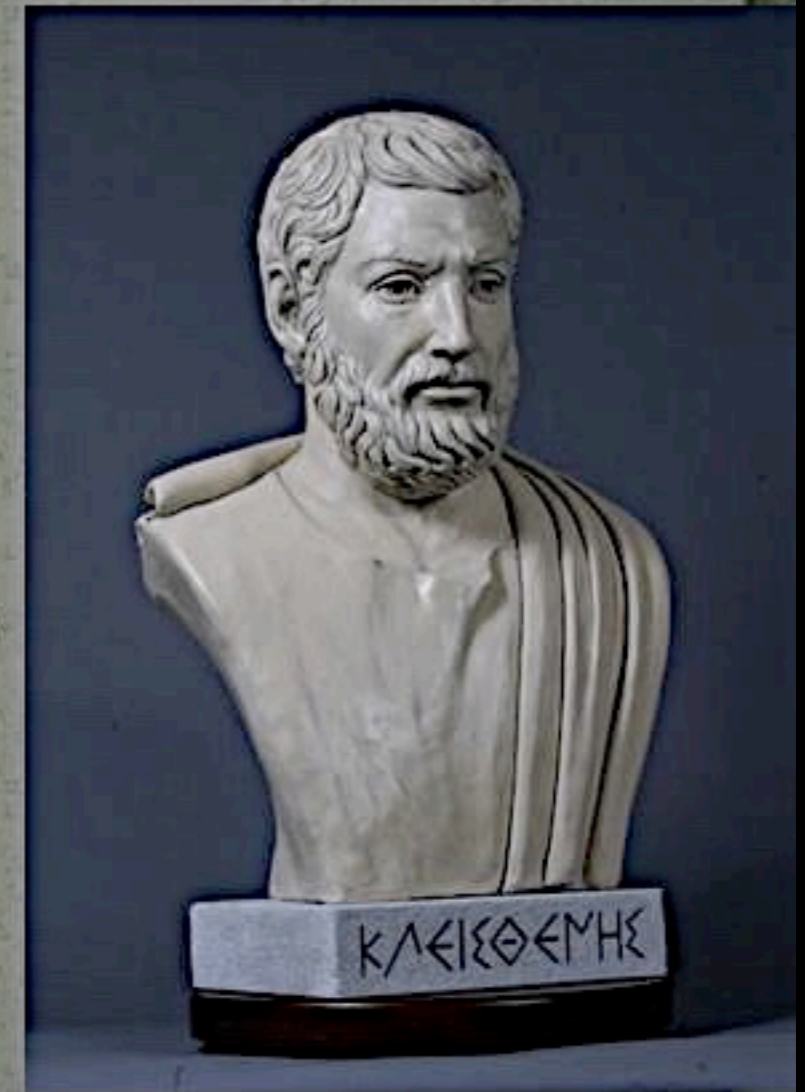
- established festivals that united the Athenians culturally,
- boosted economy by creating a market for Athenian exports
- stabilized Attic (i.e. Athenian) coinage, making it widely respected t
- brought himself to power through force and
- he used the position he assumed to better the lives of his city
- in power for many years and, when he died
- died 528, sons inherited his power. While they did not manage Athens as well as their father had and were eventually ousted, Pisistratus' lasting contributions laid the groundwork for the Athenians' rise to prominence in the next century, the fifth century

Cleisthenes and the Birth of Democracy

507 BC

After Pisistratus died, Cleisthenes takes leadership of Athens

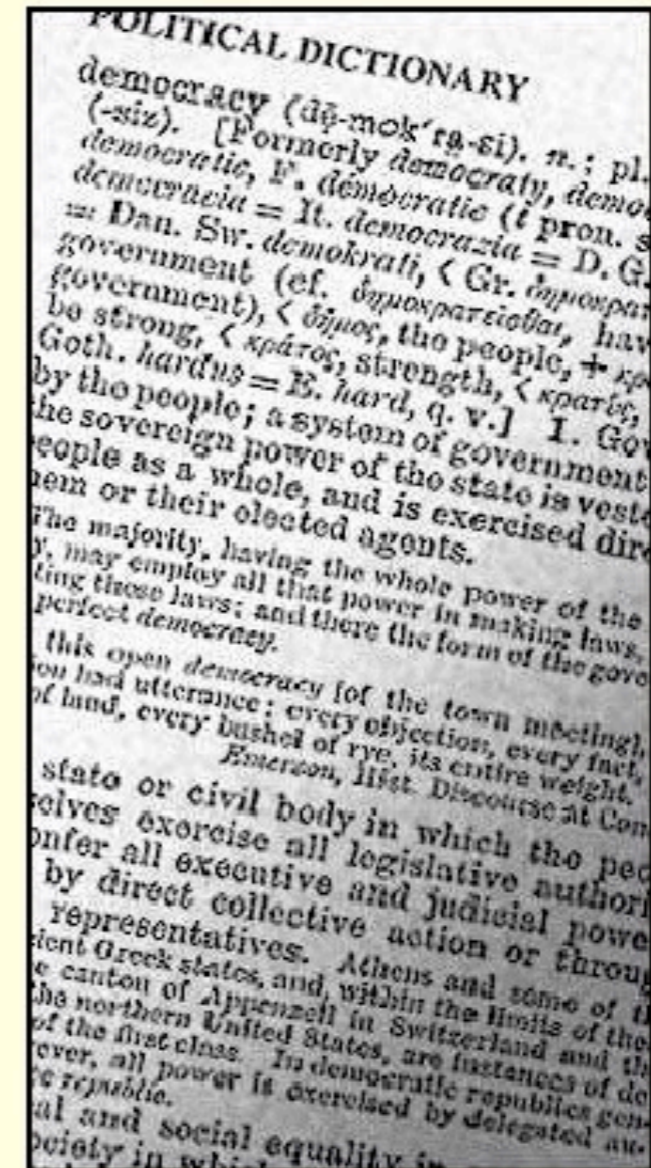
- Finished what previous three had started – empowering common people
- Re-designed electoral districts – no longer divided by wealth
- Created “Council of Five Hundred”
 - 500 people chosen by chance each year to help run government
 - Most people participated once in their lifetime
 - Leather merchant can become general!
 - **Common people rule the country**



Athenian Democracy

REFORMS OF CLEISTHENES

- **Cleisthenes kept promise to demos**
 - **Population of city and region divided into ten tribes**
 - **Each included people from all walks of life**
 - **Each elected representatives to the Council, elected generals and public officials, and jurors to Supreme Court**
- **Cleisthenes permanently broke power of old aristocracy and established the foundation for democracy**



BATTLE OF MARATHON

490 BC

- **Eretria fell quickly to the Persians**
- **Persians then entered the plain of Marathon and headed for Athens**
 - **Athenians wasted several days debating strategy**
 - **Finally decided to request reinforcement from Sparta and send 9000 hoplite army meet Persians at Marathon**
 - **By the time Spartan reinforcement arrived, Athens had won battle**
 - **By using new tactic of “collapsing center”**



