



75. PROMETHEUS

EPITHETS change from chapter to chapter. “Alcmena” refers to the nursing mother of Shabak and Tcharuq, the sons of Achilles who expelled the Argives from Egypt in the first Trojan War. “Medea” describes her in a second marriage after, having lost Achilles and his sons, she married Medjay prince Kadmus Gyges.¹ She is “Hyllus” as she and Gyges search for her lost boys, and “Tchphtperisis” (call her Paris) after they learned that Shabak was lived with snakes in a cave. Io demanded ransoms to free the boy from captivity, huge treasures of gold and silver described by later Delphians as “donations of Gyges.”²

The musician Imnirdis, Theban niece of Achilles, staged the infancy, boyhood and coming of age of Shabak when he became lord of the Nile in 705 BCE.³ Neferibre later took those plays to Saïs, where they remained until David’s sister Athena married Peisistratus in 558.⁴ She brought them to her house on the old acropolis, where they were staged in Greek, but the performance of Shabak’s captivity offended Delphi. Hipparchus, Athena’s son, was reviving the contentious play in 514 when he was assassinated – by two brothers of the lead actress, perhaps? In any case, Xerxes

¹ **Gyges** in my reconstruction heads a line of seven attested Medusas (mdjaw-sa, *leader of Medjay*): Kadmus Gyges (c. 720-682 BCE), Alyattes (c. 682-625), Cyaxares (c. 625-591), Aistiyigis (c. 591-556), Cyrus (c. 556-539), Cambyses (c. 539-522) and Bardiya (522). [For Aistiyigis and Cyrus, see Vol. 1, chapter 20 (ed).] After Darius of Susa murdered Bardiya and seized control of the empire, he and his heirs destroyed or falsified the historical records of their predecessors. The Medjay of the Sudan then became Asian “Medes,” and great Cyrus a noble Achaemenid to whom Darius was related!

² **Donations of Gyges:** see Herodotus 1.8-15.

³ **[Plays of Shabak:** Vol. 4, chapters 73-76 simulate the four plays of Imnirdis (ed).]

⁴ **[David of Saïs** ruled as judge on the Nile, c. 570-530 BCE; he also acted as king in Babylon after the assassination of Neriglissar in 556 BCE. He made a large donation to Delphi after a fire, c. 548 BCE, his daughter Athena having married Peisistratus of Athens in 558. David’s story is reconstructed in Vol. 1, chapter 21; the account of Amasis from censored Herodotus appears in Vol. 1, chapter 23 (ed).]

burned Athena's theater and scripts in 490, but the troublesome tragedy was remade by a young loyalist Euripides in 438. Unfortunately, that remake was hacked to ruin after the looting of Athens by its enemies in 404. I wanted to see the play that was fatal to Athena's son, and the muses went to work.

VISITORS ON PARNASSUS

adapted from *Ion*, the ruined play ascribed to Euripides⁵

Nine muses (mu-u-sesh, *dancers of the scribe*) acting as

1. MAERI TYPHOEUS (ti-tchpht-phuo-ewa-s, *she looks after the northern cave of the queen*)
2. SHEBIKA THEMIS (shbi-ka, *fortune changes, thi-ms, wandering child*), young Shabakka
- 3-5. CHORUS of visitors from the Nile
6. HYLLUS PARIS (hhy-ll-s, *she seeks two lions, tchpht-per-i-s-is, her true throne house is a cave*)
7. KADMUS GYGES (kai-dm-u-z, *he of high cities, gy-ggwy-z, he of the dazzling offering*)
8. SMMRI APOLLONIUS (sm-mr-i, *true pyramid priest, apollo-niw-z, he of the bowl of Apollo*)
role doubling as CANDAWIS, a servant of Hyllus in disguise as an old man
9. MESSENGER, an Amazon warrior

Set

A set of stone steps and columns on the side of Mount Parnassus, c. 715 BCE.⁶ Noisy birds nest on the lintels, but a broom leans against one of columns. Behind them, covered by a curtain, is a poorly reconstructed Egyptian sphinx with an inscription "IO." It faces into dawning light. *Enter MAERI with a torch and priestess gown, followed by MUSES 7-9.*

1. Maeri, Muses #7-9

MAERI. At sunrise, in a minute or two, Parnassus will be opened for you. The Greeks here call me Pytho, because they think that I talk to snakes, but you may remember me from Egypt where I was Maeri, the faithful servant of god-like Achilles. To save him from the wolves, his daughter Leah hid his body in the pyramid at Tirzah, and she stayed there with him, but I went on across the plain with Smmri the pyramid priest and baby Shabak, Achilles' infant son,

⁵ *Ion* is mutilated. As I theorize, the play underlying our extant text was among the spoils taken from Athens after the Peloponnesian War, c. 404 BCE. [For a similar manuscript history behind *Sons of Heracles*, see Vol. 1, chapter 5 (ed).] Although the received text of *Ion* is not stage-worthy, I think that information of historical significance is recoverable from the wreck.

⁶ **Parnassus** (pr-nsu-s, *house of the lady king*) was taken from Minoans to become a northern palace of the Amazon dynasty of Thebes, c. 1500 BCE. As reconstructed by pirates of Argos and Corinth after 725 BCE, the site featured the Theban sphinx Pelias (p-l-ias, *the old lion*), reused as the tomb of queen Io (ea-pw-l-iw, *this great lion is Io*, later "Apollo"). Thebans retrieved the sphinx from Parnassus in the first Trojan War, and they burned the site, but Greeks later rebuilt it as Apollo's Delphi (d-l-ph-i, *I attack the lion hand*, i.e., *attacker of the Nile delta*).

hoping to find help for Alcmena. Achaeans, as you may recall, were hunting poor Alcmena.⁷ Unhappily, we never saw her again. Antenor seized us, and he gave us over to queen Io for punishment. I supposed that she would kill us, but my sister Loxias intervened, and our lives were spared.⁸ Io had been struck with the plague, and she knew that she was dying. She sent us here to Parnassus to make a sphinx for her burial. *MUSES open the curtain.* There it is now, the tomb of Io!

We have been here on this mountain for almost ten years. Smmri and I care for Io, whose ghost is called Prometheus,⁹ and young Shabak now has grown big enough to do most household chores. Nobody knows that he is the rightful king of Thebes.¹⁰ Even he does not know it. I tell him that I found him here in the snake cave on the mountain.¹¹ I call him Themis, *wandering child*, also Shebika, because time changes all.

For nine years, I sent for news of Achilles and Alcmena, but I could learn nothing about them. Then finally, only yesterday, a visitor told me that the Greeks had burned Achilles, and Alcmena is now to be called Medea, for she has married Kadmus, lord of the Medjay.¹² Their marriage has been childless, so they are coming here to ask Prometheus to name their heir. *Enter SHEBIKA with bow and arrow.* I wonder if they know that young Shabak is here? *MAERI puts on her gown.* Come, women. It's time to awake Io.¹³ *Sunrise. Exit MAERI and the MUSES through a squeaky gate at the base of the sphinx. They leave the gate open.*

2. Shebika, Chorus, Hyllus

SHEBIKA. Dirty birds, get out! Ruin some other place!
Can the sun never shine upon this tomb

⁷ **Achaeon** (ach-i-y-nss): *destroyer of the second true papyrus*, i.e., the second book of Tiresheas. I take it to have been official record of the northern kingdom of Egypt taken from Iunu ("Heliopolis") or Ahab (aa-h-hb, *ruined house of the ibis*). [For Middle Bronze Age Tiresheas, *great lady scribe of the queen*, see volume 3 of this series (ed).]

⁸ **Loxias** (lo-khsy-s): *she bribes Io*.

⁹ **Prometheus** (p-rw-mt-heu-s, *she herself, the dead lion*): the voice of the great sphinx at Thebes in the time of Achilles. Jason destroyed Thebes and dismantled that sphinx, and the Argonauts later rebuilt it on Mount Parnassus as a tomb for Io. The tomb then was taken over by Corinthians who believed that Prometheus was the local titan (ti-tchn, *resurrected queen*), i.e., local goddess of the earth.

