

WEEK FOUR:
Greeks and Trojans III and the “Others” – Greeks and Persians I

Tuesday: Greeks and Trojans III:

For Tuesday, we will read a large chunk of Euripides’ *Trojan Women*. Euripides was the youngest of the “Big Three”—the greatest tragedians of Ancient Athens (the other two are Aeschylus, whom we will read soon, and Sophocles, whose *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Antigone* you probably read in High School). Yes, there were other “Big Threes” before LeBron, Wade, and Bosh. In *Trojan Women*, we meet several of the characters we have encountered in the *Iliad* and learn about their fates after the fall of Troy. The queen Hecuba (whom we knew as Hecabe in our Rieu translation) is the protagonist of the play. She often converses with a chorus, composed of other captive Trojan women. Reprising their roles from the *Iliad*, we will also find Andromache, Astyanax, Helen, and Menelaus. Another important character is Talthybius, the Greek herald who acts as a messenger between the Greek captains and the captive Trojans.

The play opens with a conversation between Poseidon and Athena, who discuss a plan to make the victorious Greeks pay for the sacrileges committed during their sack of Troy. Hecuba and the chorus then enter and discuss their grief. Talthybius, the Greek herald, comes to tell Hecuba and the other women of their fates. Cassandra, the priestess and seer, is the first to go. She prophetically declares what will become of her and Agamemnon upon their return to Mycenae, but—as usual—she is not believed. This is where we will enter the play for our reading: After Cassandra is led away, Andromache, with Astyanax in her arms, is led onto the stage on a wagon full of spoils. You will read a series of exchanges between the characters, including a sophistic—but still emotional—debate between Helen and Hecuba, in which each attempt to convince Menelaus how to proceed now that he has control over his wife’s life.

Lastly, the historical context of this tragedy, originally performed in the spring of 415 BCE, is vital to our understanding of its message. At this time Athens was enjoying a brief but uneasy respite after a difficult and indecisive ten-year-long war against Sparta. Just a few months before the staging of this play, Athens had responded to the formerly neutral city of Melos by capturing and executing all the male citizens and submitting the women and children to slavery. Additionally, the city was in the final stages of preparing to launch a large and costly expedition to besiege the city of Syracuse on Sicily.

Assignment:

- Euripides, *Trojan Women*, lines 568-end (=Lattimore trans. pp. 147-75)

Reading Questions:

- How do Hecuba and Andromache each respond to their situations in the text?
- How do Helen and Menelaus respond to each other? What are their concerns?
- What is the focus of the debate between Helen and Hecuba? Whose side would you take and, if you were Menelaus, what would Helen’s fate be?
- How do all of these characters behave compared to their depictions in the *Iliad*?
- How does the historical context of this play affect our interpretation? If you were an Athenian in 415 BCE watching the performance of this tragedy, how would you respond?

Thursday: the “Others”: Greeks and Persians I:

For Thursday, we will begin our journey through Herodotus. Up first, we will compare two of the best known Persian rulers: Cyrus, the first Great King who brought Persia out from under the Medians’ shadow, and Xerxes, best known for his failed invasion of Greece in 480-79 BCE. We will read three episodes in Cyrus’ life. The first recounts how he came to become the Great King of a united Persia and Media. Note how Cyrus is portrayed as he comes to power and how he interacts with those above and below him. The second recounts his sack of Babylon and recounts some of the history of the city. The final section describes Cyrus’ decision to attack the Massagetai, an expedition that will ultimately lead to his death.

For the Xerxes selection, the first lengthy chunk covers his ascension to the throne up to his army’s advance across the Hellespont during their expedition to Greece. Pay close attention to what leads the Great King to decide to attack Greece. As the Persian army proceeds on its campaign, Xerxes is forced to overcome several natural hurdles in his way. He also has several discussions with those around him: Mardonios, Artabanos, Pythios, and Demaratos. Take note of how he treats each and how he responds to their advice and beliefs. **NB:** The assignment is shorter than it seems at first glance; the *Landmark* text includes many full-page maps and images.

Assignment:

- **Cyrus:** Herodotus, *Histories* 1.123-130 (=Landmark pp. 68-71); **Hdt. 1.178-192** (=Landmark pp. 96-103); **Hdt. 1.205-214** (=Landmark pp. 111-114)
- **Xerxes:** Herodotus, *Histories* 7.1-58 (=Landmark pp. 493-the top of 523); **Hdt. 7.101-105** (=Landmark pp. 534-37)

Reading Questions:

- How does Cyrus come to power over the Persians and Medians? How does Harpagos contribute to this feat?
- How does the lengthy description of Nitokris and her life play a role in the narrative of the fall of Babylon?
- What leads Cyrus to attack the Massagetai? What leads to his defeat and, ultimately, his death?
- To what does Herodotus ascribe Xerxes’ successful ascension to his father’s throne?
- How does Xerxes come to the decision to attack Greece? What are the concerns and points addressed in the debate and to what extent does the debate matter?
- What do Xerxes’ actions at Athos and the Hellespont suggest about his character?
- How does Xerxes interact with his various nobles and how do they treat him?
- What do the tales of Pythios, Artabanos, and Demaratos demonstrate about Xerxes?
- What role do advisors and dreams play in the decisions made by Persian rulers?

People, Terms, Events and Concepts, to know from Week Three:

Euripides	Astyanax	Shield of Hector
Hecuba	Helen	Neoptolemus
Chorus	Menelaus	Melos
Andromache	Talthybius	Sicilian Expedition

Cyrus
Harpagos
Persians + Medes
Babylon
Nitokris
Tomyris

Massagetai
Croesus
Darius
Xerxes
Mardonios
Artabanos

Divine Dreams
Mt. Athos (Canal)
Hellespont (Bridge)
Pythios
Demaratos