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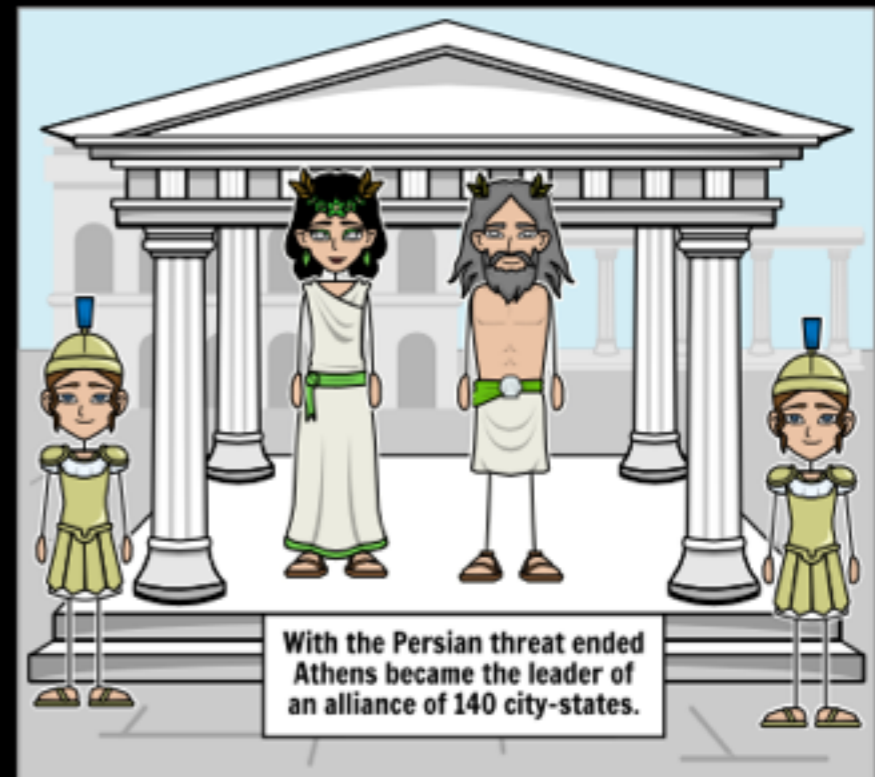
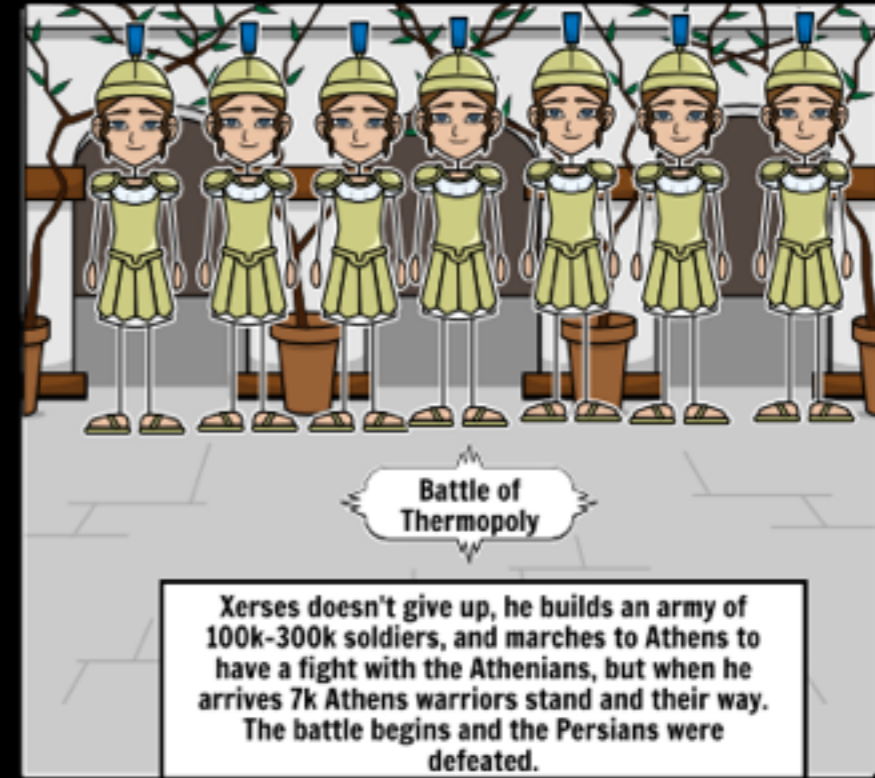
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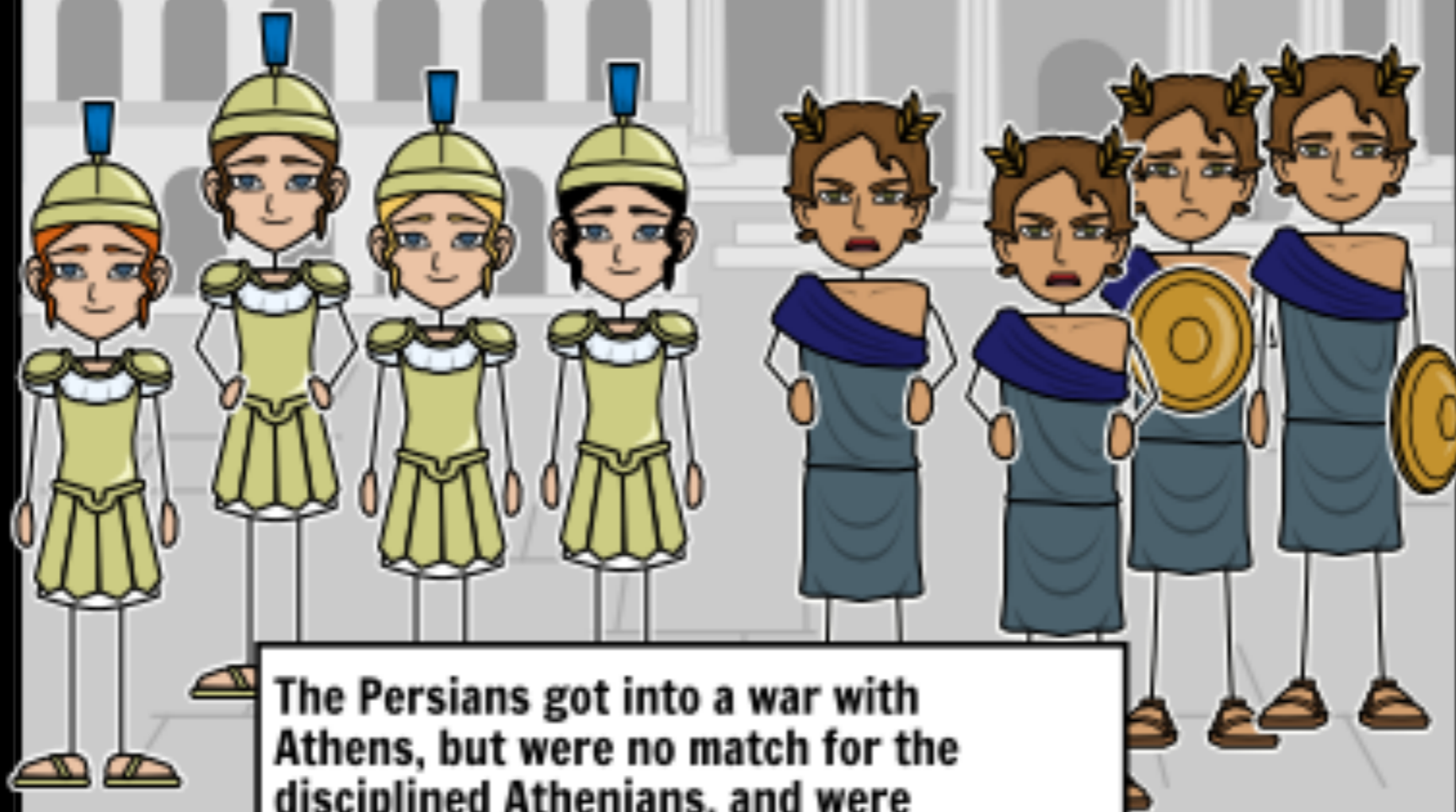
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Battle of Marathon



The Persians got into a war with Athens, but were no match for the disciplined Athenians, and were defeated.

Battle of Salamis

Battle of Plataea



Xerxes
100k-300k
have a
arrives 7
The



Everyone, we won the war against the Persians!



Battle of Thermopoly

Xerxes doesn't give up, he builds an army of 100k-300k soldiers, and marches to Athens to have a fight with the Athenians, but when he arrives **SPARTANS** stand and their way.

SPARTANS lose but delay **PERSIANS**

Thermopyles
on battle
news of



The Persians got into a war with Athens, but were no match for the disciplined Athenians, and were defeated.

ran non-st
back to At

Battle of
Salamis

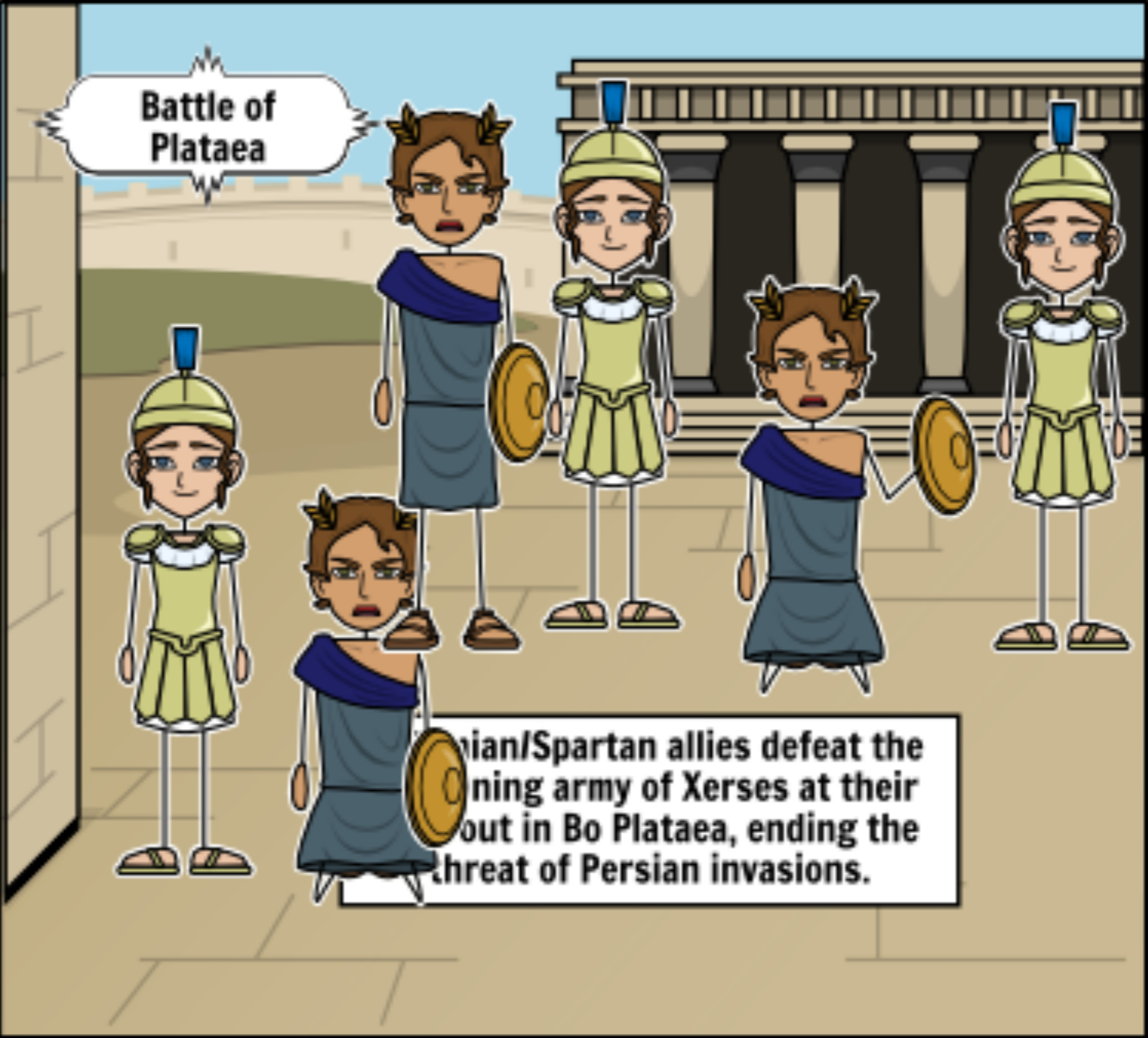
Battle of
Plataea

Xerxes does not stop, and heads to Athens, but Athens abandons the city and takes the war to the sea, and destroys the Persians navy.

