“Dropping the Scepter: The Portrayal of Xerxes as Agamemnon in Aeschylus’ *Persians*”

**1. *Pers*. ll. 8-11**

Χο. ἀμφὶ δὲ **νόστῳ** τῷ βασιλείῳ

καὶ πολυχρύσου στρατιᾶς ἤδη

κακόμαντις ἄγαν ὀρσολοπεῖται

θυμὸς ἔσωθεν

But about the **homecoming** of the king

and of the army, rich in gold, already,

deep within, my evil-prophesying heart

is greatly troubled.

**2. *Pers*. ll. 74-80**

Χο. πολυάνδρου δ᾽ Ἀσίας **θούριος** ἄρχων

ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χθόνα **ποιμανόριον θεῖον** ἐλαύνει

διχόθεν, πεζονόμος τ᾽ ἔκ τε θαλάσσας, ὀχυροῖσι πεποιθὼς

στυφέλοις ἐφέταις, χρυσονόμου γενεᾶς **ἰσόθεος φώς**.

The **warlike** leader of populous Asia

Drives his **divine flock** over the whole earth

In two ways, commanding foot-soldiers and by sea, trusting

His sturdy, harsh commanders, **god-like man** of a gold-given race.

**3. *Pers*. ll. 353-56**

Αγ. ἦρξεν μέν, ὦ δέσποινα, τοῦ παντὸς κακοῦ

φανεὶς ἀλάστωρ ἢ κακὸς δαίμων **ποθέν**.

ἀνὴρ γὰρ Ἕλλην ἐξ Ἀθηναίων στρατοῦ

ἐλθὼν ἔλεξε παιδὶ σῷ Ξέρξῃ τάδε…

The whole catastrophe began, Queen,

When an avenging power or evil spirit appeared from **somewhere**.

For a Greek man who came from the Athenian army

Told your son Xerxes these things…

**4. *Pers*. ll. 759-66, 779-86**

Δα. τοιγάρ σφιν ἔργον ἐστὶν ἐξειργασμένον

μέγιστον, ἀείμνηστον, οἷον οὐδέπω

τόδ᾽ ἄστυ Σούσων ἐξεκείνωσεν πεσόν,

ἐξ οὗτε τιμὴν Ζεὺς ἄναξ τήνδ᾽ ὤπασεν,

ἕν᾽ ἄνδρ᾽ ἁπάσης Ἀσίδος μηλοτρόφου

ταγεῖν, ἔχοντα **σκῆπτρον εὐθυντήριον**.

Μῆδος γὰρ ἦν ὁ πρῶτος ἡγεμὼν στρατοῦ,

ἄλλος δ᾽ ἐκείνου παῖς τόδ᾽ ἔργον ἤνυσεν·

…

κἀγὼ· πάλου τ᾽ ἔκυρσα τοῦπερ ἤθελον,

κἀπεστράτευσα πολλὰ σὺν πολλῷ στρατῷ,

ἀλλ᾽ οὐ κακὸν τοσόνδε προσέβαλον πόλῃ.

Ξέρξης δ᾽ ἐμὸς παῖς νέος ἐὼν νέα φρονεῖ,

κοὐ μνημονεύει τὰς ἐμὰς ἐπιστολάς.

εὖ γὰρ σαφῶς τόδ᾽ ἴστ᾽, ἐμοὶ ξυνήλικες,

ἅπαντες ἡμεῖς, οἳ κράτη τάδ᾽ ἔσχομεν,

οὐκ ἂν φανεῖμεν πήματ᾽ ἔρξαντες τόσα.

And so a deed has been wrought by [Xerxes],

Enormous, unforgettable, such as never before

Befell the city of Susa, emptying it out,

Since lord Zeus granted this honor,

That a single man rule all of sheep-rearing Asia

And hold the **governing scepter**.

For the Mede was the first leader of the army,

And another, his son, accomplished this task…

…

And I as well. I obtained the lot I had wanted for so long,

And I led many campaigns with a large force,

But I never brought so great a disaster on the city.

Yet my son Xerxes, being young, thinks young thoughts

And does not remember my advice.

Know well, my contemporaries, that all of us who ruled

Could not be said to have brought about so much suffering.

**5. *Il*. 2.100-8**

ἀνὰ δὲ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων

ἔστη **σκῆπτρον** ἔχων τὸ μὲν Ἥφαιστος κάμε τεύχων.

Ἥφαιστος μὲν δῶκε Διὶ Κρονίωνι ἄνακτι,

αὐτὰρ ἄρα Ζεὺς δῶκε διακτόρῳ ἀργεϊφόντῃ·

Ἑρμείας δὲ ἄναξ δῶκεν Πέλοπι πληξίππῳ,

αὐτὰρ ὃ αὖτε Πέλοψ δῶκ᾽ Ἀτρέϊ ποιμένι λαῶν,

Ἀτρεὺς δὲ θνῄσκων ἔλιπεν πολύαρνι Θυέστῃ,

αὐτὰρ ὃ αὖτε Θυέστ᾽ Ἀγαμέμνονι λεῖπε φορῆναι,

πολλῇσιν νήσοισι καὶ Ἄργεϊ παντὶ ἀνάσσειν.

And lord Agamemnon stood,

Holding the **scepter** Hephaestus wrought with his craft.

Hephaestus gave it to lord Zeus, son of Kronos:

And Zeus gave it to his messenger Argeiphontes.

Lord Hermes, then, gave it to Pelops the charioteer,

And Pelops in turn gave it to Atreus, shepherd of the people,

And Atreus when he died left it to Thyestes, rich in flocks,

And Thyestes in turn left it for Agamemnon to bear,

To rule over many islands and all of Argos.

**“Shepherding as ruling”:** ll. 75, 241, 783

All translations are my own, using Garvie’s 2009 text of the *Persians* and the *Iliad* OCT*.*

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