



Penthesilea

The daughter of great-souled Ares
the slayer of men

Andres Manniste

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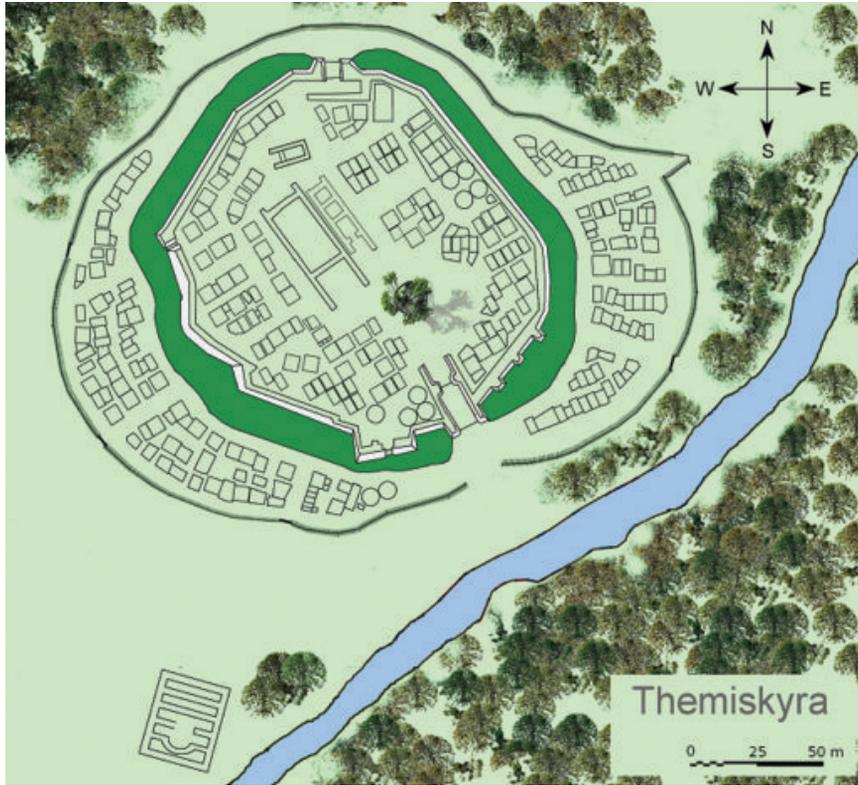


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Amazons never existed. Men would not have allowed it.
-Lynn Millette

Penthesilea





Panel 1: a bit mean

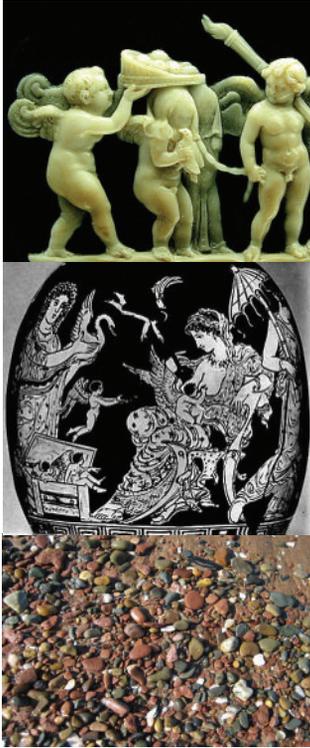
The Amazon princess Penthesilea, chasing a red fox up an embankment, allows herself to be caught unguarded by her companions Ainia and Bremusa. Avoiding a barrage of pebbles, the princess makes her way to the water's edge and successfully defends herself.

From a distance the clay walls and whitewashed gates gave Themiskyra an imposing profile, as permanent as stone, magical and impenetrable. The whole city was elevated above the river, its earthwork glacis sodded with grass and surrounded by a dry moat.

The land around Themiskyra had always been favourable for the controlled growth and prosperity that the Amazon queens preferred. There was a fertile plain just beyond where the modest river cut through the pebbles. Beyond the city to the south and southwest there were thick oak and pine forests and then hills and mountains. The prevailing winds and currents in this part of the sea were treacherous enough to protect



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the city from a naval assault yet a small but shallow harbour provided the Amazons an outlet in the summer months for commerce with more adventuresome navigators and traders.

Penthesilea had finally found her prey. The maidens were far beyond the gates, hunting upriver, where the Thermodon becomes a wide stream. They had run barefoot for what to them felt like hours, until the princess finally saw some game, a fox with a rabbit lodged in her jaws. The animal looked at her, slightly annoyed, and continued quickly into the woods that bordered the shallow river.

“Oh, let it go!” shouted Ainia as she reached Penthesilea. “I’m hungry, let’s go back.”

The princess continued, however, climbing up and into the brush. She had momentarily dropped her quiver and bow to chase the fox. Although the leather and linen protected her from the acanthus, the alder branches and holly whipped at her arms, drawing thin red lines on her shoulders. Her hair, cut at the nape of her neck was the same colour as the vixen. Her mother Otrere had done her best to shelter her from her father, who still possessed the means to penetrate their enclave, but she had noticed that as Penthesilea matured she looked and behaved more and more in the spirit of her father.

The fox looked at Penthesilea, as if she feared that she would be forced to fight and lose her prey to the maid. After a diet of insects and berries, the rabbit was a victory for her and her remaining pup. She leaned back on her haunches and, unwilling to release her prey, she attempted to expose her teeth as a sign of defiance. “I could step on you and it would be over,” thought Penthesilea as her attention turned to some noise behind her. She glanced away briefly and the fox was gone.

Penthesilea suddenly realised that Ainia and Bremusa were still at the water and throwing rocks and laughing at her. At the stream they had a cache of projectiles, something that she did not have in the bush, where there was nothing but dried leaves. “Run,” she thought, “to the beach.” She heard a rock fly through the leaves close to her. She sped

in a zigzag thinking, “Run fast, to the beach where I can at least defend myself. These girls are not friends! Get there and find a weapon to defend yourself!”

Of course, she knew that like the fox she should have never allowed herself to be exposed to such nonsense. She felt a stone strike her shoulder, followed by pain, then another one on her head. “Ow!” Her hand felt the back of her head and she could hear ridicule. She saw blood on her fingers.

“They will pay,” she thought, as she made her way to the water. The beach was lined with cedars and laurels where the land ended. The embankment was scoured away, leaving the boulders and stones that formed a beach. She jumped down through the young cedars and realised that they could no longer see her. There were no stones, no noise, only the background sound of water on the beach.

“I should never have allowed myself to be caught,” she thought as she selected pebbles. At the same moment that her eyes found the girls they too realised that she was on the beach. Suddenly Ainia on her left and Bremusa far to her right had their arrows trained directly on Penthesilea. “Give up, you little snipe.” Bremusa smiled. “You deserve it.”

Penthesilea looked at the pebbles in her hands, “It’s not fair.”

“Fair,” said Bremusa. “Ares would never use such a word.”

“You know nothing about my father,” said Penthesilea.

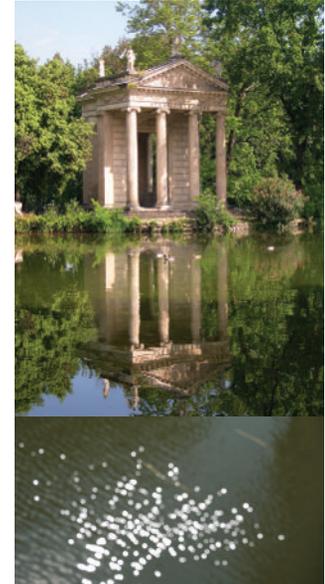
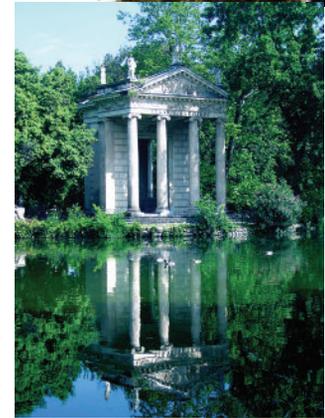
“He’s right behind you,” said Ainia. Penthesilea, slightly distracted, turned to see nothing but water. She dove forward, her head going under the surface. Turning with some difficulty and trying to breathe she came back to the surface to face two twelve-year-old girls laughing and pushing her back under. From under the water she could see Ainia’s bow. She reached for it, pulled on it and pushed herself back deeper in the water, armed the weapon and stood to see the two girls clearly in her range.

“We wouldn’t do that to you,” Ainia said.

“We were teasing,” added Bremusa, “you know we’ll always be friends.”







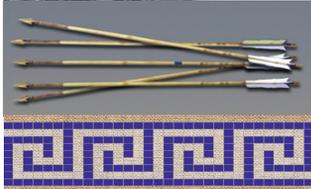
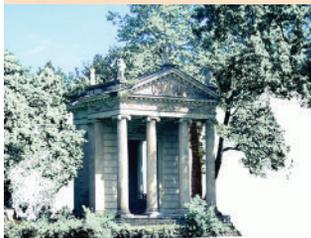
Panel 2: lessons and history

Queen Otrere speaks to a group of Amazon maidens about the war spear, their ancestry and the founding of Themiskyra.

Ainia was called the fast one because of the way that she could run. Hippolyte had already proved to be a formidable archer and Bremusa was easily irritated. They were sitting with a group of girls listening to a woman in a modest chiton wearing a gold-leaf head dress. The young girls were barefoot, dressed in uniform short linen tunics, expressing any sense of fashion they might have through elaborately braided leg-wear. Hair was generally coiffed and tied back out of the way. This was an Amazon school.

Otrere got up and motioned to her servant, who returned shortly with some women carrying bundles on their shoulders. The armourer, Aynomene, was a veteran soldier and a valuable advisor to the queen. Her legs were sheathed in woven leather, her linen chiton had even rows

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of bronze medallions that sparkled as she moved. She had a leather girdle with a long knife secure in its sheath. There were dark bands of skin decorations etched into her bare shoulders and she wore leather guards on her forearms. Her hair was tied back in tight braids intertwined with leather laces. She wore simple green earrings carved from agate and her headband was echoed by a horizontal line of black war paint through which dark and cautious eyes surveyed the group of maidens before respectfully turning to the queen. Unlike the maidens, she wore sturdy leather sandals designed for stirrups.

She was here to present each of the girls with a new Achaean war spear that the Amazons had bought from traders with barley, hazelnuts and coloured stones. As children, Penthesilea and her sisters made poplar hunting spears, fishing spears, lances and even knives. Now Otrere explained that a pointy stick would punch a hole in something but that is different from hunting with a spear, and so all the daughters of Themiskyra were given a war spear at about the age of twelve. Otrere explained, “Unlike our ivory-tipped spears, the war spear is a *stick sharpened at both ends*, having an iron spearhead at one end and a bronze spike at the other. A weapon is a tool for war, consequently its appearance will be determined by its function. The two ends of the war spear have different shapes and are wrought from different materials because they have distinct purposes.

“The spear has a lozenge-shaped point of iron attached to the shaft by a flared socket. The butt end of the spear has a long thin spike made of bronze. The spear point has sharpened edges that curve to a maximum in the middle and taper toward the back. The Argives cast it from iron, and as such it is strong and holds a true edge well but the iron is brittle and can snap if bent too much. The shape of this spear is intended for cutting flesh. If the opponent twists or turns, or the weapon is manipulated in the wound, then the wound is likely to be considerably larger. Because of its curved blade the spearhead can cut when pulled out or when pushed in. The blade is edged even on the taper behind the maximum width.

Even as the spear is withdrawn it widens the wound. By virtue of its size and its shape the spearhead can inflict large life-threatening wounds in almost any circumstance.

“The spearhead, however, has great difficulty penetrating armour. The point is too brittle to cut anything but flesh. For this reason, at the other end of the shaft, there is a long slender bronze spike with a square cross-section. It is generally used to stand the spear in the ground when it is not in use, and for this reason the Argives call it a sauroter, which means *lizard-killer*. The spike may also be used as a weapon, especially if the spearhead breaks off, something that happens quite often. For the women standing behind those at the front, in battle, the long thin profile of the sauroter is always the preferred weapon because it was designed to penetrate armour.

“In close combat the wounds made by the spearhead are more likely to disable the enemy than the narrow and deep wounds of the sauroter. The wide cuts of the spearhead will bleed profusely and it will most likely cause severe damage to tendons and nerves. For hand-to-hand fighting the spearhead is an effective weapon; however, if the enemy is already disarmed or wounded on the ground, then the sauroter is useful for stabbing or piercing through armour while advancing to the next opponent.

“As you can see,” continued Otrere, “the Argive spear is designed for battle but we use it for hunting as well.” At this point the maidens were each handed a spear by Amynomene. There was something special about handling an expensive item that now belonged to them and the girls were pleased.

“This spear is heavy,” said Hippolyte. “How do we throw it when hunting?”

“You do not throw this spear when hunting”, said Otrere, “you must lunge or stab with it to make sure that the spear goes deep enough for a clean kill. You must get within touching distance of a deer to do this. It is with these spears that you will learn to become daughters of Artemis.



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“There are three practical ways to get close enough to be effective with your spear. The first is to wait in a tree shelter. This is the best deer-hunting method. Deer rarely look up and do not see someone sitting a few feet off of the ground. For spear hunting you will want to sit a little lower than you would instinctively. A good rule is to sit holding your spear with both hands and reaching down so that the tip of the spear is not more than a *pygmē* (one pace) from the ground. You will want to use a long spear for this, like one that we make from ivory, about an *orgyia* or two spread arm lengths. A deer at ten paces is not a kill with a spear unless you throw it and that is not a good idea for deer hunting. You will need to sit hidden in such a way that the deer will walk as directly beneath you as possible.

“Another way to get close enough is to use what we call a lunging pit or hidden depression where you sit or kneel waiting for the deer to pass by. You can use a shorter spear than you would from a tree, an *Argive* spear, for example. You may still use a longer spear but it is harder to manoeuvre in the brush. When the deer walks by, you lunge out at it as it passes.

“Or you can make a hiding place on the ground with some brush. The hunting method is similar to the lunge pit but on top of the ground. You sit next to a deer trail or watering place waiting for the deer to wander by. You may also wish to try stalking, which is trying to sneak up within range of a deer without it knowing that you are there. This is difficult with a bow and next to impossible with a spear, but as *Artemis* has taught us, hunting is the challenge of mastering your prey.

“Your spear should be sharpened as sharp as you can make it. We do this with stones and the iron itself holds a good edge. A good length for a spear is your height or slightly taller. These spears are a bit long at the moment but they will soon be perfect for you. If you choose to hunt dangerous game such as a boar, you will want to attach a cross guard on the shaft of your spear. It is no myth that a speared boar could *run up* the shaft of the spear and gore the wielder. A cross guard about a *pous* from the head will keep the animal at a distance.”

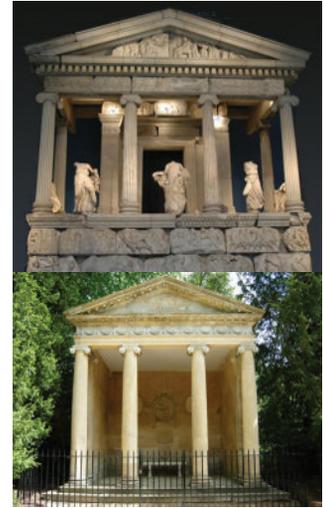
Otrere stopped to show the maidens where to attach a guard near the sharpened tip of a spear then continued, “And we must not forget the hounds. They are always with us when we hunt. No animal has been as important to us as the hound. We have built a relationship where the dog has exchanged its independence from us for support and care. Our word for hunting, *κυνήγι*, is derived from the word *dog*. Dogs find, chase and retrieve and sometimes kill game. Dogs allow us to pursue and kill prey that would otherwise be very difficult or dangerous to hunt.”

The queen paused to allow the girls some time to compare their new weapons. Her servant brought some tea and spoke to her of something that had come up. Otrere responded and the servant went off in the direction of the dwellings.

It was Penthesilea who was the most interested in old legends. She felt that she had a duty to distinguish the truth, on which she could act or intervene, from things invented to explain politics to children and the religious. Although she had been raised, like her sisters, by the whole tribe she also knew that she had blood status through Otrere that made her and Hippolyte different and endowed with special responsibility. She retained blurred memories of conversations that she might have overheard when she, like her mother at the time, was very young. People were always whispering things to her mother. Sometimes the voices she remembered from half sleep in Otrere’s bed were urgent and serious. Penthesilea also knew that the women were especially protective of Otrere’s children.

Penthesilea had heard from the other girls that there was a law that forbid a girl to have a daughter if she had not killed a man in battle. Was there any truth to such stories? Had the Amazons ever disobeyed such laws? Her mother had never spoken of this to Hippolyte or Penthesilea and her mother was queen. Nevertheless these stories led the princess to wonder if the girls were being trained not for the hunt but to kill? Did Amazons hunt men?

Penthesilea knew that there were many great warriors among the sisters but had been told that they fought intruders. This, they had been



told, was how the armourer got the scar above her eyebrows. There were many threats to their city from traders and neighbouring cities. The Amazons had learned over the centuries to always be prepared to defend themselves. She had heard songs of legendary battles for the city but they were no different than the telling of gods, imaginary beasts and lands that floated in the heavens.

The girls were all naturally curious about the way they were feeling physically and Penthesilea with them was beginning to wonder about male children. They had seen that animals regularly gave birth to males. They knew about fully-grown youths and men, intruders who would be brought into the enclave as prizes, but none of the girls had ever seen a male child nor were they aware of such a thing.

“Tell us why there are no male children here,” Penthesilea asked Queen Otrere.

The queen looked at her maturing daughter, remembering her as a toddler. She thought about the other children she had borne. She glanced at Hippolyte sitting to the right of Penthesilea and wished that Lysippe and Melanippe had also grown to adults, but Otrere especially pondered the unnamed child that she had lost at birth.

Although frankness was a part of their social code, Amazon women did not share everything with each other or with their children. Intimate feelings could still exercise considerable influence in social discourse. Amazon culture was well enough developed to provide a coherent framework to nurture children to puberty, but physicality in itself is a mysterious thing that can be disruptive and transgressing of organised social systems. The body has the independent capacity to challenge order, reason and collective ideals.

The maidens were beginning to define the world through their unique lived experience and were skeptical of what they had been told. They were well aware of the physical manifestations of their sexuality, and were far from being repressed living in a maternalistic environment, but suddenly they somehow disputed everything that they had been taught by the sisters.

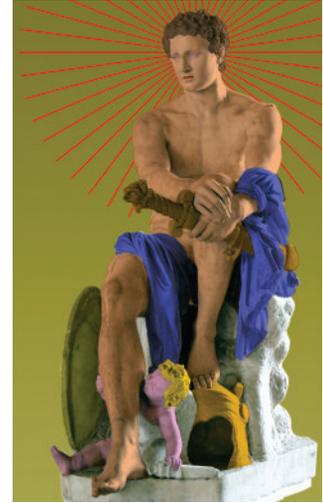
Otrere was aware of their impending maturity but knew that she was still addressing children. There were many things that were far too complicated for the maidens. For example, Hippolyte and Penthesilea were the daughters of the queen from Ares, who had also fathered Otrere. Otrere and her daughters were literally half-goddesses, which in itself would present an awkward discussion.

The gods possessed immortality but could not have children, while mortals, of course, were assured immortality through their offspring. The gods, who were jealous of humans, would use their powers to beguile certain mortals who would appear by chance or accident at an appropriate moment. It was ridiculously simple for the gods to father Amazon children because of the sisters' custom of getting pregnant through literal strangers.

It was for this reason that the laws had been relaxed and Amazons could now choose in battle which man would father their daughters. They could even negotiate a union with men from neighboring tribes or ultimately choose to live with their husbands, although only their female babies could return. Because the social organization outside of Themiskyra and her sister cities was so unnatural for women, very few Amazons ever opted to take a husband, let alone surrender a baby.

Otrere was tall even among the Amazon warrior women. Her facial features were sharp and defined while her deep-set eyes expressed the responsibility that she carried for her tribe. There is something about intelligent people that makes extraordinary physical qualities seem irrelevant. Otrere was beautiful in the sense that her symmetry overruled scars of experience. Her tarnished silver and bronze hair was braided tightly and crowned with delicately wrought leaves and flowers. Her shoulders and arms, still powerful, curved gently to expose modest breasts and hips that widened slightly and were marked with the experience of several births. She had, like all virtuous women, respected her body for without it she could not rule.

Otrere started to speak. "Let me begin, dear Penthesilea, before I get to your question, by telling all of you how we came to live here by



the Thermodon River. We are Sauromatae and we speak the language of Scythia but we have never spoken it correctly, having learned it imperfectly because of the hate we had for those who oppressed us. Our language has also taken words from Achaean traders because of our relations with them.”

Hippolyte looked at her mother. “Then were our ancestors the Scythians?”

Otrere saw that Hippolyte was acquiring the features and stature of the queen. Hippolyte had darker hair than her mother. Her deep brown eyes were set behind distinct eyebrows. The bridge of her nose was larger and more prominent than the queen’s but perfectly suited to lips that changed and appeared fuller when she smiled. Her elder daughter was adept at asking questions to which she already knew the answer. It meant that her mind, suitably political, was already probing beyond her inquiries. It pleased the queen that Hippolyte was already displaying qualities necessary for her future role.

“No, the Scythians were our enemy. In ancient times they were known by other names such as Cimmerians or the Gimirri. They were wanderers who came originally from the north with horses. We did not know of chariots at that time. Our people came from herdsmen who walked from the land between the two rivers, and eventually followed their flocks to rich grazing land on the northern shore of the Hospitable Sea (in the Achaean language the Euxine) by the river that we now know as the Tanaïs. The ancient Sarmatians were the first people to come down from the mountains after the great flood and had been farming the rich land for centuries. There, living among the Sarmatians, we could grow crops, take fish from the sea and be isolated from outsiders by the salt marshes. We lived at peace and with husbands in those times and bore many generations of children. We lived well and were protected until the Scythians, who had first visited as traders with bronze implements returned with chariots and quivers.

“The Scythians moved in swiftly, killing our men and burning fields and homes. They took the women and children into the mountains on

the northern coast of the sea. Our people, now conquered, became concubines to the Scythian princes because we had depended on husbands who had only known peace to protect us. The Amazon women lived with their violators until Artemis, protector of the womb, came to help deliver them from slavery.

“The woman Hippolyte (after whom you were named) had been chosen by the Scythian king to be his bride because she was the strongest, tallest and wisest of the Amazon women. Hippolyte was born in the valley of the great river that was called Dānu by the people who lived there. Hippolyte implored chaste Artemis to help them.

“The goddess, who was hunting boars in the pine and beech forests of the mountains, was moved by the suffering of the Amazons and instructed Hippolyte to quietly tell her sisters to sharpen the shell of the Golden Venus that could be found on the northern shores. She then told her that on Hippolyte’s wedding night, when the sisters heard her screams of passion, they were to cut the throats of their wine-sedated captors.

“This was to be done immediately without remorse or pity. By this means they would escape servitude; however, Artemis warned the princess that, if they desired her continued protection and guidance they would have to forevermore live separately from men, for Ares jealously protected their conquerors and would exercise vengeance on the Amazons.

“On that night, there was commotion and terror as blood-soaked Amazons fled their dwellings into the night. Never had they seen the horror of men grasping at their throats trying to breathe as they were being cut down at their thresholds by the daughters of Gaia. When Eos’ rosy fingers lit the horizon, the Amazon women, in tears, embracing their children and in fear of the future, gathered around fiery-eyed Hippolyte.

“She surveyed the scene in silence and at that very moment the sun darkened from the displeasure of Olympus. Zeus, in an effort to assuage the anger of his son Ares, condemned Hippolyte and all of her



descendants to eternal adversity and misfortune. Outraged, the warrior queen stared skyward and suddenly tore at her right breast and the blood flowed from her as torrential water. She loudly voiced her contempt of the gods and declared that her mutilation would be borne as an everlasting symbol of that defiance.

“From that time on, to overcome the physical constraints of femininity and the malediction of the gods, the Amazon women trained in the arts of war. They vowed to never fight for honour, conquest or the spoils of battle. They would build cities for themselves and their sole objective in battle would be the protection of their daughters and sisters. To preserve Amazon autonomy, males would have to be taken in conquest; otherwise the war-loving son of Zeus would never allow men to cede to our laws.

“The Amazons established their first settlement in the forest and built barricades of earth and wood. With the bronze they managed to bring with them they carved a wooden likeness of Artemis that they placed in the Agora where they praised the goddess in whatever manner they might have considered appropriate since they did not have instruction in such things.

“The women learned to make ivory and sinew bows and became expert archers. They could find meat and learned to gather the fruit of the trees that grew on the slopes. They wore their chitons short and wrapped their legs in leather for protection. They fashioned shirts and boots from fur and all but the very ill survived the first difficult winter and by the spring they were adept at gathering wood salvaged from fallen trees and building progressively more permanent shelters.

“It was a good thing as well, for that was when the sons of Ares arrived. A party of thirty men approached the stockade with explicit instructions from their prince to exact retribution. As the Scythians were unaccustomed to the terrain and not expecting archers, they fell quickly to an ambush of arrows. The victorious women came back wishing to commemorate the day by naming their city Cypress after Artemis, but

angry Hippolyte forbid celebrations, advising the Amazons to make reverent sacrifice to the goddess for having saved them.

“She solemnly told the gathering that there was no victory except a woman’s task to bear and raise children. She sent everyone away to mend ivory bows and prepare bone-tipped arrows. By the evening it was quiet as if nothing extraordinary had happened. This was when we began to learn to be Amazons.

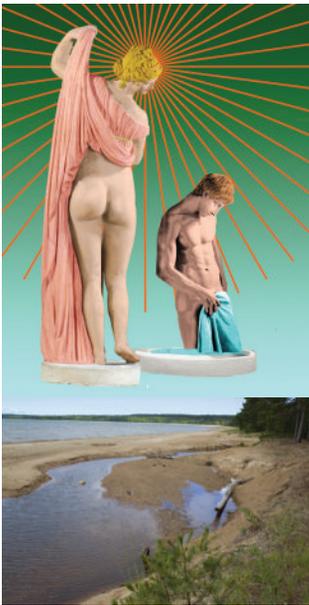
“Before the second winter came, fearing more reprisals from their enemies’ families, and considering that, when discovered, they would be soon outnumbered, Queen Hippolyte decided that they would move their camp eastward, away from the mountains and forests. She led the Amazons southward to a narrow place where they could cross the waters in boats of wood and hide. (You have already heard many of these things in songs.)”

The queen looked at the maidens sitting around cross-legged. They were interested but constantly repositioning themselves. Penthesilea’s lips were pursed, as if she was holding back a giggle from a surreptitious comment coming from behind her. Her hair appeared lighter today, escaping in a halo from its tight knot. Her eyes tended towards green in the late afternoon light, and her freckles seemed more intense on a pale background. The queen knew that the maidens were busy connecting the legends that they had heard with the history now being told.

Otrere continued with her lesson. “The Amazons returned to the Tanaïs and settled there but found that the Sarmatians had heard stories and were afraid of women without husbands and were unwilling to accept our customs. The Amazons could not live in peace and for several years were obliged to defend their settlements. This was the time that we learned how to ride the ponies and use the arc.

“Eventually however, some of the Amazon women did adapt to Sarmatian ways. In one battle, the men put down their weapons, refusing to fight maidens. The warring camps were then joined in one, and the men began living with them as husbands, but the men were unable to

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learn the Amazon language with its tonal variations and clicking of the throat. The women however, soon learned theirs and when they could understand one another, the men told them that they had parents and properties and they wished that the women could give up their customs and return to live with them. The Amazons would be their wives there on their land no less than on Amazon territories, and they promised that they would have no others.