Create your own at Storyboard That

ran non-stop from the Marathon battle back to Athens to spread the news of their victory.

Battle of Plataea



ian/Spartan allies defeat the
ning army of Xerxes at their
out in Bo Plataea, ending the
hreat of Persian invasions.

heads to
ons the
the sea,
s navy.

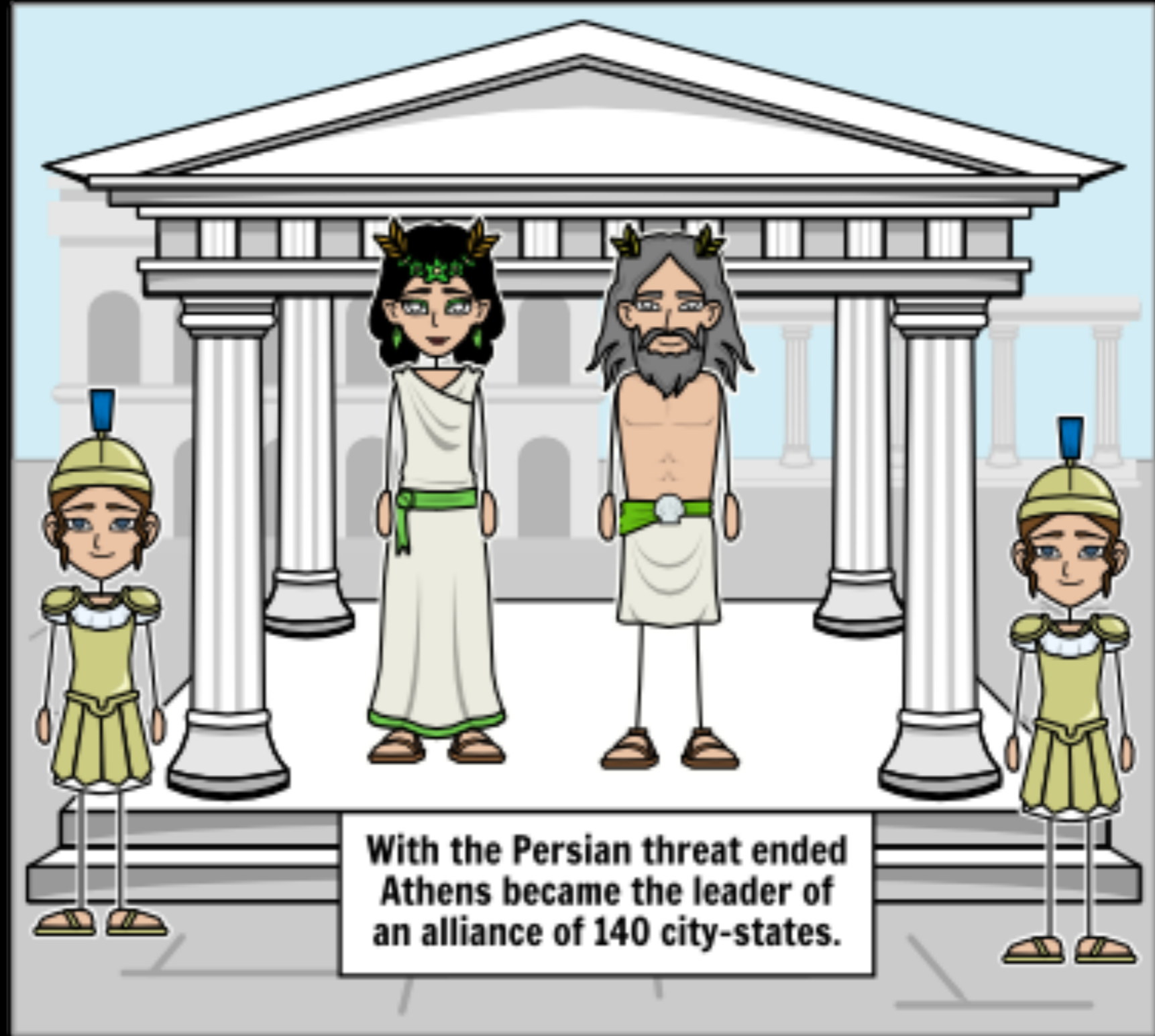


ation battle
the news of

have a fight with the Athenians, but when he
arrives 7k Athens warriors stand in their way.
The battle begins and the Persians were
defeated.



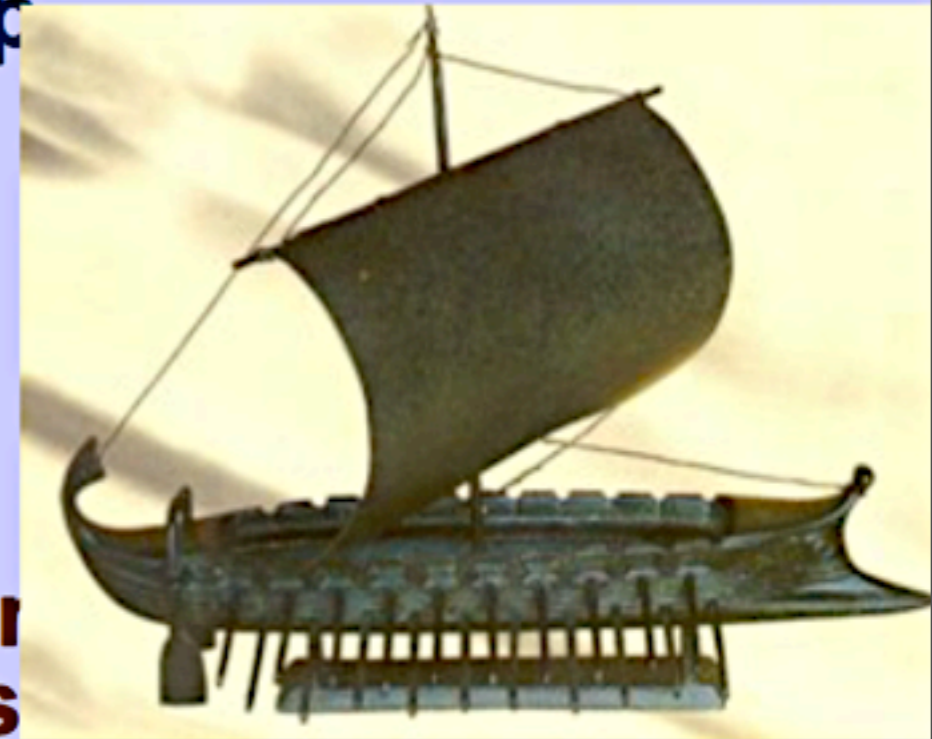
es defeat the
rses at their
, ending the
nvasions.



With the Persian threat ended
Athens became the leader of
an alliance of 140 city-states.

AFTERMATH OF MARATHON

- Athenians saw victory at Marathon as vindication of their adoption of democratic reforms of Cleisthenes
 - More democratic reforms followed
 - More elected offices opened up to demos
 - Introduction of practice of ostracism
 - To check against overly ambitious men
 - To make a clear-cut decision between conflicting policies advocated by different individuals
- Athens also embarked on huge naval construction program
 - Financed by silver in Laurium
 - Resulted in fleet of 200 ships



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AESCHYLUS

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525 AESCHYLUS born

born of a noble family at 525 BC in Eleusis, a small town about 27 kilometers northwest of Athens, which is nestled in the fertile valleys of western Attica, near Athens B.C.

490 He took part in the Persian Wars. He fought at Marathon.

470? At some time in his life he appears to have been prosecuted for divulging the Eleusinian mysteries, but he apparently proved himself innocent.

Aeschylus wrote more than seventy plays, of which seven have survived: The Suppliants, The Persians, Seven Against Thebes, Prometheus Bound, Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, and The Eumenides.

460. He visited Syracuse more than once at the invitation of King Hieron I.

455 he died at Gela in Sicily in 455 B.C. Aeschylus was recognized as a classic writer soon after his death.

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



The *Oresteia* is our rite of passage
from savagery to civilization.

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



Homer and Athenian Democracy

How to interpret Homeric themes in a democracy.

How to understand militant heroism in a society that requires communal co-operation.

The Dilemma. The Iliad and Athens
Achilles and Agamemnon.

At the center of the Heroic Ideal is a terrible dilemma.