¹⁰ **Shabak** and his twin Tcharuq were sons of Achilles born on Wadjet Island, where Alcmena had hidden from Greek invaders, c. 725 BCE. Mother and sons were captured there by Jason and his Argives. Escaping from them, Alcmena lost both infants, but after almost ten years of separation, she recovered Sheba on Parnassus in the place now known as Delphi. They returned to Egypt where the prince grew up to command the army of the Nile, c. 705 BCE, to reunite with his brother, and to defeat the Greeks in Trojan War I. He led the army until 690 BCE, when Greeks returned to Troy, and he was killed in battle. [For the death of Shabakka, see Vol. 1, chapter 19 (ed).]

¹¹ **Mountain cave**: compare the legend of Lugalbanda and the mountain cave. [See Vol. 2, chapter 30 "Ur and the Zubi" (ed).]

¹² **Medea** (mdjaii[y]-ea): *great Medjay*. The Medjay were an ancient tribe in the Sudan. In marrying their king, Tchpyrys claimed to control the succession of their rulers.

¹³ **Awake Io**: a choral song of Io may have been sung here.

Without foulness running down the pillars?
Zeus, you again!¹⁴ Nesting here in my range?
Be a warning to others! *He shoots an eagle. I hit you! He looks sadly at the fallen bird.*

How many more of your flock must die?
Yes, you were drawn here by the stink of death,
but how many hundred times did I say
that if again you threatened Prometheus
I would shoot to kill you! *He takes the broom to sweep.*

Enter CHORUS with cakes, beers and a wine jug.

CHORUS #1. Look at these stones!
How they shine in the first rays of day,
even in this ruin!

CHORUS #2. Is this our place
of meeting with Medea? It must be.

CHORUS #3. That boy isn't Greek.

CHORUS #1. He could be our lord.
Why don't you ask him?

CHORUS #2. Child, a word with you!

SHEBIKA. Welcome, strangers.

CHORUS #2. I thank you. What's your name?

SHEBIKA. Themis. I'm Themis.

CHORUS #2. Were you not born here
on Parnassus, Themis? Where were you born?

SHEBIKA. I can't tell you.

CHORUS #2. Really, you don't know?

CHORUS #1. How old are you, dear child? How old in years?

SHEBIKA. I don't know.

CHORUS #1. You ought to know your age!

CHORUS #3. Is this the temple of Prometheus?

SHEBIKA. I clean it for her as well as I can.

¹⁴ Zeus: an eagle that attacks Prometheus by night.

CHORUS #1. We washed our feet in the stream below.
Can we go inside there, into the sphinx?

SHEBIKA. Who are you?

CHORUS #1. I served Pelias in Thebes.¹⁵

CHORUS #2. I serve king Kadmus, lord of highlanders.

CHORUS #3. I serve Medea, the wife of Kadmus.

SHEBIKA. Are you Greek?

CHORUS #2. No.

CHORUS #1. The Argives captured me,
but Kadmus freed me.

CHORUS #3. Me too. I'm free now.
I can't wait to sail for the Nile and home.

SHEBIKA. Women are not allowed in the tomb
unless they are Greek.

CHORUS #1. I've brought loaves to offer.
They are fresh.

SHEBIKA. I can take them in for you.

CHORUS #1 *handing over the loaves*. You won't eat them, will you?

SHEBIKA. What are they?

CHORUS #1. They're from Aethra.

CHORUS #2 *as Shebika tastes a loaf*. Is it good?

CHORUS #3. Aethra is the house where the dough rises.¹⁶

SHEBIKA. You are foreigners?

CHORUS #1. I was born in Thebes,
which is far from here. You must cross the sea,
then row a long way up the big river
to a city of a thousand gates. Yes,
Thebes is a city of a thousand gates!
There is no richer place in all the world.

¹⁵ **Pelias** (p-l-ias, *the old lion*): father of Medea and father-in-law of Achilles.

¹⁶ **Aethra** (ie-t-hr-h, *distant house of rising bread*): leavened bread. Themis is unfamiliar with Egypt (ie-gy-p-t, *the offering bread rises*). He is used to unleavened bread.

CHORUS #3. It once was ruled by my queen Medea,
the daughter of Pelias. She herself
will be arriving here this morning.

CHORUS #2. Medea's husband too is on the way
king Kadmus. His home is in the highlands,
even farther up the Nile. Medea
and Kadmus are long married, but she
is barren, as it seems. Kadmus comes here
to ask Prometheus to name his heir.

CHORUS #2. I hope the titan has a good answer.

CHORUS #3. Here is Medea now. *Enter HYLLUS.*¹⁷

SHEBIKA. What's her trouble?
Where is her crown?

CHORUS #3. She wears no valuables
when she travels.

SHEBIKA. Queen lady, are you hurt?
Did a snake bite you?

HYLLUS. Familiar things
bring tears.¹⁸

SHEBIKA. I can stop the pains of venom.

HYLLUS. Sweet boy, I'm remembering . . . I'm reminded
of another time and place.

SHEBIKA. Where is that?

HYLLUS. I was born across the sea in Egypt.
I'm from Thebes.

SHEBIKA. Thebes of a thousand gates?

HYLLUS. No more. Thebes has no gates now. They burned.
Thebes lies in ruins. It will be rebuilt
someday, I hope, but I moved farther,
much farther up the Nile to Napata.

¹⁷ **Hyllus** appears as the Athena depicted at the top of this chapter. Her cape appears to be edged with snakes.

¹⁸ **Familiar things**: the sphinx of Delphi is made from parts of the sphinx of Pelias, Medea's father.

Just below the lake where the great river
begins, I live with king Kadmus.

SHEBIKA. You're rich?

HYLLUS. We are poor in children. I once had twins,
but now both are lost.

SHEBIKA. How could you lose them?

HYLLUS. We became separated in the war,
in Egypt years ago. How old are you?

SHEBIKA. I can't tell you. I don't know. Please don't cry.

CHORUS #2 *watching the boy eat*. Don't they feed the boys here?

CHORUS #3. He eats like a king.

CHORUS #1. Re will break no bread with Prometheus!¹⁹

HYLLUS. Kadmus wants a son to rule after him
in his place. That's why he soon will be here.
How many boys are living here?

SHEBIKA. Just me.

HYLLUS. No other boys?

SHEBIKA. No children.

HYLLUS. You're sure?
You haven't told me your name.

SHEBIKA. I'm Themis.

HYLLUS. Themis? Wandering child?
That's unusual. Who is your mother?

SHABBAKA. I have no mother.

HYLLUS. No mother? Really?

SHEBIKA. Pytho is like my mother.

HYLLUS. Who is she?

SHEBIKA. Pytho is the priestess. She serves Io.²⁰

¹⁹ **Re will not share**: a source for Hesiod's story of Zeus and Prometheus may have appeared here.

²⁰ **Io** the mummy is cared for by Pytho; Prometheus, the voice of Io's resurrected spirit, belongs to Smmri.

HYLLUS. She is like your mother?

SHEBIKA. I live with her.

She found me in the cave on the mountain.²¹

HYLLUS. The mountain bore you?

SHEBIKA. I sprang from the cave.

HYLLUS. Is that true? No woman gave birth to you?

No woman nursed you after you were born?

SHEBIKA. I sprang from the cave. That's what Pytho says.

HYLLUS. How does she know? *Women in the sphinx chant Oheo Io.*

SHEBIKA. Prometheus told her.

HYLLUS. I don't know much about him. Who is he?

He's a prophet?

SHEBIKA. She knows all about
the people in the earth.

HYLLUS. You mean the dead?

The dead talk to her?

SHEBIKA. She is one of them.

HYLLUS. Io, the old queen of Arcadians?

SHEBIKA. Yes.

She became the titan Prometheus.

HYLLUS. Pytho speaks for Io?

SHEBIKA. Through the titan
Prometheus. Do you hear them singing?

Oheo Io calls Prometheus.²² *The chanting stops.*

The titan must have appeared in the sphinx.