“Queen Hippolyte responded that Amazons never live amongst foreign women. Our customs were too different. Archery, combat and riding ponies were our skills and we knew nothing of economics, or the distaff. It appeared to Hippolyte that there would be only discord, but to be fair, she asked the men that if they truly wished that we lived with them, they should go home to their parents, pick up their possessions, and come back to our land, and live with us.

“The men approved and went to their homes to get the portion of goods that fell to them and returned to the Amazon camps. Then the queen, touched by their faithfulness, addressed the young men and said that the Amazons were ashamed to live in a country that they had conquered. Not only had they stolen land and treasures but they had done great damage by the ravages they had inflicted on their countrymen.

“Since the young men had chosen Amazons as wives, then they were obliged to leave the country to dwell beyond the Tanaïs. The men complied and the wives packed their goods and left with their families. Crossing the river, the Amazons journeyed eastward and again northward to an uninhabited country and took up their abode in it. The women who live there have continued to this day observing our ancient customs, worshipping Artemis, hunting on horseback with their husbands and in war, taking the field wearing the very same dress as the men.

“These women speak our language and their marriage law states that no girl shall wed till she has killed a man in battle, but for this reason many women die unmarried at an advanced age, having never been able in a lifetime of peace to fulfil the ancient conditions. These women

are still our sisters and Lysippe, our most renowned queen. came from that country that is also called the land of the Chorasmii.

“Many Amazons, however, remained with Queen Hippolyte in permanent camps by the great river. Hippolyte had a son, Tanaïs, with the Sarmatian named Berossus. Her son was allowed to live with the Amazons. His virginity and worship of Artemis offended Aphrodite, who found the young man very attractive. In revenge for his spurning of all her attempts to have him, she cursed him to know lust for no one else but his own mother. Hippolyte never learned of this, since it is told that Tanaïs drowned himself in the river. Devastated by the suicide of her son, the queen remained chaste and turned her energies to consolidating and expanding our nation.

“Hippolyte renamed the great river Tanaïs in memory of her son. Becoming tired of many years of strife, she consulted her oracles. The signs advised her that the Amazons should leave the area, lest the ghost of her son Tanaïs return to them as an evil spirit. Under counsel of Artemis she decided to lead the Amazons away from the river valley. They gathered what they could carry with them and chose a difficult route through mountains to avoid new conflicts as they passed through foreign territories.

“In the fourth season of the third year when they had almost reached the sea, the aged Hippolyte fell ill with a fever and four days later Persephone came to take her. A great mound of oak branches was gathered and the queen’s body was laid on a bed of pelts and covered with dried fruit and meats and brightly coloured stones (for the Amazons had few possessions). The fire was lit and as the flames consumed the woman who had led the Amazons away from their ravagers, there were whispers of despair, as the women, who were now without a queen, had not yet found the place that Artemis had chosen.

“The maiden Lysippe, which means *she who lets loose the horses*, had at sixteen years old travelled from the northeast. For two years she searched for the Amazon camp until she finally joined them in the

mountains. She came on a pony, larger than the Amazon horses, and was wearing a helmet fashioned from boar's tusks.

"Like the ones that the warriors wear today?" said Hippolyte.

"Yes, we have worn such helmets since that time," continued the queen. "She was also the first to bear a shield and wear a breastplate of leather and hardened linen. Lysippe had already demonstrated great skills in hunting and scouting as a child and had now become a fierce warrior, although she chose never to speak of what had occurred on her journey. She soon shared with the sisters her eastern ways of decorating the skin and living on a pony and became a favourite of the queen who treated her as a daughter.

"Lysippe was the child of the Sarmatian Arpoxais and the Amazon Euandre who as young people had settled on the land by the Oxos River. Euandre was Hippolyte's second cousin through her mother's sister who was said by some accounts to have also been a daughter of Ares. The queen Lysippe, for she did become queen, was beautiful like a goddess and as powerful as a man. She was formidable in all manners of war but exercised precocious wisdom. Soon after the queen's death she was leading the march and calming fears and rumours that had begun to erode confidence. When she was passed the crown of Hippolyte she managed to deal with her challengers with diplomacy and tact.

"It was Lysippe who led our people to the Thermodon plain. The Amazons, travelling on foot (very few horses had survived the journey), found plenty of food and firewood by the sea and soon the women had once again become a disciplined army. They travelled until they came to a place by the Thermodon River where they encountered other women who lived like them but spoke a foreign language. These women had lived in this place for as long as they could remember. It was here that a beech tree had been planted by the archer goddess. Artemis had chosen this place on the coast because it was surrounded by dense oak and pine forests and was isolated by mountains to the south and the east.

"There, Lysippe divided her nation into three tribes. A new city, Themiskyra or *divine Themis*, was established by the queen. Lysippe



placed a statue of Artemis carved from stone under the beech tree where the Amazons could offer tributes and soon the land around the city became fruitful. The Amazons became adept in all manners of war and were entirely capable of defending their cities and preventing intrusion by enemies.

“This was many generations ago. Now even Ares is reluctant to enter Themiskyra, Lykastia and Chadesia because of the protection offered by Artemis.”

“Why is Ares kept away from the city?” asked Bremusa.

“Ares was once welcome in our cities but it is Artemis who protects us now and that is a large part of our history. Before the invasions we were dependent on Ares. As children, we were ceremoniously betrothed to him. The sons of Ares provided us with shelter and protection and when, in the course of seven years we had mastered our land and household, we would honour Ares through the children we could provide. This was the way of the world at a time when we had forgotten Artemis. But she was already there in the form of the mountains and rivers and the peat and the forests. Artemis was within the very soil from which sprouted the beech tree.”

Otrere, pointing at a mature tree that had grown in the centre of the square for two centuries, continued, “As long as that tree remains Artemis is with us but we are always in danger of extinction because the gods favour the sons of Zeus over the actions of our queens. The gods are beings of the sky while we are born of the earth. It is for this reason that the gods will never understand our ways and we must always be prepared for war.

“As you are all aware, *Hippolyte* is also a dynastic name, like that of *Minos*, who was a king who ruled Crete long before the Achaeans sailed there. We now know Minos as a title, such as *high king* or *honourable*, that has belonged to many great rulers at the Palace of Minos including the grandfather of Idomeneus who now rules.

“The first Hippolyte was the mother of all Amazons who led our people out of Sarmatia centuries ago. This was long after the waters of



the Hospitable Sea had settled and shortly after the time that Dardanus the son of Zeus built Troy to guard the passage to the sea.

“Lysippe, who was also called Hippolyte, was an ingenious strategist and general who led our first cavalry and consolidated our laws. Lysippe and her warriors conquered the land all the way back to the mountains and with the spoils of war she built temples to Ares and Artemis, whose worship she founded. Her strategy and judgment of character were so sound that all other Amazon leaders refer to her.

“There were five, perhaps even more, queens who succeeded Lysippe, including Deianeira, Androdaira, Phillipis and Hyppolyta, but they have all been remembered as Hippolyte in honour of our great mother. At times we have had two queens simultaneously, one who led the warriors and another who stayed in the city. This was the case when Queen Myrene laid siege to the Phrygians, leaving domestic affairs to Androdaira, who was also known as Hippolyte at the time.

“When Antiope came to the throne she wore a golden belt given to her by our father, Ares. The girdle was a symbol of her supremacy and represented the protection of Ares. The Amazons, feeling secure with the war god, neglected their ancient tree and the goddess.

“Hera, forever suspicious of Zeus and his designs, began telling the queen that Heracles, which means *being born with great strength*, planned to put an end to the Amazons. That was when King Theseus and sly Heracles arrived from Athens to beguile Queen Hippolyte (born as Antiope). From what my grandmother told me, Heracles may have given Queen Hippolyte as a prize to King Theseus for having accompanied him on his quest. On the other hand, Hippolyte (who is often confused with her sisters Glauce, Molpadia, Orithya and Melanippe) may have also been abducted at a separate time when Theseus sailed back to the Aegean Sea, or as queen, she may have chosen to stay on Theseus’ ship for some time after Heracles’ departure (these stories have changed over time because Hippolyte shared her reign with her sisters).

“When Theseus took Hippolyte to Athens, she was replaced as queen in Themiskyra by Orithya, who was now called Hippolyte.

Antiope's Amazon sisters led by Molpadia pursued the Greeks and began a siege on Athens with the intent of rescuing the queen. The war raged four years before Heracles artfully captured and ransomed Melanippe. Antiope's love for her sister was so strong that she finally gave Heracles the symbol of her throne as an offer of peace to both sides. By then, having broken most Amazon laws, she had become the wife of Theseus and mother of their son, Hippolytus. In another story, Antiope led a march on Attica and the Peloponnese, where she was defeated. She then fled to Megara where she died of grief. According to many, her tomb, which no longer exists, had been seen for many years after.

“What is important to learn from these stories is that the Amazons came to the realisation that they could not trust Ares. The war girdle had not protected their queen or our people. Instead it had drawn enemies to our cities. When the Amazon warriors sailed back to Themiskyra, Melanippe, now queen, urged a return to the ancient worship of Artemis and her promise of eternal protection in return for chastity. It was then that we went back to many of the laws from the time of Lysippe.

“As a people we have lived here by the Thermodon for many generations. Time has given us stories, some true and some that were invented to be told to foreigners. Our life would be more difficult without these legends.”

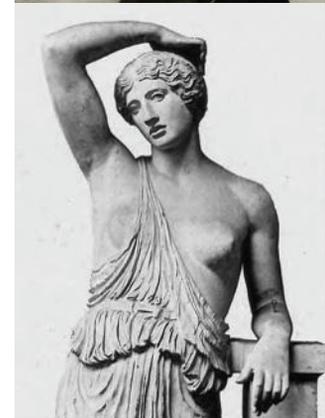




Panel 3: about coming of age

Otrere, teaching a group of maidens in Themiskyra, speaks of Amazon culture and the affirmation of a female future. She explains that temperance and moderation are characteristic of the Amazon even in the use of pleasures. She talks of lovemaking as pleasure and as a means to procreate. She describes childbirth and the fate of male children. She explains that Amazons collectively raise and educate their children and finally she relates the Amazons' relationship to men and tells of their seduction.

After a week of rain the sun was finally warming the group of young Amazons in the square. It was damp and overcast most of the time in Themiskyra, but that was why the grain grew so well and the cherries were abundant. The warmest days were in August and whenever the skies cleared the Amazons moved outside. The weavers, the millers, the potters and the metal merchants were out today and from them came a comfortable sound of activity.



The queen was also outside working with the future leaders of her people. She had overheard her daughters who, in denial of their absolute ignorance, expounded wisdom in the ways of man by repeating every whispered fairy tale that they had ever heard. Otrere began to speak. “Ares was the father of all the Amazon women but at a disparaging cost to our people. To be women born to the war god was not an acceptable way of living. The men would choose from among our women whomever they wished and whenever it pleased them. In such an environment all relations, even consensual sex, could be considered as an act of violence against us.

“That is not to say that all sexual relations between man and woman are rape. We Amazons have never held that, now or ever, however, the whole issue of intercourse as the penultimate expression of Ares’ dominance was and still is of interest to us as Amazons. We must approach the subject as a social practice, material reality.

“This is our history, but I think that when we hear that all sex is rape it is probably a simplification and misunderstanding. For one thing, you should know that most men and women experience sexual pleasure in inequality. For Ares the paradigm for sex has been one of conquest, possession, and violation, consequently we think that many men believe that they need an unfair advantage, which at its extreme we call rape. I personally don’t think they need it. I think that intercourse and sexual pleasure can eventually be experienced on an equal basis among all.

“To create and preserve a less violent world, our culture had to affirm a female future. To this purpose, the responsibility of children had to be returned to us and the proportion of men had to be reduced and maintained at a serviceable minimum. As your queen I do not think it is a bad idea. If we were to survive as a people, there had to be a decontamination of our lands. The implication was a drastic reduction of the population of males, including male children. We must never be afraid to say these things. At this moment, I am totally joyous to have a

great community of women. It is not important to me whether men are somewhere out on the periphery or not. We as Amazons do not share a goal of reconciliation with men. From our history and experience that does not seem to be a very promising future for our kind. So why would we even think about it? I think that it is obvious that men are not central to us.”

Bremusa exhibited an almost disappointed expression and then she moved closer to Penthesilea, extending her arm around her. “I told you that we didn’t need men,” she whispered.

Otrere smiled and said, “The sons of Ares still do visit our city but they cannot live here. We return them to their fathers and wives because they are not accustomed to our ways. Our customs exist to preserve the Amazon way of life in Themiskyra and our sister cities.”

Otrere continued, “For example, you must all know by now that temperance and moderation are virtues characteristic of the Amazon. We also practice this moderation with our use of pleasures. We are said to be beautiful and strong if we are able to conquer and tame our desires.”

She glanced at the wide-open eyes around her and continued, “Men can taste unpleasant and look perfectly alarming but we love them anyway. There are places on a man’s body, like the delicate covering of his shaft, where the outer skin is softer than anywhere on a woman’s and there is no part of a body so vulnerable as the testes. We are taught to always say of his “membrum virile” that it is huge, wonderful, larger than any other and then we must say, “Come fill me, O my wonder!” and other compliments of the same kind. Men are always afraid that we will laugh at them so we never mention the size of their member in public... and never, ever let them know that anyone else knows or you may find it shrivels up and disappears.”

The girls giggled at the direction that the talk had turned. Otrere continued, “And here is one of the ways that we are quite different. For a man the essence of sexual performance is concrete. The physical



Penthesilea



excitement is apparent and perceptibly expended. For women, artifice has been the essence of performance but our sexuality is more easily understood as a transferable, mobile fluid.

“No matter what each of us may think in terms of lovemaking we are, on the whole, swiftly aroused when we observe men with men, women with women or women with men. We respond much more to the exercising woman than to the strolling man, and our blood flow rises quickly - and markedly, though to a lesser degree than with humans, when we hunt animals.

“For the Amazon woman, the mind and genitals seem to scarcely belong to the same person. When watching women make love to women we report disinterest but our bodies respond cordially; when watching men with men, we articulate little but are as aroused as when we see a man and a woman making love. Among our women who love each other, there is a vehement denial of interest when observing men with men but the acorn is moistened nearly as much as when watching women.”

Otrere looked directly at the Amazon maidens. “Of course this kind of talk when committed to action brings us children, which is a serious responsibility for our race because with half the people of neighbouring tribes we cannot afford mistakes. For this reason we begin to be fully engaged in parenting even before we think of having children. First our mothers and sisters explain to us what it is to have a child. They teach our customs and prepare maidens for the grieving and pain that we sometimes bear as Amazons.

“All through the swelling of our bellies and the months of waiting, our sisters tend to us and we learn of childrearing and the beauty of being a mother and a family and then when the time comes that Eileithya helps deliver the child, our sisters are there to encourage and to soothe pain and, if necessary, to take the stillborn away, and comfort his grieving mother who for nine months has suffered in fear of this moment. This fear is so powerful that we have invented all kinds of herbs,

incantations and medicines to assure the safe arrival of a daughter, but let me warn you now, my children,” Otrere’s eyes were serious now, “none of these work! They are but foolish lies that some, in pity, use to attempt to make our labour less difficult.”

The queen spoke in a softer tone. “The male child is never shown or spoken of and he may be returned to his father or to the family of his father or, if he no longer has a family, he may be sent to his home country to be raised by neighbours. If war and strife has lain waste to their lands, then he might be traded to the sea merchants. Rarely, and only after profound deliberation by all the community,” the queen turned her eyes away and stared into space for a moment, “is he placed in the arms of Morpheus with potent herbs.”

Otrere gestured around her and continued, “Our cities are built according to our customs. Our homes have more than one entrance, to permit escape from danger. They are often south-facing, with good visibility from the main entrance, and are usually constructed on dry, sandy soil to help keep them clean. Families build their houses close to each other. We move our children from one house to another as if any one of us could take the role of mother, although at other times we do it for no apparent reason except to amuse the children.

“Our sisters remain close to us as we educate our daughters and try to relate to all the children, however unique their interests, orientations and preferences. Keeping a happy and satisfying relationship with your mothers helps you later to assume the responsibilities of a mature woman. We choose to speak gently and guide rather than strike in punishment, for we know that all of us can make poor decisions at times. We have also learned that children sometimes turn to delinquent behaviour as a means to ask for guidance.”

The queen turned around and looked at the work being carried out all around them. She turned back to the maidens and spoke. “Of course we still cannot have children without men. Because of our history we have learned to be self-sufficient and cautious but we maintain a rela-



tively civil relationship with foreigners. Generally we live side-by-side, respecting each other's territory but keeping to ourselves and never revealing how many people we have in our cities.

“At times this relationship has been mutually beneficial, especially when we were confronting invaders. On those occasions we left the city and fought alongside our neighbours, protecting their lands and destroying the enemy before they even reached our cities. It is for this reason that we have been called mercenaries. Although we are trained warriors, we prefer to fight away from our land because we have learned that men make easy alliances even with enemies and that we would be quickly outnumbered in such an invasion.

“Individuals from neighbouring tribes have chased and sometimes killed an Amazon when the opportunity presented itself. This, however, should never spark revenge killings that could provide an excuse for a general invasion. These occurrences are usually sexually motivated crimes and the perpetrators are punished as murderers by their own tribe. We accept payment for the loss of our sisters and foreigners appear to be satisfied with the arrangement. We mourn our sisters at home but outside it is wiser to appear to be heartless.

“These are our ways and we know that through these customs our daughters have excelled at being as sociable with their friends as with foreigners. Amazons are unmatched in the skills of riding, archery and sports, and of course we seldom have problems with rule-breaking, aggressiveness, and blaming others.”

The maidens were curious about this discussion. So far they had only experienced farming and fishing, which were rooted in the reality of the land and the sea, and play, rooted in their imaginations. They knew of the Amazon practice of taking warriors in battle and bringing them to their city in triumph. They were now beginning to understand that there was a relationship between being mercenaries and having children.

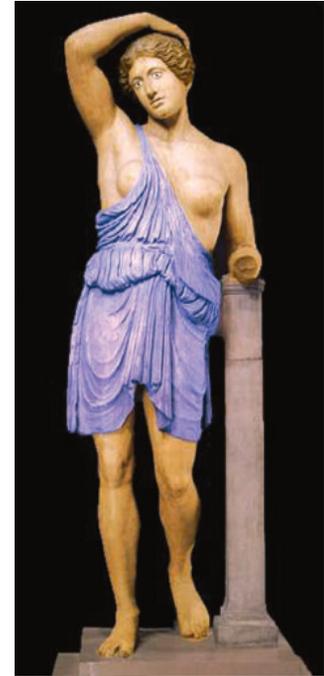
“I have seen men here and they were not slaves,” said Penthesilea. “We have always wondered why they did not run from Themiskyra.”

“This is an excellent question,” continued Otrere. “There is a misconception among the Hellenes that because we are as men we hate men. Nothing is further from the truth. To be an Amazon is to be a woman. We have always enjoyed being independent and not following the foreign ways but that does not mean that we do not adore men. For most occasions we prefer our tunics and trousers to the chiton and peplos and women who work and ride cannot wear heeled footwear. We have no husbands to tend our animals or glean our grain. We are not raised to sit by a spindle and distaff, although we are certainly able to spin our thread. It is because we do our work well that men fear us. We also know that even though we can take men as prizes, we also desire and expect love from the men that give us our daughters.

“It might seem that seducing a man is easy work and it may very well be so but Amazons believe that our daughters should be conceived by willing partners. Our ancestors, as concubines, cut the throats of their captors as they slept. Why should we expect our prizes to behave differently? Seducing is a means to temporarily divert a man from his usual intentions.

“So how do we communicate desire without threatening? Before we begin to think about perfuming ourselves and dressing our hair, we must make a man aware of why we have spared him. When we are attired as warriors, men naturally conspire to escape or even to kill their captors. Our prizes are dangerous because we as warriors are always attracted to the ones who could be lovers of Aphrodite, those who also happen to be the bravest and the strongest. We must not respond cruelly, for Adonis is attracted to the woman with a softened demeanour. It is certain that as Amazons we can and do prevail over men despite their physical abilities, but in our homes we court our prize with our femininity and his weakness is that he is naïve when faced with these charms. If we change our behaviour just enough to show him that we are serious about getting his attention, he might imagine his release.

“Sensuality is the graceful movement of a feline. Those who are not confident in their womanhood might flaunt themselves blatantly



and that will indeed get the attention of a man but will not render him less dangerous. If you desire something more substantial, then you must seduce him. Sensuality is having confidence in your womanhood. There is nothing more intoxicating to any man than confidence. It is a state of knowing what you desire and what you reject.

“When you mirror a man you are engaging with him. Seduction is the ability to understand the captive’s arrogant demeanour and to return the same arrogance without anger or remorse. The better you play these games, the more fun they become. So let your body speak for you. Let your lips and tongue speak of your desire. Let your movements and the ways you gently touch yourself communicate. Men are interested in all of your body.”

The girls laughed nervously as Otrere continued, “Acknowledging his attention by the way you stand and carry yourself without being blatant or timid will make you irresistible. The youth who talks of his conquests has none to speak of and can be returned to his camp with little fear of reprisal. Amazons never seduce with words! Seduction is only about you and your body. It is touching your neck with your fingertips, it is the way you move and the unspoken confidence that you carry.”



Panel 4: the stag hunt 1

This tells of how Zeus determined to send misfortune on the daughters of Ares and how Artemis granted them the protection of chastity. The affliction of the gods follows the princess Penthesilea on the day that Ares appears to her in the form of a magnificent stag.

The Scythian princes arrived in the late summer on chariots to take barley and animals from the hard-labouring Sauromatae. The men of the Dānu armed themselves with spears and prepared a defence at the periphery of their lands so that their villages would be protected. Without archery or ponies, they were easily surrounded and killed but the invaders also lost dear brothers and in revenge burned fields and captured the women and children.

Athene counselled against their liberation because the land that fed the women had been ravaged. The sons of Ares independently determined not to allow male children to survive lest they someday demand com-

Penthesilea



penetration and revenge. The remaining prisoners could not be exchanged or returned since there was no one to pay ransom. So what could they do in such a situation? Tradition recognized slaves and concubines as property; consequently a portion of the invaders, mostly those with land, wishing to avoid conflict in their households, chose to return to their wives with animals, grain and young servants, while those who chose to take concubines continued with their spoils across the Dānu and beyond the mountains where they would build their winter camp.

Hippolyte greatly displeased the son of Zeus when she instructed her sisters to avenge their torture and rape. In response to Ares' complaint but in consideration of the wisdom of Athene on matters of war, Zeus spared the Amazons but declared that the queen and her descendants would be accountable for this contempt of the gods. The daughter of Leto intervened and vowed to protect her daughters from the malediction as long as they remained chaste. Ares, immediately recognizing the tenability of such a condition, agreed to her compromise.

Queen Hippolyte had one child, a son who might have been a man or youth, unequalled for his beauty, whom she called Tanaïs. His eyes were twin stars, his hands and forearms were carved from marble, as Ares might desire. His flowing hair was as glorious as Apollo's in the sunlight and his cheeks were youthful and smooth. His neck was of ivory and his mouth was dreaming in sweetness. His complexion was fair and blushing as a rose in a snowdrift. Many a maid sought to gain his love but he worshiped only the appliances of war and the hunt and because of his mood, spirit and pride, none gained his favour. Tanaïs worshipped Artemis and was a fierce warrior but he would never know mortal love.

On one summer's day Aphrodite spied Tanaïs as he drove, in his delusive nets, some timid stags wandering in the pathless woods. She loved him and followed him, with soft and stealthy tread. The closer she approached the hotter she burned, as when the flames flare upward from a torch. Oh, how she longed to make her passion known, to plead in soft entreaty, to implore his love but Tanaïs saw only the deer. He did not return affection to the goddess and she, having never encountered

such a mortal, spoke in anger, “If he should love deny, deny him what he loves!” and with these words Tanaïs suddenly felt unnatural urges for his mother, Hippolyte. He could no longer move from where he was, for to do so would reveal a morbid affection for the woman who had borne him. With nowhere to turn, Tanaïs gazed upon the flowing river and said loudly, “In vain, in vain!” and breathed a sad “farewell!” And so Hippolyte’s beloved child, Tanaïs, died tragically in the waters of the Dānu.

The subsequent queen, Lysippe, came from a distant land and was a daughter of Ares through her mother, Euandre. Lysippe abandoned her sons, trusting only daughters to be faithful to Artemis. Lysippe begat Deianeira who took the name Hippolyte; Deianeira begat Androdaira through Ares. Androdaira the queen begat Phillipis and her sister Hippolyte, mother to Antiope who was taken to Athens by King Theseus where she bore a son, Hippolytus. Hippolyte, sister to Phillipis, was also mother to Molpadia who led the siege of Athens as well as Orithya and Melanippe who were both great queens of Themiskyra. Melanippe through her liaison with Ares was the mother of Otrere. Queen Otrere begat Lysippe, Melanippe, Hippolyte and Penthesilea.

Penthesilea was of smaller physical stature than her sisters. She had sharp features, a pointed jaw, dark eyebrows, a prominent but slightly rounded nose and well defined eyes that changed from dark blue to green depending on the light. Her slightly-built but agile body made her dependent on all of her senses when confronted.

She had excellent eyesight, a keen sense of smell, and acute hearing, which helped her greatly for she would be alerted to the slightest distant movement before anyone else in her hunting party. She had endurance that allowed her to wait patiently for hours to hear the sound of a deer moving along its path and then she could track the animal to exhaustion, never losing her breath. At other times, she could locate her prey by its scent.

It was for these reasons that she had earned the respect of all in Themiskyra. The experienced women knew that her abilities would

make her a great warrior as she evolved into that role but at this moment she was in her seventeenth year, a chaste daughter of Artemis and a sly huntress of large game.

In the early summer, a creek ran far beyond the south end of the land that her household cultivated for barley. There, where the soil was too poor for tilling and before the forest began on the hills in the distance, there was a small, sometimes dry, stream. While hunting alone along that riverbed, surrounded by laurels and a rocky terrain, Penthesilea spotted a stag on the opposite side. As she crept through the brush on the edge of the ridge, the stag disappeared when she glanced in the opposite direction for a moment. Suddenly she turned the other way and saw the great animal looking directly at her. She slowly dropped to the ground, hoping he would simply ignore her and continue feeding.

It was then that the princess heard a grunting and growling sound directly in front of her through the brushes. Still lying on her stomach, she peered through the brush to see a badger. She rolled to her side, pulling an arrow from the quiver, hoping that she was not going to need it. At the same time she did not want to lose the stag. As she shuffled backwards the badger advanced. Each direction she moved, the animal followed. She no longer cared about the deer that she could still see through the brush. Suddenly the badger, apparently bored, waddled off grunting and growling. By the time the challenge was over the stag had disappeared.

When Penthesilea returned to that place on another occasion, the deer seemed to be content with where he was and displayed no intention of crossing the creek. For five days the maid watched as he went to the stream to drink and then disappear. Penthesilea was ready to spend the amount of time that this animal demanded. She began to learn his habits. She made long hard stalks on the stag only to watch him vanish. No wonder he had grown so large! He knew his escape routes and was well aware of his surroundings. It began to get frustrating watching him for hours only to see him vanish again once she had positioned herself to strike. The huntress now had established a goal and was determined to hunt for him and to prevail.