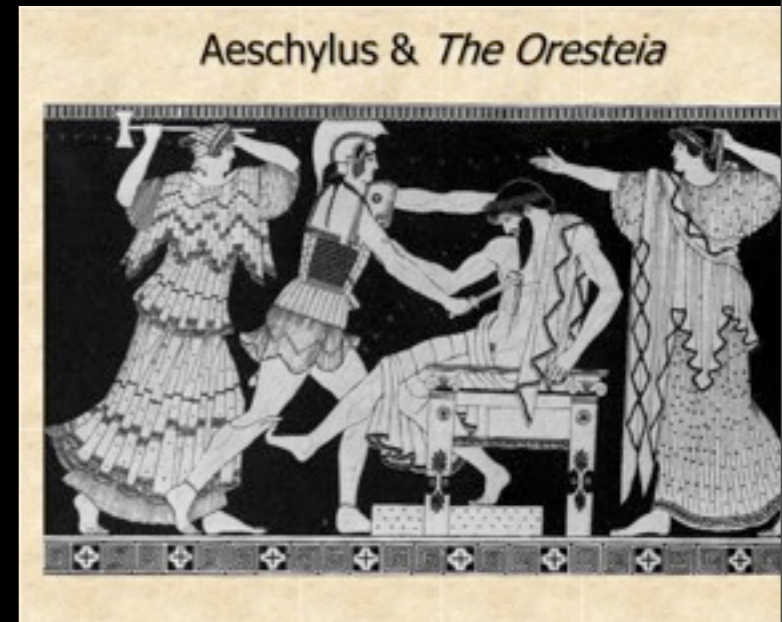
The hero must always test himself against his own
conscience.

That is the only court of opinion that matters.

Has he been true to his own self, true to his
convictions, has he fought as hard as he should?

Thus the Heroic Ideal centers on the individual.

But the goal of all Heroic behavior is finally the
applause of one's fellow men.



Homer
and
Athenian
Democracy

Honor and fame are worthwhile in this code.

So what happens when one's own conscience sets
oneself against one's fellow men?

Which is more important?

This is the theme of the Iliad.

Homer and all others understood the terrible dilemma

"Sing the anger of Peleus' son Achilles
and its devastation

which put pains thousandfold
upon the Achaens ,

hurled in their multitudes

to the house of Hades

strong souls of heroes

but gave their bodies

to be the delicate feasting

of dogs....."

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Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



The human life and suffering

Aeschylus celebrates man's capacity for suffering, his courage to endure hereditary guilt and ethical conflicts, his battle for freedom in the teeth of fate, and his strenuous collaboration with his gods to create a better world.

Zeus, as the old men of Argos tell us, 'lays it down as law / that we must suffer, suffer into truth.'

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



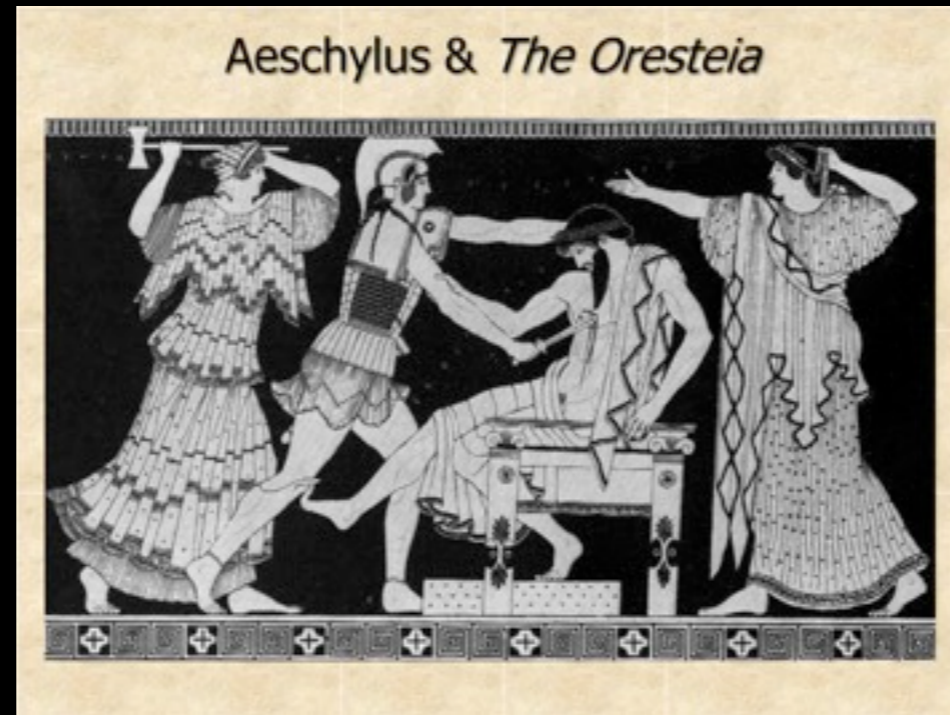
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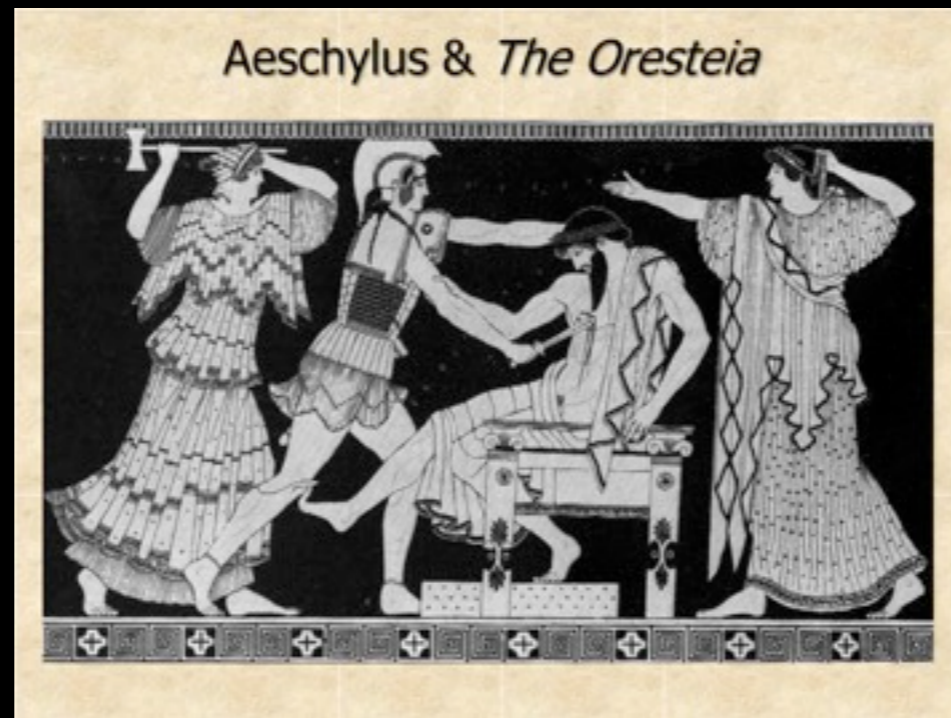
The Agamemnon is like the rite of separation; the king is cut off from his society. *The Libation Bearers* is like the rite of transition; the son is at the threshold of maturity. But *The Eumenides*, the rite of aggregation, celebrates Orestes' initiation into Argos and our initiation into Athens.

Agamemnon



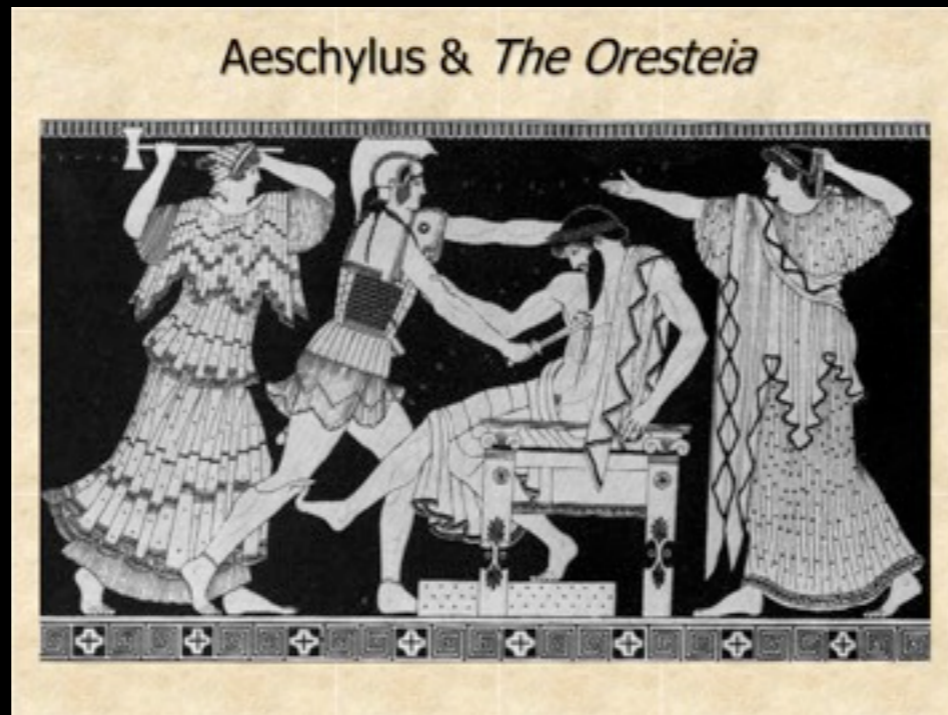
The action of the *Oresteia* begins more than nine years later, just after the fall of Troy and Agamemnon's seizure of Cassandra, the daughter of Priam and priestess of Apollo, whom he abducts to Argos as his mistress. The Agamemnon describes how Clytemnestra kills her husband for the death of their daughter and the insult of Cassandra, and establishes herself and Aegisthus, her paramour and also the avenger of his father, as rulers over Argos.

The Libation Bearers



And its sequel, *The Libation Bearers* there erupts into a moral struggle never told by Homer. In *The Libation Bearers* the only son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Orestes, obeys the command of Apollo and kills the murderers in revenge; but his mother's Furies drive him mad.