HYLLUS. Is your tunic wool or ram hide? Pytho
made it for you?

SHEBIKA. She doesn't weave.

²¹ **The mountain:** Parnassus, the so-called naval of the Greek world. According to Herodotus, Egyptians believed that their country grew from a single hill. Local legend in the delta identified that hill as Shemer. [For Shemer, see Vol. 4 chapter 74 (ed).]

²² **Oheo** (wh-e-w, *interpreter*): the cry Oheo-Io summoned Prometheus from below.

HYLLUS. I do.

I would like to make you shorts of linen,
clean white shorts such as men wear in Egypt.

SHEBIKA. I don't care what I wear. It's all I have.

HYLLUS. Themis, I came here with a question.
Can you keep a secret?

SHEBIKA. Sure, I think so.

HYLLUS. I will tell you, but you must never tell
this secret to anybody.

SHEBIKA. OK.

HYLLUS. Some years ago, almost ten years ago,
a woman of the court of Egypt,
a young woman, came here to this mountain.
She brought two babies with her, baby boys,
and she left them here on these steps.

SHEBIKA. Right here?

HYLLUS. Yes.

SHEBIKA. Her babies?

HYLLUS. They were born across the sea,
down in Egypt, but a priestess found them
here on these steps.

SHEBIKA. They came across the sea?

HYLLUS. That's right. The priestess found them on these steps,
and even though she was not their mother,
she took them into her house, her black house.²³

SHEBIKA. Our black house here?

HYLLUS. Yes.

SHEBIKA. Why did she want them?

HYLLUS. Because they were alone, she pitied them
and she took care of them. These things happened

²³ **The black house** (the *maison noire* first excavated in 1950) was located on a terrace just east of the site of the classical temple of Apollo at Delphi. It had been reconstructed from charred remnants of a fire, and it was about to be burned for a second time. See Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton 2014), 45-51.

ten summers ago. How long have you lived here? Ten years? Two boys of ten years of age could be living here. Have you seen them?

SHEBIKA. No.

HYLLUS. No other boy of your age is here?

SHEBIKA. No.

HYLLUS. Were any boys of your age living here in the past? Do you remember brothers?

They were twins but not exactly alike.

The elder one was a little more red, and the younger one was somewhat more black.

The first one was as headstrong as a ram and the second was as fierce as a bull.

What happened to them? What could have happened?

SHEBIKA. Maybe they were struck by a poison snake?

HYLLUS. Did a snake ever strike at you, Themis?

SHEBIKA. No, I have a cap that keeps them away, a cap with a snake that sticks out of it.

HYLLUS. A gold crown with a cobra and vulture?

SHEBIKA. Yes, that's it!

HYLLUS. Where on earth did you get it?

SHEBIKA. From Pytho. She found it in the cave, the same cave where she found me and the bones and teeth.

HYLLUS. Bones and teeth?

SHEBIKA. A cobra's teeth and bones of men.

HYLLUS. Bones of young men, perhaps? Bones of children? Young children?

SHEBIKA. They were small.

HYLLUS. Where are they now? Are they still in the cave?

SHEBIKA. No. Smmri buried them, Smmri the priest.

HYLLUS. Smmri the priest buried the little bones?
Could they have been the bones of two babies?

SHEBIKA. I'll ask Pytho, and she can ask the priest.

HYLLUS. I'll ask her myself.

SHEBIKA. She won't speak to you.
She is not allowed to talk to women
unless they are Greek, but I'll talk to her.

HYLLUS. I need to know if the twins are alive.

SHEBIKA. Maybe I can get an answer for you.
What more can you tell me about them?

HYLLUS. Their two names are Shabak and Tcharuqu.²⁴
Their father was Achilles, but he's gone.
Some angry men destroyed him in a fire.²⁵
His father is known as lord Aegeus
because he rules in the high mountain lake
from which the mighty river Nile flows down
to Egypt and the sea.²⁶ I live there now,
in Napata, beside that mountain lake.

SHEBIKA. Are you the queen in that land?

HYLLUS. No, I'm not.
The ruling queen is Neferukashta,
the most beautiful of women in Kush.
She had a hundred suitors, maybe more,
but she married Illi, the prince of Troy,
the same king who I now called Aegeus.
Greeks here call her Helen, Helen of Troy,
Troy in the delta. Have you heard of Troy?

²⁴ **Tcharuqu** (tcha-rw-q, *mountain lion child*, "Taharqa") succeeded Shabakka as regent for Shabakka's minor son Bakare Tantamani. That story was a source for the legend of Saul (saw-l, *lion guardian*) and David. [See Vol. 1, chapter 20 (ed).]

²⁵ **Achilles**: the mummy of Achilles was destroyed in Tirezah, the tomb of his Amazon wife Ptrukis.

²⁶ **Aegeus** (edj-ewa-z, *he looks after the edge*, "Aegeus") was a title of the lord of Napata (npri-ta, *brim land*), the city below the fourth cataract of the Nile. Above that city was ancient Qash (q-sh, *mountain lake*, "Kesh"), said to be the place where waters from heaven overflowed into the Nile. To secure access to Egypt after the death of his first wife, Achilles married Theban heiress Tchpyrys ("Alcmena"). He died not long after that marriage, but his death was not admitted in public. He left Alcmena pregnant with twins who grew up to be kings of Nile dynasty 25, Shabaka and Taharqa. Argives and later Spartans commonly appropriated their stories, calling them Iphicles (or Eurystheus) and Heracles.

SHEBIKA. Never heard of it.

HYLLUS. Pytho knows it well.

SHEBIKA. I can ask her your question tomorrow,
your question about the twins who came here,
if she has time—

HYLLUS. My question can't wait.

SHEBIKA. I'm not allowed to talk to her right now.

HYLLUS. She ought to be happy to talk to you.
Tell her that Hyllus is here with Kadmus.

CHORUS #2. O Medea, look now! It's king Kadmus,
but where's his crown?

HYLLUS. What's wrapped around his head?

CHORUS #2. Some kind of vine?

SHEBIKA. They are leaves of Daphnis.

CHORUS #3. Who?

SHEBIKA. Daphnis, the girl who turned into a tree.²⁷
The seer is with him.

CHORUS #2. What's he holding?
A fleece? Enter GYGES with laurel boughs and SMMRI with a sacrificed lamb.

3. Gyges, Hyllus, Smmri, Shebika and Chorus

GYGES. Greetings to my beautiful wife!
I hope that sphinx has not frightened you.

HYLLUS. Kadmus, good husband, I am no longer in fear,
now that you are here. What have you seen?

GYGES. All is well insofar as I can tell.
What do you say, Smmri?

SMMRI. Queen Medea,
I saw this morning that two young children
have resurrected, two growing boys

²⁷ **Daphnis** (djaf-ns): *fire tongue* or perhaps *fire flame*. The slavers may have burnt uncooperative slave women and made stories to cover up the atrocities. By Ovid's time, Daphnis had been transformed into bay laurel worn by poets. Pentecost may be a Christian revision.

are now in heaven.²⁸ They appeared to me
in the clouds, but I could have been deceived,
of course.

HYLLUS. Princes?

SMMRI. The titan will tell all.
King Kadmus, please wait here for a moment,
and excuse me now. I need time to prepare.
Then this boy will show you into the tomb.

GYGES. Yes, of course, Smmri. Go ahead.

SMMRI. Come, boy. *Exit SMMRI and SHEBIKA through the squeaky gate into the sphinx.*
They leave the gate open.

GYGES. O dear Medea, I am so sorry
that you must bear the sight of this ruin.

HYLLUS. It is the sphinx of Laius. I know it.
It is.

GYGES. The priest does not admit it.

HYLLUS. No?

GYGES. I swear to you, I will learn the truth,
even if I must consult Musaeus
herself.²⁹ If it is the ancient tomb
of Laius, or any of our ancestors,
every stone will be returned to the Nile
where it belongs!

HYLLUS. The priest is Smmri?

GYGES. So he says.