Even when she was young Penthesilea had been told that there were very few places in their realm that had not been explored by hunters. She was certain that this open place where the creek gently turned through stones and dry clay had never been considered for large game. It seemed to be barren at first glance. When the maid returned to the city this time, she told her sister Hippolyte that if she could keep a secret then she would be taken to the place where Penthesilea had been seeing the stag. After swearing Hippolyte to secrecy they decided against using hounds, hunting like true Amazons, with their natural given possessions and ivory tipped spears. It was going to be difficult but the young princesses were up for the challenge.

The morning of the hunt they woke early at a time when dawn allowed barely enough light to see past the tip of the lances. Penthesilea really did not know where to start looking for the stag on this day because he was not where she had previously seen him. After many hours of searching they saw neither deer nor rabbit. Hunting aimlessly, they found themselves walking to a different place where they had on other occasions spotted worthy game. It was not until midday that they saw the first deer track. It was in some mud close to a small creek that flowed to the river Thermodon.

They followed the marks in the clay for about 500 paces before they saw a group of animals bedded in grass. Penthesilea knew that they did not have long, because the wind was blowing in the direction of their backs. The princess caught a glimpse of a deer that at first she thought must still be in velvet because she could not see the clear antlers of the stag that she had been tracking. It was at that moment that the animals caught the scent of the young Amazons.

Once they started to move, the maids realised that it was the stag they had been hunting. This time Penthesilea had found him with seven other deer. They could not get close enough and then the whole group began to move. Penthesilea ran out and around in an attempt to manoeuvre them. She did separate a part of the herd, the part the stag was not



Penthesilea

with. She had no idea where he might have gone, so they started back to Themiskyra.

The next evening Penthesilea found herself on the same vantage point that she had been to many times in the past. Spreading apart the bushes, she was hoping to see the stag. After so much effort spent watching and stalking this deer, she realized that he was now a short distance away from her. Penthesilea suddenly saw that this was a beautiful animal, the most symmetrical stag she had ever seen, fit even for Artemis.

Not wanting to scare him away, she was reluctant to attempt a lunge that was not perfect. The sisters moved towards the deer silently through the brush. They stalked, ever so slowly creeping, to get as close as possible to the animal. As they came near to their game, they waited for a chance to strike, but the stag did not move. Abruptly Hippolyte decided that she was going to take the stag by throwing the spear, contrary to all that she had learned. Penthesilea silently detested her and whispered to herself that the lance would never pierce the hide, yet Hippolyte was determined to throw. Penthesilea braced herself, knowing that this would not end well.



Panel 5: the stag hunt 2

This is the telling of the grievous accident that took the life of Princess Hippolyte, daughter of Ares and Otrere and beloved sister to great-hearted Penthesilea who with her loyal sisters went to battle for the great Priamos of Troy, for purification and to appease the Erinýes. Chaste Artemis, the great hunter and protector of the wilderness and the animals, can also portend sudden death and disease. Although the daughter of Leto honoured Hippolyte from birth, affinal relationships tied in blood condemned the princess to an ancient vengeance. The bloodlust of daughter-slaying Ares deflected the bronze-tipped spear to darken the eyes of Hippolyte, a crime that the awful ones, the Erinýes now seek to avenge.

Hippolyte stands and with all her might hurls the spear at the animal and then everything slows in time. Penthesilea sees the stag stop

Penthesilea



foraging. His antlers turn toward the movement and then, acting only from his senses, knowing that danger is near, the beast dodges the spear with ease and vanishes.

Most hateful Ares lusted after his half-sister, chaste Artemis. Father to the Amazon queens, he considered them his and as such worthy of their honour, but when Ares looked at Themiskyra from the mountain he saw the Amazons shamelessly contemptuous of the Dodekatheon. It was Ares who had constructed this furtive apparition that so tempted the young Amazons.

From chaos came Gaia and Eros and their children Erebus and his sister Nyx. Nyx gave birth to the sky Ouranos. Ouranos and Gaia had many children because of Eros. Their eldest son, Kronos of the Titans, in fear that his offspring would usurp his authority, swallowed his children whole but his wife, fair Rhea, hid her youngest child Zeus, who matured to overthrow his father. Gaia eventually became life on the Earth and Ouranos transformed into the stars that still fill the sky.

The Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus, were left with the task of providing nature with qualities that would permit mortal life to revere Gaia and share a portion of eternity. Epimetheus graced each animal with a gift but when he came to man he had none left. In the morning, when the sun rose, his brother Prometheus, fearing the wrath of Zeus, stole some light from Helios and gave man fire so that he would have some defence from the shadow of Erebus.

Man, however, was the sole animal that had been made in the image of the gods themselves and when Zeus discovered the error of the Titans he was furious. After great arguments and discussions, the gods could not agree on an adequate punishment. For the theft of fire, Zeus sent Prometheus among the animals who would inflict eternal punishment on his body. He then ordered Hephaestus to mold Pandora from the clay of the earth as a companion for Epimetheus. Pandora would possess all of the qualities of Gaia with all of the human attributes that the Titans had neglected.

Epimetheus was overtaken by Pandora's beauty and charm and realised that he could never live without her. All of the Immortals were

invited to the marriage. The couple were presented with a sealed jar in which had been placed the wedding gifts. Since a Titan could provide Pandora with all that was necessary, the jar was to remain sealed as a symbol of generosity. Epimetheus sat late into the evening pleased to be drinking and celebrating among the gods. Finding herself alone on the evening of the wedding feast, Pandora, with human curiosity, unsealed the jar, thus revealing all of the horrors of pain, sickness, envy and greed. She quickly replaced the seal, but only hope remained trapped within the vessel.

The gods had indeed devised a treacherous punishment. Epimetheus now was destined to be forever alone because the only way to alleviate the suffering that tortured his bride was to release Pandora to man in the form of hope. Ares, having witnessed all these events, held that man, created in the image of the gods, did not come from woman but rather woman was created for man and, through Pandora, all women were to be held accountable for the errors of the Titans. To this end Ares took pleasure in the clamour of war and the vain cries of women and children.

Now here in Themiskyra the war god saw the Amazons behaving in a manner contrary to their feminine disposition. Queen Lysippe had taken Artemis and Ares as her protectors but now, under this queen, Ares had received nothing to bring him joy. After seven years of waiting for sacrifice he decided to put an end to peace among the viragos.

Ares believed it rational to undertake extreme acts. He obeyed no law, so why persevere if it was only to please the Olympians with their own designs. The Amazons had always enraged Ares. They nurtured the advantages of women, including beauty, endurance, sensitivity and longevity, while seizing for themselves those of men. They practiced athleticism and fought as equals to men thanks to their lineage from him. They drew fish from the estuary, grew and harvested barley in their fields, and hunted like men, yet they still swelled their wombs and suckled their daughters.

To Ares it was an obvious truth that if the Olympic Games removed the separation between men and women, women would prevail only in the graceful events, but it seemed that the Amazons had no intention of



removing that barrier. They were so opportunistic that they neglected the fact that they profited from the knowledge accumulated by men through the ages, misrepresenting males as they did it. And so, when Ares heard that the gods were honouring both men and women at Troy he was angered. How could one explain it thus when there had been no warrior women at Troy? How could the gods entertain stories of female heroes? How could women occupy half the ranks of history, when no such warriors ever went to Priamos? Ares saw this as a real occasion for war. The die was cast, for there would be women at Troy and the outcome would not bring fortune to the city on the Thermodon.

The evening of the second day, the sisters Penthesilea and Hippolyte came back to Otrere with accounts of a stag of perfect symmetry and unusual instinct that grazed by the river, on barren land. He was of such beauty that surely this was a gift and omen from Artemis. They asked that Otrere would send sisters, with a pack of dogs this time, to bring the prize home as a suitable offering for a festival in the city. Otrere consented to send the tracking dogs and maidens to help Penthesilea in her expedition but insisted that Hippolyte remain in Themiskyra, explaining that her sibling's time and attention were employed on other things. If Hippolyte were to inherit the responsibilities of Otrere she would be obliged, on occasion, to assume her duties.

When Hippolyte heard this reply, she remonstrated very earnestly against it, and begged her mother to allow her to go. "What will the world think of me," said she, "if I shut myself up to domestic pursuits and enjoyments, and shun the dangers and toils of a hunt which other women consider it their highest honour to share? What will my fellow citizens think of me and how shall I appear in the eyes of my sisters? They will despise me."

Otrere explained to her daughter the reason why she had been so careful to avoid exposing her to danger on this day. She related to her the dream that had greatly alarmed her as she woke. She dreamed that Ares had come to her bed to tell her that his daughter Hippolyte was destined to die of a wound received from the point of a bronze-tipped

spear thrown by a child of Ares. The queen was made very uneasy by this ominous vision. She determined at once to take every precaution in her power to avert the threatened danger.

“It is on that account,” said the queen, “that I am so anxious about you.

Hippolyte said, in reply, that she was not surprised, under those circumstances, at her mother’s anxiety; but she maintained that this was a case to which her caution could not properly apply. “You dreamed,” she said, “that I should be killed by an Achaean weapon; but a stag has no such weapon. If the dream had portended that I was to perish by antlers or a fall from a cliff, you might reasonably have restrained me from going to hunt; but iron-pointed instruments are weapons of war, as you have explained many times and we are not going, in this expedition, to contend with war, rather to lunge a bronze hunter’s blade into the prize.”

The queen, partly convinced, perhaps, by the arguments that Hippolyte offered, and partly by the urgency of her request, after careful consideration allowed her eldest daughter to go with her sisters. She consigned her, however, to the special care of Princess Penthesilea, who was likewise to accompany the expedition, charging Penthesilea to keep constantly by her side, and to watch over her with the utmost vigilance and fidelity.

The band of hunters was organized, the dogs prepared, and the train departed. Very soon afterward, a messenger came back from the hunting ground, breathless, and with a countenance of extreme concern and terror, bringing the dreadful tidings that Hippolyte was dead. It was her beloved sister Penthesilea who had killed her. In the ardour of the chase, while the hunters had surrounded the stag and were each intent on her own personal danger while in close combat with the animal, and while all were lunging darts and lances at their prey, the bronze-tipped spear of Penthesilea missed its prey, and entered the body of the unhappy princess and pierced her heart. Despite all the frantic attempts to save her, she bled to death on the spot.

Penthesilea



Soon after the messenger had made known these terrible tidings, the maidens, transformed now into a funeral procession, appeared, bearing the dead body of the queen's daughter, and followed by the wretched Penthesilea herself, who was wringing her hands, and crying out incessantly in accents and exclamations of despair.

Hippolyte's eyes were closed on a strangely peaceful face. Except for a slight tear in the centre of the linen corselet she appeared untouched. Tormented, with her face covered in tangled hair wet with a mixture of blood and lamentation, Penthesilea begged the queen to kill her at once, over the body of her sister, and thus put an end to the unutterable agony that she endured. This calamity was more, she said, than she could bear for she had murdered her dearest sister, her greatest benefactor and friend.

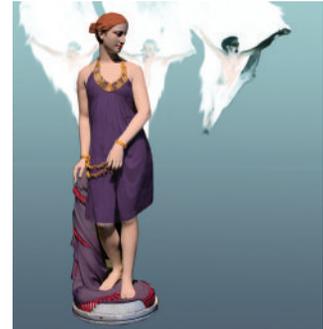
Otrere, though overwhelmed with anguish, was disarmed of all resentment at witnessing Penthesilea's suffering. She turned to embrace her young daughter, running fingers back through soiled copper hair. She endeavoured to soothe and quiet the agitation which the unhappy maid endured, but it was in vain. Penthesilea would not be calmed, her eyes incessantly flashing from the face of her sister and back to her mother while screaming for forgiveness. Otrere finally released Penthesilea into the arms of the mourners and turned back to Hippolyte. In a practiced composure befitting her office Otrere ordered the body of her daughter to be buried with proper honours.

The Amazons washed Hippolyte's body and anointed it with the oil of the halinda plant that grows close to the river and then perfumed it with the essence of violets. She was clothed in a new white tunic and her dark hair was carefully held in place with a finely carved ivory comb. Her face was painted rose and decorated with the charcoal lines of a warrior. She was then laid on the finest woven cloth with her arc, some arrows and her Achean spear and all was covered with early summer flowers. When her tearful mother came to see that all had been properly done, she added a doll that the princess had hidden amongst her few personal possessions.

The funeral services were performed with great and solemn ceremonies in the city but only the queen, her consort, her children and her servants were present for the interment. The body was wrapped tightly in cloth and lowered into the earth at a place not far from Themiskyra. A wooden marker identified the place where a stone column would be erected at a later time.

The household of Otrere returned to the palace, which was now, in spite of all its splendour, shrouded in gloom. That night at midnight, Penthesilea, finding her mental anguish insupportable, retired from her apartment to the place where Hippolyte had been buried, and desired at that moment to kill herself over the grave. But Artemis appeared with a stag and warned her that an ignoble death was not worthy of an Amazon princess and certainly not one who was to be a mighty queen. The chaste princess feigned agreement but nevertheless decided in her heart that she would offer herself one day to fight and die a warrior.

After these events, Otrere was plunged into inconsolable grief and into extreme dejection and misery. Penthesilea was not given another occasion to contemplate these calamities for the Amazons had long recognized the abilities of the young princess and expected her to assume responsibility in the queen's period of darkness. In the summer of her seventeenth year, Penthesilea was the youngest warrior since Lysippe to be made queen.







Panel 6: Truwisa

Penthesilea gains experience as a great warrior and leader. On her return to Themiskyra, a messenger sent by King Priamos petitions Amazon assistance at the siege of Truwisa. Despite warnings from Otrere and the council, Penthesilea decides to go alone as atonement for her crime and to seek purification from the torments of the Erinýes at the Oracle of Apollo. Her sisters insist on joining the queen on her journey and on their arrival they are greeted as saviours by the Trojans.

Otrere eventually was well enough to resume her duties in the city but Penthesilea's abilities and wisdom had grown. She emulated the excellence of her mother and even surpassed her in some particular deeds. For example, she began to train maidens from an earlier age, drilling them daily in the arts of war. She was soon solely responsible for the defence of the Amazon realm. Penthesilea organised magnificent festivals both to the Goddess Artemis and to Ares who had been long neglected.

Penthesilea

Although it was not obvious, Penthesilea was in fact shy, secretive, and nervous by disposition. As a precocious child she had already mastered her physical body and her weapons of battle and so now she learned to focus on the analysis of every move, position and situation. An excellent negotiator, she avoided disputes. When she acted on a decision, she was dangerous and decisive.

Two Scythian youths of royal extraction had been driven from their country by other princes who had tired of their ways. Their names were Ylinos and Scolopitus. They took with them a large band of young warriors and with chariots and carts they raided settlements all along the coast of the Hospitable Sea until they reached the edge of the Thermodon plains. Hearing that the Amazon cities were well-defended and that they could not advance past them, they settled on the coast, riding out from their camps and looting undefended settlements for almost two years.

The tribes living around the Amazons sent messengers petitioning the young war queen to ally with them in battle in return for treaties of peace and a portion of plunder. A child of Ares, at the age of nineteen, and counter to the advice of Otrere and the council who found her too inexperienced, she was determined to lead her first expedition to war. To manoeuvre around politics, the young general organized volunteers.

The Amazons rode out and the Scythian raiders were at last, by a combination of the surrounding people, cut to pieces in an ambush. The few wives and children in the camp were taken as slaves but soon relinquished all thoughts of marrying when they realised that it would not be matrimony to live under the men who had conquered them. The queen accepted these women and their children as payment and the captives, happy to have been delivered from vengeance, quickly adapted to Amazon ways and the worship of Artemis.

A year later, Penthesilea and her sisters on nimble ponies, bearing crescent shields, repelled an invasion and continued their campaign against the territory west of the Thermodon, subduing all the peoples

one after another as far as Thrace, thus spreading news of their fierceness and competence throughout the world. Penthesilea returned to her native land with much treasure that she wished to dedicate to the building of elaborate shrines to Artemis and Ares. Derimakheia captured her prize, a Thracian named Tilthazeis who had fought valiantly before surrendering, and Ainia, who was already with child, brought Rolistene whom she had captured after killing two of his bronze-helmeted companions.

Penthesilea saw the change in her sisters. The process of transitioning from the condition in which a maid might play with others, use her strong body in physical activities and give no thought to how she looks, to *femininity* in which she must learn to walk in shoes and long robes and constantly paint and check her face to ensure that her mask is intact, is a harsh one and likely to cause self consciousness. She noticed that the maidens with whom she had been all of her life had to practise femininity until it felt *natural* enough to create a difference between them and their men.

Observing these human changes stimulated different feelings within the queen. Introspectively she wished to know more about her closest companion. Throughout their childhood, Bremusa had unselfishly met the princess's needs for friendship, camaraderie and peace, but more recently there had been a quietly emerging desire. The battlefield made them grow closer rapidly for they had similar fears and crises and shared the soldier's life of damp beds and shelters. Now Penthesilea had noticed that they had begun to cling to each other.

Penthesilea felt strong and excited as she rode fast on her pony. It was only when they crossed the river that her stomach began to turn again in pain and her palms grew damp as she held the reins. She could smell herself now; clean sweat harmonized with the distinct wine-like perfume of her horse.

Her companion's blonde hair had fallen loose and was tousled from the ride. She measured close to four pēchys (six feet) in height. She had a strong voice and painted her face in fierce ways as if to hide the gentle



self that her sisters had known. She was, by now, an experienced archer and swordswoman who had killed many men and could have her choice of prizes.

On this day, for some unknown reason, as they dismounted, Bremusa swept the princess into a long, strong embrace. The princess was overwhelmed as she lost the strength in her legs but, before she could say anything, Bremusa had turned to other preoccupations.

For the rest of the day, they avoided each other, only exchanging eyes flickering back and forth as they tended to the work in the camp. In the evening they met again and walked together. Bremusa spoke of how she had always been unsure of her acceptance by others because of her physical stature, her different hair colour and features that were apparent only to her, such as a slightly asymmetric bite and a prominent nose which widened at the bridge. In fact, Bremusa had been tall and attractive since she was a girl and her qualities had only been refined since she became a woman. She also expressed remorse for her deeds of the battlefield and admitted that she had cut down many who were simply unprepared in the wrong place.

Penthesilea spoke of some minor details of her administrative responsibilities, but soon the conversation drifted toward the dark thoughts that returned night after night to steal sleep from an increasingly fatigued war queen. She told her that she no longer knew what ailed her body and had begun doubting her beliefs and questioning the goddess' darker intentions. She admitted to Bremusa that she was envious of Ainia and that it made her feel quarrelsome and incompetent as a woman.

That night in bed, Penthesilea was stirred by being near Bremusa as she lay with her head so close to hers. She already loved this maiden who had always been a special person and wonderful friend. They had both confessed physical attraction to each other as children and even spoke aloud that they might be for each other. Tonight their bodies began to think for them, pulling them closer, but Penthesilea could not act, uncertain of whether Bremusa, in deep sleep beside her, shared similar feelings.

The next morning felt more comfortable, like the way they had always been. They spent the day together planning a triumphant return to the city but that night their bond was complete. It was warm that evening and Bremusa lay there, her strong and healthy body wrapped in a thin layer of linen, her eyes and mouth demanding, but Penthesilea restrained herself for fear of clumsiness. She loved and trusted the sound of the maiden's reassuring voice as she confided how happy she was to be close to home. Suddenly she turned around to face the queen and whispered, "How do you feel right now?"

After a pause Penthesilea said, "Warm." At those words, Bremusa confessed that she wanted them to hold each other and to feel that they were able to do that. The thought of an embrace made Penthesilea hot with desire but she shyly responded, "I think we can do that."

Bremusa sighed, "I want to touch you." She moved her body toward Penthesilea. Her hand touched the queen's fox-coloured hair and stroked backwards. Fingers felt like feathers on skin and a warm sweet breath drifted over Penthesilea's face. Then a knee touched her thigh and currents moved up her back and down between her legs. As Bremusa's lips found her forehead Penthesilea felt a tremble. She released a nervous breath to which Bremusa responded, "Am I improper? Do I upset you?"

"I am nervous," replied Penthesilea, "but please do not stop. I have dreamed of you for such a long time." Bremusa moved closer, turning sideways, face-to-face, her arm curving around the back. Penthesilea trembled again, happy for once and content but mostly weak from desire. Then kisses invited more and more as hands explored the warmth that they had found. Fingers ran along backs and down thighs and received caresses in return. Lips passionate and sweet met and explored bodies until they shook from happiness. Sweet words of softness were exchanged over and over as they held each other and fell into Morpheus' spell.

By her twenty-second year, queen Penthesilea was chaste, wealthy, renowned and the undisputed leader of an army of experienced warriors.

Penthesilea



Because of her kindly disposition, her sense of justice and her beauty she received from all her subjects the greatest approbation.

Athene guiding the spear of Deiphobus pierced the side of Ares' beloved Ascalaphus but the thunderstrokes of Zeus forbade Ares' return to the fields that surrounded Truwisa. The war god was growing wearied and restless and his thoughts turned again toward Themiskyra, for the sacrifices that Penthesilea had offered were not enough to appease the depth of vengeance endemic in Ares. He again called for Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone to intervene for the soricide of his daughter Hippolyte. The Erinýes' power grew as they approached Penthesilea for they were born of such a crime, being sprung from the blood of Ouranos, spilled by his own son Kronos.

They stayed with the queen day and night in visions of her dead sister and in the sound of screams of unborn children scattered as blood sacrifice. An agonizing pain within her abdomen interrupted her concentration and made her unable to eat. She was gradually getting thinner and paler as she took no rest and found little counsel, for the wrath of the grey ones could only be placated through the purification and atonement of eternal darkness.

It was at this time that the herald arrived at Themiskyra with an appeal from the great King Priamos of Truwisa. The petition was brought to the council of the Amazons by Queen Penthesilea who proposed to travel with a small group of sisters as an ambassador to negotiate the terms of Amazon assistance.

Queen Otrere tried to reason with her daughter. "The siege of Truwisa has brought many heroes to that place and throughout the world these half-gods have elevated the values of war and placed them above domestic concerns. They have left women and children who will never know their fathers to fend for themselves. The principal guarantee of our freedom has been autonomy. It is not our custom to be engaged as mercenaries for that leaves us open to subjection. The battle at Truwisa has been of Agamemnon's design. He lies to the Achaean kings who, under threat, yield all decision-making and thinking power to him alone. Com-

mon sense is suspended for the sake of security and the war continues in the direction he wishes. Any questioning of Agamemnon is said to ‘give aid and comfort to Priamos.’ If we march to Truwisa, we cede our power to such kings and replace the rewards of labour with dreams of plunder. Should not the moral life of the Amazon nation be bound to two virtues only: concern for our sisters and willingness to sacrifice? With such a campaign all social needs of our city will become secondary to the conducting of war where all other realities vanish. We have considered and declined such adventures many times.”

Penthesilea turned to the queen and the council and spoke in a careful and eloquent voice, “It has been easy to approve of war when it doesn’t happen in our own city. Amazons have been careful to not face that reality by finding the invaders before they are upon us. Our battles have been almost diversionary spectacles and demonstrations of our skills. We have reduced risk through preparation and observation. We know our neighbours and our land. Campaigns of ambush and surprise have left many raiders, from the east or from the west, defenceless to the accuracy of our arrows. This battle is different, however, for the city of Priamos guards the Hospitable Sea and has allowed no civilised army to ever arrive at the gates of Themiskyra. If Truwisa falls we become easy prey to the might of the Greeks.”

Amynomene, a warrior of considerable experience, asked for permission to speak. She turned to Penthesilea and said, “I have fought many battles for Queen Otrere and I have supported and fought in your campaigns on the coast and to the Bosphorus but I must speak. The environs of Truwisa are unknown to our scouts and I have heard that on this venture we will not be facing raiders wishing plunder but battle-hardened armies led by princes like Odysseus, Ajax and Achilles. These half-mortals adhere to values foreign to us. They show no fear and hold to no morals. You will not be greeted as ambassadors but as women and savages. Priamos mourns his son Hektor, leader of men, who fell to the wrought spear of Achilles. He is desperate and defenceless for he now petitions ‘women’ and ‘savages.’ This is a dangerous journey. I implore

the war queen not to go to a place where gods appear as warriors, where allies can become foes and where even Ares is denied satisfaction.”

The council, in agreement, voiced their decision to Otrere. The queen spoke. “This community cannot afford to support the war queen in this venture.” She continued, “It is true that as defenders we have had an advantage over attackers and we have had much experience in defensive war. If indeed there were a siege of Themiskyra and our sister cities, we have the means to strengthen our position. We know how to protect our people while making the invader vulnerable.

“Now I will speak of what awaits us in Truwisa. We are Sauromatae. Throughout our history our relationships have been with people of the east. Our invaders have also come from the east and we know their tactics well. We have not had relations with Hellenes except as traders until recently, when Thracians, scattered after the death of King Rhesos, wandered to the Thermodon plains. It is true that our victories pushed them back to the Bosphorus and brought back many treasures but we also learned that their ways are foreign. Our warriors have never faced an organised Danaan army led by men like the Argives or the son of Peleus. At Truwisa we will find a killing field stripped of defenses and populated by treachery. We will ride there as naïve and vulnerable maids. Do not misconstrue fear or lack of skill from my words but understand that wisdom dictates that Truwisa is clearly not our battle.”

But Penthesilea, determined to tame the defiant war god Achilles, central to all that she had heard on this day, imagined that she would either put an end to his dreams of immortality and bring him naked in a cart to Themiskyra, or die at the siege. She spoke in a quiet measured tone, “Sisters, I do not beg for approbation nor do I wish to bring misfortunes to this city. I have decided to go alone for rituals of purification offered by King Priamos at the oracle of Apollo. I ail in body and disposition for there are grey spirits who, even as I speak, seek their amends.”

The council could not deny this wish and agreed that the war queen could go with sufficient guard and provisions provided by the city. Penthesilea thanked Otrere and the council but declined their offer of protection.

Later, alone with her mother and after Penthesilea had voiced her wishes, Otrere asked for a truthful explanation since they had always shared thoughts. After waiting for what felt like hours, her heart sinking lower with each passing second, Penthesilea turned to her mother with anguished eyes and said, “The Erinýes steal my sleep and strength. Divine Artemis guides me to her twin, Apollo, who resides on the plains of Truwisa. Do not cry, mother, for my motives are not of suicide. I possess the invulnerability of chastity and am of Ares, equal to man. I wish only to be freed of these torments. If, however, after my period of veneration, it should happen that I find a prize suitable for an Amazon queen, I will bring him home.” She smiled, “I have seen the changes in the eyes of my sisters Derimakheia, Ainia and Antibrote and I wish a daughter and grandchild for our household.”

The queen remained calm and kept herself from crying in front of Penthesilea. She reiterated her point of view and tried to get her daughter to reconsider but observed that a decision had been made. Penthesilea’s words broke her mother’s heart for she wished to hug her daughter and never let go. Otrere kept her composure but later, when she was alone, she began crying and could not stop, for of her five children, there remained only Penthesilea.

The queen desired happiness for her daughter and would do anything to that end. When she withdrew as queen she had hoped that Penthesilea’s new responsibilities and position would change her. Her daughter quickly became a victorious war queen and there had been no signs of discontentment and so her decision came as a shock. Penthesilea was hurting her mother, who had given her life, helped her grow and mature, provided for her and kept her safe. Otrere only wished for a few more months of her time, after which her daughter would have the rest of her life to do as she wished.