The Eumenides



In the final play, *The Eumenides*, pursue him to Apollo's shrine at Delphi. The god can purify Orestes of blood-guilt but cannot release him from the Furies and refers him to Athens and Athena for their judgement. There the goddess appoints a group of men to conduct a trial for manslaughter and so establishes the Areopagus, her famous court of law. Orestes is acquitted and restored to his fathers' lands in Argos, while Athena persuades the Furies, the demons of the primitive vendetta-law, to become benevolent patrons, changing their names to 'Eumenides', the Kindly Ones of Athens. The final choruses are in the mood of Beethoven's Hymn to Joy: let us rejoice, the spirit of man has triumphed over the harsher elements of life—a new order has been born.

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



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Agamemnon Act I

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of Troy, the play opens at King Agamemnon's palace in Argos with the lonely Watchman's soliloquy. From the roof of the palace, the Watchman begs the gods for respite from his interminable watch. The stars, his sole, plentiful and steadfast, companions seem to him like so many "dynasties" revolving in endless cycles, waxing and waning, moving out of winter into summer and back again. What he wishes is rest. He relates how he has been obliged by the queen to keep watch for a fire. Further he cannot sleep for restless fear. In his musings he hints of a great bygone woe, "the pity of this house," which he hopes will soon be redeemed. The flames, he says, would presage positively. Far off in the distance, then, a light glows, and the Watchman spies a messenger's blaze that hails the fall of Troy. He draws a joyous analogy to a sunrise. The soliloquy closes with the Watchman hopeful that his king will return home, since the house, he says, has too long wallowed in a dismal sadness. The Chorus enters and begins its recapitulation of the commencement of the Trojan war tens years previous: the call to action, the deploying of the one thousand ships, the loss of so many young Argive lives. They go on to explain that the devastating fall is the exacting of a procrastinated punishment by angry gods upon the transgressors, mainly, Paris and Helen

CHARACTERS

WATCHMAN

CLYTAEMNESTRA

HERALD

AGAMEMNON

CASSANDRA

AEGISTHUS

CHORUS, THE OLD MEN OF ARGOS
AND THEIR LEADER

*Attendants of Clytaemnestra and of Agamemnon,
bodyguard of Aegisthus*

TIME AND SCENE: *A night in the tenth and final autumn of the Trojan war. The house of Atreus in Argos. Before it, an altar stands unlit; a watchman on the high roofs fights to stay awake.*

WATCHMAN:

Dear gods, set me free from all the pain,
the long watch I keep, one whole year awake . .
propped on my arms, crouched on the roofs of Atreus
like a dog.

I know the stars by heart,
the armies of the night, and there in the lead 5
the ones that bring us snow or the crops of summer,
bring us all we have –
our great blazing kings of the sky,
I know them, when they rise and when they fall . . .
and now I watch for the light, the signal-fire 10
breaking out of Troy, shouting Troy is taken.
So she commands, full of her high hopes.
That woman – she manoeuvres like a man.

And when I keep to my bed, soaked in dew,
and the thoughts go groping through the night 15
and the good dreams that used to guard my sleep . . .
not here, it's the old comrade, terror, at my neck.
I mustn't sleep, no –

Shaking himself awake.

Look alive, sentry.

And I try to pick out tunes, I hum a little,
 a good cure for sleep, and the tears start,
 I cry for the hard times come to the house,
 no longer run like the great place of old.

Oh for a blessed end to all our pain,
 some godsend burning through the dark –

*Light appears slowly in the east; he
 struggles to his feet and scans it.*

I salute you!

You dawn of the darkness, you turn night to day – 25
 I see the light at last.
 They'll be dancing in the streets of Argos
 thanks to you, thanks to this new stroke of –

Aieeeeeee!

There's your signal clear and true, my queen!
 Rise up from bed – hurry, lift a cry of triumph 30
 through the house, praise the gods for the beacon,
 if they've taken Troy . . .

But there it burns,
 fire all the way. I'm for the morning dances.
 Master's luck is mine. A throw of the torch
 has brought us triple sires – we have won!

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But there it burns,
fire all the way. I'm for the morning dances.
Master's luck is mine. A throw of the torch
has brought us triple-sixes – we have won! 35
My move now –

*Beginning to dance, then breaking off,
lost in thought.*

Just bring him home. My king,
I'll take your loving hand in mine and then . . .
the rest is silence. The ox is on my tongue.
Aye, but the house and these old stones,
give them a voice and what a tale they'd tell. 40
And so would I, gladly . . .
I speak to those who know; to those who don't
my mind's a blank. I never say a word.

He climbs down from the roof and disappears into the palace through a side entrance. A CHORUS, the old men of Argos who have not learned the news of victory, enters and marches round the altar.

CHORUS:

Ten years gone, ten to the day
our great avenger went for Priam -

45

Menelaus and lord Agamemnon,
two kings with the power of Zeus,
the twin throne, twin sceptre,

25

Atreus' sturdy yoke of sons
launched Greece in a thousand ships,
armadas cutting loose from the land,
armies massed for the cause, the rescue -

50

30

*From within the palace CLYTAEM-
NESTRA raises a cry of triumph.*

the heart within them screamed for all-out war!
Like vultures robbed of their young,
the agony sends them frenzied,

55

35

25

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Atreus' sturdy yoke of sons
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*From within the palace CLYTAEM-
NESTRA raises a cry of triumph.*

the heart within them screamed for all-out war!

Like vultures robbed of their young,

35

the agony sends them frenzied,
soaring high from the nest, round and
round they wheel, they row their wings,
stroke upon churning thrashing stroke,
but all the labour, the bed of pain,

55

the young are lost forever.

60

Yet someone hears on high - Apollo,

Pan or Zeus - the piercing wail

these guests of heaven raise,

and drives at the outlaws, late

40

but true to revenge, a stabbing Fury!

65

*CLYTAEMNESTRA appears at the
doors and pauses with her entourage.*

So towering Zeus the god of guests
 drives Atreus' sons at Paris,
 all for a woman manned by many
 the generations wrestle, knees
 grinding the dust, the manhood drains,
 the spear snaps in the first blood rites
 that marry Greece and Troy.

70

And now it goes as it goes
 and where it ends is Fate.

And neither by singeing flesh
 nor tipping cups of wine
 nor shedding burning tears can you
 enchant away the rigid Fury.

75

*CLYTAEMNESTRA lights the altar-
 fires.*

We are the old, dishonoured ones,
 the broken husks of men.
 Even then they cast us off,
 the rescue mission left us here
 to prop a child's strength upon a stick.
 What if the new sap rises in his chest?
 He has no soldiery in him,
 no more than we,

80

85

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And neither by singeing flesh
nor tipping cups of wine
nor shedding burning tears can you
enchant away the rigid Fury.

CLYTAEMNESTRA *lights the altar-*
fires.

We are the old, dishonoured ones,
the broken husks of men. 80
Even then they cast us off,
the rescue mission left us here
to prop a child's strength upon a stick.
What if the new sap rises in his chest?
He has no soldiery in him, 85
no more than we,
and we are aged past ageing,
gloss of the leaf shrivelled,
three legs at a time we falter on.
Old men are children once again, 90
a dream that sways and wavers
into the hard light of day.

But you,
daughter of Leda, queen Clytaemnestra,
what now, what news, what message
drives you through the citadel 95
burning victims? Look,
the city gods, the gods of Olympus,
gods of the earth and public markets –
all the altars blazing with your gifts!

now the
beating
gnaw

O but I
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I sing ho

and win
The king
one
sh

bur
quick sp
Cry, cry

70

Argos blazes! Torches
 race the sunrise up her skies -
 drugged by the lulling holy oils,
 unadulterated,
 run from the dark vaults of kings.

100

Tell us the news!

105

What you can, what is right -
 Heal us, soothe our fears!

75

Now the darkness comes to the fore,
 now the hope glows through your victims,
 beating back this raw, relentless anguish
 gnawing at the heart.

110

NESTRA lights the altar-

*CLYTAEMNESTRA ignores them and
 pursues her rituals; they assemble for
 the opening chorus.*

80

O but I still have power to sound the god's command at the
 roads
 that launched the kings. The gods breathe power through
 my song,

85

my fighting strength, Persuasion grows with the years -
 I sing how the flight of fury hurled the twin command,
 one will that hurled young Greece
 and winged the spear of vengeance straight for Troy!

115

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one will that hurled young Greece

and winged the spear of vengeance straight for Troy!

The kings of birds to kings of the beaking prows, one black,

one with a blaze of silver

90

skimmed the palace spearhand right.

120

and swooping lower, all could see,

plunged their claws in a hare, a mother

bursting with unborn young – the babies spilling, quick spurts of blood – cut off the race just dashing into life!

Cry, cry for death, but good win out in glory in the end.

125

95

But the loyal seer of the armies studied Atreus' sons,
 two sons with warring hearts – he saw two eagle-kings
 devour the hare and spoke the things to come,
 'Years pass, and the long hunt nets the city of Priam,
 the flocks beyond the walls, 130
 a kingdom's life and soul – Fate stamps them out.
 Just let no curse of the gods lour on us first,
 shatter our giant armour
 forged to strangle Troy. I see
 pure Artemis bristle in pity – 135
 yes, the flying hounds of the Father
 slaughter for armies . . . their own victim . . . a woman
 trembling young, all born to die – She loathes the eagles' feast!
 Cry, cry for death, but good win out in glory in the end.