HYLLUS. He served the Amazon
and Achilles?³⁰

²⁸ **Two sons:** in the dawn sky, the twins (“Gemini”) are replacing their mother (“Orion”).

²⁹ **Musaeus** (mu-u-sesh-ea-s, *the great lady scribe of the dancers*): an epithet for Tiresias (fl. 1530-1510 BCE) who documented the wars of the Hyksos expulsion, the rise of the Amazon dynasty at Thebes, the introduction of the great law into Egypt, and the alliances of the Thebans with Phoenicians, Babylonians and Keblites that established the third empire (“the New Kingdom”). Onomacritus (wawa-m-krht-u-s, *she takes counsel from ancestral spirits*), an epithet for Athena, brought texts of Musaeus to Athens in the time of Pisistratus.

³⁰ **The Amazon:** Ptrokis (“Patroclus”), first wife of Achilles. She was killed in the Argonaut invasion, and Achilles buried her in a step pyramid in Tirezah, near Bubastis. Smre was her ka-priest.

GYGES. He claims that he served them.

HYLLUS. Do you believe that we can trust him?

GYGES. He knows who I am and why I have come.
He also knows the Amazons are here
to recover their old palace.³¹

HYLLUS. My sons?
Did he tell you anything about them?

GYGES. He says the titan Prometheus
can tell me of them. She is in the sphinx.

HYLLUS. I don't understand why he put you off.
Enter SHEBIKA from the sphinx; he leaves the gate open.
That ram-bodied child could be my Shabak.
He could be. I can't tell. He is not Greek.
He says he does not know where he came from.
He calls himself Themis.

GYGES. How old is he?

HYLLUS. I asked him, but he could not tell me.

GYGES. He looks to me as if he's ten years old.
Were you able to speak to the priestess?

HYLLUS. No, not yet. I am not allowed entry
to the tomb, but it seems that you can go in.

GYGES. Well, I won't keep the titan waiting.
Doris, where are the loaves? *The bread has been devoured.*

CHORUS #2. This young fellow
already took them in.

SHEBIKA. Now we can go,
also.

GYGES. And the queen and these servants?

SHEBIKA. Women can't go in, unless they are Greek.

GYGES. Women can't go in, unless they are Greek?
Why is that?

³¹ **Amazons** and Thebans will oppose each other in the first Trojan War. They are divided over the two marriages of Achilles, the former supporting Ptrokis and the later supporting Medea.

SHEBIKA. Those are the rules.

HYLLUS. We will wait.

GYGES. Shall I go with the boy?

HYLLUS. Yes, take the beer.

When you return, I will meet you out here.

GYGES *taking the beer*. From you I'll take the brew. Lead the way, boy.

SHEBIKA. I can go with you most of the way,
but you must go alone to see Pytho. *Exit GYGES and SHEBIKA into the sphinx.*
The boy closes the squeaky gate.

CHORUS #1. O Medea, nearby down that path
I saw an altar to Artemis.³²
I think the Greeks may allow women
to pray there.

CHORUS #2. Veiled women are allowed.

CHORUS #1. You could cover yourself with your shawl.

HYLLUS. Yes, I'll go there and pray.

CHORUS #1. I'll go with you.

HYLLUS. No, you have no cover. I'll go alone.

CHORUS #1. I fear for you here among these strangers.

HYLLUS. I'll be safe. Send word when Kadmus comes out.

CHORUS #3. Good queen, what will I do with the wine?

CHORUS #2. You had best not give it to that boy!

HYLLUS. No, let the boy take it in, if he will. *Exit HYLLUS, leaving the CHORUS alone.*

CHORUS #2. That child was not sprung from any hill,
yet he looks Egyptian. If he is one
of your lady's twins, she never said so.
Maybe she will not recognize the boy?

³² **Artemis** (ar-ti-ms, *birth protects the queen*): the queen will be protected if she produces an heir. The altar of Artemis is conceived as off-stage opposite the sphinx, behind the audience.

Maybe she can favor him no longer?
Maybe Kadmus wants an heir of his blood?³³

CHORUS #1. The boy must be a son of Achilles.
Who cannot see in him the strong likeness?
If his royal birthright now is made known,
will he face danger here? And what of Kush?
Will the highlanders accept him as king,
if the child is thought to be Medea's?

CHORUS #3. If this young Themis is our prince Shabak,
then where is his twin brother? Will that pair
ever be restored to their true mother?
Maybe both sons are living, maybe not.
Who can expect that both will be found
after such long years of separation?

CHORUS #1. I can't wait to leave this accursed land!
How I long to go home!

CHORUS #2. Do they still play
pipes and lyres? Do they still remember
the old songs?

CHORUS #3. I can't forget how to dance
with a jug. *Enter SHEBIKA after closing the squeaky gate behind him.*

4. Chorus, Shebika, Gyges

SHEBIKA. Visitors, where is your queen?

CHORUS #1. She prays at the altar of Artemis.

CHORUS #2. Will she bear a child?

CHORUS #3. What did Io say?

SHEBIKA. I can't tell you what Prometheus said.

CHORUS #2. Is it a secret?

SHEBIKA. Only Pytho knows,
Prometheus tells Pytho the priestess.

CHORUS #2. Pytho the priestess can hear the titan?

³³ **An heir of his own blood:** in Medu succession, Gyges (ruling c. 720-682 BCE) was succeeded by his daughter Ardys (ar-dd(y)-s, *she of Djiddjdu holds out*, 682-633). In Theban succession, Medea was succeeded by Shabakka, her eldest son by Achilles. That dispute fueled the second Trojan War, c. 690-664 BCE).

SHEBIKA. Yes, that's right.

CHORUS #2. What did she say? Do you know?

SHEBIKA. I can't tell you that. It's a secret.

CHORUS #2. You're not allowed to hear what Pytho says?

SHEBIKA. I'm not allowed to say what I have heard.

CHORUS #3. *offering a drink.* Themis, darling, those cakes must have been dry.
Would you like a drink?

SHEBIKA. What's in the jug? *The gate sounds for a third time.*
Wait, I hear the gate. It must be your king.

CHORUS #1. I'll fetch Medea.

CHORUS #2. Which way did she go?

CHORUS #1. I'll search this direction

CHORUS #2. I'll search that way.

CHORUS #3. Themis, will you take the jug?

SHEBIKA *taking the jug of wine.* I have it.

CHORUS #3. It's for the prophet.

CHORUS #1. Don't drink all of it!

CHORUS #2. Tell the king that Medea will meet him
here.

Exit CHORUS in three directions. SHEBIKA waits by a column with the jug. Enter GYGES from the sphinx.

GYGES. There you are! You're the one! Yes, boy, you,
you with the jug! Wait! Where are you going?

SHEBIKA. It's for Apollonius, the prophet.

GYGES. This land is dry. It must be purified.
I'll pour a libation.

He takes the jug, pours out the wine and returns it empty to the boy.

Now keep this jug
forever to remember this day,
and after I'm gone think where you got it.
Do you have any idea who you are?
What name will I call you?

SHEBIKA. I am Themis.

GYGES. I'll call you Ion, for I found you here standing upright like a mighty column.³⁴ Hereafter you will uphold my house in Kemet.³⁵

SHEBIKA. Kemet?

GYGES. All of the black lands of the Nile will be yours hereafter, if I can keep them for you.

SHEBIKA. For me?

GYGES. Your ransom will cost more than any king before you, but I'll find some way to pay.

SHEBIKA. You will pay for me?

GYGES. To buy your freedom. I'll be giving up everything I've got, but you, Ion, you will be my treasure!

SHEBIKA. I'll be yours?

GYGES. You will be Medea's and mine until you come of age. We'll leave this place.

SHEBIKA. What about Pytho? She doesn't want me?

GYGES. You may be a king someday, a great king of all the Nile, so embrace your future! Give me a hug, Ion!

SHEBIKA. Please don't touch me!

GYGES. You are as my own son, my only son! Let me kiss you! How I have longed for a son!

SHEBIKA. I'm not your son!

GYGES. It must be marvelous to you as it is to me!