After Penthesilea had decided to go alone to Truwisa, her sisters insisted on joining her so that they would march as a regiment. Touched by their allegiance she addressed them, “Most men tend to be sceptical of our commitment on the battlefield but we are a race of women who

want to fight for our way of life. The prospect of women warriors has always been used as an argument against us because death at childbearing age has always been a possibility for the children of Ares. But we must remember that the enemy is weakened by their myths and assumptions about what we do in battle, what we are not doing, what our capabilities are, and what impact we have. We hear this rhetoric repeated as an excuse to vocalise every misogynist and paternalist stereotype. Be reminded that when we are not called upon to die in battle it is one more reason cited to uphold patriarchal values. In all societies, the old, the young, the infirm and the dependent are sheltered from fighting. We know that a military leader rightly has more credibility if she has seen combat and it would be impossible for the inexperienced to exercise leadership over the battle hardened. Common men should be well prepared when they face us in combat. We first appear as flirtatious prey, amenable and weak, so that a man will allow us to come near, then suddenly the ground falls under him as he feels the nauseous sensation of an open wound.

“Our mothers established a city at Themiskyra because their husbands did not protect them. Conquered and raped, forced to be concubines by their enemies, they escaped by their own power and decided that from that moment they would live separately from men. We are armoured with our skills in warfare and it is with this ability that we can meet the needs of our children.

“Amazons have never fought for honour, conquest or the spoils of war. We are fearsome soldiers but never forget that we alone can give immortality through birth. Ours is fundamentally a maternal society and the main objective of our participation in any battle has been procreation. We take men by conquest, in part to retain autonomy and more so as a symbolic gesture to those who by their nature desire to prevail over us through charm or force.”

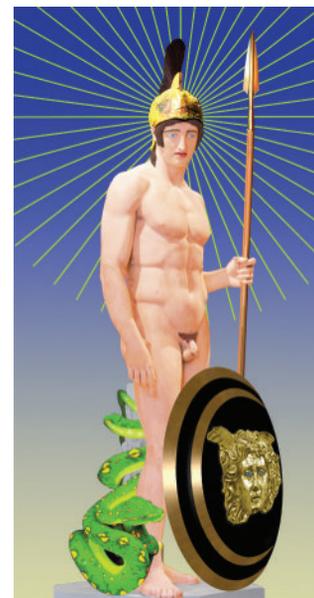
The dark-eyed war queen spoke to her sisters, “We are all saddened by the words: died after waging a battle. Waging a battle sounds like a wasteful way to pass the last moments of life. We are asked to fight

to stay alive and to defeat the enemy and then our bodies become the battlefield as we are assaulted with weapons that deform and debilitate. We are asked to imagine our arrows destroying the enemy as if to enlist the aid of the gods. On a battlefield, living is put on hold in order to wage war. But, what is war? War is death, yet we spend our whole lives battling this inevitable foe. We are all born and we all die. I do not presume that we should not try to live as long and as well as possible, using whatever means are available to us, but if we are to live, we must live well, whether we are in our homes or on the killing ground.”

Penthesilea continued, “Perhaps we find vitality in the wages of war, a camaraderie while fighting death. Perhaps it provides us with a purpose. Let us now assume that death is not a failure, but a transition. Let us accept that everything that happens in our lives has some instructional value, some meaning. Let us take life as the opportunity to learn lessons that we will need in our next world. Let us believe that life is all about facing challenges with curiosity, and excitement, knowing we cannot fail. Then when we come to battle, we will recognize it as a lesson with something to be learned. We do not learn from helplessness, but from challenge. What could make us feel more helpless than the fight against death? What better challenge than the opportunity to find meaning?”

With these words the Amazons prepared for the battlefield where the great kings of the Hellenes were assembled in siege. Queen Penthesilea was to ride out with her sisters, each one a princess, hot for war and battle hardened, each renowned, and yet willing to serve. Klonie was there, Polemoussa, Cleite, Derinoe, Euandre, Antandre, and Bremusa with Hippothoe, dark-eyed Harmothoe, Alkibie, young Antianara and Thermiodosa. Ainia, Derimakheia and Antibrote dressed in battle clothes and left their young daughters to join their comrades. All had fought with their queen and now had chosen to be beside her at Truwisa.

It took time to prepare provisions enough for the journey. Food had to be prepared, packed and stored in bags. Weapons had to be fabricated and the horses had to be gathered and prepared for travel. The nights would be extremely cold in the mountains and they required suf-



Penthesilea

ficient clothing and fuel for their camps. The Amazon regiment was accompanied by handmaidens, groomers responsible for the extra horses and other servants, even some men, who had volunteered with hopes of freedom and fortune. All of the company had to possess training in the Greek manner of fighting and use of the hoplon and were bound to their allegiance to the queen and her sisters. Together, they were over two hundred with eighty horses.

Cleite, who had been given the responsibility for the Cypriot merchant ship they had chartered to bring the Amazons back to Themiskyra, had sailed a week earlier with a small group of warriors. The land march to Truwisa took a circuitous route to avoid disturbing the Scythians they encountered as they made their way across Anatolia. Penthesilea wished to avoid accidental skirmishes that might impede their advance. Except for the few places her messengers had determined to be appropriate for trading tools for food and water, they tended to camp on barren ground. Although the land they rode across had been cultivated for thousands of years, a decade of cold and drought had forced farmers to abandon many areas to dust and the wind. They also passed near many protected valleys and woodlands, green from the nearby streams that irrigated them. These were the places that they desired to avoid.

The city of Truwisa had been built before the beginning of time after the flood at a fertile place overlooking the Hellespontos. People had lived there even before the Danaan had rebuilt the citadel. But now as the Amazons neared the city the land became increasingly sparse, stripped of timber and vacant of crops, nor were there animals of any kind. These were signs of the presence of a rambling encampment. Penthesilea began considering the thousands of soldiers who had already lived half her lifetime in this sterile place. She thought of their women waiting for news while their hoplite husbands lusted for women and base plunder even as arrows pierced the linethorax. Yet, throughout her childhood she had only heard about the heroes, the gods and stories of noble battles, but most of all, she had been fascinated by Achilles, cunning and cruel in his ways.



By the time that Penthesilea entertained joining the conflict at Truwisa, it was well known that the father of savage Neoptolemus had, in his youth, lived among the daughters of Lycomedes. To the copper-haired queen the tale portended the murderous darkness of the son of Peleus.

It was told that, seizing an appropriate moment while in the household of Lycomedes, lovely-haired Thetis asked of her son, "Is it too hard a thing, to pretend to dance and join hands in sport among these maidens if only to save your life?" Charmed by his mother he abandoned his earlier resistance to the idea of pretending to be a maiden, and with a sly and sidelong glance he refused the maiden's clothes with less certainty. His mother wrapped a peplos around him and softened his stalwart neck and lowered his strong shoulders, and relaxed the muscles of his arms, and tamed and ordered his uncombed hair, and set her necklace around the neck that she loved so dearly. Then, with him dressed in an embroidered skirt, she began to teach him how to walk and speak with the modesty of a maiden. Such was the picture of a goddess as she transformed her son from a youth to maiden. Achilles did not complain much for even in his manhood it excited him that he could possess as much feminine grace and charm as the daughters of Lycomedes.

For Queen Penthesilea, beauty practices and femininity were not essential properties of being a woman. That a man could be a more ardent exponent of femininity was clear to her as well. Dressing as a woman is exciting to the man who seeks it because it represents subordination and satisfies an unnatural desire to be submissive with a partner. But a woman does not choose femininity, for it is thrust upon her with her first menses. She is feminine because of her physical nature and the position that she assumes, often by force, in the household. This aspect of femininity is not a fantasy as for a man but rather the hard work required of those who have been deemed to hold a lower status.

Deidamia, and she alone, had learned in stolen secrecy the manhood of Aeacides that lay hidden beneath Achilles' show of a feigned sex. Initially she thought that her sisters knew, but kept it discretely quiet, for

when Achilles, rough as he was, stood amid the company of the maidens, and the departure of his mother rid him of his bashfulness, and even though all of the girls gathered around him, he chose Deidamia as his friend and slyly assailed her unsuspecting innocence. He followed her around, and persistently looked towards her.

Now he clung to her side zealously and she made no attempt to avoid him. He teased her with light garlands and a thyrsus and showed her the sweet strings of the lyre that he knew so well. He repeated the gentle measures and songs of Chiron's teaching, and guided her hand to let her fingers strike the sounding harp. As she sang he made a conquest of her lips, and bound her in his embrace, and praised her amid a thousand kisses. With pleasure she learned of Pelion's summit and of Aeacides, and hearing the exploits of this youth was spellbinding and wondrous to her to the point that she sang of the marvels of Achilles in his very presence.

Deidamia in her turn taught him to move his strong limbs with more modest grace and to spin out the unwrought wool by rubbing with his thumb, and repaired the distaff and the skeins that his rough hand had damaged. She marvelled at the deep tones of his voice, how he shunned all her sisters and pierced her with his too-attentive gaze and at all times hung breathless on her words. Now he prepared to reveal the fraud, but she like a fickle girl avoided him, and would not allow him to confess. Even so and counter to his mother's instructions, the young prince of Olympus gave treacherous kisses to his sister, after all he was still her brother and she thought no harm, until the reverence for their common blood gave way, and the sister feared a lover's passion.

In the darkness of the night, content that the unstimulating silence gave timely aid to secret deeds, Achilles gained her by force, and with all his vigour strained her in a real embrace. She filled grove and mountain with her cries, but the train of Bacchus, dispelling slumber's cloud, deemed it the signal for the dance and on every side the familiar shout arose and Achilles once more brandished the thyrsus and said, "What are you afraid of? I would never have endured this dress and shameful

clothing, had I not seen you, sweetest Deidamia, on the seashore. It was only for you that I agreed to this charade.”

Achilles continued with his assault. “Why are you still crying. You have been made the daughter-in-law of mighty Ocean and will bear valiant grandsons to Olympus!”

The princess was horror-struck at such dark happenings. Although she had borne suspicions and shuddered at his presence, she had also nurtured a secret fondness for godlike Achilles. What could she do? If she spoke to her father she would ruin the reputations of both herself and her lover. She would be excluded from her position and household and he would in all probability suffer untimely death? And despite her anger and terror, there remained in her a trace of her burgeoning love for him.

So she bore her grief in silence. She cleaned up after the crime and made her handmaiden reluctantly swear to secrecy. She concealed the rape and the swelling womb and the burden of the months of ailing, until Eileithyia, seeing that Deidamia’s course was now fully run, helped deliver Achilles a son.

As the regiment came closer to Truwisa whole cities appeared as chaotic clusters of tents. Chariots and wagons were filled with people seemingly indifferent to her passing. In this strange place the queen was simply another client, as this assembly owed its existence to the conflict. Here anything that was necessary for an encampment as large as any city in the world could be provided. Perversely built on unproductive land far from the bounties of the sea, they nevertheless had plenty of fish, grain, livestock, wood, weapons and tools. The impermanence and lack of humanity in this place was disconcerting to the queen.

It was here, where one could not identify Trojan or Greek, east or west, that Penthesilea decided to rest and to feed and water her entourage. It was here that she would plan her strategies and prepare her sisters for their entrance to Truwisa. Having nothing remaining that might have been useful to trade with, all was paid for with the gold that she carried. The vendors seemed entirely satisfied and accustomed to this practice.

Penthesilea



The next morning they advanced through the settlements lateral to Truwisa. From a distance they could make out the shadows of the city that stood guard over the passage between the west and the east. Truwisa was surrounded by walls the height of trees, built of stone and covered with clay brick the same colour as the earth from where the city rose as a hill. When seen from the sea, one could imagine that it was indeed a place where gods could live and battle, so different from beautiful but modest Themiskyra with its grassy mounds and wooden gates. This city was surrounded by a great moat, carved out of the rock itself, perhaps a thousand steps wide. An invader would have had to pass through the moat at the mercy of Truwisa's archers to get to its inhabitants.

But over time the moat had been conquered and the Greeks had built bridges and all kinds of contrivances that had rendered Truwisa's first defence irrelevant. No longer serving its initial purpose, the cavity was filled with shelters and tents so that each of the Greek commanders could witness the famous battlefield that had now become a staging place for blood sports. Behind the tents and further toward the waters there was a settlement that looked as permanent as Truwisa itself. Some houses had been built of new bricks while most of the others were wood structures that unlike the villages to the east followed the patterns of an organized community. One could even distinguish the decorative styles of the different tribes that had gathered here. Penthesilea assumed that the camp must have been laid out on the foundations of the Truwisa that had once existed outside of the citadel.

After the death of Hektor, who was the pillar of Truwisa, who was left to lead the nobles of the city? Hektor's corpse came back to the city, after Priamos, the king of Truwisa had set aside pride to beg for the return of his son. Penthesilea and her sisters approached the city as the Trojans were still lamenting over the loss of their champion.

As the queen entered the empty area between Truwisa and its surrounding settlements there was an impatient silence that contrasted with the babble that she had encountered up to this point. She could see that she was being observed from all directions.

The queen's heralds had informed her that although the silence of truce was more tiresome to those gathered here than the commotion they had grown used to, the death of Hektor had also assuaged most of their blood lust. Some of the commanders had already begun preparations for withdrawal and there were negotiations everywhere. She looked around and told her sisters to wait as she wished to ride alone towards the shore. Because the strait was about fifteen minutes away, Bremusa refused to allow her queen to ride unaccompanied for fear that an undisciplined arrow would find her alone. Insisting, her partner argued that it would be useful to possess an extra set of eyes, to which the war queen was in agreement.

The Amazons rode away from the larger group toward the west, precipitating discussions and speculation from the camps. They rode down from the citadel and through the muddy salt marsh until they arrived at the pebble beach. Penthesilea could see in the distance, towards the Aegean Sea, masses of ships of many different colours, almost pretty the way they were decorated with drying garments and banners. She could also see the smoke from the cooking fires of a settlement more permanent than it should have been. The air smelled of salt and fish, quite different from the river of her home. From their perspective the ships continued endlessly towards the horizon of the sea.

Her horse was uncomfortable on this land that bred the insects that served as another barrier to invasion. This was not a place where the queen would choose to remain for so many years. She looked across and saw the low hills of the eastern shore and imagined the people quietly tending their animals, cautiously oblivious to the events that were transforming a world. She turned her horse and the Amazons made their way up the slope, this time in a gentle gallop. Penthesilea smelled the smoke from the seaside fires and could faintly detect the ritual of roasting lamb.

"I don't understand why they are all still here," said Bremusa from her mount. "How could they all pretend to be fighting for this Helen of Sparta?"

“I have chosen Truwisa because it is certain that I will die, if only to appease the Erinýes. But you, my dear Bremusa, and our sisters are here for a much more noble adventure and you are great warriors who can succeed at this task. These men follow the wisdom of their leaders who are most certainly not here to defend the aging daughter of King Tyndareus.”

“Look at this place,” the queen gestured, “it is the passage from one way of thinking to another. He who controls this place decides who may use it for conquest or trade. Our city does not conform to the Achaean way of life. If Truwisa falls, then too falls our beloved Themiskyra, our way of life including the love that we share and the protection of Artemis. But to make all of this simpler, we choose Truwisa simply because godlike Achilles is our greatest adversary.”

“There is no one on this earth who is more beautiful than you, my queen,” said Bremusa as her heels nudged her horse forward, “and I will die for my love before anyone comes close to you.”

As she rode, Penthesilea reflected on Helen, who to the young queen was nothing but a foolish wager. How could anyone but the idiot Paris judge for the apple Tēi Kallistēi? How could the great King Agamemnon be so greedy for power as to have sacrificed his innocent daughter Iphigenia? And Helen of Sparta, now late in her fourth decade of life, where does she come into the story? What do the gods think at this point and what punishment are they planning for all of those gathered here?

The queen knew that her warriors were the most beautiful women on the dark earth but now she began to wonder about love. She had loved; her dear sister Hippolyte whom she had by mischance slain and of course the raging Bremusa who was always by her side. Could it have been anything other than love that made the most beautiful of all mortals desert her most noble husband and sail to Truwisa, with never a thought for her daughter of nine years and her dear parents?

Now was this the same corruption that kindled in her heart for swift-footed Achilles, deadly in his lack of empathy, unfaithful both to men and women, comfortable feigning maidens yet godlike in his lineage.

These thoughts grew and changed in the queen, transforming into sharp and deadly weapons of rage. She felt melancholy as she approached the city.

When the messengers arrived there was confusion in both the Greek and Trojan camps. As a young man the noble Priamos had participated in the defence of the Phrygians on the day when the Amazon women came as men's equals. The Phrygian men with their swarming horses, the people of Otreus and Mygdon, whose camp was spread along the banks of the Sangarios with young Priamos, were not enough to defeat the glancing eyed Achaeans. But on this day, noble Priamos could not clearly determine the enemy as these Sarmatian savages made their way towards his city. But Queen Penthesilea had made her choice for she had already broken her laws and displeased the gods, having chosen the brave Achilles as her most valuable prize.

Trojans were cheered when the war god's child of Parthian race and her brave sisters chose the city. Her face shone with a glorious and terrible beauty. Her smile was ravishing but ruthless eyes shone a dark metal blue.

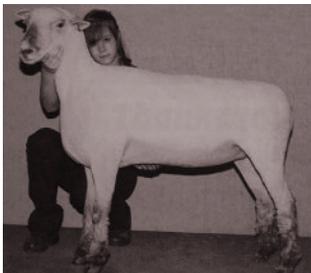
All of Truwisa celebrated when they realised that despite past agonies inflicted by the Amazons, Penthesilea was allied with besieged Truwisa and so it appeared that all was to be forgiven. After all that Priamos had suffered he was strangely overjoyed to see this terrible and dangerous queen.

Priamos welcomed and honoured Penthesilea as a daughter to her home after having returned from a far country. He gave her costly gifts, and pledged more, so that she might save the Trojans from imminent doom. She in return promised, as no man ever had, to slay Achilles, conquer the Argives, and burn their ships.

Penthesilea told Priamos that she had come from the country of Eos to seek atonement for having caused the death of her sister Hippolyte. She told of the constant cries of the Erinýes and how she wished to go to the Temple of Apollo where she might find peace.

Queen Penthesilea was immediately guided by Polyxena, the king's

Penthesilea



daughter, to the sacred place where she was permitted to offer sacrifice and perform rituals, for she too was chaste and pure as was required by the gods. To complete her purification Priamos quickly made all of the arrangements for the great feast that was demanded by Apollo. The son of Zeus was invited to his throne by a table facing Priamos. With him sat Artemis and Aphrodite and next to them sat Hermes. A place had also been set for the war god, who appeared pleased with the occasion. At the centre overlooking all was Zeus. For the sacrificial table, the Trojan princes offered a ram and a ewe and Aegestlion, who was a landowner in the country of Truwisa, alone offered a large bull to be sacrificed on this day, for it was a great gift that the Amazons had come to rally the Trojan multitudes. The war chiefs offered cheese, honey, anointing oil, wheat and sweet resinated wine. The priests, acknowledging Apollo's generosity, gave two young goats from their herd.

Priamos sat at his table with Hecuba, daughter of Dymas, on his right and to his left, in an honoured place, sat Penthesilea with Bremusa. To her left sat Laodice, the most beautiful of Priamos' daughters. Paris was seated with Helen, to his right Aeneas. Wise Anthenor sat with Theano, Helenus sat beside the widow Andromache. With them were also Cassandra the priestess, Deiphobus, Polites, Hippothous, Agathon, Medesicaste, and Polyxena as well as Klonie, Polemoussa, Derinoe, Euandre, Antandre, Hippothoe, Harmothoe, Alkibie, Antianara, Thermiodosa, Ainia, Derimakheia and Antibrote. The princes, allies and chiefs sat with their families along with the priests.

The bull, two goats, the ewe and ram, with gilt chains as collars, were led into the courtyard. The priest with a bronze knife uttered the words of offering to the seated gods and cut the animal's throats with swift precision. The beasts were then slaughtered with axes by the attendants and following the normal practice the offal and cleaned bones were cooked on an altar with the oil, grain, cheese and honey so that the gods might have food to eat. Small drinking bowls for Apollo and the other guests were filled with wine, for it was customary for them to feast

and sit among mortals. They accepted these gifts for it was decreed by Zeus that all feasting and burnt offering was to be done in his presence.

After the rituals, the rest of the meat was brought to the tripods and bronze spits, along with thirteen rams, two ewes, fourteen goats, eight pigs, two fattened pigs, two cattle, two calves and one deer. Every table was heaped up in baskets of bread in the home of Priamos as well as throughout the city, where grain, olives, peas, lentils, figs, pomegranates, dates, almonds and walnuts as well as resinated wine and beer were given to all the people so that they too could feast on this day. Then as the food was roasted by the princes and their Amazon guests or boiled by the many attendants, the invited mortals and gods drank wine with grated cheese and discussed matters as they feasted deep into the night.





Panel 7: the death of the queen

In the battle, Achilles will strike Penthesilea, drawing profuse blood from her chest. She collapses from her mount and considers surrender, as her eyes grow dim. Powerful Achilles strikes a second time and the queen falls into the dirt, her eyes making contact one last time as the son of Peleus is moved by her beauty.

The Amazon warriors rode screaming onto the battleground in flashing battle-gear, boar-tusk helmets, corselets of hardened linen, with bows and quivers and leather-bound heels urging nimble ponies to war. From their foaming mounts they moved unimpeded by chariot wheels, casting arrow after arrow, bone tips, harder than iron, piercing defenseless hoplites falling from all sides to Amazon accuracy. Clad in the rage of fight they close on the Argives, like beasts locked in a tangle of gory strife. Their bright metal battle-axes fashioned in Achaean foundries



clanged together with clumsy lances and cut through stiffened corselets and wooden shields.

Here were people doing irrational things to others and to themselves. What started with the war cries and ringing of metal was now mayhem. But it was exciting as well for the Amazon warriors, with their war-hardened bodies urging them forward from within. Some have imagined women as fragile yet here we see men under attack standing helpless. You would never see a woman do that for she is always under assault, whether at home or on a battlefield. Women learn quickly that if they don't fight back they die. There is no place for female compassion, no room for emotion.

What do Amazons think while at war? Pull the bowstring, reach for an arrow and pull again. "Kill them before they kill you!" There were so many bone-tipped arrows on that day. Then the Trojans flowed from the gates, each stabbing at flesh with fierce brass against brass. And the soil flowed crimson-red.

In the confusion, Penthesilea dismounted her pony to face alone the Syntagmarches Molion. She stepped back, turning her body to his right side, threatening from above with her spear and appearing at first to leave her liver vulnerable. Molion aimed his sword directly at it from below but encountered two problems. It is more difficult to strike a body disposed sideways and in order to succeed he had to either stretch ahead or take a step. By exposing herself the Amazon invited a direct thrust with his sword. Molion should have protected himself with his shield, but her side seemed so tempting as he lunged.

Penthesilea shifted her centre of gravity to the leg that he moved. Making a swift turning move, her right arm blocked his sword arm and her chest was now next to his right shoulder, her weapon braced against his open belly. His shield was on the left and his right arm stretched ahead in a vain attempt to strike as he was slain.

Next his lieutenant Persinous fell, and then Eilissus and Antitheus felt the iron spear. Remounting, the Queen slew Naubolos, the pride of Lernus, with her axe and bore down on Hippalmus, crushing his back

with her horse-hoofs and then stalwart Elasippus succumbed to her rage.

Penthesilea looked up momentarily to see her sister Derinoe in what appeared to be a critical position. She had fallen and Laogonus attacked her with his spear from above, lunging with all of his strength. But Derinoe like a string turned her body. Placing her shield against the spear, she shifted her left leg ahead and at the same time stood, crushing his unprotected head and chest with her shield.

Ignoring her option to clip a vein inside of his thigh, she plunged her spear into the Achaean's open belly. Dying, he slid along her shield by inertia and was thrown to her left. Derinoe quickly remounted her pony and without hesitation swung her deadly axe while her fierce handmaidens, sex disguised by shields and helmets, continued to push and force the Argives toward the dusty moat now stirring in retreat.

Menippus, who had sailed nine years earlier from Phylace, led by his lord Protesilaus to the war with Truwisa, was felled by young Klonie. Podarces, son of Iphiclus, angered to see his best beloved of all battle-comrades, Menippus, lie broken, responded by swiftly plunging his unswerving lance into Klonie, the maid fair as a goddess. He ruthlessly twisted and pulled and with a rush of dark blood her bowels gushed out to the ground where she fell.

Penthesilea, with a cry of rage, leapt at him, and with her axe, cut cleanly through his great blood-brimming veins. A crimson fountain spewed from his severed arm and with a groan Podarces turned in shock to see the face of the vengeful daughter of Ares. He sprang backward, his courage broken by pain, sorrow and dismay, to flee, followed by his men of Phylace. At the moat, he reeled aside but was helped down into the arms of a comrade.

Then noble Idomeneus, grandson of Minos and king of Crete, thrust out with his lance and plunged it into the right breast of Bremusa. Her heart stilled, she fell as a tall graceful-shafted pine would, heavily sighing through its boughs and then crashing to the earth. It was in such a way that the princess fell to her death, her tall and powerful body collapsing, her limbs void of life as her soul mingled with the sighing winds.

Euandre and Thermodosa rushed through the murderous fray to avenge their sister but Merione the archer stood beside Idomeneus as a lion in the path. His spear pierced the heart of Euandre who fell, surprised at the banality of her death, and then he turned to Thermodosa at his right. Thrusting his seasoned sword under her toughened linen breastplate, he found a vulnerable spot between her hips. The brave sister fell back, pushed by his lightning stroke. She was only aware of warm blood draining from her belly as her sun faded to the soft darkness and silence of dusk.

Then the fiery son of Oileus plunged his ruthless spear between the throat and shoulder of Derinoe. She twisted in defence, grasping the bronze-tipped lance but he pulled it back fiercely, severing her fingers. Horrified, she fell from her pony; blood gushing forth and died alongside the wounded Argives.

The terrible Diomedes suddenly swooped on Derimakheia and Alkibie. With axe-like precision his sword sheared through the sinews of the neck, severing their heads one after the other. Together the Amazons fell like ceremonial calves, not by their beloved Thermodon River to be buried by sisters, but on the blood-seeded Trojan plain. But they were not the only ones keen to fight who fell that day.

Aeneas, son of Anchises, led from the gates the archers and chariots and all the brave Trojans who were driven to defend their city. And the women of the city, seeing the brave Amazons turn back the invader, wished to join their sisters in the noble defence of their homes but were moved by the dissuading words that Theano the priestess of Athene spoke. "From an early time the Amazon women have been trained in the arts of war. As children, when you were taught the weaving-wool and the distaff they were taught the use of bows, the axe and the lance. Their ancestors were the first humans to tame and ride horses. They have joyed in ruthless fight, in charging steeds. From the beginning they work like men and endure like men. The spirit of Ares thrills them and so they are like men in every way. Their labour-hardened frames give them strong hearts and they never faint their knees or tremble. It is said that Penthe-

silea, their queen, is indeed the daughter of Ares. And we must not forget that these women have also been our fiercest enemies. No one in this assembly should attempt to compare herself with such power and we should be thankful that she now fights with us. If she is indeed a woman rather than a goddess, then she is an answer to our prayers. These Amazons are fearless and expert warriors, on horseback or on foot, but here, on the battleground of Truwisa, they are being equalled by the Argives who have not yet greeted their reinforcements from the ships.”

Then the priestess of Athene warned the Trojan women that without knowledge of war craft, their wish to fight was truly a desire for death and therefore against the wishes of Athene on this day when the beating of many a heart, Trojan and Argive, was forever stilled.

While the battle and the fury roared around them, Penthesilea and her sisters Polemoussa with Hippothoe and Antandre neither fainted nor failed. Like she-lions prowling along the long ridges of lone hills they stole down the ravines of battle and sprang with a lightning speed and thirst for the blood that sustained them. Joined on the flanks by dark-eyed Harmothoe and Antibrote, the women who come before men, now angered, leapt on the Danaans.