'Artemis, lovely Artemis, so kind 140
 to the ravening lion's tender, helpless cubs,
 the suckling young of beasts that stalk the wilds –
 bring this sign for all its fortune,
 all its brutal torment home to birth!
 I beg you, Healing Apollo, soothe her before 145
 her crosswinds hold us down and moor the ships too long,
 pressing us on to another victim . . .
 nothing sacred, no

yes, the flying hounds of the Father
slaughter for armies . . . their own victim . . . a woman
trembling young, all born to die – She loathes the eagles' feast!
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her crosswinds hold us down and moor the ships too long,
pressing us on to another victim . . .

nothing sacred, no
no feast to be eaten
the architect of vengeance 150

Turning to the palace.

growing strong in the house
with no fear of the husband
here she waits
the terror raging back and back in the future
the stealth, the law of the hearth, the mother – 155

Memory womb of Fury child-avenging Fury!
So as the eagles wheeled at the crossroads,
Calchas clashed out the great good blessings mixed with doom
for the halls of kings, and singing with our fate
we cry, cry for death, but good win out in glory in the end. 160

Zeus' sons,
eagle-kings
come,
of Priam,

130

bring out.

135

Father
victim . . . a woman
steals the eagles' feast!
glory in the end.

140

wilds -

145

birth!
before
the ships too long,

Zeus, great nameless all in all,
if that name will gain his favour,
I will call him Zeus.
I have no words to do him justice,
weighing all in the balance,
all I have is Zeus, Zeus -
lift this weight, this torment from my spirit,
cast it once for all.

165

He who was so mighty once,
storming for the wars of heaven,
he has had his day.
And then his son who came to power
met his match in the third fall
and he is gone. Zeus, Zeus -
raise your cries and sing him Zeus the Victor!
You will reach the truth:

170

175

Zeus has led us on to know,
the Helmsman lays it down as law
that we must suffer, suffer into truth.
We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heart
the pain of pain remembered comes again,

180

Father
tim . . a woman
thes the eagles' feast!
ory in the end.

140

wilds -

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he ships too long,

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Turning to the palace.

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You will reach the truth:

Zeus has led us on to know,
the Helmsman lays it down as law
that we must suffer, suffer into truth.
We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heart 180
the pain of pain remembered comes again,
and we resist, but ripeness comes as well.
From the gods enthroned on the awesome rowing-bench
there comes a violent love.

So it was that day the king, 185
the steersman at the helm of Greece,
would never blame a word the prophet said -
swept away by the wrenching winds of fortune
he conspired! Weatherbound we could not sail,
our stores exhausted, fighting strength hard-pressed, 190
and the squadrons rode in the shallows off Chalkis
where the riptide crashes, drags,

and winds from the north pinned down our hulls at Aulis,
 port of anguish . . . head winds starving,
 sheets and the cables snapped 195
 and the men's minds strayed,
 the pride, the bloom of Greece
 was raked as time ground on,
 ground down, and then the cure for the storm
 and it was harsher - Calchas cried, 200
 'My captains, Artemis must have blood!' -
 so harsh the sons of Atreus
 dashed their sceptres on the rocks,
 could not hold back the tears,

 and I still can hear the older warlord saying, 205
 'Obey, obey, or a heavy doom will crush me! -
 Oh but doom *will* crush me
 once I rend my child,
 the glory of my house -
 a father's hands are stained, 210
 blood of a young girl streaks the altar.
 Pain both ways and what is worse?
 Desert the fleets, fail the alliance?
 No, but stop the winds with a virgin's blood,
 feed their lust, their fury? - feed their fury! - 215
 Law is law! -

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Law is law! –

Let all go well.'

And once he slipped his neck in the strap of Fate,
his spirit veering black, impure, unholy,
once he turned he stopped at nothing,
seized with the frenzy 220

blinding driving to outrage –
wretched frenzy, cause of all our grief!

Yes, he had the heart

to sacrifice his daughter,
to bless the war that avenged a woman's loss, 225
a bridal rite that sped the men-of-war.

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alls at Aulis,

195

'My father, father!' - she might pray to the winds;
no innocence moves her judges mad for war.

Her father called his henchmen on,
on with a prayer,

230

'Hoist her over the altar
like a yearling, give it all your strength!

She's fainting - lift her,

200

sweep her robes around her,
but slip this strap in her gentle curving lips . . .

235

here, gag her hard, a sound will curse the house' -

and the bridle chokes her voice . . . her saffron robes
pouring over the sand

205

her glance like arrows showering
wounding every murderer through with pity

clear as a picture, live,

240

she strains to call their names . . .

I remember often the days with father's guests
when over the feast her voice unbroken,

210

pure as the hymn her loving father
bearing third libations, sang to Saving Zeus -

245

transfixed with joy, Atreus' offspring
throbbing out their love.

215

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245

215

What comes next? I cannot see it, cannot say.
The strong techniques of Calchas do their work.
But Justice turns the balance scales,
sees that we suffer
and we suffer and we learn.

250

220

And we will know the future when it comes.
Greet it too early, weep too soon.

It all comes clear in the light of day.
Let all go well today, well as she could want,

255

225

Turning to CLYTAEMNESTRA.

our midnight watch, our lone defender,
single-minded queen.

LEADER:

We've come,
Clytaemnestra. We respect your power.
Right it is to honour the warlord's woman
once he leaves the throne. 260

But why these fires?
Good news, or more good hopes? We're loyal,
we want to hear, but never blame your silence.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Let the new day shine — as the proverb says —
glorious from the womb of Mother Night. 265

*Lost in prayer, then turning to the
CHORUS.*

You will hear a joy beyond your hopes.
Priam's citadel — the Greeks have taken Troy!

LEADER:

No, what do you mean? I can't believe it.

CLYTA

Yes,

LEADER

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CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Troy is ours. Is that clear enough?

LEADER:

The joy of it,
stealing over me, calling up my tears –

270

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LEADER

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CLYTAEMNESTRA.

260

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Yes, your eyes expose your loyal hearts.

LEADER:

And you have proof?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

I do,
I must. Unless the god is lying.

LEADER:

That,
or a phantom spirit sends you into raptures.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

No one takes me in with visions - senseless dreams.

265

275

LEADER:

Or giddy rumour, you haven't indulged yourself -

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

You treat me like a child, you mock me?

LEADER:

then turning to the

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LEADER:

Then when did they storm the city?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Last night, I say, the mother of this morning.

LEADER:

270

And who on earth could run the news so fast?

280

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

The god of fire – rushing fire from Ida!
 And beacon to beacon rushed it on to me,
 my couriers riding home the torch.

From Troy

to the bare rock of Lemnos, Hermes' Spur,
 and the Escort winged the great light west 285
 to the Saving Father's face, Mount Athos hurled it
 third in the chain and leaping Ocean's back
 the blaze went dancing on to ecstasy – pitch-pine
 streaming gold like a new-born sun – and brought
 the word in flame to Mount Makistos' brow. 290

No time to waste, straining, fighting sleep,
 that lookout heaved a torch glowing over
 the murderous straits of Euripos to reach
 Messapion's watchmen craning for the signal.

Fire for word of fire! tense with the heather 295
 withered gray, they stack it, set it ablaze –
 the hot force of the beacon never flags,
 it springs the Plain of Asôpos, rears
 like a harvest moon to hit Kithairon's crest
 and drives new men to drive the fire on. 300

That relay pants for the far-flung torch,
 they swell its strength outstripping my commands

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they swell its strength outstripping my commands
and the light inflames the marsh, the Gorgon's Eye,
it strikes the peak where the wild goats range –
my laws, my fire whips that camp!

305

They spare nothing, eager to build its heat,
and a huge beard of flame overcomes the headland
beetling down the Saronic Gulf, and flaring south
it brings the dawn to the Black Widow's face –
the watch that looms above your heads – and now
the true son of the burning flanks of Ida
crashes on the roofs of Atreus' sons!

310

And I ordained it all.

Torch to torch, running for their lives,
one long succession racing home my fire.

315

One,

first in the laps and last, wins out in triumph.

There you have my proof, *my* burning sign, I tell you –
the power my lord passed on from Troy to me!

285

LEADER:

We'll thank the gods, my lady – first this story,
let me lose myself in the wonder of it all!
Tell it start to finish, tell us all.

320

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

The city's ours – in our hands this very day!
I can hear the cries in crossfire rock the walls.
Pour oil and wine in the same bowl,
what have you, friendship? A struggle to the end.
So with the victors and the victims – outcries,
you can hear them clashing like their fates.

325

300

They are kneeling by the bodies of the dead,
embracing men and brothers, infants over

Tell it start to finish, tell us all.

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So with the victors and the victims – outcries,
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325

300

They are kneeling by the bodies of the dead,
embracing men and brothers, infants over
the aged loins that gave them life, and sobbing,
as the yoke constricts their last free breath,
for every dear one lost.

330

305

And the others,

there, plunging breakneck through the night –
the labour of battle sets them down, ravenous,
to breakfast on the last remains of Troy.
Not by rank but chance, by the lots they draw,
they lodge in the houses captured by the spear,
settling in so soon, released from the open sky,
the frost and dew. Lucky men, off guard at last,
they sleep away their first good night in years.

335

310

340

If only they are revering the city's gods,
the shrines of the gods who love the conquered land,
no plunderer will be plundered in return.
Just let no lust, no mad desire seize the armies
to ravish what they must not touch –
overwhelmed by all they've won!

345

The run for home
and safety waits, the swerve at the post,
the final lap of the gruelling two-lap race.
And even if the men come back with no offence
to the gods, the avenging dead may never rest –
Oh let no new disaster strike! And here
you have it, what a woman has to say.
Let the best win out, clear to see.
A small desire but all that I could want.

350

LEADER:

Spoken like a man, my lady, loyal,
full of self-command. I've heard your sign
and now your vision.

355

*Reaching towards her as she turns and
re-enters the palace.*

Now to praise the gods.
The joy is worth the labour.