³⁴ **Ion** (*lwn, column or pillar*): Gardiner catalog sign O28.

³⁵ **Kemet**: *black land*, i.e., land of the dark alluvial soils of the Nile.

SHEBIKA. I'm not your son!
I sprang from the cave!

GYGES *laughing*. Who told you that?

SHEBIKA. Pytho did. Why do you laugh?

GYGES. She was right!
You are as Egypt sprung from a hill,
my hill! The sphinx confirmed it. She said,
"Kadmus, find Kemet here among the pillars.
He will be your heir."³⁶ Immediately
I came out to these pillars, and right here
you are, Ion, like a column of stone.
Look at those shoulders! How strong you will be!

SHEBIKA. You are my father?

GYGES. To you I will be
as a father.

SHEBIKA. I'm not your son?

GYGES. You are,
figuratively speaking, my son,
not actually my natural son,
but the boy who will succeed to my throne.
I'll adopt you. If it is allowed,
I'll adopt you.

SHEBIKA. Pytho is my mother?

GYGES. No, I'm afraid that impossible.
She's the god's wife.

SHEBIKA. I'm the son of the god?

GYGES. Ion, there's no god here, so the god's wife
has not borne any sons or daughters.

SHEBIKA. I've seen statues of children of the gods.
I can show them to you.

GYGES. Yes, I've seen them.
They are statues the Greeks took from the Nile,
the river where the gods used to reside.

³⁶ **Kemet** is a pun referring to a jar or to Egypt.

They're all gone now, the gods and statues.
I suspect that you also were taken
in Egypt, and brought here to serve the thieves
and maintain the stolen statues for them,
but you are not made of stone, my boy.
You are like stone, but you are flesh and blood.
Have you heard of Jason and the Argo?
He invaded Egypt, and carried off
the gold and silver he found, and also
the women and children.

SHEBIKA. Pytho told me.

GYGES. You are not white like Europeans here.
We are red or black like the people
of Thebes or Napata in the far south
where we will live when I take you home.

SHEBIKA. Is my mother there?

GYGES. Not at this moment.

SHEBIKA. No? Is she here? Medea, the queen,
she had two sons.

GYGES. She told you?

SHEBIKA. Is she
my mother?

GYGES. I will tell you later, Ion.
Where is Medea now?

SHEBIKA. With Artemis.
She has gone to the shrine of the goddess.

GYGES. And her attendants? Did they go with her?
Where is everyone?

SHEBIKA. They will meet you here.
I think I see them now. *Enter CHORUS #1-2.*

5. Chorus #1-2, Gyges, Shebika

CHORUS #2. O King Kadmus,
I cannot find Medea.

CHORUS #1. I thought she was nearby.

GYGES. I have news! Yes,
I received wonderful news from the sphinx!

CHORUS #2. Our mistress is going to have a child?

GYGES. No, the news is more wonderful than that.

CHORUS #1. Medea will have many children?

GYGES. No! I have an heir! I mean, already
I have him. Here he is! This young man
is mine! He is my successor.

CHORUS #1. Themis?

GYGES. I call him Ion, the pillar.

CHORUS #2. This boy?

GYGES. I'll redeem him from Apollonius.
Yes, I must pay a king's ransom for him,
a price greater than ever paid before,
but somehow I will scrape it up. I must!
Who would not give everything for a son?

CHORUS #1. Ion is your son?

GYGES. He will be your lord.

CHORUS #2. What a fortunate child you are, Ion!
You will lead a princely life, the best life
there is in this world! Congratulations!

GYGES. Doris, you will serve Ion hereafter.
You will be his.

CHORUS #2. I'll serve him faithfully!

GYGES. Keep him out of trouble.

CHORUS #2. I will!

CHORUS #1. Good king,
you must hear me! Please listen!

GYGES. What's wrong?
All of the news is too good to be true?
What can it be that I forgot this time?

CHORUS #1. Let me not offend in what I must say.
Kadmus, I must speak the truth in my heart.

GYGES. The truth! Be careful that your truth is true.

CHORUS #1. If Ion is your son, who is his mother?

GYGES. That will be revealed to you hereafter.

CHORUS #1. What will you tell Medea about it?

GYGES. I'll tell her what Pytho said to me.

CHORUS #1. That this beautiful young man is your son?

GYGES. He will be your lord.

CHORUS #1. Who was his mother?

GYGES. There are no secrets between Medea and me.

CHORUS #1. Ion must have been born before you married Medea. How old are you, Ion? How many years old? Are you ten? If this boy was born outside of marriage, he cannot ever become lord of Thebes.

GYGES. He will be king!

CHORUS #1. Our law does not allow it—

GYGES. This matter is none of your concern!

CHORUS #1. My concern is only for Medea. She bore two sons to Achilles: twins.

GYGES. I know.

CHORUS #1. Those twins are her heirs. Do you think they died? There is no evidence that they are dead.

GYGES. I have not given up the search for them.

CHORUS #1. Do you not claim that this boy is your heir?

GYGES. He's heir apparent. Pytho declared it.

CHORUS #1. And she heard it from Prometheus?

GYGES. Right.

CHORUS #1. Kadmus, you place faith in this damned sphinx cobbled from ruins of the tomb of Laius?

GYGES. I'll hear no more—

CHORUS #1. Do you not recognize
these steps as stolen from houses of Re?

GYGES. Enough! Say no more! This is blasphemy!

CHORUS #1. My allegiance is only to Re!

GYGES. Your loose tongue puts all of us in danger!

SHEBIKA. I don't mind staying here with Pytho.

GYGES. No, son, as soon as your ransom is paid,
we leave for Egypt. There's much work ahead.

First, you will be known as Electryon
for you will serve the lord of the river.³⁷

In time, you will be known as Theseus,
for your protection of travelers,
and you will serve the honor of the queen.³⁸

Come now, the Greeks are met in assembly
They expect ransoms, and they must be paid.

CHORUS #1. O Kadmus, don't be rash, I beg you!
First consult with Medea!

GYGES. Silence!
Say not another word! Where's the queen?

CHORUS #2. I searched the temple of Artemis,
but I did not find her.

CHORUS #1. Where's Medea?

GYGES. Wait here for her, and attend to her
after she arrives, but of those things
Pytho said to me do not speak to her.

CHORUS #1. Are you not afraid that she's in danger?

GYGES. I have trusted you with a secret.
As you love life, do not betray my trust!

CHORUS #2. Surely, she will ask where you have gone.

³⁷ **Electryon** (l-ekyt-re-ion, *Ion, servant of the lord Re*): young heirs may have studied their forefathers in libraries and collections connected to royal tombs.

³⁸ **Theseus**: thi-z(i)-ewa-z, *he cares for the wandering man*, or ti-hsi-ewa-z, *he cares for the honor of the queen*. [On Homer's puns, see Vol. 3, chapter 58 (ed).]

GYGES. Tell her that we will meet here at mid-day,
as planned. Let her be prepared to sail
immediately. Ion, bring the jug.
Stay close to me. *Exit GYGES and SHEBIKA.*

CHORUS #1. That child was found abandoned in a cave?
How can he be the son of Medea?
Why then is he adopted as our prince?
Who in their right mind can believe Pytho?
Her prophecy is an obvious fraud.
What foundling ever became lord of Thebes?

CHORUS #2. Don't you understand? The boy is your prince;
he's a son of Achilles by your queen.
She has crossed over the sea to free him.
Kadmus will adopt him as king of Kush.
The boy's identity is kept secret,
even from himself, lest the Greeks find out.

CHORUS #1. I fear your king plays false with my lady.
Has he hidden his lover from his wife?
Has that woman raised this child in secret,
waiting for Kadmus to acknowledge them?
If so, our mistress will be cast aside.
Already he is careless of her safety.

CHORUS #2. Kadmus is an honorable man!
Do not tarnish his good reputation
with your ruinous lies and gossip.
Do not libel the boy as a bastard.
I'm sure that somehow Medea will prove
that the boy is her legitimate son.