Backward they shrank to the rapid onslaught as the Amazons followed like a towering surge to dash the Greek ranks asunder. Triumphant-souled, Penthesilea, daughter of great-souled Ares the slayer of men hurled, “Dogs and fools! Happy now are young Klonie and brave Derinoe, for whose main concern was war, wombs empty, now lie on this bloody ground sacrificed for the art they so wished to practice. Derimakheia taught well her young daughter to honour Artemis before she fell to cunning Diomedes, and Euandre, Alkibie and Thermodosa fell not to common lance bearers but to noble Argive princes; they too will be well spoken of and emulated by their sisters by the river Thermodon. And my beloved Bremusa who fell before me here, as promised, in defence of Priamo’s city, is at peace at last, but listen well, for before this day for evil outrage is done, all of you will pay your lives. Not a man among you will deliver his life from my hands to return to his home, to

gladden his parents' eyes or to comfort his wife and children. Rabble! There will be no plunder for you to share! My greatest pleasure is to break you, to drive you before me, to take from you all the things that have been yours and to hear the terrible weeping of those who cherished you. You will die here, food for the vultures and wolves, for no one will come to claim your bodies or to deliver you from the shadows!"

Then Penthesilea called to the moat, "Where is this great son of Tydeus, the scion of Aeacus? Where is his might? Where is this Ajax, powerful son of Telamon? You call them the mightiest but they make fools of you. They dare not confront the queen in open battle but skulk near the ships with their women and pillage."

"Then we shall go to them!" she cried, and as a tigress she leapt on the foe, crashing through the ranks of Argives, smiting from her pony and hurling keen darts, quiver and death-speeding bow close at hand. Amid the confusion and blood she deftly moved, freely choosing targets among the charging lines of fleet-footed men, friends and brothers of Hektor who never flinched from close death.

The hot breath of Ares flowed from the breasts of Polemoussa, Hippothoe and dangerous Antadre as Danaans with ashen spears fell as leaves in autumn. With sharpened bone-tipped arrows, swift Ainia, Hippothoe, the imperious mare, and Antibrote dispatched men, one after another and from the earth rose a blood-drenched moaning from corpse on corpse, mingled with the screaming neighing of chariot ponies now exhausted, pierced with arrows, or impaled on lances. Men, in the dust, lay gasping, while the Trojan steeds with chariots stormed in pursuit, all the time trampling the dying with the dead.

Penthesilea's pony rushed into the fleeing mob; the war queen like a black cloud with the lightning of her axe and a sharp rain of darts cut fear into those who once doubted her wrath. A wounded Achaean cries, "O friends, from heaven an invincible goddess has come to fight the Argives with sanction of almighty Zeus who now remembers his strong-hearted Priamos, who may boast a lineage of immortal blood. For I have never seen a mortal woman so daring and clad in man's arms. She must

be Athene, or the mighty-souled Enyo or Eris the mother of discord. Look! She moves swiftly towards the ships to set them aflame. The same ships that brought us many years ago to the sorrows of intolerable war. Alas, we shall never see our homeland for the gods fight with her!”

The Trojans coming behind in chariots and lances cheered in exultation of their deliverance. Fools! They could not foresee ruin rushing upon them and their city or the destruction of the dark-eyed daughter of Ares, for she had displeased the gods with her arrogance, for at this point neither stormy-souled Ajax nor Achilles, waster of tower and town, had entered the fray but were lying by their ships, at rest with the sad memories of crushed comrades and echoing each other’s groaning.

As it was, the gods were holding back Achaea’s princes from the battle-tumult until the Trojans had had their measure of havoc and slain Greeks. While Penthesilea pursued with murderous intent their rifled ranks, the princes, now with politics more pressing than pride and war craft, had retreated to the encampment. Neoptolemus, Nestor, the son of Neleus, Diomedes, Menelaus, cunning Odysseus and King Idomeus quietly withdrew to plan further treachery while Penthesilea waxed her valour more and more, pushing Argives one after the other into the moat. She aimed the unswerving lance and pierced the backs of those who fled and the breasts of those who charged to meet her. The shining spear point dripped with steaming blood. Her feet were swift when she dismounted and remounted and her spirit never failed, nor did she tire or lose strength for she was the child of Ares. She fought on, ignorant of impending doom, as Achilles and Ajax, by their camp, focused on their tasks.

The Amazon maiden’s wish to appease the Erinýes slew foe after foe. So she ranged, Ares’ child, on foot and horseback through reeling squadrons of Achaea’s sons. Penthesilea broke their ranks, yet still there were more, but they found no screen or hiding-place from imminent death. As bleating goats slain by the blood-stained jaws of a panther, they were scattered by her advance. In each man’s heart the lust of battle died and fear alone lived. This way and that they fled, panic-stricken,



Penthesilea



armour flung from their shoulders to the dust, or they lay grovelling in terror beneath their shields. Horses, unreined of charioteers, fled through the rout, trampling the frightened and wounded, raising the blood-soaked dust, and kicking about severed heads and limbs. The Amazons charged in triumphant rapture as Greeks fell with groan and scream of agony, their manhood withered in that terrible place where the great Danaan host lay, dashed to dust by Penthesilea's spear.

Brief was the span of victory that the fierce maid in battle gained, for as vengeance stormed through the burning death-filled moat and toward the very ships that were to be set aflame at the hands of Trojans, it was then that Ajax, hearing from afar the panic of retreating Argives, spoke to Aeacus' son, "Achilles, the air is full of cries and moans! The thunder of battle is rolling nearer. It is time to go forth before the Trojans light aflame ships and slaughter Argive men to the displeasure of mighty Zeus. We cannot shame the sacred blood of our forefathers, or battle-eager Hercules who sailed to Truwisa and brought down her walls when Laomedon was king at the height of glory. If we who are also mighty men allow the Trojans to prevail then the foulest reproach of the gods will fall upon us alone."

As he spoke, the son of Peleus rose and listened as well to the roar of coming battle. He responded, "Then we must prepare to hunt quail." He turned and donned girdle and knee armour, a golden helmet, plumed with horsehair, and sharpened sword and lance. Then both, agile Achilles shining naked and Ajax in splendid war gear, went to face the approach of the stormy rout. Their metal rang, but louder yet clashed the armour in their souls with a battle fury equal to Ares' anger.

The swift-footed Achilles who arrived on the battleground bore a sadness that had grown since Thetis, over fire, peeled his skins of mortality. Isolated as a child, he became solitary and despaired his exclusion from the games of other youths. His melancholy turned to anger when his father left him on Pelion's heights to shield him from learning the ways of the wicked. There, broad-shouldered Chiron taught wisdom and fed him the innards of lions and boars along with milk and honey.

Achilles was ever the object of divine discord nor did his fire extinguish with the loss of Troilus and the treachery of Agamemnon. The fire within grew with the outrage and emptiness that he felt when his promised Briseis left the camp and when Patroclus was lost on these plains. These were all multiplied within his spirit as proof that the gods had provided no quiet place for the son of Peleus.

The ambrosia-anointed infant, crying as he was bathed in the dark waters, had twisted and embroidered aspects of his life to become the embodiment of Ares. Striking suddenly like a leopard stripped of heart and morals, his every action stemmed from years of deliberation. He most often killed indiscriminately in public in the daytime, but he was as dangerous in intimate quarters at night. He came prepared with a powerful arsenal of weapons with no escape planned. He was a collector of injustice who nurtured a wounded spirit and retreated into an inner life of violence and revenge. Achilles came to the field, a screaming terror, naked but armed in pursuit of his agenda of retribution to an uncaring, rejecting world. He seemed to welcome death, perceiving it as fame and immortality.

Such was the power that Achilles possessed that it maddened Athene who, with Atrytone, shaker of the shields, urged him forward against haughty Paris. As the two warriors pressed on, the Argives joyed at what seemed to be Aloeus' giant sons. They marched as lions and the fleeing Greeks turned and regrouped to stem the tide of war. Onward they pressed to crush the triumphant foes and slay with their resistless spears. As they marched, bloody corpses fell heap on heap. Fed with flesh, the destroyers slew on, spreading wide havoc through the hosts of Truwisa.

First Deiochus fell wounded and then gallant Hyllus fell, slain by Ajax. Then died Eurynomus, lover of war, Alcahous and goodly Enyeus. Then Peleus' son burst on the Amazon war maids, impaling young Antandre and Polemoussa on his blooded lance and then with sword rending the womb of Antibrote, blood a darkened red flowing from the stunned princess. Fierce-souled Hippothoe raised her axe but was cut down by Ajax when momentarily distracted by suddenly audacious

Argives lancing her pony. Then dark-eyed Harmothoe with shining brown hair, who would never know a man's softness, succumbs too soon to the cold precision of Achilles' determination. With blood flowing from her lips she falls forever muted as the arms of the dark night greet her.

The Argive phalanx grows stronger as it moves like a growing storm surge over the broken Trojans. Achilles with Telamon's mighty-hearted son presses on through the reeling ranks. Battalions once dense crumbled as weakly and as suddenly as grass trampled underfoot. When battle-eager Penthesilea felt the change of wind approach through the scourging storm of war, she moved toward the Achaean heroes, a grim leopard in a deadly pursuit, while they like silent hunters, armour clad, put trust in their long spears and waited for the lightning leap. And so Achilles and Ajax, with spears held ready, waited for Penthesilea.

Two, then three, arrows flew straight from Penthesilea's ivory bow to the heavy beating heart of Aeacus' son, but he like a cat playing with its prey deftly moved his shield to glance the deadly darts. Then she threw a long-shafted lance. It flew straight but its tip shattered into slivered fragments as if it hit a rock face when it struck the fire-god's bronze of Ajax. Then the warrior-maid swung her battle-axe and with fierce words cried, "The first lance found metal but I will strike flesh. You may vaunt that you are the mightiest of the Danaans but if mortals you will certainly die! You wish to learn what comes from the breasts of Amazons. It is blood mixed with war for I am the child of Ares and no man can defeat me!" She screamed scornful laughter and hurled the Grecian-wrought battle-axe. But now she was mocked in utter scorn as the axe glanced off the bronze of Ajax. The Fates had ordered that all the fury of the earth could not draw the blood of the son of Telamon. But Ajax had already chosen to rush the Trojan chariots, leaving the queen to Peleus' son, because in his heart he knew that despite all of her prowess, she would be to Achilles as a dove is to a hawk.

The hero must hold fast to his hatred of anything such as growth, beauty, or humanity, which might be an advance over his bleak, static in-

terior landscape. He must hold to the notion that the gods have done him grievous wrong. He is owed reparation for this damage. He has a right to be an exception, to disregard morals by which others hold themselves back. He may do wrong himself, since wrong has been done to him. It is Achilles' feeling of being an exception to the rules, of being entitled to harm others and break laws, that fuels his obliterative state of mind.

His pain and rage cannot be contained so he embarks on a course of self-destruction that transfers his pain to others. He is a collector of injustice, grasping onto every perceived insult and amassing evidence that he has been grossly mistreated. To sustain this desire for revenge his enemies deserve to be the targets of a merciless, incendiary rage. They must be worthy of their fate and so he sees his victims as barely worthy of consideration as human beings. His goal is not to kill, for that would entail honour on these noble maidens, but rather to destroy their capacity to enjoy their prized status as Amazons.

Penthesilea then groaned in anger that her shafts had been in vain as in scoffing speech the son of Peleus spoke, "Savage young maid, why have you come here to fight with us, the sons of Kronos? Even the great Hektor fell to my spear like lamb sacrificed for fair weather. But you and your sisters, all girls, are utterly mad to threaten us this day! We are not the disorderly crowd that you have played with so far. Your last hour is marked here on my lance and, little girl, you should not look to Ares to save you here on a real battle ground against real men, for you have a genuine debt to pay for your mayhem, and doom in the point of my lance awaits you!"

The queen looked around the battlefield and thought of Helen, whose beauty must be weary of battle, and Penthesilea dreamed nostalgic of her childhood naked in the forest and of Helen's youth when she too ran free with the youths of Sparta.

And so maliciously quick-witted Penthesilea, after wreaking much death and havoc among the Achaeans, found herself face to face with Achilles, who was once much less than her, now towering over her. Stripped of all but her bow, she looked at the son of Peleus attired as



Penthesilea



a youth, in his nakedness appearing vulnerable, except for the deadly weapons that he still embraced in his hands. As she thought of these things, she felt the screaming of the Erinýes fade away to silence. Her head now silent and clear, she had only a moment to choose between her lance and the quiver but as she reached for an arrow, the long spear warrior-slaying, wrought by wise Chiron, pierced the battle-eager maid above her right breast. Red blood leapt forth, as a fountain, and all at once stole the strength of Penthesilea's limbs.

Half fleeing, half falling, she looked up at Achilles, brandishing her axe ineffectually in her nerveless hand. A mist of darkness veiled her eyes, and anguish thrilled her soul. Yet even so, still she drew difficult breath and dimly still could see. Penthesilea, daughter of Otrere, even now wished to drag herself from the swift steed's back. Confusedly she thought, "Shall I draw my sword, and in desperation block Achilles' fiery onrush, or dismount and kneel unto this godlike man, and promise great heaps of ransom and gold to pacify the victor's thirst for blood. Would this soothe the murderous might of the son of Peleus and speed my return to beautiful Themiskyra by the river and spare my youth to see my home again? O, I long to live!" So surged the wild thoughts in her as she cried, "Son of Peleus, why do you slay me!"

But Achilles did not hear this, because anger focused his attention, making it difficult to think about other things. Rage fed on itself until it was all that remained. It gave him strength, a sense of control and coherence, and sheltered him from logic or reasonable consideration of adverse consequences. Achilles did not thirst for the blood of the queen in particular, but revenge for all that had befallen him. Even now Peleus' son thrust again his spear into the heart of the Amazon. Then she fell into the arms of death; in grace and beauty, for nothing could have dishonoured her fair form, but their eyes met on that fatal blow that impaled the daughter of Otrere.

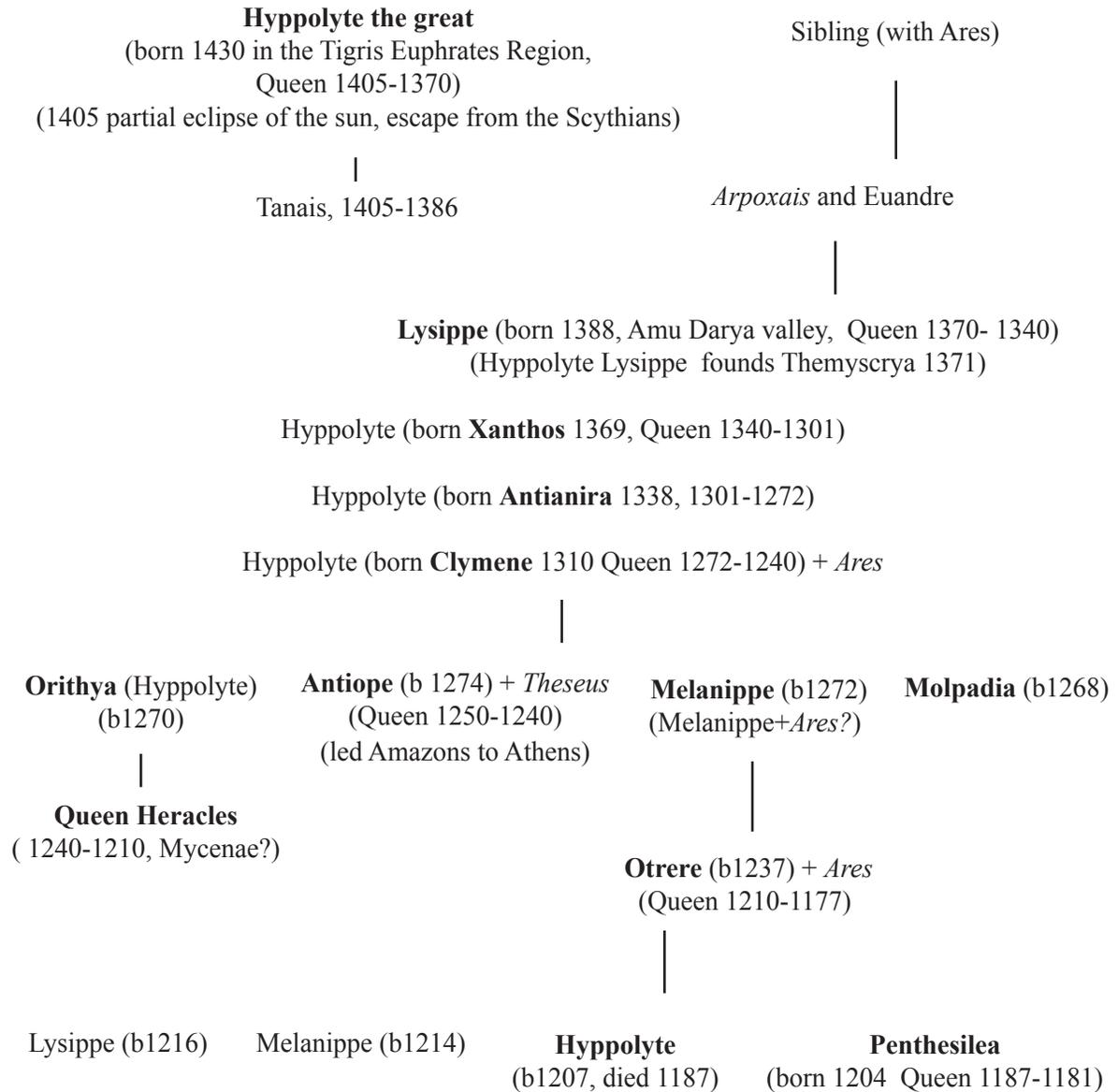
Now when the Trojans saw the war queen struck down in battle, a shiver of panic ran through their lines. They turned to run towards the walls of the city as the whole army sensed the strengthening of the

Greek lines. As chariots retreated to Troy, men wept for the child of Ares, on whom they had placed their last hope. They grieved for friends lost to the battle and they now feared that the city of Ilos and Laomedon would finally succumb to the Argive assault.

Then they heard the scornful laugh of the son of Peleus as he vaunted, “You lie now in the dust, wretched outcast, carrion for dogs and ravens. You foolish maid! Who convinced you to confront me? Did you imagine that you would return triumphant to your home with the gifts and promises of Priamos? This is not a war to be won by women, and now you forfeit your life! The immortals could not have inspired you to confront the mightiest of Danaan heroes but rather it must have been the darkness-shrouded Fates and feminine folly that urged you to leave maiden’s work!”

Achilles turned over the dying maid and pulled away the ivory helmet to see her face. There, in dust and blood lay Penthesilea, like the breaking of the dawn, beneath dainty-pencilled eyebrows, shattered in strength and out-gasping a last breath, in all her loveliness still lovely in death. Just at this critical moment Achilles fell to his knees beside the courageous Amazon, seeing her the first time in all her beauty, and perversely feeling remorse for having slain a thing so sweet. For now Penthesilea looked like an immortal, and in death seemed to sleep. This is why his cold heart twisted sickeningly and contemplated this maiden who was a wonder even in death.

(5600 Black sea flood)
c1440 Troy is founded



Fall of Troy 1177

Hyppolyte
(born **Antianara** 1203, Queen 1177-1150)

Cleite (b.1203)
establishes, Cleite in Southern Italy in 1177



Panel 8: the beauty of the queen

The Argives see Penthesilea, in her death, as a goddess. As the dods debate whether Achilles deserves punishment for his act of violence against women, the beauty of the fallen queen brings silence to the battlefield.

The Argives thronged around Penthesilea, for when bared of her armour, the linen-draped body in the dust appeared as Artemis, the immortal child of Zeus, not dead but asleep. The warriors gazed, and could not imagine that Achilles would have slain such a maid but instead had taken her as his bride. They could see now, in all her vulnerability, that she was flawless and divinely fair. They marvelled that she was indeed a daughter of the gods and this death would bring vengeance on all that were present on this field.

It was then that Ares , filled with grief and rage, came down from Olympus as a thunderbolt. The sky darkened and Mount Ida quaked as



he arrived, golden armour-clad, with his heart aflame. As soon as he heard it, Zeus himself from far Olympus sent lightning and Ares, recognizing the stormy threat of the mighty-thundering father, was forced to yield to the high-throned ruler. But his desire to avenge the death of his daughter caused many a wild thought to surge through his being. He was split between the respect he felt for his daughter and a wish to stain immortal hands with the blood of Achilles. He was tempered by the displeasure of Kronos' powerful son and by the memory of how many a child of Zeus himself had died in war.

Then arrived Artemis, the lady of arrows, to tend to a fallen sister, but hearing the tumult between her father and the war god, she withdrew in the form of a tree to survey the battlefield. Her heart grieved for the chaste Penthesilea and wished to inflict displeasure on the son of Peleus for this outrage.

Thoughts of immortality had created for Achilles an illusion of another within. This was a dark entity that desired to sustain itself, seek pleasure and avoid injury as zealously as his physical reality. It autonomously strived for an enduring sense of being and so revenge was the only appropriate response to any perceived threat to its existence. But this private self, unlike the physical Achilles, was dependent on others for its identity. The fragility within forced Achilles to be in conflict with his world to the extent that he felt the need to dominate or obliterate, if only to exist. These destructive rages were harboured and nurtured until they transformed him into an avenger and source of the most fanatical human violence. When justified, revenge can be construed as a sacred obligation, but righteous anger is vainglorious, as it is merely a reaction to intolerable feelings of powerlessness and humiliation.

There came a point in time when violence was the only defence avenging Achilles had to ward off the annihilation of his sense of being. The only thing that remained for him was to persist in the unremitting denunciation of injustice. He had assumed a perversely heroic refusal to compromise against all odds lest he might surrender to the reality of a mortal self, an admission that he now found intolerable.

Is heartless Achilles an aberration or does he stand as a symbol of violence against all women? How often will it be heard that, “The son of Peleus was living proof of an indignation against Hera”? But these tragedies prove a possibility but not the certainty that Achilles hated women. He clearly mocked the maid, but did her death fall into a pattern of revenge or was it that Penthesilea stood in a long line of worthy opponents? Did Achilles’ rampage reflect the acts of abuse committed by men fearful that a woman will assert greater independence? This may have been so, except that Achilles did not go to Troy to kill women. He went there to kill those who were his equals. That she happened to be a woman might have made it intolerable but to imply that he saw the warrior queen’s behaviour as an insult to her feminine body was not obvious.

Violence is committed from a position of dominance, as in the case of the Trojans and Argives, or from a position of virtual powerlessness, as perhaps in the case of the Amazons. Kings and princes focus on the horrors of violence when they seek support for their decisions because it diverts attention away from social inequalities and allows for less discomforting explanations for social and cultural strains. The focus of the world on Troy and her battlefield allowed the powerful on both sides of the Hellespontos to remain unquestioned in their motives and in full possession of their privileges and abuses.

Vainglorious, Achilles naïvely gloried in his beauty and knowledge of the contrivances of war. He had always known that he was unique and that he could never be accepted into the intimate circles of power. He consequently found little of interest in politics but nevertheless spent time feeling resentful or ruminating on past humiliations from that circle of influence. Such thoughts further fuelled his fantasies of revenge.

This was a string of incompatible elements, juxtaposed one against another, side-by-side, near and far, widely dispersed. A warrior queen is dead but does the responsibility fall exclusively on Achilles? It is easy to imagine the son of Peleus as a murderer who tortured, maimed and humiliated his victims, but in so many ways Achilles was not such a

man. There was a crime, but not because Amazons died, or were obvious victims, but because on all sides people experienced injustice. This battlefield had become a sacred place, the understanding of which was reserved for those who had been here and to the exclusion of outsiders.

Over the months and years following these deaths, many would write about this horrendous occurrence, trying to make sense of it. From the perspective of the Amazons it would be an easy theme to pursue. Over time, the warrior maidens' deaths would be generalized to include the wider phenomenon of violence against all women. There is no denial that these were women that were killed, and that Achilles hated what they represented but would he have done the same things shed of his armour in his bed? Should all men be expected to be held responsible for the deeds of Achilles? Is it proper to suggest from these events that all men have within them the capacity to kill their loved ones, and that they might?

Then Artemis, in deference to Zeus, put down her weapon, and saw the face of Achilles, the leader of men, change as if he had been struck by Eros' dart of lamentation and she realised that even the chaos of this landscape was not sufficient suffering to satisfy the Erinýes, for now the Maniae had dropped a veil of mist on all those gathered around the fallen Amazon queen.

The pure and distinct beauty that stopped for a moment the battle was inherent to the queen, real in the sense of having essence and symmetry prior to and apart from any interpretation or reflection on the nature of beauty. The perfection of the daughter of Ares was laid up in the heavens from where all beautiful things partake in or imitate the essence of beauty. But there was more to Penthesilea than the notion of a universal form capturing the essence of beauty imitated through her radiance. The beauty of Penthesilea was a rarefied and special form connected with truth and knowledge. She was but an instance of that which is beautiful in itself, and although she may have possessed features that served as a kind of example of beauty as defined by the gods, she motivated all

who were around her to direct their passion beyond her beauty toward the pursuit of truth itself.

In Themiskyra, the city by the river, there were moral and political implications of what was taken to be beautiful and these consequences were real for women affected by them. There were many who might have shared similar “sympathies” for or agreed about what was beautiful based on what was useful, pleasing or pleasurable to them. Hellene women saw beauty in chastity while their men saw it in talents and treasure. But when beauty is dependent on usefulness or virtue then the poor, the old, the barren and unchaste must be ugly. Such notions of beauty merely reflect entrenched and discriminatory attitudes of the powerful. Their ideas become influential components of culture and contribute to the shape and perpetuation of feminine roles.

Nowhere was this more evident than with the Hellene women themselves who remained entirely at the disposition of their husbands. This battlefield was a bloody celebration of the beauty of Helen, daughter of King Tyndareus, and for many years, it continued as in a dream. But as dreams evolve, the interaction between imaginary and real is more prevalent with demarcations becoming increasingly ambiguous. It becomes difficult to distinguish a true dialogue from a false, a human from a god or an authentic voice from an impostor. On this battlefield of Troy, individuals adopted whatever role they wished to communicate with others who possessed the same capacity of invention. And so when the Amazon women arrived, mercenaries, their identity, gender and physical appearance was misleading and irrelevant within the extreme subjectivity of a dream world.

The invisible demarcating line, or even range, separating beautiful from non-beautiful is unknown, even though we feel like it exists. The Amazon mothers taught that for the Danaans, the disinterested viewer defining beauty was a man in the higher position of assuming power over the object of beauty. When women are passive objects, their chief purpose must be to be posed for the enjoyment of the viewer. A man’s

“pleasure in looking” signifies the perspective of social dominance and man’s authority. Perception and pleasure become themselves biased and in ways that have consequences for those who are objects of a male perspective.

But women are not creatures cast in diverse mould from men. Women have been given the same energy of life that stirs in men. Their eyes are the same as men’s eyes, women’s limbs the same as men’s; throughout women are fashioned alike. Women look on one common light and breathe one common air. They are nourished with the same food, so why should the gods have offered women less than men? Femaleness does not automatically produce femininity any more than maleness produces masculinity. The ancient queens taught the Amazons to separate sexuality, the ability to bear children and birthdates from an understanding of beauty.

Moderation characterized the Amazon. Apart from characterizing womanhood, temperance also determined whether a woman had mastery over herself. To be a master of oneself was necessary before one could exercise dominion over others. If a woman was not aware of her body, she could not be a strong and true woman. Moreover, she could not be an effective mother to her children, or a good, active partner with her sisters.