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 ing towards her as she turns and
 ers the palace.

CHORUS:

O Zeus my king and Night, dear Night,
 queen of the house who covers us with glories, 360
 you slung your net on the towers of Troy,
 neither young nor strong could leap
 the giant dredge net of slavery,
 all-embracing ruin.

I adore you, iron Zeus of the guests 365
 and your revenge - you drew your longbow
 year by year to a taut full draw
 till one bolt, not falling short
 or arching over the stars,
 could split the mark of Paris! 370

The sky stroke of god! - it is all Troy's to tell,
 but even I can trace it to its cause:
 god does as god decrees.

And still some say
 that heaven would never stoop to punish men 375
 who trample the lovely grace of things
 untouchable. How wrong they are!

A curse burns bright on crime -
 full-blown, the father's crimes will blossom,
 burst into the son's. 380

armies

345

run for home

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375

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burst into the son's.

380

Let there be less suffering . . .
give us the sense to live on what we need.

Bastions of wealth
are no defence for the man
who treads the grand altar of Justice
down and out of sight.

385

Persuasion, maddening child of Ruin
 overpowers him – Ruin plans it all.
 And the wound will smoulder on,
 there is no cure, 390
 a terrible brilliance kindles on the night.
 He is bad bronze scraped on a touchstone:
 put to the test, the man goes black.
 Like the boy who chases
 a bird on the wing, brands his city, 395
 brings it down and prays,
 but the gods are deaf
 to the one who turns to crime, they tear him down.

So Paris learned:
 he came to Atreus' house 400
 and shamed the tables spread for guests,
 he stole away the queen.

And she left her land *chaos*, clanging shields,
 companions tramping, bronze prows, men in bronze,
 and she came to Troy with a dowry, death, 405
 strode through the gates
 defiant in every stride,
 as prophets of the house looked on and wept,

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and she came to Troy with a dowry, death,
strode through the gates
defiant in every stride,
as prophets of the house looked on and wept,
'Oh the halls and the lords of war,
the bed and the fresh prints of love.
I see him, unavenging, unavenged,
the stun of his desolation is so clear -
he longs for the one who lies across the sea
until her phantom seems to sway the house.

405

410

Her curving images,
her beauty hurts her lord,
the eyes starve and the touch
of love is gone,

415

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'and radiant dreams are passing in the night,
the memories throb with sorrow, joy with pain . . . 420

390

it is pain to dream and see desires
slip through the arms,

a vision lost for ever

winging down the moving drifts of sleep.'

So he grieves at the royal hearth

425

yet others' grief is worse, far worse.

395

All through Greece for those who flocked to war

they are holding back the anguish now,

you can feel it rising now in every house;

I tell you there is much to tear the heart.

430

down.

400

They knew the men they sent,

but now in place of men

ashes and urns come back

to every hearth.

nests,

War, War, the great gold-broker of corpses

435

holds the balance of the battle on his spear!

Home from the pyres he sends them,

home from Troy to the loved ones,

heavy with tears, the urns brimmed full,

the heroes return in gold-dust,

440

dear, light ash for men: and they weep.

n bronze,

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395

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dear, light ash for men; and they weep,
they praise them, 'He had skill in the swordplay,'

'He went down so tall in the onslaught,'

'All for another's woman.' So they mutter
in secret and the rancour steals

445

towards our staunch defenders, Atreus' sons.

415

And there they ring the walls, the young,
the lithe, the handsome hold the graves
they won in Troy; the enemy earth
rides over those who conquered.

450

The people's voice is heavy with hatred,
 now the curses of the people must be paid,
 and now I wait, I listen . . .

there – there is something breathing
 under the night's shroud. God takes aim
 at the ones who murder many;
 the swarthy Furies stalk the man
 gone rich beyond all rights – with a twist
 of fortune grind him down, dissolve him
 into the blurring dead – there is no help.
 The reach for power can recoil,
 the bolt of god can strike you at a glance.

455

460

Make me rich with no man's envy,
 neither a raider of cities, no,
 nor slave come face to face with life
 overpowered by another.

465

Speaking singly.

– Fire comes and the news is good,
 it races through the streets
 but is it true? Who knows?
 Or just another lie from heaven?

470

into the starting door
The reach for power can recoil,
the bolt of god can strike you at a glance.

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neither a raider of cities, no,
nor slave come face to face with life
overpowered by another.

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Speaking singly.

– Fire comes and the news is good,
it races through the streets
but is it true? Who knows?
Or just another lie from heaven?

470

– Show us the man so childish, wonderstruck,
he's fired up with the first torch,
then when the message shifts
he's sick at heart.

– Just like a woman
to fill with thanks before the truth is clear.

475

– So gullible. Their stories spread like wildfire,
they fly fast and die faster;
rumours voiced by women come to nothing.

LEADER:

Soon we'll know her fires for what they are,
 her relay race of torches hand-to-hand -
 know if they're real or just a dream,
 the hope of a morning here to take our senses.

455

480

I see a herald running from the beach
 and a victor's spray of olive shades his eyes
 and the dust he kicks, twin to the mud of Troy,
 shows he has a voice - no kindling timber
 on the cliffs, no signal-fires for him.

460

485

He can shout the news and give us joy,
 or else . . . please, not that.

Bring it on,

good fuel to build the first good fires.

490

And if anyone calls down the worst on Argos
 let him reap the rotten harvest of his mind.

465

*The HERALD rushes in and kneels on
 the ground.*

HERALD:

Good Greek earth, the soil of my fathers!
 Ten years out, and a morning brings me back.
 All hopes snapped but one - I'm home at last.
 Never dreamed I'd die in Greece, assigned
 the narrow plot I love the best.

470

495

460

On the cliffs, no signal-fires for him.
He can shout the news and give us joy,
or else . . . please, not that.

Bring it on,

good fuel to build the first good fires.

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495

And now

I salute the land, the light of the sun,
our high lord Zeus and the king of Pytho –
no more arrows, master, raining on our heads!
At Scamander's banks we took our share,
your longbow brought us down like plague.
Now come, deliver us, heal us – lord Apollo!
Gods of the market, here, take my salute.

500

475

And you, my Hermes, Escort,
loving Herald, the herald's shield and prayer! –
And the shining dead of the land who launched the armies,
warm us home . . . we're all the spear has left.

505

The people's voice is heavy with hatred,
 now the curses of the people must be paid,
 and now I wait, I listen . . .

there – there is something breathing
 under the night's shroud. God takes aim 455

at the ones who murder many;
 the swarthy Furies stalk the man
 gone rich beyond all rights – with a twist
 of fortune grind him down, dissolve him
 into the blurring dead – there is no help. 460

The reach for power can recoil,
 the bolt of god can strike you at a glance.

Make me rich with no man's envy,
 neither a raider of cities, no,
 nor slave come face to face with life 465
 overpowered by another.

Speaking singly.

– Fire comes and the news is good,
 it races through the streets
 but is it true? Who knows?
 Or just another lie from heaven? 470

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Speaking singly.

- Fire comes and the news is good,
it races through the streets
but is it true? Who knows?
Or just another lie from heaven?

470

- Show us the man so childish, wonderstruck,
he's fired up with the first torch,
then when the message shifts
he's sick at heart.

- Just like a woman
to fill with thanks before the truth is clear.

475

- So gullible. Their stories spread like wildfire,
they fly fast and die faster;
rumours voiced by women come to nothing.

LEADER:

Soon we'll know her fires for what they are,
 her relay race of torches hand-to-hand -
 know if they're real or just a dream,
 the hope of a morning here to take our senses.
 I see a herald running from the beach
 and a victor's spray of olive shades his eyes
 and the dust he kicks, twin to the mud of Troy,
 shows he has a voice - no kindling timber
 on the cliffs, no signal-fires for him.
 He can shout the news and give us joy,
 or else . . . please, not that.

Bring it on,
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 And if anyone calls down the worst on Argos
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And you, my Hermes, Escort, 505
 loving Herald, the herald's shield and prayer! –
 And the shining dead of the land who launched the armies,
 warm us home . . . we're all the spear has left.

You halls of the kings, you roofs I cherish,
sacred seats – you gods that catch the sun,
if your glances ever shone on him in the old days,
greet him well – so many years are lost.
He comes, he brings us light in the darkness,
free for every comrade, Agamemnon lord of men.

510

Give him the royal welcome he deserves!
He hoisted the pickaxe of Zeus who brings revenge,
he dug Troy down, he worked her soil down,
the shrines of her gods and the high altars, gone! –
and the seed of her wide earth he ground to bits.
That's the yoke he claps on Troy. The king,
the son of Atreus comes. The man is blest,
the one man alive to merit such rewards.

515

520

Neither Paris nor Troy, partners to the end,
can say their work outweighs their wages now.
Convicted of rapine, stripped of all his spoils,
and his father's house and the land that gave it life –
he's scythed them to the roots. The sons of Priam
pay the price twice over.

525

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pay the price twice over. §25

LEADER:
Welcome home
from the wars, herald, long live your joy.

HERALD:
Our joy —
now I could die gladly. Say the word, dear gods. §30

LEADER:
Longing for your country left you raw?

HERALD:
The tears fill my eyes, for joy.

LEADER:

You too,
down with the sweet disease that kills a man
with kindness . . .

HERALD:

Go on, I don't see what you—

LEADER:

Love
for the ones who love you—that's what took you.

HERALD:

You mean 535
the land and the armies hungered for each other?

LEADER:

There were times I thought I'd faint with longing.

HERALD:

There were times I thought I'd faint with longing.

HERALD:

So anxious for the armies, why?