CHORUS #1. I will believe it when she proves it.
Who raised the boy here on Parnassus?
Pytho raised him. Why would she raise the child
of another woman? Who is the voice
of the oracle? Pytho in the sphinx.
She tells us what she wants us to believe.

CHORUS #2. Here comes Medea now with an old man.
Who is he?

CHORUS #1. Do you not recognize him? *Enter HYLLUS, CANDAWIS and CHORUS #3 slowly.*

6. Chorus #1-3, Candawis disguised as an old man, Hyllus

CHORUS #3. Some enemy here may recognize you,
Candawis. You need to watch your language.

CANDAWIS. My thoughts now are more angry than before.

HYLLUS. Control them, Candawis.

CANDAWIS. I am furious!

How can you pretend to be at peace with thieves!

CHORUS #3. Old man, let me help you up these high steps.
Lean on your staff. Give me your other hand.

CANDAWIS. Look at these! This stone is from Iunu.

And that one from Wadjet! You must know them.

Are you not enraged?

CHORUS #3. Silence, Candawis!

HYLLUS *to the chorus*. My loyal attendants, where is Kadmus?

Has he come from the sphinx?

CHORUS #1. Yes, he was here.

HYLLUS. The news is good? I'll be blessed with a child?

What's wrong? He did not tell you? What did he say?

CHORUS #2. He will return here by noon, as planned.

That is what he told me.

HYLLUS. Where did he go?

You don't look happy.

CHORUS #1. How will I tell you?

HYLLUS. Some misfortune has happened, is that it?

CHORUS #1. I'm at a loss for words.

HYLLUS. Tell me what is wrong!

Why won't you tell me?

CHORUS #1. Please, don't be upset.

CANDAWIS. Your silence is upsetting! What's the news?

Medea will not have any children?

Kadmus will have his marriage annulled?

He will have her killed?

CHORUS #2. It's nothing like that.
The news is good for those who have good ears.

CANDAWIS. Where is he?

CHORUS #2. He is paying a ransom.

CHORUS #1. A royal ransom.

CANDAWIS. He ransoms a king?

CHORUS #1. A man child who was found in a cave.

HYLLUS. Themis?

CHORUS #1. He's Ion now. Kadmus calls him Ion
and Theseus, too, for he will be our lord.

HYLLUS. The temple boy I met this morning?

CHORUS #1. Yes.

CANDAWIS. A king's ransom is to be paid for him?
Outrageous!

CHORUS #2. The boy will be your next lord of Thebes.

CANDAWIS. Who determined that succession?

CHORUS #1. Pytho:
she heard it from Prometheus himself.

CHORUS #2. We were forbidden to discuss these things!
They were secret.

CHORUS #1. Medea needs to know!

CANDAWIS. Who is this Pytho to disinherit
Medea's sons? Who is Prometheus?

CHORUS #1. Ion is Pytho's son. So it seems to me.

CANDAWIS. I'll kill the little bastard! I'll kill him.

CHORUS #2. That's treason! Hold your tongue, old man.

CANDAWIS. Treason? You mean that the boy is the son
of Kadmus?

CHORUS #2. No, you fool, that's not what I mean at all.
Why do you mistake everything I say?

CANDAWIS. How many wives does Kadmus have?

HYLLUS. Kadmus is an honorable man!

CANDAWIS. How many women has he known?

CHORUS #2. Shut your mouth! You slander my good king!

In the sphinx, Kadmus was told he would find
the next lord of Thebes among the pillars.

As he left the shrine, passing the columns,

he found the temple boy. That is why

he calls him Ion, and he promises

to act like father to the young man.

He never claimed that Ion is his son.

CHORUS #1. I saw him hugging and kissing the boy
as his own son. Did you not see him?

CHORUS #2. He never said that Ion was his son.

Speak the truth here or else hold your tongue.

CHORUS #1. Doris, you serve Ion now. Is that true?

Kadmus has given you to his son.

CHORUS #2. I serve Ion by order of Kadmus.

HYLLUS. Please, let's have no more bickering today.

I am full of joy.

CANDAWIS. Joy? How can you be happy? Don't you see

what has happened? When Kadmus married you,

he promised to recover your sons,

but he lied to you from the beginning.

He never intended to find your sons.

He had a son by another woman,

and he kept that boy hidden from you.

CHORUS #2. Those are lies!

HYLLUS. Kadmus is not deceitful!

CANDAWIS. He hid the bastard here on Parnassus

until the Amazon priest declared him

prince of Thebes.

CHORUS #2. There's another lie!

HYLLUS. I know Kadmus. I know his mind.

CANDAWIS. Open your eyes, Medea.

CHORUS #2. Old man,
you are the blind one.

CANDAWIS. The Greeks even now
are gathering in council to acknowledge
Ion as heir to the crown, but I'll stop them!
They must be stopped!

HYLLUS. What are you saying?

CANDAWIS. We must kill the Greeks before they kill us.
If we don't act now our lives will be lost.

CHORUS #2. You will fight the whole assembly?

CANDAWIS. Amazons are no cowards as you are!

HYLLUS. Calm down, old man.

CANDAWIS. Who will go with me?

CHORUS #2. Are you drunk? You are ridiculous.

CANDAWIS. Once we attack, the slaves will rise up
against their masters. There are many more
slaves than Greeks.

CHORUS #2. You count on slaves for support?
Their fear of the Greeks is far greater
than their hope to be free. No, I won't join you.

CHORUS #1. I will stay with the queen.

CHORUS #3. As I will, too.

CANDAWIS. I will go alone, then.

HYLLUS. I forbid it!
I forbid you to go!

CANDAWIS. I will save you,
Medea, or die in the attempt!

HYLLUS. Wait, old man! Don't be rash!

CANDAWIS. The throne must not pass to a foreigner! *Exit CANDAWIS to the side.*

CHORUS #3. That was no old man.

CHORUS #1. That was Candawis.

HYLLUS. Yes, stop her if you can! Bring her back! *EXIT CHORUS #3, following after Candawis.*

CHORUS #1. Candawis is loyal to you, Medea.

CHORUS #2. She is deranged! The Greeks will laugh at her.

CHORUS #1. They will kill her when they learn who she is.

CHORUS #2. She had no reason to accuse Kadmus.

HYLLUS. I must speak to Pytho, the priestess.

She sent for me to come to Parnassus.

Her message told me that here I would find

Shabakka. Doris, will you find Pytho,

and ask her to come here?

CHORUS #2. Yes, I will go,

and soon I will return to you with her.

HYLLUS. Tell her to bring the boy, if she can!

Go quickly! *Exit CHORUS #2 into the sphinx.*

CHORUS #1. I'm afraid for you, Medea.

I fear Pytho and Kadmus will trap you.

HYLLUS. Don't you see? My son, my son Shabak

is the child of the cave. As soon as I saw him

I remembered Achilles as a boy.

Did I never tell you how Peleus

brought him to Thebes when I was a child?

My father rejected their suit, of course,

because I was so young, but I loved him

at first sight. When he married the Amazon,

it broke my heart, but I'll tell you the truth:

I grieved with him when he lost her. Nothing

more revealed the purity of his heart

than the pyramid he built for her.³⁹

I was far more in love with Achilles

on the day of our marriage than before.

That day was the happiest of my life.

Themis is my Shabak. It must be so.

³⁹ **Pyramid** (p-y-re-mdt, *word of the second Re*, cf. Greek "pyre"): name of the memorial that Achilles built for his Amazon wife Ptwkas Ibar (pt-rw-ka-s, *body of the lioness of heaven*, i-ba-r, *Re true of voice*, "Patroklos," "Abar"). Constructed at Tirzah, site of house of Tiresheas, near Bubastis, the pyramid may have resembled the tomb of Tcharuq at Nuri, but likely it was a ziggurat step-pyramid made of mud-brick. It was destroyed by enemies, c. 725 BCE, but rebuilt by Omri of Israel, c. 730 BCE. That "tower of Babel" was destroyed by Sennacherib at the end of the first Trojan War, c. 700 BCE.

CHORUS #1. He is not the son of Kadmus?

HYLLUS. No!