We can see here that the “aesthetics of existence” was an ethics that was not egotistic or narcissistic; for, after governing oneself well, it then sought to govern others well. It had, and should have had, a political dimension. It should not have remained within the confines of oneself but should have gone out and reached out to others. Governing oneself well eventually enabled one to govern others well; exercising moderation with one’s use of pleasures, mastering oneself – all this typified a life that was lived aesthetically and morally. If one chose to live such an existence, one willed to live a beautiful life. To have lived a beautiful life was to have lived well.



Panel 9: Thersites' rant

Ainia and Antianara, under the advice of Artemis, begin their return to Themiskyra. Thersites comes upon Achilles, who seems to be expressing a dark desire for the dead Penthesilea. Thersites mocks Achilles, enraging him. The son of Peleus strikes and kills Thersites.

In a moment of respite with the overhead clouds of Zeus' anger veiling the battlefield in black, Artemis, wearing the clothes of an aged mourner looking for a fallen son, urged Ainia the swift to return to her children. Ainia, still determined to confront Achilles, refused until Antianara, recognising the goddess, told Ainia that for the security of Themiskyra they must ride northeast to warn Clete before she reaches Truwisa by water.

Working their way through the field, they watched the warrior sons of Argos hastily stripping blood-stained spoils from the corpses strewn all round. Young Antianara saw Bremusa, eyes wide-open as if alive. So

swift was the stroke of Idomeneus that it left no mark to betray a fatal wound. The Amazons continued through the bodies of the fallen, ponies delicately avoiding the mourners and broken chariots. Among the rummaging soldiers lay Klonie, Thermodosa and Euandre. Derimakheia and Alkibie, mutilated, would not join Ainia to see their own children grow. Unidentifiable now, they would be thrown into an anonymous pit outside of the moat. Behind Ainia, for whom a city would be named, and Antianara, whose name would be as renowned as Hyppolyte, in a dangerous place close to their slain queen, lay their sisters Antandre, Polemoussa, Harmothoe, Hippothoe and Derinoe.

Thersites the son of Agrius had already incurred Odysseus' wrath with his ranting. Odysseus had struck Thersites with the sceptre of Agamemnon but let him live. Spared by Diomedes, Thersites, now lame and bow legged, with shoulders caved inward, poked at the eyes of dead Harmothoe with the intention of removing them. His head was shaped like a sugar loaf, coming to a point. Atop that head sprouted tufts of hair. Thersites was a vulgar man with a head full of obscenities and nonsense.

The father of Thersites, Agrius, from a young age had been raised with Oeneus in Aetolia. When Oeneus became ruler of Calydon he adopted Agrius as his brother to honour their long friendship. After many years, Thersites with his brothers Onchestus, Prothous, Celeutor, Lycopus and Melanippus conspired against their adoptive uncle. The city of Calydon was delivered to Agrius but shortly after all the brothers were slain by Diomedes, the scion of Oeneus, except for Thersites, who, in the clothes of a woman, managed to escape and make his way to Peloponnesus.

Thersites, deprived of any wealth he may have once possessed, was drafted as a hoplite with the Argives at Troy. What he had learned from war was to avoid dangerous situations, while at the same time to be present wherever princes and heroes gathered between battles. In these assemblies of the sons of gods and goddesses he appeared as a buffoon, ugly but somewhat amusing in otherwise serious circumstances.

King Agamemnon had seen through Thersites and suspected him a traitor but he also exploited Thersites' tendency to rant as a means to get a sense of the encampment. When Agamemnon tested the loyalty of his command by suggesting a retreat, Thersites responded loudly, "Wives and children sit at home and wait for us, meanwhile we don't advance against Priamos. Board the ships, I say, and home! Troy will never fall to this rabble." Hearing such words shouted directly to the king, many did leave the field and take to the ships.

Through these rants Thersites allowed the king to determine his weakest ranks. Then when Agamemnon communicated his decision to remain, Thersites, too stupid to understand the situation, went on, "My lord Agamemnon... what is the problem now? What more do you need? The ships are full of loot, and you always get the first pick! You get the best whores as well! Are you suddenly short of gold or whores or is it that Achilles screws your prize?" Then he turned loudly to the gathering, "Let us sail home and leave this fellow here with his spoils so that he can find out how much he completely depends on our ranks."

When Thersites' diatribe ended, the son of Laertes swiftly intervened, calling him insolent and threatened, "You should be thankful for the king's patience but if I should catch you playing us fools again, I will strip you of your clothes and thrash you ignominiously!" With these words, Odysseus struck him with Agamemnon's staff, drawing some blood from the side of his twisted face. Thersites, rather than defending himself, flinched, and sat on the ground terrified, brushing away tears as the rest of the assembly laughed at his expense.

On this dark day Peleus' son gazed and continued to gaze wild with regret at Penthesilea. She, no longer lethal but calm and beautiful, lay in the dust. Before Achilles had ever killed, he had experienced an attraction to the sleep of death, such that in youth he would spend hours pretending to be dead. There was something about this vulnerable state that stirred in him an intense hunger. And now his heart was wrung, broken down with sorrowing love as deep and strong as he had ever known. He felt desire for the fallen Penthesilea as strong as when his beloved

Patroclus had died, and more deeply than he had ever felt.

Thersites, no longer amused by stripping the dead, turned to the leader of men and suddenly spoke, “You are truly a vainglorious coward! The son of Peleus lusts after a corpse with tits. You have been called a god but your desire really is to possess a thing that cannot resist or reject you. Do you think that because there is no one to be harmed it cannot be wrong? Even if I was girl enough to accept your fantasies, it is still not normal: only a mad person wants to have sex with the dead. Are you possessed by the Maniae or do you expect us to abandon the dignity of the dead, to harden the heart and loosen inhibitions, so that we should lust after the asses of our ponies and our neighbours’ chickens?”

So Thersites, realising that he had an audience, railed and mocked Achilles. “Sorry-souled masturbator Achilles! Have you no shame to let some evil power allow you to pity a dead whore whose whole purpose was to slay us in fury? Have you no sense? Your soul lusts for this dead ass as if she was a lady with a dowry, knowledgeable in economy and hoping for a proposal of marriage! You took Priamos’s son, a prince, and dragged him like garbage to and fro before his great city, yet here you are sighing over a lesser corpse. Look at you, you unmanly ass, falling all over a dead whore. You forget all about reputation and valour the second your eyes lust for a pair of tits. Where is this leader of men, the brave Achilles, the one with good sense? Have you lost your stainless strength to be a whoring girl? Do you have any conception of the misery that this Amazon has brought to Troy?”

He turned now, speaking loudly to draw more people around him. “I tell you that you are ass-lucky that your spear reached the Amazon first because her weapons were meant for your heart and she would have remorselessly slain you for the fun of moving forward and burning our ships.”

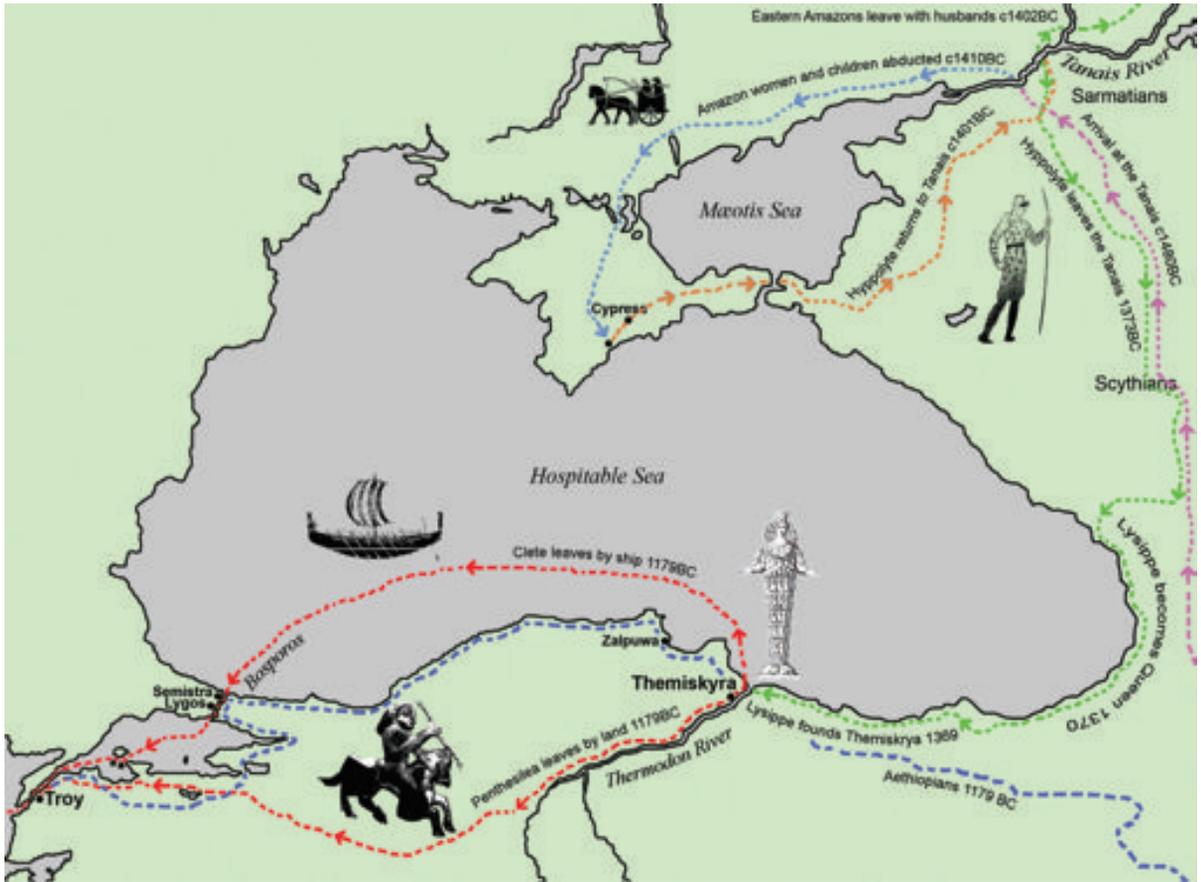
Where there is rage, there is also fear, perhaps obscured in the background. Aggression is the body’s response to fear, for when threatened it can help assure survival. The insults that Achilles felt were affronts to self-esteem, status and dignity, none of which threatened him physically.

Thersites hardly posed a threat to the son of Peleus but Achilles had grown accustomed to using excessive violence as a response.

Thersites jabbered long and loud, pleased with his oratory. "Battle makes men heroes and only Ares' work was meant for this field. There is nothing worse for a man than to lust for woman's beauty for it makes fools of wise men. You are romancing a corpse as if you were a maiden in wait of promised sweet kisses in a pasture. Only a coward craves beauty and a bed with the whore that she was! Look at her! Why do you think that she seems prettier as a disarmed stiff?"

With these words the mighty heart of Peleus' son leapt into a flame of anger. With a swift movement his backhand struck Thersites below the ear. Teeth flying in all directions, the fool fell face to the earth. As he took his last breath it seemed that he might have had another word to utter before the blood began to ooze from his lips.

Then from the warrior Argives cried the voice of the son of Telamon, "It is not good that baser men complain about kings, secretly or openly, for death may come quickly. Dike who oversees from the stars always assures that justice prevails and even Ate, who delivers woe on woe to Greeks and Trojans, will stop to punish a shameless tongue." So his voice was heard above Achilles' rage, "It is good that an idiot lies in the dust. Could he have not learned from Diomedes' rage or from the patience of Agamemnon? Odysseus thrashed this fool in public but still he babbled with venomous tongue until now he met his end, having insulted for the second time the great warrior son of Peleus."





Panel 10: Nestor's speech

Tydeus, the son of Oeneus, reminds Achilles of his kinship to Thersites. He protests the murder on the battlefield. Achilles returns with death threats but Artemis intervenes as the Argive princes move to stop the confrontation. Nestor speaks out against Achilles, alluding to the same suspicions that Thersites had vocalized. Plagued by the Erinýes, Achilles wishes to be delivered from his immortality.

Alone among the Argives, Tydeus, who bore the same name as the father of Diomedes, spoke against the murder of Thersites, "I share blood with Agrius, the brother of Oeneus. How can I remain silent when one of my people is slain by Achilles who pretends to be an ally. If there was vengeance to be had, it belonged to Diomedes. Achilles had no dispute with Thersites except that he spoke truth frequently. By our laws I demand atonement for this murder and before this assembly I appeal to the gods and King Agamemnon for justice."

Achilles, hearing the challenge, drew out his sword to prepare for the fight. Pulling it quickly from the scabbard to assure a crucial edge over the Argonaut, he took deep breaths and maintained a strange posture as he moved towards Tydeus. Appearing calm, with his body balanced and positioned, he brought the blade closer to himself, looking for an opportunity to attack. As he made a quick assessment of his surroundings he moved closer with confidence. Elbows bent towards his body, he extended his sword, choosing an area between the helmet and armour.

“So we are to continue killing brothers?” taunts Tydeus, “I have no desire for vengeance, for it is not my body that was injured by the son of Peleus. Many here think that revenge, when justified, is a sacred obligation and immediate retribution an appropriate response. I do not believe in revenge that leads to internecine conflict, but I do petition justice for a murder that has been committed on these fields. If the assembly determines that Achilles has wronged Thersites, only then will there be punishment and satisfaction, for justice is not revenge.”

Aware of Achilles’ accuracy and agility, Artemis, in the form of a falcon, intervened, knowing that Tydeus had but a moment to live. Distracted, Achilles was quickly surrounded by the noblest of Achaea’s sons pleading with the mightiest of all Argives to fall back in peace. At this moment the gods found reason to intervene and were already planning revenge for the death of their chaste daughter. Ares would ask the Erinýes to exasperate the rage of Achilles, and Artemis, when she found the proper occasion, intended to guide an errant dart.

High-hearted Nestor moving up beside Tydeus spoke thus. “There is no law forbidding speech. I, too, ask why this man has been killed. I heard no king objecting to Thersites’ foolish words. We presume, by our presence on this battlefield, the son of Atreus to know what is right and wrong for this assembly. Even after resourceful Odysseus thrashed Thersites for insolence, Agamemnon allowed him to remain and permitted him to speak his mind. King Agamemnon has never dictated the thoughts we might validly think and come to know and which we might not. Was this Thersites, who acquainted himself with the ways of for-

eigners and spoke of things openly, truly an enemy of Argive princes to be summarily dealt the death penalty? Or has the son of Peleus witnessed too much killing to be able to distinguish right from wrong?

“I too sense something strange in the way that Achilles looks at this woman, Penthesilea of Amazon blood. She fell to his practiced sword because she may have forgotten the commonly known natural order in which the male is born of the female. The mother presides over the life of her child but princes preside over death and execution. No woman can be trained in the dispassionate guile to execute that which is born of her. Myths and legends of a race of women outside of the natural order created this warrior, Penthesilea, who as we see, was a mere mortal whose beauty was defenceless under the cold sword of the son of Thetis.

“It is true that when Thersites spoke of this he did not choose princely words when he ranted not of a great victory but of the death of a maiden. This insult wounded your pride but carried no visible threat. When Achilles imagined Penthesilea as equal to man he saw her as drawn out of the man. This impossible reversal of the natural order hides and reveals true intentions, because I believe that Achilles indeed lusted for the war queen. He felt that he was not only a greater man than the maiden, but perversely felt himself more a woman than she,” he paused to the laughter of the assembly, then continued, “and so she died on this battlefield because as long as she lived, vainglorious Achilles could never have carnally possessed a reflection of himself!”

To these words, Achilles lunged forward but the bravest of Achaea's sons continued to surround Nestor and Tydeus.

Nestor continued, “As the greatest of warriors and an immortal you knew that this woman presented no obstacle. It was your desire for her that drove you to apply divine will and intention against this chaste maiden. The naïve words of Thersites alluded to these things and for that he was slain.”

Nestor's voice rose as he turned toward the body of Penthesilea, “This was not a great victory but a lustful murder to bring shame and defeat to all Achaeans!”

To these words rose a noise of approval as the crowd anticipated Achille's response.

The winged Erinýes, children of the blood of Ouranos, still hovering by the body of the queen, were suddenly interested in the altercation. Alecto of unceasing anger, Tisiphone, avenger of murder and fratricide, and Megaera, always sensing jealousy, came to taste the flesh of this half-god with his sword poised to murder the elderly Nestor.

Then the Erinýes embraced Achilles with hurt, anguish and pain. He looked at Penthesilea and beyond at the fallen and bloodied around him and he saw his sword turned against the father of his friend Antilochus. It was then that he realised that there would be no end to it.

Strength comes from the distinction that we can make between reality and illusion. Achilles suddenly felt in his soul the reality of the land and the sea. Up to this point, the gods had created for him a world where illusion had become his reality and now he faced charges of murder, a human crime. The existence of Penthesilea drained his strength. The thought that she could take a position in history, that she could have children and independently raise them, was an insult to the man. She deserved to die but first she had to become a subhuman entity that deserved his rage and so, in battle, he met a surrogate, an enemy undefined. In the process all meaning was misplaced, even Troy existed only in the imagination. Now he saw her broken and desired only to be at her side, his spirit exhausted. The pain that he felt in his forearm brought him back to the smell of blood, dust and sea breezes. As the war had evolved in his mind, the interaction between fantasy and the concrete became prevalent with demarcations increasingly ambiguous. He was comfortable on a battlefield because there is no way to distinguish a true dialogue from a false, a being from a mythical entity or an authentic voice from an impostor. Now in the perspective of reality, of loss, and in pain his victims appeared as real people in a world of true experience. He felt guilt, fear, loneliness, a dread of growing old, or worse, of dying badly. For the first time he deemed immortality to be unbearable.

The voice of the Erinýes grew in volume. Their demands were increasingly heard above everything, and began to occupy a greater part of Achilles' mind until they smothered more reasonable voices in the distance. He felt himself relentlessly moving toward self-destruction. To the assembly, however, none of this was apparent. The son of Peleus stood, his face carved of the coldest stone, and stared through them as if they were a morning mist.





Panel 11: the funeral of a daughter of Troy

Priamos, through a messenger, asks for the body of Penthesilea. Achilles realises that he has little choice but to grant the request. Penthesilea's body is taken to Troy and she is honoured by a funeral befitting a daughter of Troy. Achilles remains with his ship as the battlefield dead are buried. Agamemnon gathers the princes and feasts Danaan victories.

Achilles cleared his head and, in disgust, threw his sword and girdle to the ground, turning toward the body of Penthesilea, now draped with the clothes of Achaean princes. He took a binding cord with the intention of attaching her stripped body to his chariot. The assembly, dumbstruck by his swift moves, was slow to intervene. Just then a messenger came bearing the request of Priamos, who, begging again, after asking for the body of his beloved son Hektor, requested in exchange for ransom that

Penthesilea



the battle-eager maiden be delivered as queen in her armour and with her pony to the great funeral mound of Laomedon. Then did of pity the Atreid kings insist that Achilles, against his will, hold back his cruel ambitions and render up her body to Troy; for they too were awed by the imperial loveliness of Penthesilea.

The scion of Peleus became silent, picked up his armour, and returned to his ship to grieve Penthesilea in secret and in solitude as he prepared to return to his homeland.

The eyes of Penthesilea were closed gently, her body was covered with a clean sail and laid on a pallet of wood. Lamps were lit as the Klimakophoroi bore the body to the fountain near the Scaean Gates of Troy where it was received by Priamos and his family. The Trojan women thoroughly cleaned, anointed and wrapped the body in a simple linen shroud. Hecuba was there, barefoot and in mourning clothes, as was Helen. Penthesilea's body was tended to by Cassandra, Medusa, Polyxena, Laodice, Medesicaste and the widow Andromache. Her remains were never unguarded as the highest-born wept and tore at their garments and kept vigil, for in death the queen was defenceless as she waited to pass the threshold where the Rich One would guide her to the Elysian Plains.

Penthesilea was mourned as a sister by the house of Troy. The women neither ate nor drank in the presence of her body for to do so would have been contemptuous of the Amazon queen, who from her twilight could not join them in a feast. From the day of her death until the morning of the twelfth day after the burial of the ashes, the women did no work, nor did they take comfort or pleasure. They did not bathe, nor put on fresh clothing nor did they lie with their husbands.

The king of Troy ordered a broad pyre to be constructed outside of the city walls. On the ebony summit they laid the warrior-queen in her armour now gilded in gold leaf. Around her they placed treasures of terebinth, coriander, frankincense, myrrh, almonds, figs, olives, pomegranates, ostrich eggs, fine oil and resinated wine. They decorated her with amber, ivory and finely made jewellery of all kinds, flowers and fleeces

and linens. All these were offerings befitting a mighty queen who had died in battle. All was given in honour of Penthesilea with the knowledge that the war god demanded tribute for his child. Then suddenly ravenous flames consumed her. All around Trojans stood and when the fire cooled, they quenched the pyre with wine and gathered the bones, pouring sweet ointment over them. All that remained was laid in a fine casket and they sacrificed a calf as if for a beloved daughter of Troy. The night air was filled with heart-stricken wails and in the morning they buried Penthesilea beside the bones of old Laomedon.

Her Amazon sisters, all equal to men, all beautiful women who had fallen to Argive spears, were buried close to their queen and then, so that the poor would not receive less honour in death than the rich, the rest of the dead were laid, as best they could, in the ground with perfumed oil and flowers so that they too might sleep in honour.

Argives and Trojans, equally bereaved, burned their heroes. All day and night smoke could be seen from the far off plains to the shores of the Aegean. Many Achaeans had been slain by Trojan hands but above the rest they mourned Podarces who with his brother Protesilaus was oath-bound to defend Menelaus. In fight he had been no less mighty than his brother who had faced Hektor but Podarces had been struck down by the spear of Penthesilea, a woman. The Argive princes laid him on a pyre to the grief of all except Achilles who, under the watchful Antilochus, was wavering between pining for a lost queen and the cruel taunting of the Erinýes.

When the fires died, they built an earth mound in which they laid the bones of Podarces. Then they buried the rest of the dead heroes in the clay above the shoreline. In a pit they laid the common dead and on top of them all, they threw Thersites' wretched corpse.

Then they returned to the ships in praise that Peleus had sent them such a hero. The feast in honour of Achilles' victory was a spectacle of music and loud chatter.

The chair King Agamemnon sat in, like a burnished throne, glowed from the flames of the torches that reflected upon richly laid tables. Seat-

Penthesilea

ed with Zeus were Hera and Athene. Ares was there as was Hermes. Drapes and cushions of purple felt contrasted with the pale gold of the wood-wrought furniture. A mixture of odours from perfumes, unguents, spilled liquids and human smells filled the air and drowned the senses. In the presence of the feasting gods to whom they had made appropriate offerings, the heroes and princes repeatedly dipped cups into polished bronze cauldrons filled with wine and strong ales flavoured with the resins of terebinth and flower petals. Each consumed five portions of sweetened wine and ale and toasted the might of Achilles in his absence. They feasted on plentiful fish, two rams, a ewe, two goats and three pigs all roasted on wrought bronze spits. Maidens, some with breasts exposed and others in loosely fitting tunics, served food and appeared resigned to their duties until, softened by wine, they too danced around baskets of bread, olives and cheese through the night until the rosy fingers of Eos welcomed the morning sun.



Panel 12: the seduction of Lyssa

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles, son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures, for so were the counsels of Zeus fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.

As Achilles contemplates recent events, he incessantly hears Alecto, Tisiphone and Megaera who afflict his thoughts with their voices. Odysseus and Antilochus arrive to find the son of Peleus in a state of exhaustion. Odysseus offers to accompany Achilles to Lesbos where the oracles have suggested that he may find atonement. Antilochus offers to take command of the Myrmidons in his absence. At this very time King Memnon of Susa, acting on a request from Priamos, was approaching the walls of Troy with his multitudes.

Achilles sat by his ship listening to the sound of the water lapping under the planks. The yellow lights of fires continued into the distance. He heard the sounds of bragging and screams of insult but his mind was with the Amazon maiden. His men quietly tended to their ships or weapons. Some were sleeping.

He knew that she deserved his sword. She, like the others, was insulting not only the Myrmidon warriors but all who had died on the plain of Troy. What was the maiden imagining, flinging darts at Ajax and the son of Peleus? Did she think that these events were not planned far in advance by Zeus, father of gods and men who rules from Olympus? Was she not advised by her mentors that she could have come with victorious Achilles to Phthia, where decorated in rich gold jewellery, her hair anointed with precious oils, she would have sat with him as queen. Achilles cursed. Once again envious Zeus, angry with the Nereid, was punishing her progeny for fear that history might construe the name of Achilles as greater than the Olympians.

Hovering close to the prince was Alecto, chattering incessantly and reminding him of how ignoble his life had been. In her words he heard his mother's voice whispering, "You are still a mortal, my son, and only on your mother's side is the way of death barred for you." Alecto could be silenced only by atonement but Achilles did not believe in the very gods by whom he was conceived. Achilles believed in no one and when he focused upon spiritual advancement, it was from within himself, rather than submitting to gods or morals. His rites were practiced with his lance and he received absolution through his withdrawal from the celebration of life.

Alecto in the voice of Thetis cried, "You abandoned Deidamia and Briseis. For the lust of Hemithea you killed Tenes who honoured Apollo. Fair Pisidice of Methymna begged for your love that you lent freely and then you had her stoned as a traitor. Now Achilles has slain the fairest of all maidens, the goddess daughter of great-souled Ares, the slayer of men. You have angered the children of Leto, for Penthesilea came to the city of Apollo for atonement. The gods are silenced by the thunder

of Zeus, who has forbidden them to intervene, but the mistress of the wild beasts will not tolerate a mortal in the armour of Hephaestus who wields the lance of Peleus to use his masculine powers to destroy the most chaste of all her daughters. With the cut of a sword you have slain generations of children that will never be born. With your lance you have opened the east gates of Themiskyra but be wary of the west gates of Troy, for it is there that it is portended that you will fall, not as a god but as a common man, to the anger of darkly cloaked Apollo.”

The son of Peleus known as Achilles was male, twenty-nine years of age. He was born to the nereid Thetis in the kingdom of Phthia. We have come to know him as the slayer of men. He found that life among the Myrmidon warriors suited him but he was not a naturally affable person. He had met a handful of people in his life that he had found decent but he found the vast majority to be worthless, conniving, betraying, lying and deceptive manipulators.

He disliked his position as leader of his men. He preferred to fight. He disliked his upbringing, angry that wise Chiron shared with him Prometheus’ seed of hope that had allowed him to endure this long. He disliked the time he spent with Lycomedes for having met Deidamia and left her with child but most of all he disliked having to sit idle by his ships, wasting his skills. He knew that he must die sometime.

Alecto taunted, “Achilles is alive and breathing in a prison of his own making. He has the means to return with his ships and treasures to Deidamia and see his son, Neoptolemus. He can leave this battlefield to the bickering of kings. Achilles wakes to the fingers of dawn each day where Penthesilea took her last breath on the fields of Troy. Penthesilea can never be released from these plains of death.”

Achilles lived in tragedy. His heart was black. He was dead inside because of the past. He felt that he had no emotions left and he was simply waiting. He found it hard to trust people and let them get close to him. His manner was quiet and cool. Individuals were lulled into a false sense of security when they were close to him for he appeared to have a soft and sensitive side. He did not, and when angered he was pitiless.

Penthesilea



“Do not pretend it matters not,” Alecto whispered into his ear. “Nothing can bring the maiden back. Lives have been forever changed, and the world will carry the pain of her death. Will you ever understand the unspeakable despair, pain, suffering and grief that you have manufactured with your anger. On a blood-soaked field the beautiful Penthesilea lay slain by your sword. How could such a young, vibrant, healthy and loving maiden be still? But there she lay naked, covered for modesty to her shoulders with the cloaks of Achaean princes. All those who were present in tears attempted to raise her, but the body did not move nor respond. They all recognized a goddess but she could not answer them for she was dead.”