LEADER:

For years now,
only my silence kept me free from harm.

HERALD:

What,
with the kings gone did someone threaten you?

LEADER:

So much . . . 540
now as you say, it would be good to die.

HERALD:

True, we *have* done well.
Think back in the years and what have you?
A few runs of luck, a lot that's bad.
Who but a god can go through life unmarked?

545

*AGAMEMNON enters in his chariot,
his plunder borne before him by his
entourage; behind him, half hidden,
stands CASSANDRA. The old men
press towards him.*

Come, my king, the scourge of Troy,
the true son of Atreus –

How to salute you, how to praise you
neither too high nor low, but hit
the note of praise that suits the hour?

770

So many prize some brave display,
they prefer some flaunt of honour
once they break the bounds.

When a man fails they share his grief,
but the pain can never cut them to the quick.

775

When a man succeeds they share his glory,
torturing their faces into smiles.

But the good shepherd knows his flock.

When the eyes seem to brim with love
and it is only unction, fawning,
he will know, better than we can know.

780

That day you marshalled the armies
all for Helen – no hiding it now –
I drew you in my mind in black;
you seemed a menace at the helm,

785

AGAMEMNON

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785

sending men to the grave
to bring her home, that hell on earth.
But now from the depths of trust and love
I say Well fought, well won –

790

the end is worth the labour!
Search, my king, and learn at last
who stayed at home and kept their faith
and who betrayed the city.

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MEMNON enters in his chariot,
 her borne before him by his
 e; behind him, half hidden,
 ASSANDRA. The old men
 ards him.

770

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785

AGAMEMNON:

First,

with justice I salute my Argos and my gods,
 my accomplices who brought me home and won
 my rights from Priam's Troy - the just gods.
 No need to hear our pleas. Once for all
 they consigned their lots to the urn of blood,
 they pitched on death for men, annihilation
 for the city. Hope's hand, hovering
 over the urn of mercy, left it empty.
 Look for the smoke - it is the city's seamark,
 building even now.

795

800

The storms of ruin live!

Her last dying breath, rising up from the ashes
 sends us gales of incense rich in gold.

805

For that we must thank the gods with a sacrifice
 our sons will long remember. For their mad outrage
 of a queen we raped their city - we were right.
 The beast of Argos, foals of the wild mare,
 thousands massed in armour rose on the night
 the Pleiades went down, and crashing through
 their walls our bloody lion lapped its fill,
 gorging on the blood of kings.

810

770

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810

785

Our thanks to the gods,
long drawn out, but it is just the prelude.

815

790

*CLYTAEMNESTRA approaches with
her women; they are carrying dark red
tapestries. AGAMEMNON turns to the
leader.*

And your concern, old man, is on my mind.
 I hear you and agree, I will support you.
 How rare, men with the character to praise
 a friend's success without a trace of envy,
 poison to the heart – it deals a double blow. 820
 Your own losses weigh you down but then,
 look at your neighbour's fortune and you weep.
 Well I know. I understand society,
 the flattering mirror of the proud.

My comrades . . .

they're shadows, I tell you, ghosts of men 825
 who swore they'd die for me. Only Odysseus:
 I dragged that man to the wars but once in harness
 he was a trace-horse, he gave his all for me.
 Dead or alive, no matter, I can praise him.

And now this cause involving men and gods. 830
 We must summon the city for a trial,
 found a national tribunal. Whatever's healthy,
 shore it up with law and help it flourish.
 Wherever something calls for drastic cures
 we make our noblest effort: amputate or wield 835
 the healing iron, burn the cancer at the roots.

CLYTAEMNESTR

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835

Now I go to my father's house –
I give the gods my right hand, my first salute.
The ones who sent me forth have brought me home.

*He starts down from the chariot, looks
at CLYTAEMNESTRA, stops, and
offers up a prayer.*

Victory, you have sped my way before,
now speed me to the last.

840

*CLYTAEMNESTRA turns from the
king to the CHORUS.*

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CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Old nobility of Argos

gathered here, I am not ashamed to tell you
how I love the man. I am older,
and the fear dies away . . . I am human.

820

Nothing I say was learned from others.

845

This is my life, my ordeal, long as the siege
he laid at Troy and more demanding.

First,

when a woman sits at home and the man is gone,
the loneliness is terrible,
unconscionable . . .

825

850

and the rumours spread and fester,
a runner comes with something dreadful,
close on his heels the next and his news worse,
and they shout it out and the whole house can hear;
and wounds – if he took one wound for each report
to penetrate these walls, he's gashed like a dragnet,
more, if he had only died . . .

830

855

for each death that swelled his record, he could boast
like a triple-bodied Geryon risen from the grave,
'Three shrouds I dug from the earth, one for every body
that went down!'

835

860

The rumours broke like fever,

broke and then rose higher. There were times

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like a triple-bodied Geryon risen from the grave,
‘Three shrouds I dug from the earth, one for every body
that went down!’ 860

The rumours broke like fever,
broke and then rose higher. There were times
they cut me down and eased my throat from the noose.
I wavered between the living and the dead.

Turning to AGAMEMNON.

And so

down from the chariot, looks
EMNESTRA, stops, and

our child is gone, not standing by our side,
the bond of our dearest pledges, mine and yours;
by all rights our child should be here . . .

865

Orestes. You seem startled.

You needn't be. Our loyal brother-in-arms
will take good care of him, Strophios the Phocian.
He warned from the start we court two griefs in one.
You risk all on the wars - and what if the people
rise up howling for the king, and anarchy
should dash our plans?

870

Men, it is their nature,
trampling on the fighter once he's down.
Our child is gone. That is my self-defence
and it is true.

875

For me, the tears that welled
like springs are dry. I have no tears to spare.
I'd watch till late at night, my eyes still burn,
I sobbed by the torch I lit for you alone.

880

Glancing towards the palace.

I never let it die . . . but in my dreams
the high thin wail of a gnat would rouse me,

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I never let it die . . . but in my dreams
the high thin wail of a gnat would rouse me,
piercing like a trumpet – I could see you
suffer more than all
the hours that slept with me could ever bear.

885

I endured it all. And now, free of grief,
I would salute that man the watchdog of the fold,
the mainroyal, saving stay of the vessel,
rooted oak that thrusts the roof sky-high,
the father's one true heir.
Land at dawn to the shipwrecked past all hope,
light of the morning burning off the night of storm,
the cold clear spring to the parched horseman –
O the ecstasy, to flee the yoke of Fate!

890

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It is right to use the titles he deserves.
Let envy keep her distance. We have suffered
long enough.

895

Reaching towards AGAMEMNON.

870

Come to me now, my dearest,
down from the car of war, but never set the foot
that stamped out Troy on earth again, my great one.

Women, why delay? You have your orders.
Pave his way with tapestries.

900

875

*They begin to spread the crimson
tapestries between the king and the
palace doors.*

Quickly.

Let the red stream flow and bear him home
to the home he never hoped to see - Justice,
lead him in!

880

Leave all the rest to me.

The spirit within me never yields to sleep.
We will set things right, with the god's help.
We will do whatever Fate requires.

905

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AGAMEMNON:

885

There
is Leda's daughter, the keeper of my house.
And the speech to suit my absence, much too long.
But the praise that does us justice,
let it come from others, then we prize it.

910

890

This –
you treat me like a woman. Grovelling, gaping up at me –
what am I, some barbarian peacocking out of Asia?
Never cross my path with robes and draw the lightning.
Never – only the gods deserve the pomps of honour
and the stiff brocades of fame. To walk on them . . .
I am human, and it makes my pulses stir
with dread.

915

AGAMEMNON turns to the leader.
And your concern, old man, is on my mind.
I hear you and agree, I will support you.
How rare, men with the character to praise
a friend's success without a trace of envy,
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Wherever something calls for drastic cures
we make our noblest effort : amputate or wield
the healing iron, burn the cancer at the roots. Now I go to my father's house -
I give the gods my right hand, my first salute.
The ones who sent me forth have brought me home.
He starts down from the chariot, looks at

CHORUS:

But the lust for power never dies -
men cannot have enough.
No one will lift a hand to send it
from his door, to give it warning,
'Power, never come again!'
Take this man: the gods in glory
gave him Priam's city to plunder,
brought him home in splendour like a god.
But now if he must pay for the blood
his fathers shed, and die for the deaths
he brought to pass, and bring more death
to avenge his dying, show us one
who boasts himself born free
of the raging angel, once he hears-
Cries break out within the palace.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Words, endless words I've said to serve the moment -
now it makes me proud to tell the truth.

How else to prepare a death for deadly men
who seem to love you? How to rig the nets
of pain so high no man can overleap them?
I brooded on this trial, this ancient blood feud
year by year. At last my hour came.

Here I stand and here I struck
and here my work is done.

I did it all. I don't deny it, no.

He had no way to flee or fight his destiny -

(Unwinding the robes from AGAMEMNON'S body,
spreading them before the altar where the old men cluster around them, unified as a chorus
once again.)

our never-ending, all embracing net, I cast it
wide for the royal haul, I coil him round and round
in the wealth, the robes of doom, and then I strike him
once, twice, and at each stroke he cries in agony-
he buckles at the knees and crashes here!

LEADER:

You appall me,
you, your brazen words -
exulting over your fallen king.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

And you,
you try me like some desperate woman.
My heart is steel, well you know. Praise me,
blame me as you choose. It's all one.
Here is Agamemnon, my husband made a corpse
by this right hand - a masterpiece of Justice.
Done is done.

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



The Oresteia is our rite of passage
from savagery to civilization.

History of Ancient Greece

Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

Week 13: January 22, 2020

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