This is Pytho's plan to free the boy.
We trick the Greeks. Thinking he is the son
of some common girl, they will let him go.
If they learn that he is heir to the Nile,
they will hold him here or they will kill him.

CHORUS #1. Finally, I understand the riddle!

HYLLUS. These are secrets that I have told to you.

CHORUS #1. Trust me, I will keep your secrets. I am sorry
for all that I said in my ignorance.

I hope Candawis does not spoil your plan.
Her hatred of these Greeks knows no bounds.

HYLLUS. They murdered Ptrukas, her mistress.
Candawis follows the old warrior code
of the Amazons. She will be avenged
even if she must die in the attempt.

CHORUS #1. What if the Greeks won't release your son?
What if they already know who he is
and who you are?

HYLLUS. I'm prepared to die
As the Amazons fought of old, so will I.
I'll be fearless as Pallas was that day
when she rushed into battle at Phlegra.⁴⁰
She wore a picture of the Gorgon's head
on her breastplate, and it foretold his doom.

CHORUS #1. Your serpents!

HYLLUS. Yes, these serpents of Wadjet
appeared along the borders of her shawl.⁴¹ *Enter Messenger, an Amazon.*

⁴⁰ **Pallas** (pa-ll-s, *she of the two lions*) led forces of Troy against the invasion of **the Gorgon** (grg-wn, *liar*) Medusa. Later writers transformed the scene to a battle between giants and gods at Pallene in Thrace or on the Phlegraeon Plain in Italy, but historical memory of Pallas remained during the Saite dynasty, and Athena brought the image to Athens when she married Pisistratus.

⁴¹ **Pallas** is imaged at the head of this chapter. Her shawl is lined with snakes. Our standard classical image of Pallas Athena derives from the Periclean temple that replaced Athena's house on the acropolis. It is inappropriate to call that second temple "the Parthenon." Athena was the queen mother of Athens, not its virgin goddess!

7. Messenger, Chorus #1, Hyllus

MESSENGER. Where is Medea, the wife of Kadmus?

CHORUS #1. She is here, girl. What news do you bring her?

HYLLUS. What is the matter?

MESSENGER. O queen Medea,
I come from the council of the Greeks.
It's on fire. The nobles are trapped inside
a burning tent.

CHORUS #1. I must prepare to die.

MESSENGER. Servants outside are trying to stop the flames.

CHORUS #1. This is my last day!

MESSENGER. No, our enemies
are surrounded. We have trapped the Greeks
and their slaves. Our archers shoot them as they
try to escape.

CHORUS #1. An army supports us?

MESSENGER. An Amazon army.

HYLLUS. Where is Kadmus?

MESSENGER. I hope he survived, and his son also.
I can't be sure.

HYLLUS. Tell me all that you know.
Tell me clearly. What happened?

MESSENGER. Where to begin?
I met Kadmus the king and Ion on their way
to the place of assembly where the prince
was to be ransomed. I escorted them,
and at the place of meeting we met
Greek workers constructing a huge tent.
As noon was approaching, Kadmus led Ion
up the mountain to pray at the cave
but I stayed below to keep watch on the Greeks.
Their tent was large enough to shelter
a hundred men from the mid-day heat,

and inside it they hung rich tapestries.
Then they brought in spoils of pure gold and silver.

CHORUS #1. Riches robbed from Egypt?

HYLLUS. What did you see?

MESSENGER. Precious things indeed, stolen treasures,
gold and silver images of their night sky,
the great plough above the golden pole,
giant Orion with his glittering belt,
giving chase to our mother Pleiades,
and Hyades marking the sailors' path
from here to Egypt. Then came Priam's daughters
twelve of them from the time of Cecrops,⁴²
and the arms of warriors who the Argives killed,
including the armors of Achilles.

CHORUS #1. Ruins of Thebes!

MESSENGER. Of Priam's palace!

HYLLUS. The Greeks held their assembly in that tent?

MESSENGER. Yes, the tables were spread for a rich feast,
and a herald danced all round them
inviting garlanded guests arriving
in large numbers. They crowded into the tent
to partake of the delights while the priest
Apollonius stood in their midst
with a bowl from which he read the dregs of wine.

HYLLUS. All the Greeks are trapped? They are burning?

MESSENGER. When they had assembled in the tent,
I stepped away, and gave the signal.
flaming arrows then began to fall
as lightning from the sky. Greeks cursed and screamed
as fire surrounded them.

HYLLUS. Where were Kadmus
and Ion? Had they returned from the cave?

⁴² **Cecrops** (sy-khrw-wps, *she scatters the defeated enemy*): post-Athenian myth changed this Amazon figure to an eponymous founder of Athens. The daughters of Priam were mummies of Nile queens

MESSENGER. I did not see them. I turned away
and ran quickly to report to you.

CHORUS #1. No Greeks were escaping? You're sure of that?

MESSENGER. I don't know what happened after I left.
I can return to the fire and bring word
of further developments, if you wish.

HYLLUS. Please go, but be careful.

MESSENGER. Yes, certainly. *Exit MESSENGER*

8. Chorus #1, Hyllus, Shebika, Maeri

CHORUS #1. Medea, if any Greeks find us here,
what will they do to us? Can't we leave now?

HYLLUS. Let them throw me headlong from the rock,
I'll not sail without my husband and son.

CHORUS #1. We will be stoned or worse! We must not die
in this evil land! Our souls are in peril.

Let's go!

HYLLUS. I'm sure they will be here soon.

CHORUS #1. When?

HYLLUS. We should not have to wait for very long.

CHORUS #1. In the meantime, let's hide in the sphinx.

Is it not a sanctuary? It is
forbidden by law to kill suppliants
in any sanctuary.

HYLLUS. That is our law,
not the practice of these barbarians.

CHORUS #1. I think only of your safety, Medea. *Enter SHEBIKA from the side.*

HYLLUS. Shebika, you are safe! Where is the king?

SHEBIKA. We went to free the snakes. I set them loose.
They never bite me.

HYLLUS. But where is Kadmus?

SHEBIKA. Burying a snake. I did not mean to shoot
her. I aimed at a bird that threatened her.

CHORUS #1. Where is Kadmus, child?

SHEBIKA. He sent me down here.

HYLLUS. He will be here soon, and then we will leave together, my son. We will sail for home!
Our ship is ready.

CHORUS #1. It may be ready,
but which way does the wind blow? Do you feel it?
It isn't the cool of a north wind,
or sweetness of the east. I fear it blows
from the west. Even if we reach the sea,
we will be trapped in the gulf.

SHEBIKA. Where is Pytho?

HYLLUS. Have you not seen her?

SHEBIKA. No.

HYLLUS. We will not leave
without her.

CHORUS #1. Wait for Pytho! What are you saying now?

HYLLUS. We leave together, or die together. *Enter MAERI with a woven basket.*

MAERI. Hail to you, Tchphtperisis, Alcmena,
mother and nurse of the sons of Achilles,
the orphans Shabak and Tcharuqu.

HYLLUS. Maeri, strangely out of place we seem to be,
like these steps, like this tomb, like this child.
You were the caretaker of Achilles!

MAERI. I was, but since that day on Shemer hill⁴³
when we parted, I have cared for this fine child,
your eldest son Shabak. Always hoping
for his day of freedom, I raised him
as well as I could here in this hell hole.
Now the time has come. He returns to you.

HYLLUS. The weave of that basket under your arm
looks familiar. Its reeds are Egyptian?

⁴³[**Shemer**: this episode appears in chapter 74 above (ed).]

MAERI. Egyptian indeed. This is your basket.
In it I carried this boy away that day
when we were beset by wolves. Remember?

HYLLUS. How could I forget?

MAERI. Achilles and I
took the child in this basket to Tirzah.
We went with Leah and her chariots,
and we laid Achilles in his pyramid.
Leah stayed there to watch over him,
but I went on with this child and Smmri
the ka-priest, seeking help from Bubastis.

HYLLUS. You did not return. What happened to you?

MAERI. We never reached that city. On our way
across the plain, Antenor seized us,
and he brought us bound to his queen Io.