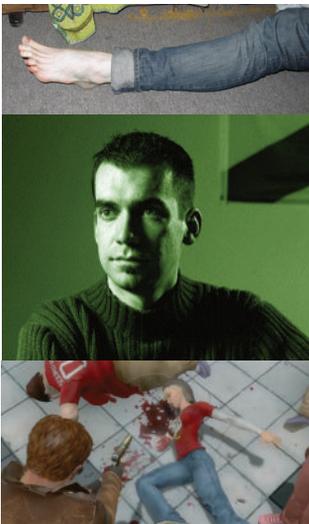
The underworld was Achilles’ home. It was bleak and sinister. He hated the living world and felt that he was its victim. He had no objections to causing other people pain as he put himself through his rituals of self-denial. He was a suffering child with the hard exterior of a warrior.

“You are not the one who suffers,” Alecto taunted. “This is not in the natural order of life. The mother should die before the child, not the child before the mother. With your sword you severed the maiden from all her futures. Penthesilea will never walk her children on the lawns outside the walls of Themiskyra nor will she speak of legends of the ancient queen or of Lysippe’s journey from the land by the Oxos River. She will never tell them how Otrere held her close to her heart to wipe the tears of a minor scrape. Penthesilea will never teach her daughters to ride the ponies or string the arc on a summer afternoon. She will never see grandchildren who bring honour to their queen.”

Achilles tried to escape the Erinýes by concentrating on his thoughts. When alone, the warrior recorded words of great personal meaning as if he wished to leave an untarnished record from his heart. He took time and effort to ensure that the writings were kept for it was highly important to him that he be not forgotten:

He rides down to the earth from an invisible mountain.

As pounding hoofs touch wet grass, the steed releases his angry growl,



*For he yearns to be elsewhere.
The Hellene creatures scream in panic and run in all directions
with lies and deceptions.
Death gazes at the humans with an empty stare.
They knock each other down in their dash for safety.
He would slaughter them as they flee, but sensing that his horse is
hungry and weary,
He decides to rest.*

He wrote again:

*It rained for three days. The sky is so grey.
A deep cut makes its way through pallid clouds, and a figure
emerges,
Draped head to foot in black cloth, black as night.
His cloak lashes to and fro with the wind.
He carries a sword on his back, an axe on his left side and a lance
on the right.
The disgusting Hellene creatures scream in panic and flee in all
directions,
With lies and deceptions.
Death gazes with an empty stare, as they knock each other down in
their dash to safety.
He wishes to slaughter them as they flee.*

Now Megaera and Tisiphone joined Alecto to cry as violent wind through the trees when a storm rises from the darkened sea, “Why does Thetis grieve for the son whom she has loved and protected? Is it that she has gathered all favours owed to her and now watches as Hephaestus and Dionysus forge a golden vase as a burial gift? Even Olympian Zeus intervened on her behalf and granted Achilles respect from the Achaeans and showered him with recompense and victory, but look how she prepares her dismal mourning clothes!”

“Quiet!” Achilles whispered as he looked for the source of the sounds. “Why do you torment me?”

Odysseus and Antilochus, the son of Nestor, arrived in the camp of Achilles to overhear him speaking to a void. It was clear to them that the dark sisters were angry with the son of Peleus for the dissent in the ranks of the Greeks sown by the death of Thersites.

Antilochus greeted Achilles with the embrace of a confidant. The hero reacted with empty eyes, not wishing to reveal his preoccupation with the slain Amazon. He had no such concern for a dead fool.

Odysseus spoke. “My friend, you appear gaunt and worn from the events at Troy.”

Said Achilles, “I have not slept for I am plagued through the night by Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone, who tear at my soul. Give me strong wine that I might rest before battle.”

Odysseus reached for the wine and mixing some in the bowl he offered it to Achilles and Antilochus and spoke. “Did you not know that the Erinýes are demanding sacrifice and atonement, for without the shedding of innocent blood there can be no release from their cries. There is much talk in the camp of the death of Thersites and Nestor’s speech on the field. There is hearsay that you lusted after the maiden even after her body lay cold.”

“I should have tied her by the ankles to my chariot and dragged her naked around the walls of the city!” Achilles interrupted.

“Be it such, but it was not considered proper by the princes and chiefs to see such a maiden dishonoured before their men. The nature of such actions breeds mutiny in the hearts of those who have been so long away from their wives.” Odysseus sipped from his kylix, looking briefly toward the sea, before continuing quietly, “The oracles have advised that it might please the gods that we sail to Lesbos for a time that these things may fade from conversations and that you might offer sacrifice to Leto, Apollo and Artemis. I can sail with you to Mithymna but they advise that the rituals must be performed by you alone.”

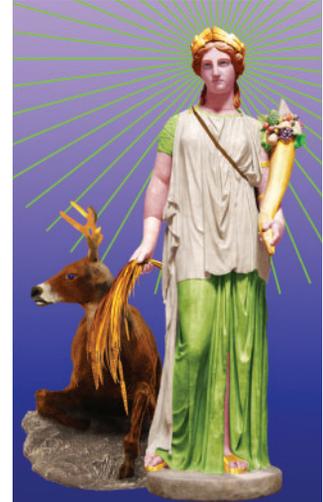
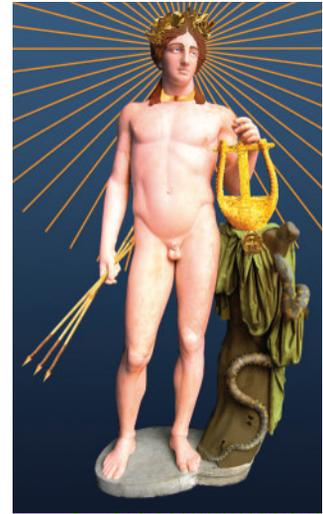
Antilochus added quickly, “In this time of appeasement, I will re-

main with your ships and the Myrmidons and I will speak with my father reasonably to soften the words of Nestor that have been whispered throughout the camp. While the Trojans mourn the Amazon queen, their last hope, the multitudes of Agamemnon continue an assault on the gates of Troy. Priamos and his princes dare not leave the city.”

Odysseus counselled Achilles, “The high priest Prokopios who tends the altar in the ruins of the temple has instructed that on your arrival you are entreated to search for three spotless goats from the forest of stone in the wilderness. You will then capture and patiently tame the wild animals so that they remain by you. When the goats trust and follow you, they must be taken to the temples of Leto in Issa, Apollo on Mount Lepetymnos, and Artemis close to the city of Mytilene, each on a different day. You must inflict death upon the kids to make sacrifice to Leto and Apollo. You may roast and share the meat of the sacrifice to Leto, having burned the bones and offal, but you must leave the offering to Apollo to the wild birds and animals. These creatures have taken your place and can provide atonement, but only temporarily. The third goat, your offering to the mistress of the animals, must be released to the wilderness. If the tamed kid leaves your care, then you will have received the acknowledgement of Artemis. If however, the goat remains with you and refuses the wilderness, then you must bring the animal back to Troy to be sacrificed by the Scaean Gates before you will be left in peace.”

Achilles addressed his companions. “Friends, for you truly are dear to me, Odysseus, sacker of cities and beloved of Zeus, and Antilochus son of Nestor who has been close to me since Patroclus, lying bloodied and defenceless by the lance of Euphorbus, was treacherously slain by Hektor; I will do all the things that the children of Leto command, but more so I go for those with whom I now share this sweet wine. In due time, when our weapons have been sharpened and the horses have rested, we will return to our business with King Priamos on these blood-soaked fields.”

While Troy’s daughters mourned within her walls, her young men, having toiled through the night, prepared to meet a reorganized Achaean



horde. As the first light of day appeared on the sparkling water, waves of men pressed hard on the Trojan defenders at the Dardanian Gate. Still the Trojans charged forth and despite initial losses held their position firmly. They had little choice, for Eris and deadly Enyo stalked in their midst. Encouraged by the Erinýes, Achaeans, breathing destruction from their lips like flame, raged ahead ruthlessly. Fiercely Ares stirred the horde until sheer willpower made men forget that they were spent to exhaustion. Each side feigned to be stronger than the other, masking their dread with icy faces. All around fell javelins, spears, and arrows from the parapets as Achaeans grouped and crouched, each in their turn, under heavy shields and armour. Slowly like rising black water they advanced closer and closer to the murderous fight.

Two years earlier Priamos had sent messengers to King Memnon, son of Tithonus who founded the city of Susa, to come in aid of Troy. With little news, hope of his arrival had long been abandoned and with the death of the queen of the Amazons it appeared that Troy was lost. Already preparations had been surreptitiously undertaken for the escape of the noblest sons of Priamos.

On year eight of the Trojan War, the first month of the second season, day 9, under the majesty of cloud gatherer Zeus, Memnon, king of Susa, son of Helios, in life, prosperity and health received the heralds of King Priamos of Troy. The messengers, in chariots and dressed in battle mail, brought gifts of oil and perfumed wine and pine nuts along with finely wrought gold vessels and iron spear tips.

They told of dissension in the Greek camp and of ambassadors having been sent to all the cities of Asia, petitioning Paeonia, Ismarus, Thrace, Tenedos, Lesbos, Thebe, Adramytium, Lymessus, Mysia, Larisa, Ionia, Thermodon, Alybe, Paphlagonia, Ascania and Lycia to come to the defence of Troy. They spoke of hope that Queen Otrere of the Amazons was at this moment gathering her multitudes and allies to join the fray. They told of how glorious Hektor was leading the defeat of Achilles, Odysseus and Ajax.

The ambassadors prayed that the king of Susa would come to Troy

where he would be met as a brother of Hektor and Paris and would enjoy equal share of all the treasures that the city could offer. Memnon, being the son of Tithonus, shared blood in the line of King Laomedon and could not as a prince of Troy refuse but surmised that he would require a considerable army for the task as well as the approbation of his council.

Soon after Memnon received word he met in council. Memnon seized the adornments of battle, and arrayed himself in his coat of mail that Eos had forged by Hephaestus. When the scion of Laomedon appeared before his princes like the rising of Hyperion, he assumed the appearance of his father, Tithonus. He stood erect and spoke, "Our brethren, who belong to the greatest of the families, we have received a petition from Priamos of Troy, that has been under siege for ten years now, that we may join in the battle and defeat King Agamemnon who wishes all to bow as subjects of Mycenae. Agamemnon is stationed, together with many countries, which he has brought with him by force, being every country in Thessaly, Argos, Achaea, Crete, Boetia, Elis, Laconia, Attica, Phocis, Aetolia, Hestiaeotis, Rhodesa and Euboea. They brought a thousand ships to the harbour and are well equipped with infantry bearing weapons, steeds and chariotry. More numerous are they than the sand of the shore. We have been told that they are standing, drawn up for battle, behind the deceitful Agamemnon."

The same evening they, in council, drank dark sweet wine, danced to music and feasted in honour of Apollo. Then, as Memnon sat upon a throne of gold, there arrived scouts who were in the following of the Achaean invaders. They were conducted into his presence, and Memnon said to them: "What are you?" They said, "As for us, Agamemnon has caused that we should come to spy out where Memnon is, for he has received word of a powerful alliance from all of Asia gathering for the defence of Troy. The king bade us to determine the truth in such hearsay."

Then Memnon had the princes and chiefs called into the presence of the spies, and had them hear every word that the scouts of Agamemnon had spoken. Said King Memnon to them, "See that this is proof of the

dissention in the Greek ranks, for the peasantry and the officials that have fought daily under the king question openly the endless war and its outcome. But the presence of his scouts in Susa tells us that Agamemnon also fears defeat. Yea I say, however, that should Troy fall, Agamemnon will follow his scouts to Asia together with the numerous countries that are with him, being people and horses, like the multitudes of the sand.”

Said the princes and chiefs who were in the presence of Memnon, “It is a great fault which the governors of the countries and the officials of Agamemnon have committed in not informing us of these things.”

Then Memnon said, “Let us gather every prince of Susa and Aethiopia, their infantry and their chariotry, and march in force, to stand, equipped, drawn up in line of battle at Troy before Agamemnon and the Achaean princes rout and plunder Asia.”

Then the high priests and oracles were instructed to offer a sacrifice of oil and wine to the god of the silver bow and the next morning rose-coloured Eos portended a fruitful march for Memnon and his princes. With these signs, the order was given to prepare infantry and chariotry and hasten to Troy. The council gave the plan of battle.

The army would cross the mountains, defeat Memnon’s enemies and spread word of the Aethiopians throughout Asia. With seized treasures they would winter on the plateau by the Salt Sea to continue the march to the Hospitable Sea to join the Amazons during the warm months and then surprise the Greeks from the north.

Memnon betook himself to his horses, and led quickly on, being alone by himself. With such leadership he gathered a multitude of warriors, five thousand strong. Those from the country of Susa rode a thousand chariots dressed in bone mail and armed with pikes and arcs. The Aethiopians, in animal hide and furs, carried short broad spears and wide shields and ran as swiftly as the steeds.

Year nine of the Trojan war, the tenth month of the third season, Memnon marched with the Aethiopians through Asia, laying waste to those who opposed him and gathering fame and reinforcements from those who with their chiefs were with him. The allies brought to him

chariotry, horses and warriors in quantity without its like. They covered the mountains and the valleys like grasshoppers with their multitudes. He left not silver or gold in the lands that fought him, plundering all possessions and sharing them with those who would choose to join him in battle.

Every country trembled before him, fear was in their hearts and all the rebels came bowing down for fear of the fame of Memnon when his army came upon them. Then Memnon continued northward and when he arrived at the highland of the Salt Lake he made a vast camp where his army and his allies with their princes prepared for the advance to Hellepontos early in the first season.

During this time messengers reached Troy to announce that Memnon who had marched from Susa for one-and-a-half years was arriving with an army of Aethiopians larger than the world had ever seen and with a multitude of allies with horses and chariots. The son of Tithonus with the help of Apollo had driven through the land between the rivers, north across the mountains to the Euxine Sea and then southwest to Troy following the path of the Amazons. In his march he had laid waste to those lands that opposed him plundering their gold and rich possessions. He had gathered together many allies from Asia and was determined to put an end to adventuresome King Agamemnon. The half-god Memnon shone from his chariot with the light of Eos and wore golden mail forged for him by Hephaestus.





Panel 13: a fool's death

King Memnon arrives with the Aethiopians, Susans and many allies from the countries of Eos who have marched to meet the Achaeans at Troy. Among them are many Lycians seeking vengeance, as well as Amazons accompanied by men from the country of the Thermodon.

Priamos welcomes Memnon with a feast while the hordes prepare for battle. The Greeks arrive led by Antilochus and the Myrmidons but soon Memnon turns their multitudes back toward the ships. Antilochus fights valiantly but falls to the might of Memnon.

Nestor pleads with Achilles to once again save the Greeks from a rout. The son of Peleus meets Memnon as an equal and following a violent confrontation where he is wounded, Achilles slays the king of Susa. Weakened and delirious from the Erinýes, Achilles wanders away from the main battle in search of Amazons. He falls on women in mourning and having being instructed by Lyssa that they are Amazons, he murders them.

Penthesilea

Hera, having lost patience with the son of Thetis, arranges that Apollo and Artemis receive satisfaction for the injuries that Achilles has inflicted, these being the desecration of the Temple of Apollo and the killing of Penthesilea while she was on a mission of atonement. Apollo and Artemis find Achilles alone by the Scaean gates. While Zeus sleeps on Ida and Poseidon tends to his palace, an arrow launched from distant walls at a stranger by Paris is guided by Apollo through Achilles' ankle. Surprised and wounded by dogs sent by Artemis, Achilles receives two more darts and curses the heavens. Awake now and angered by the insolence of Achilles, Zeus strikes him dead.

Eris once again enters the household of Zeus. In the confusion on the plains, a battle begins for the body of Achilles. The Greeks prevail and while Ajax carries the body of Achilles back to the ships, Odysseus pushes the Trojans back to the city.

On the third day after the short truce to bury the dead, at a time when the sun was highest in the heavens, there came news of a cloud of dust on the northern horizon that was like the growing storms in the wilderness that violet-winged Boreas would make when he was angered. Then came the clamour of horses, metal and chariots that blackened the horizon. At length, King Memnon arrived, leading his armies of Aethiopians and the greatest princes and chiefs of Susa and all the allies who had joined the son of Tithonus.

King Memnon began his victorious march with 900 chariots, 16,200 infantry and 5,000 fierce Aethiopian warriors. The city of Kish added 100 chariots and 1,800 of their finest infantry, Opis added thirty chariots, all skilled archers, and 600 men, Assur, 60 chariots and 1,000 men, Tushpa, 50 chariots and 950 warriors, Tieum, 45 chariots and 810 infantry, and Pandaros joined Memnon at Zelela with his 120 chariots and 2,400 hoplites.

When Memnon early in the first season came to the shores of the Hospitable Sea, he sent ambassadors to Queen Otrere of Themiskyra. They came back to him with news that the expedition of the warrior queen Penthesilea had already left for the Temple of Apollo near the

city of old King Laomedon. Otrere sent gifts of oil, wine and jewellery to King Memnon along with a guard of twenty of her fiercest archers on horseback for they had begged Queen Otrere to join the warrior maiden at Troy. To their number, the peaceful farmers of Paphlagonia paying homage to Queen Penthesilea sent 15 chariots and 200 of their young warriors.

The Lycians, wishing to avenge the death of King Sarpedon, rallied 400 chariots and 7,200 fresh hoplites. When the army of King Memnon reached the country of Troy he had accumulated 1,720 chariots and 35,000 warriors from all the countries of Eos, enough to equal the Achaean multitude.

The Trojans rejoiced, for Memnon had now completed his long journey from the country of Eos, through the land between two rivers northward to the Hospitable Sea and finally south to Troy. In his march he had subdued the country of the Solymoi. The Solymoi were the fiercest of men on chariots and rose up against Memnon thinking that he was the new Lycian king, but he and his army fought them and defeated them, plundering their gold and treasures and driving them back to the hills. When Memnon came to the table of Priamos, the king gave him a great cup of forged gold, full of sweetened dark wine to the brim, and Memnon, to express his appreciation, drank the wine at one draught.

“You have come to save our city”, the nobles cried, “for he who is equal to Achilles has arrived!” but Memnon wisely did not make boasts of what he could do for he had now learned of the tragic fate of Queen Penthesilea who was equal to the greatest of all warriors and he said in a sober tone, “I have come to meet the Achaeans on the field and whether I am a good man at arms will only be known in battle, where the strength of men is tried. So now let us drink and listen to sweet music and rest this evening for the Greek camp, having witnessed my arrival, is certainly preoccupied with plans of war.”

Priamos then praised this wisdom. He invited Memnon, his generals and the gods to his table where in the company of Zeus, Apollo and Ares they gave thanks for this miracle and sacrificed six rams, two ewes,

four goats and three pigs. He gathered the royal family and the nobles of Troy and the princes and chiefs and with the finest of terebinth-scented wine they feasted on all that the king and princes could offer and then went to bed early for the Greek hordes waited on the plains. Eos unwillingly opened the curtains of darkness the next day, to throw light on the battle where her son was to challenge the Greek princes. King Memnon had already rallied the dark clouds of his chariots, the Amazons and his infantry and the Greek multitudes gathered there had a foreboding of death when appeared so diverse an army of warriors.

Antilochus, the son of Nestor, rode up from the ships to lead the Greeks in his shining mail and to restore to them their courage. At the same time, Memnon fell upon the left wing of the Greeks, and on the men of Nestor, and first he slew Ereuthus and then turned his sword to Nestor but held back having seen the age and wisdom in the clear eyes behind the folds of experience. "I cannot slay you, old man," he spoke. "Go back to your country!"

Then Nestor's son Antilochus, who was the dearest friend of Achilles and who had been left to command the Myrmidons, arrived with the formidable warriors. He, a prince in wrought armour, came on chariot to spare his father but Artemis intervened and forced the young prince on to the field with a shower of arrows and lances. Antilochus, adeptly lowering his shield, thrust his lance between the corselet and girdle of Aithops, who fell dead at the feet of Memnon. Seeing his dear friend bleeding in the dust the Aethiopian leaped on Antilochus like a lion on a kid, but the son of Nestor with the strength of Heracles turned to lift a stone from the plain, a rounded pillar that had been set on the tomb of some great warrior, and flung it at the helmet of Memnon, who reeled injured to the ground. But the son of Eos seized his spear and, standing again, guided it through the shield and mail of Antilochus to pierce his heart. The young man fell and died beneath his father's eyes. Nestor in sorrow and anger called to his other son, Thrasymedes, but Memnon was too strong for Thrasymedes, who retreated to save himself. Then Nestor himself raised his sword but drew back for he was weak with

age. His men quickly forced him on a chariot and retreated to the ships.

Memnon and his army were now pushing the Greeks toward the sea, slaying all opposition and stripping the dead. Surely as the rising tide covers the sun-dried stones, the thousands advanced over the plains and through the marshes closer to the shores.

Nestor was taken to Achilles, who had only just returned with Odysseus from Lesbos. Weeping, he implored Achilles to come swiftly to save the body of his son Antilochus before it be desecrated by the Trojans. Achilles, still regretting his loss of Patroclus, wept with Nestor, furious that the gods, after his due sacrifice, once again conspired to betray the son of Thetis.

He gathered his Myrmidons and sped to meet Memnon, who standing with his horde saw the son of Peleus as an equal. Memnon threw a lance, glancing Achilles on the left shoulder, but Achilles was not shaken by the blow. The half-god ran forward and wounded Memnon over the rim of his shield yet Memnon fought and managed to thrust his spear through the arm of Achilles, for the son of Peleus fought with bare arms. Then, wounded Achilles, in pain, his blood spilling to the dust, drew his sword and fell on Memnon. They lashed at each other and thrust at each other's throats. The dust beneath their feet rose in a cloud around them as they fought, neither of them yielding until finally, guided by Athene, Achilles passed his bronze sword clean through the body of Memnon who fell moaning at his feet.

Wounded and weak, Achilles did not stop to strip the golden armour of Hephaestus, but shouted a war cry for he had heard that the king of Susa had come to Troy with more Amazons. All the Greeks followed after him and pursued the fleeing army of Menmon, slaying as they went, and the Dardanian Gate was choked with armed men, pursuing and pursued. In that hour the Greeks could have entered Troy and burned the city and ravished the women but that Paris with his archers stood on the tower above the gate and in his mind was anger for the death of his brother Hektor. With black clouds of arrows and spears that fell like the dark rain from the anger of Zeus he held back the Greeks. Then Odys-

seus surveying the impenetrable gate fell back with the Argives from the melee, calling a retreat to reorganize.

Achilles, struggling to remain conscious and hearing clamour from another direction, saw Artemis who had taken the form of Penthesilea. The queen appeared not like a spirit but as a maiden in full youth and beauty. With tears in her grey eyes she urged him to turn away from the thick of the battle and join her. But Achilles, certain that his lethal sword had slain the maiden, sensed a ruse of the gods to keep him from fighting. Still following the sounds of distant battle he lightened himself of armour and made his way toward the Scaean Gates that were still being besieged by the Amazons. As he walked he saw neither living Aethiopian nor Asian but only fallen Achaeans and Trojans to his left and right. The blood-soaked plain was oddly quiet except for the common thieves who in their filthy clothes stripped the dead for what was left of garments and possessions. As he approached the western gate toward the north he realized that the multitudes had vanished, for Eos mourning the loss of her son had begged the intervention of Zeus, who had transformed the Susans and Aethiopians into two flocks of birds who would honour forevermore the ashes of the fallen Aethiopian king.

Let no one disparage Artemis, for her altar had been dishonoured by the son of Peleus and yet she could not be satisfied, for he lived under the watchful eye of Zeus who allowed no peace on the plains of Troy. Now Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons who had once refused to dance around the altar of the goddess, had come to love Artemis and offered bread and oil and wine and celebrated her in all the cities of the Thermodon, but Ares demands blood sacrifice and so the daughter of Otrere had fallen to the spear of her chaste sister. Tormented by the Erinýes, the queen had fled to Troy for purification. Hera, who had banished Leto to Delos when she was full with her twins, who hated Paris for slighting the beauty of the daughter of Kronos, and who had little patience when Ares' children made sacrifice to Apollo and Artemis, now sought to put an end to the contempt of the son of the nereid, for she could tolerate no more. As Zeus slept sweetly on Ida, she softly petitioned Poseidon to join

her lest Achilles bring down the walls of Troy, to which the earth shaker chided, “Hera, mistress of trouble that you are, what empty-headed talk is this? I would not dream of pitting the rest of us against the interdiction of Zeus. He overmasters all!”

Then ox-eyed Hera replied, “I shared no love with Otrere when she lay with Ares, but I have a blood relationship with the children of the war god. Queen Penthesilea came to the Temple of Apollo to seek atonement for a divine accident that claimed her sister Hippolyte, but Achilles, secretly lusting after the maiden, drew chaste blood with the lance of Peleus. Should we then be surprised that the children of Leto conspire against the son of Kronos while Achilles, who places himself above us, continues with his insults? Thetis of easy virtue has exhausted the favours that she asks when my eyes are turned. I plead not for the walls of Troy nor for the heirs of Laomedon but rather that the children of Leto return honour to the Amazon queen who, in her innocence, worshipped them.”

To this Poseidon said nothing, but soon left the fields of Troy to wade deep into the sea to his palace.

With Zeus in deep sleep and the continued clamour at the Dardanian Gates, Apollo found the son of Peleus stripped of war garments searching for Amazons near the Scaean Gates.

Achilles had come upon a group of Trojan women searching for kin and tending to their dead, for even the poor must receive obsequies in proportion to their sacrifices. The widows in dark garments, some with their hair shaved, were charged with carefully washing the bodies in perfumed water and singing laments to say farewell for the last time before the dead were collected for burial. Achilles approached the spring with raised lance and challenged the women, “Why do you come here in the place of men?”

The men stripping the dead, not recognising Achilles and supposing him to be one of them asked, “Why are you threatening these women who are lamenting their husbands? There is enough plunder for all of us. Look here, this man still has gold hidden in his belt!”



Achilles responded in anger, "I need no gold! I am fighting Amazons. Do you not see that I come on behalf of all men? These interlopers pretend to be as strong as men and then steal opportunities and glory from us. They are an insult to the natural order of things!" Turning quickly and applying full force to his lance he pierced the heart of a woman who was tending to the body of her husband. Achilles cried loudly, "Amazons must be taught their place!"

The women, confused and frightened by his sudden act, fell back. A mourner whose name was Aoide tried to say that they were not Amazons but Trojans, but this only enraged the son of Peleus. He lifted his spear again and as she screamed and tried to flee, he lanced her through the neck. Still breathing, she pleaded for assistance and so Achilles returned to her. He sat next to her, quietly pulling his sword from the sheath and stabbed her through the heart. She uttered in surprise and pain and fell back to the earth. Then without mercy, he plunged it twice again until Aoide lay silent.

Suddenly no one dared to move. No one wished to draw the attention of Lyssa. Clearly this stranger bent on destruction was blind to reality.

Achilles, convinced that there were more Amazons within the city, growled and moved hunched over like a hungry dog. All this time he was carefully watched by Apollo and Artemis as he moved toward the Scaean Gate.

The battle waning, Paris, growing suspicious of the silence on the flank with the weakest gate, gathered his archers and moved along the wall. Below him ran a passageway between two walls, where any intruders who might have breached the initial gates would be trapped. He reached the parapet above the gates and surveyed an empty battlefield. Dark cloaked scavengers moved from one corpse to another. Women mourned and gathered. Mindful of Helenus who had presaged the many battles fought at this gate, he looked for anything unusual. Then he saw a crowd near the springs and a lone warrior running toward the city. A

skilled archer, he drew his bowstring to the bridge of his nose and aiming true launched an iron-tipped arrow.

Apollo, seeing an opportunity, guided the arrow but Achilles, hearing the whisper of the dart, turned away just as it pierced his ankle. Surprised, and momentarily immobilised by the pain, the son of Peleus looked up to see where it came from. He reached down to his ankle to break the arrow and continued to limp toward the gate. Then he saw Penthesilea to his right, in hunting dress, approaching him with her dogs. "I see an immortal!" he cried, but wounded twice, he suspected that she was a vision. He challenged the apparition with his sword as the archers on the wall watched him turn in circles blindly swinging at ghosts. From the spring the women, ever cautious, watched a strange naked creature dance with Lyssa.

All the while Artemis, a pack of dogs behind her and in the form of the Amazon queen, was drawing nearer to her prey. With her hunter's eye she cried, "A stag!" She drew her golden bow until the two ends met, then aimed and shot an arrow through his throat. He turned his slender neck to look at her beauty and cried, "Ajax! Odysseus!" They did not answer. Encircled by her dogs, he looked around for brush or tall grass. On hands and knees he crawled away in pain, slowly losing the strength that he had once possessed. It has been said that war is a man drenched in blood who still has the will to burn the land of the living, yet here was war in the form of a woman surrounded by hungry wolves.

With a bow in her hands, the hunter screamed and with the strength of rage she drew, aimed, and shot again. A third arrow found its home deep in Achilles' flesh. Still he picked himself up and stood drunk in pain and injury, then fell again, an easy target for raging dogs. The huntress approached her game. Now lying in blood, Achilles looked up at the Amazon queen and reached for the soft cheek of a lover. He uttered, "Is this how I die?" He reached for her breast. She pulled back, repulsed. Frustrated that he still lived she looked for Apollo to complete her vengeance but her brother, fearing Poseidon, had left the field. Achilles tried



again to stand but now the dogs held him down. United, they sank their teeth into his flesh. He moaned loudly, no longer in pain he begged with anguished whimpers. Suppliant on his knees he felt the beasts all around him, draining his lifeblood. Still trying to deprive chaste Artemis of satisfaction, Achilles taunted Zeus, raising his hands over his head and calling, "Here I am!" At that moment a bolt of lightning struck the son of Peleus, killing him instantly.

Zeus, having smitten motionless the son of Peleus with his anger, now had to mediate endless quarrels in his house. Athene began the recriminations, putting the blame on Hera for arranging that Achilles could be in a moment of vulnerability as he was mourning Antilochus. The war god on his part protested the interference of Thetis to the extent that he could not avenge the loss of his dearest daughter to the sword of Achilles.

All were questioning the means by which the children of Leto had been able to interfere at the Scaean Gates, contradicting the father of gods and men. Apollo, whose temple had been so grievously desecrated, certainly did not lack motive but did he truly wish to invite divine displeasure by guiding the dart that incapacitated Achilles, or had Tyche, protecting the walls of Troy, endowed Paris with godlike accuracy on this occasion? What was certain was that the huntress with her hounds intended to finish the work of her brother while Zeus dreamed on Ida's summit.

No one doubted her desire for satisfaction but now Eris was guiding the debate. Thetis had petitioned immortality for her son but the greatest of the Achaeans lay lifeless and mutilated. The Olympians were left with the task of retelling history in light of each of their particular interests and designs. Their intent to fashion a hero would obscure the truth of the circumstances of his demise. None of those on Olympus could permit that Achilles died a fool, driven mad by his contempt of women and gods, nor could they accept that he had been finally struck dead by the rage of Zeus.

Now the crowd moved from the springs and surrounded the fallen

Achaean. Paris, realising that his arrows had found their mark, ordered the gates opened so that the Trojans might know whom they had slain and retrieve the body. At the same time, the Greeks who had retreated from the Dardanian Gates were now quickly moving toward the commotion. While archers watched from the parapets, a contingent of Lycians and Trojans accompanied by many experienced defenders of Troy led by Glaucus and Aeneas were marching toward the gathering.

Unknown to the defenders, behind the scattered Achaeans they had already observed was the Greek horde led by Ajax and Odysseus.

Aeneas was halfway to the fountain when his messenger returned with the word, "Achilles." The news spurred the Trojan defenders to run toward the spring, leaving the hoplites behind. It was clear by now that a larger group of Greeks was marching to the same place. The Trojans, unprepared for a major confrontation, asked Chromis and his Mysians to provide a diversion as Aeneas and his men moved to recover the body of Achilles. It was too late however, for leading the scattered Achaeans was the son of Telamon, with resourceful Odysseus coming from the other direction with the Greek multitude.

The groups met near the spring with great noise and clashing of steel and breaking of wood and bones. There was fierce fighting over Achilles' body, now lying uncovered like a fallen stag. Ajax challenged Glaucus, who had been the first to reach the body.

Ajax moved swiftly, delivering a thrust with his bronze sword to the face of the Lycian. Glaucus responded by bringing his shield up to defend himself. Ajax pulled back and delivered a cut to Glaucus' exposed leg but Glaucus having expected Ajax's move responded violently with a counter-attack followed by a brief withdrawal. Then using identical moves, Glaucus landed a blow on Ajax who withdrew into a guard to begin the fight again. Ajax returned, his eyes raging, his shield close to his side and lunged at Glaucus' head, stepping forward with his right foot. Glaucus raised his shield to defend himself but Ajax's sword found an opening on Glaucus' exposed leg.

Pushing back the bleeding warrior, Ajax thrust again at Glaucus'

head and then pulled back to cut low. As the son of Telamon attacked, Glaucus stepped alertly to his right, removing Ajax's target, and delivered a short edge cut to Ajax's head. Ajax, recognizing the feint, removed the obvious target, allowing an opening that permitted him to deliver a devastating back thrust to the helmet guard. Glaucus, surprised, pulled back and cut low but Ajax quickly stepped out and back, bringing his sword up in front of him for an attack to the other side.

Glaucus shielded another attack to the head but Ajax adroitly retargeted. He moved his shield to block Glaucus' counter-attack, a move that necessarily exposed Glaucus' arm. Ajax returned with a vicious slice. Now feeling pain, Glaucus returned with a shield bind to Ajax but the Achaean thrust to cut low, forcing Glaucus out and back. Ajax raised his right arm for a new attack but Glaucus aggressively responded and bound Ajax's sword arm with his shield and managed a cut to the inside of Ajax's leg.

As Ajax, now bleeding as well, raised his sword, quick-thinking Glaucus recognized that he was well set up for a thrust under Ajax's shield but his opponent quickly withdrew and returned, pushing his shield on Glaucus. The move was confusing to Glaucus for it might have been an advance, an attempt to cause loss of balance, or merely an opportunity for withdrawal. In the instant of his hesitation, Ajax rapidly sliced behind Glaucus' knee and, as the Lycian fell back, Ajax thrust a sword deeply into his abdomen. Glaucus, blood flowing from his limp body, felt his life fade into darkness.

The great struggle for the body of Achilles continued and many fell. Odysseus and the Argives defended their position until the Achaeans prevailed and forced the Trojans back to the gates of Troy. Ajax had already left the plain, carrying the body of his comrade back to the Greek camp.

Thetis had been forbidden by Peleus to console the young Achilles. Perhaps it was because of this that the boy grew up brimming with rage and primed to hate the only creatures that he perceived as lowlier

than himself – women. Now silver-footed Thetis along with the mousai mourns her son. Zeus had determined not to explain the sordid circumstances of his death; that her son had died murdering women. He let the rumour be told that Paris' arrow found its mark in an unanointed ankle as Achilles valiantly scaled the walls of the city together with the Myrmidons, the son of Telemon, and Odysseus and the Argives. His wound and ensuing fever festered on his body and broke his skin. He died in the presence of his comrades in arms.

The body of Achilles was thus explained and delivered with all honours to his grieving mother surrounded by the nereids. Then from the surge of the seas rose Poseidon, who spoke to grief-draped Thetis, “Do not mourn for Achilles for I will give to him a holy island as my gift. It lies far within the Euxine Sea and there evermore as god your son shall reign and be honoured with incense and sacrifice”. Her heart lightened with his words and then the nereids changed to mist and were absorbed by the sea followed by the mousai singing sweet dirges in memory of Achilles.

Athene, frustrated and angry that the walls of Troy stood unassailed, demanded that Zeus bring an end to the war. No longer amused nor caring about the original dispute that Eris had so cleverly enabled with the golden apple, she spoke, “Thetis mourns the son that Peleus abandoned and the world has been bereaved of many a prince. Let Poseidon assuage her tears. Permit me to teach Odysseus a manner by which the Achaeans may enter Troy and put an end to the slaughter.”

To this Zeus replied, “Know that our life is but a sport and a diversion, an adornment and a cause of boasting among you, and a rivalry in wealth and children. This war is like the rain whose vegetation pleases the eye and feeds the appetite; then it withers and yellows and turns to corruption. As we argue in our joy of delusion, we give mortals forgiveness and good pleasure but this has become outweighed by grievous punishment and death. Daughter, I too mourn children who have fallen to the adulteration of sickness, blood, and death that quarrels have sown. Go, and counsel the son of Laertes. Tell him that the families of the



Penthesilea

dead have the responsibility to fulfill any debts as soon as possible and that they must swear the commitment to maintain contacts and courteous relationships with their former enemies. Let them feast and sacrifice together to bring an end to this conflict. Then there must be charity, fasting, prayers and pilgrimage on behalf of the dead.”

Hearing these instructions yet determined to execute her designs, Athene returned to Troy to provide surreptitious advice to the prince of Ithaca.



Panel 14: divine Themis

Teucer arrives to find his half brother despondent. Ajax, who regrets having vented his anger on the Greek herds, asks to be left alone. He commits suicide in the morning.

Ainia and Antianara return to Themiskyra without having met Cleite on the Hellespontos. At their welcome feast attended by Artemis and Apollo, they speak in sadness of the Amazons they left behind in Troy. Queen Otrere rises to justify the expedition to Troy and address rumours and demands for retribution. She then says a few words of eulogy before retiring to mourn her daughters in private.

The brother of Ajax, Teucer arrived to see the proud warrior exhausted and sitting by his ship. He addressed the dejected prince, “Son of Telamon, I rejoice when you are happy but whether you are touched by angry Zeus, or bear the vehement blame of fierce-tongued Greeks, I

grieve and quake from fear as a fluttering dove chosen for sacrifice. The rumours tell of a mighty warrior under Lyssa's spell slaughtering herds of Achaean sheep and burning fields. Odysseus whispers these stories into all men's ears, winning easy belief. As the tale spreads it rouses joy among those who have been jealous of your brave heart and kinship with the great.

"These low-born men now murmur against you, Ajax, and we strive to repel this accusing hate. Whenever they are away from our glance, they chatter and screech like birds in a flock but should you make an appearance, they would surely cower in silence. Your brothers cannot accept that Ajax so loved by Zeus would by his own design destroy animals as if they were a horde on chariots, but escape from heaven-sent Lyssa's embrace would be impossible even for the son of Telamon. Still Apollo and Zeus do not avert these evil rumours and Athene sits strangely mute. We pray that you tell us that these stories are false, crafty slanders spread by powerful chiefs who wish a larger share of the plunder of Troy."

Ajax moved his head slowly upwards and whispered, "Athena".

Telamon spoke. "Then this is the work of the daughter of Zeus?"

"No," replied Ajax, who resumed a listless face.

Frustrated, Teucer moved close to his brother and whispered, "Come, brother, leave your tent by the sea and your grief. Arise and kindle the flame of death on the insolence of your foes. Avenge these lies for the tales spread as a disease among the Achaeans as the grief in your heart wanes not."

Ajax responded, "After Achilles' murderous rampage and the struggles that followed, I managed to bring his body back to the shore. A strong draught brought sudden deep sleep where I dreamed that in frenzy I slaughtered animals, thinking they were Greek princes. I took a ram to my tent, thinking it to be Odysseus. I bound the animal and beat it savagely but then I woke to see butchered animals all over the field and I realised that I was still asleep. So you understand, dear Teucer, that this

is a dream, for a brother could do no such thing unless he were in the embrace of Morpheus.”

“Tell me then,” responded Teucer, “Was it Artemis who drove you to slaughter the herds of the Achaeans, in search of satisfaction for some unpaid-for insult? Or did Ares, the bronze-clad demon of battle, aggrieved by a hero who has scorned the might of his spear, seek revenge by this deception?”

Ajax raised his voice and said, “Let me alone to sleep! Let me wake stronger when it is morning.”

To these words Teucer withdrew, thinking it better to discuss such things the next day.

It has been told that Ajax killed himself about dawn when no one was present. His blood drenched the earth from which crimson larkspur grows to this day.

After a long journey along the coast, north by Phrygian lands to Thrace and then east along the Hospitable Sea past where the Gimirri roam, the captains, Ainia and Antianara, finally arrived in Themiskyra with their company. They had not succeeded in meeting Cleite and had concluded that she had been lost to Poseidon’s angry temperament. Despite their lack of treasures and haggard countenances they were welcomed by Queen Otrere as returning conquerors and were given a feast that was attended even by Artemis and Apollo. There, they were told of the sisters who had accompanied Memnon and his army, some of whom had already returned overland with news of the death of Queen Penthesilea, the defeat of the Amazons and the flight of the Aethiopians.

Ainia and Antianara spoke of how the queen’s escort of fourteen Amazons accompanied her to Apollo’s temple where they were met by armed Greeks. The Amazons prevailed on the battleground until they fell to the supernatural might of Achaean princes. Wild-haired Bremusa, as nearly perfect a captain as one could wish for, should have been invincible under normal circumstances. Of equal skill and rank she met Idomeneus on that sad plain and died there dreaming of a daughter. En-

terprising Klonie who cultivated the pleasure gardens of Themiskyra fell suddenly to Podarces' rage. Then they witnessed Achilles taunt and disparage Amazons as he led the slaughter. Polemoussa who played the *aulos* and sang the songs of Aura, the virgin who brings cool morning air, fell to his rage. Antandre who will be remembered as always surrounded by devoted sisters met his bloodied lance, with eyes wide open, in the warrior's role that she had so carefully practiced. Fierce Antibrote was quickly slain together with her dear companion Hippothoe. The two had been planning to teach Antibrote's daughter to ride on their return. Achilles' appetite for female blood and revenge for all that the nereid had done to him was not diminished, not even after his spear had silenced the heart of our queen.

Antianara then said, "In a pause of the clamour came the goddess disguised in mourning clothes. As an old woman she instructed Ainia to leave Truwisa and return to her children but Ainia argued hotly that our work was not finished and she would not abandon sisters. Only then was I allowed to recognise the light of Artemis. The goddess then urged us to abandon the dead on the plain and travel north in search of Cleite. As we retreated we passed by the body of dark haired Harmothoe, who enjoyed hunting and riding. She so longed to swim that even the winds and cold waters could not stop her. We saw Derimakheia, who sleeps forever with a doll meant for her daughter still tucked behind her breastplate. By the queen lay Derinoe, our gentle athlete, so skilful and agile on the battlefield yet she always preferred swimming and diving to sword training and archery. Lifeless lay Euandre who had been a most obedient student and an even more patient teacher. In tears we rode by Alkibie who had hoped to bring a handsome trophy to Themiskyra. Our hearts were torn to see the broken body of Thermodosa who had been as happy spending hours sewing and weaving as she had been braiding leather or carefully layering strips of linen for armour."

To these words spoke Queen Otrere, her hair tightly wrapped in the dark cloths of mourning, "These events certainly and surely have upset us deeply. We are few and our finest are no longer here to celebrate with

Artemis and Apollo. These maidens were Amazon warriors, intelligent, creative, ambitious and in control of their lives and that was removed from them with impunity. It is now clear that they were executed. They died not as equals but because they were women. There were no lessons to learn or prizes to honour in Truwisa and for that reason our stifled rage and despair wells up in us and spills over in tears, oratory and boiling words. In this moment of mourning we permit ourselves to express our rage and defiance of a constant stream of blows and wounds inflicted on us simply because we are women. We all have been touched by this tragedy in many ways and so we begin to look for explanations and demand vindication.

“Ares, still embittered by the death of his dearest daughter, wanders through our cities stirring emotions and whispering rumours. It has been said that Truwisa was an unfortunate decision of the council. Some demand an inquest to assign blame. That may be wise, but if there is responsibility it must be shared with the gods for the war god surely endorsed the expedition and history will record forevermore that Amazons fought his war at Truwisa.

“As to the question of responsibility, I will first address my personal losses. It was a clearly witnessed accident that caused my daughter Hypolyte to fall on that fatal spear in the confusion of a hunt, yet Penthesilea alone assumed the burden of guilt. Perhaps the tragedy was indeed guided by Eris’ jealous design or Ares’ insatiable desire for satisfaction, but it left my daughter cursed by the Erinýes. She matured and excelled as our warrior queen but still she insisted on atonement at the Temple of Apollo. She brought her request for a pilgrimage, not only to me, but to the council as well. In Themiskyra, life is to be valued above all else. Because life is so precious, we are not permitted to do anything that may hasten death, and for these reasons we have been careful to wisely choose our battles.

“Each time that King Priamos sent messengers requesting our support in the defence of Truwisa we had to decline, for that war was not of our world, however, the warrior queen provided us with another reason,



that of survival. We live in two worlds, one that was made for men and another, not sung of often enough, for women. The man's world belongs to the shaker of skies and all those who share that high domain. The woman's world is that of the earth, of the trees and of our homes and daughters. Our world is jealously guarded by the eternal youth of Artemis. Each month the goddess reminds us that we create the world and that angers the sky gods and those who make sacrifice to them.

“The war against our ways began long before Truwisa. King Agamemnon has always coveted the countries of the Hospitable Sea. If the defence of Truwisa failed, the Achaean ships would follow and we would be conquered either by sword or fondly overcome by Greek goods and charm. Our father Ares has, thus far in our history, provided the means to assure our independence but with the Bosphorus open, we would be overwhelmed by numbers and limited by our sex. We cannot prevail in the world of men. The council, listening to Penthesilea's arguments, made their decision, not for war but rather in support of the queen's quest for purification and to that purpose alone did we agree to provide her with an escort.

“Later in my private chambers, I tried to persuade a daughter to remain in Themiskyra but she pleaded that she wished to bring home a prize from Truwisa according to the old custom, so that she might have daughters and I, grandchildren. In the world, women are dependent on husbands for food, shelter and defence but we share a different history. You have all been told that story. When raiders arrived in our lands and killed our men, we were taken as possessions and raped. But the ancient Queen Hyppolyte, contrary to the wishes of the gods and with the guidance of Artemis, fashioned a means to break the cycle and establish a way to forevermore defend ourselves.

“Queen Penthesilea chose Truwisa despite the efforts of the council to dissuade her, because all the suitors were on that field. Penthesilea was intent on battle with the greatest warrior in the world because Ares and Artemis and even the thunder god had made her his equal. The only way an Amazon may have a man on an equal basis, *as a woman*, is to

take him prisoner, subdue him and then free him to choose to remain. Achilles had to be made her prisoner and this had to be of his free will, for a lover taken by force will cut your throat as you sleep.

“Achilles imagined that because our maidens could take their lives into their own hands, they were haughty and pompous and it was for this perception that they died. The gods have said that this was the work of Lyssa and that it had nothing to do with warcraft or male honour. The oracle has said that the Erinýes inhabited Achilles’s mind and that the unnatural fed his strength until Hera, the daughter of Kronos, tired of the violence. That may be so, but it is not unrelated to what is going on around us. Anger occurs in any place and in every place but when it becomes prejudice and hate, it delights Ares for then we march to battle. We fight to defend our way of life and we inflict casualties on opponents and sometimes we die but we also give men spoils and pleasures and send them home wealthy because Amazons do not share the goals of revenge, spoils or conquest that men so cherish. Our paramount objective even in war has always been maternity.

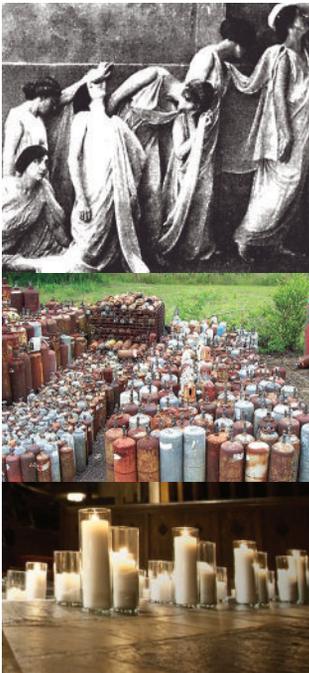
“Many have asked why the dead have not been returned to Themiskyra by the Trojans, that they not sleep in a foreign country unattended. This is a valid question for I too am a mother who has lost a daughter. This has been explained thus: that even though the battle raged, the war god assured Queen Penthesilea a proper funeral in the custom of that land. Her body was tended to by the Trojan women, Hecuba, Helen, Cassandra, Medusa, Polyxena, Laodice, Medesicaste and Andromache. King Priamos built a great pyre for the queen’s body, for in that country and on that ground she had been made a daughter of the house of Troy. Although these are not the ways of our culture, the protector Artemis and her brother laid a wreath of laurel on the queen’s body and kept vigil as she passed from the dream of life to the wakefulness of the truest self. Then when her bones had cooled, they were anointed and laid with honour in the great funeral mound of King Laomedon. Her Amazon sisters, all equal to men, were gathered as best they could and buried not in a common grave but close to the queen with perfumed oil and flowers as

is our custom, so that they too might sleep in peace. Both Trojans and Greeks mourned the Amazons who had died on that plain.

“Now I speak to those who are hot to organize an expedition of revenge. To this I must speak of practical things. Memnon’s Aethiopians have been seen returning to the east in haste, with wounded and without chariots or wagons. There is news that the temple of Apollo is in ruins. The Olympians have abandoned their war and mortals and have returned to the mountain leaving the smoke-filled battleground to Eris and Enyo. The goddess wishes to return to her forest and even Apollo advises caution as he can no longer intervene. Returning Amazons talk of men from both sides as common thieves, rapists and murderers in a confusion that was once called Truwisa. I ask therefore, if we actually had enough battle-hard maidens to avenge our wounds, which we do not, where should we send them? Against whom should we retaliate? It would be irresponsible to entertain such a venture.

“We will first mourn, then we will work hard for change. Our mourning is profound. We will need lamplight vigils, solemn bells and silence. We will need the stopping of time, the ceremony and heightened words that will unlock feelings and make us remember. It will take an effort of will to bring to mind the blows and the ugliness that lie just beneath the surface of so many around us. We must make the effort, because even as we speak, hands are raised against children who will grow up to take vengeance on those who have never harmed them. We must mourn all women killed by male violence. I speak not only of those lost in battle, but also of women slain *because* they were female.

“Now I will speak of the daughters of Themis. The material shell within which we dwell a lifetime is to be honoured for it is formed from the ashes of the Titans mixed with divine flesh and granted the breath of life. At times the body may seem a hindrance and a burden. The truth is that birth, sickness, aging and death are suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering. Association with the unpleasant is suffering and dissociation with the pleasant is suffering. Not to be satisfied is suffering; in brief, life is suffering and so all living things die. It



is difficult to understand why this must happen and so the best we can do is to accept death. When our sisters are taken suddenly, it may be the hardest kind of death because it happens so quickly. There is no time to get accustomed to the idea of losing those we love. Reconciling our grief will not happen quickly for it is a process that requires patience and tolerance.

“The body is a temporary possession and life is the struggle to sprout wings to escape that prison. Each of us is born with the countenance of a creator that our eyes will never see. That is why, in life, we are permitted only reflections of ourselves. We see our image reflected in water but also mirrored in our sisters, our families, our companions as well as throughout the natural world, in our labours or in the things that we create. This is the lesson of the immateriality of life, yet there is always a part of the person that survives death. The truest self exists prior to the body into which it is born. It shares the life of the invisible world for the truest self is not born, nor does it ever die, nor can it be destroyed after having been brought into being. It is of the unborn, the permanent, the eternal, the ancient and is not slain when the body is slain.

“The truest self, having in this dream enjoyed the pleasures of sense, gone hither and thither, experienced good and evil, goes back to the state of waking from where it began. As we pass from dream to wakefulness, so do we pass from one life to the next. We originated in clay, were fashioned and shaped with water and took a breath of life from our mothers, but all will return to one place, for we are of the dust, and will be dust again. There is, however, more to our life than simply passing through a dream. The truest selves that have been wise and that have lived in respect of the mortal existence that they have shared, will shine bright as the sky above and the best of those will forever shine like the stars from whence they came.”

With these words the queen retired from the feast to return to mourning her five children. Ainia was content to be reunited with her mother and daughters, but she felt angry for having abandoned the bodies of her



Penthesilea

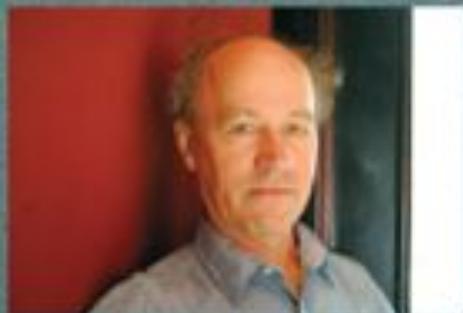
sisters to the soil of a foreign country. She pined to have either brought them back with her or to have been buried with them. Plagued for the rest of her days by the cries of the Erinýes but tired of warfare, she was determined to never again lift a weapon in anger. She offered sacrifice to Hera and Artemis at the beech tree and dedicated herself to the preservation of Amazon traditions.

Young Antianara grew wise and powerful. She became a warrior queen and fought several victorious campaigns until the passing of Otre-re, after which she was crowned Hyppolyte, queen of all the Amazons.

This was the life of Penthesilea and her Amazon sisters. Anyone looking at this can say, here was her birth, that was adolescence and that was the struggle of wishing for things and that was the vengeance and finally the story ends with mourning, a thing that fades to black.

Credits

- Page 8 George Ledger, *Amazon Warrior*.
(Used with permission of the artist)
- Page 20 Afrank99, *Boar's Head Helmet*.
- Page 27 David Shankbone, *Naomi Wolf*.
- Page 28 Mayang Murni Adnin, *Dates*.
- Page 37 Ross, *White Stag*.
Pandiyana V, *Deer*.
- Page 34 Justin Ennis, *Venus Kallipygos*.
- Page 41 Andrew Junge, *Pandora's Box*, 2005,
found toolbox with neon, 53 x 23 x 28 cm
(Used with permission of the artist)



Penthesilea, Andres Manniste

Figures float on a background that fades into memories.

This piece is a memorial to tragedy. In Marc Lepine's head, I presume, women had to be taught the natural order of things but his victims were not responsible for his demons. In the Bronze age myth a quest into the world of men also leads to tragedy.

I created *Penthesilea* as atonement. The Amazon died at the hand of Achilles and in my myth Artemis puts an end to him for I speculate that all who have lived such events fantasize disarming a coward.

Penthesilea describes a life. Something here might remind you of a loved one. Hands of unborn children are the stars in the sky, snow on the television.

Andres Manniste has participated in many solo and group exhibitions over his career and has been the recipient of several important prizes including grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Quebec Ministry of Culture. His work has been acquired by public collections including the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, the Heritage Collection of the Quebec Archives, the Government of Ontario Art Collection and the Canada Council Art Bank and the Rhizome artbase in New York. Andres works and teaches in Montreal.