SHEBIKA. I don't remember any of these things.

MAERI. You were an infant, only two months old.
I was sure Io would execute you,
but she was very ill, and Loxias,
my captive sister, persuaded her
to build a sphinx for her tomb here in Greece.

SHEBIKA. This sphinx of Io? This is her tomb here.

MAERI. The Greeks had disassembled the great sphinx
of Laius in Thebes, and they had looted
several shrines of Re in the delta,
gathering up all of the stones they needed
for Io's tomb, but they did not know
how to care for immortals. That's where I
and the priest were needed for Io's plan.
Wise Smmri introduced you to Io
as his son Themis, and he promised
her that he would raise you to be a priest.

HYLLUS. Maeri, how can you know that Themis
is my child? How can you be certain?

MAERI. I was never separated from him.
He is Shabak, the foretold king of Thebes.

HYLLUS. You or Smmri made that prediction.

MAERI. We did and we sincerely believe it!
He will be lord of Thebes as is his right.

SHEBIKA. You never told me.

MAERI. For your safety, child,
I could not tell you. To prove what I say
is true, I have something your mother made.

HYLLUS. I recognize the basket.

SHEBIKA. What's in it?

MAERI. Here are infant swaddling clothes
in which your mother wrapped you. You wore them
when I took you from her. Here are your boots.

HYLLUS. They belong to a royal Egyptian.
Others cannot wear them.

You were wearing these when I last saw you!

MAERI. Indeed, he was! They are recognized
everywhere, even by the Greeks.
so I kept them hidden in the cave where
the great snake guarded them.

SHEBIKA. You mean Geia?⁴⁴

MAERI. Yes, and here is further proof of your birth:
it is the hilt of your father's scepter.

HYLLUS. Lycus took the scepter when he declared
himself judge of Egypt, and Candawis
took it from Iunu when we escaped.
I gave it to you, Maeri, so that you
could prove that you spoke for Achilles.

SHEBIKA. It's broken.

MAERI. It was broken by Antenor.
He threw it in two pieces in a lake,
but Smmri could find only the hilt half.

SHEBIKA. Half of it has rotted out!

⁴⁴ **Geia** (dj-ea, *the great snake*) lived in the cave of Corycea (kwi-re-y-sia, *perceived as being another Re*).

MAERI. It rotted
from moisture in the cave where I kept it.

SHEBIKA. Yes, I remember when it was longer.

HYLLUS. Pytho cared for you as a mother.

MAERI *handing the basket to Hyllus*. Alcmena will always be your mother.
She's queen of Thebes and now through marriage
future queen in Napata. I'm happy
for you but saddened that now we will part.

HYLLUS. Maeri, I won't leave here without you!
You will return with us now to the Nile.
Your testimony will be needed,
if our rivals claim that young Themis here
was born to you or to some unwed girl.

MAERI. I cannot have been mother to Shabak
or mother to any other infant.
I am a virgin. I was the god's wife
here in this godless temple. The sweet life
of motherhood I have not yet known,
and I promise that I'll never know it.

SHEBIKA. You forgot my crown. Look how small it is!

HYLLUS. Nothing in this basket ever belonged
to any slave. Here is more: a garland,
and relics undecayed. How unexpected!

MAERI.⁴⁵ If you will take my advice, Medea, these things should be dedicated to the god
by whose grace they have been preserved. Give them to the old house of Re in Athens.

HYLLUS. Why Athens?

MAERI. I hid this basket and its contents near Athens, in a seaside cave among the rocks of the
saber-tooth cats. It was called the cave of Cecrops. It was named for the Amazon queen who
enlightened the region a thousand years ago.

SHEBIKA. I have heard of a Greek city where citizens are free to speak their minds. Is that
Athens?

MAERI. That's right. That's Athens.

⁴⁵ **Marked in red**: a simulation of language that could have suited Athena's version of this play.

SHEBIKA. I would like to see that city. Can we go there?

HYLLUS. I hope that we will go there some day before I die, my son! And you will dedicate this baby basket to Re.

MAERI. I can show the cave to you.

HYLLUS. I hope you will, Maeri.

SHEBIKA *looking in the basket*. What is this thing?

HYLLUS. I recognize it. It is a bit of unfinished weaving that I made before you were born. It was to be a shawl embroidered with protective serpents all around its edges.

SHEBIKA. Like the cape you wear?

HYLLUS. Exactly.

SHEBIKA *taking an olive branch from the basket*. Here's something else, a twig with leaves still green.

MAERI. An olive branch I took from a tree that grew by the mouth of the cave. I have always kept a branch to help me find the place again. The tree still grows there.

HYLLUS. My son, give me a hug.

SHEBIKA *embracing her*. My dear mother!

HYLLUS. You are the son I have imagined,
one who was dead, who now returns to life.
To hear that you were living was as a dream,
but now to hold you here in my arms
in the light of this day, I know I'm awake.
I owe this happiness to you, Maeri.

MAERI. No, this miracle is a work of Re.

HYLLUS. It was in great pain that I gave you birth,
and in greater pain I lost you, but Re
brings me the greatest joy I could hope for.
Now Thebes is not childless any more.

MAERI. O Shabak, your father is in Re.
Great Achilles shines his face upon you,
and I hope one day you also will look down
from heaven and bring light to your son
in his hour of darkness.

HYLLUS. My son will have a son?

MAERI. You will find a wife for him in Egypt,
and she will bear a son to rule in Thebes
after him.⁴⁶

HYLLUS. We have suffered one misery
after another, but now our fortunes rise
from happiness to greater happiness.

MAERI. Each night Re falls into the sea but then
he rises again to bring light in the morning.
Like him, we have endured a great fall,
but now we will take hope for the future.

Enter MUSES #4, 5, 7, 8 & 9. They draw the curtain over the set, as HYLLUS steps forward to deliver the epilogue.

9. Hyllus as Athena

ATHENA. I am Athena, sister of your friend and ally David, who is judge of all the Nile and king in Babylon. To your famous city of Theseus and Pirithoüs, I have come with your judge Peisistratus and our sons Hippias and Hipparchus. The judge brings you our law, but I bring you our history. Today I have shown you my ancestor queen Tchphtperisis, who lived at the time of the Trojan War. You have seen how she bore Shabakka to the great warrior Achilles, judge of Thebes, how they suffered under the lawless Achaeans, and how they overcame adversity to restore the noble house into which I was born. Your enemies have hidden these things from you. They have slandered me and my sons, and my brother David and his children, but the true history of the Trojan War was recorded by Imnnirdis, the cousin of Achilles, and her Muses showed it to the people of Thebes. They saw the truth about their past, as now you see it, too.

Ion, son of Tchphtperisis and Achilles, established Ionia, a league of cities spread far and wide across the seas. You have known him here by his Greek name, Theseus. He built theaters all along the coasts. They are not theaters of Apollo or Dionysus, as your enemies claim. They are theaters of the great god Re who enlightens all the world.

The Medusas claim that Ion was the son of Gyges, their ancestor, but that claim is false, as you have seen. To usurp Babylon, the Medusa Aistyigis assassinated my cousin Neriglissar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, but David now has succeeded Neriglissar as great king in the east. He has established control of that region with assistance of Pisistratus. Your city now, through me and my sons, is joined in the great alliance that governs the world by law. A prosperous future

⁴⁶ **A son:** Shabaka's son Bakare Tantamani. The biography of Bakare and David are mixed in the book of Samuel. [For Djarew's studies of Samuel, see Vol. 1, chapters 19-20 (ed).]

now awaits you. Heaven may be slow to bring its glory to us, but in time it will come.

Exit ATHENA. Music.

CHORUS (singing). Sister of David and queen Bathsheba,
welcome to your home, built upon this rock.

As long ago your house withstood rages
of the Argives, so now it will endure
the dark storms of the lawless Medusas.

Our ancestor Theseus descended
from Parnassus, home of Geia, where he
learned the great law and grew into manhood.
Let us follow the mandate of heaven
and act with justice to find happiness.

THE END