



The Phoenician Women, by Euripides
Recension/translation by David Travis

The Choral Odes

Parados

Chorus

Strophe 1 (sung)

I came from Tyrian lands
Carried by seaswells toward Phoebus Apollo
From lovely Phoenicia. [205]

My journey is to the house of Lord Phoebus
On the shoulders of snow-swept Parnassus.
I crossed Ionia's sea
Hauled by oars
League on league
We sailed over vast unharvested deeps, [210]
Past great Sicily's coasts
Aided by Zephyr, the west wind,
Singing sweet music above us.

Antistrophe 1 (sung)

Chosen to serve Lord Apollo
Carried to Kadmos' land
The home of Agenor's long line, my kin, [220]
Where seven great towers surround me.

Here I became the handmaid of Phoebus,
Devoted like his golden statues.
But the pools of Kastalia at great Delphi's shrine
Still wait for me to wet my virgin hair
And seal my pledge to his service. [225]

Epode (spoken)

O sacred rock, flashing with torchfire
High above Delphi,
High on the heights where Dionysos dances;
O vine of miracles, every day dropping [230]



Your famous ripe clusters of grapes;
O holy cave of the dragon
Parnassus, you windswept watchtower of the gods,
O sacred snow-scattered, storm-tossed mountain! [235]
I long to be with you
Far, far from here, free of fear
Dancing the dance of the deathless god,
In the valleys of Phoebus at the center of the world
Release me from this dread!

Strophe 2

But now, before the walls [240]
Murderous Ares has come,
Fanning the flames of war
Stop him! Save this city!
We all are the children of the horned maid Io;
Our blood is one;
If this land and its seven tall towers should suffer [245]
We will share that pain.
One fear, one agony, one bond;
These sorrows I claim as my own.

Antistrophe 2

Shields all around us, gathering, swarming,
Surrounding the city like thunderheads;
The looming spectre of war! [250]
O Ares!
You bring the curse of the Furies upon
The heads of the sons of Oedipus. [255]
O mighty Argos!
I dread your strength,
And the vengeance that heaven may send;
For the man who has come to this city's great walls
Claims a right that is not without justice...



Ode 1

Chorus

Strophe 1

Kadmus of Tyre came to this land,
Seeking his destiny, searching
Here the wandering calf
Bent down, fell to its knees [640]
Fulfilling the prophecy.
He obeyed the oracle
And started to build his home.
It was here
On the fertile plains
Thick with sprouting wheat [645]
Where the crystalline waters of Dirke
Flow over the fields,
Rich cascades feeding the green
deep-sown furrows.
It was here the god Bacchus was born [650]
From his mother's union with Zeus;
He whom the ivy twined tendrils around
Twisting a wreath,
Covering him, blessing him
A tiny infant bathed in smiling green. [655]
Dionysos, who dances with Theban girls
And wives inspired by revelry
High on the hills!

Antistrophe

It was here.
And here the savage dragon lay
Murderous minion of Ares
He waited and watched with flashing eyes [660]
Guarding the war god's sacred spring.
Kadmus killed it.
One day when he went
to fetch the holy consecrated water...
He crushed its skull [665]
with a jagged stone.
Blow upon blow
until it was dead.



Pallas Athena suggested a plan
He scattered the monster's teeth
Across the field, into the folded furrows... [670]

The soil erupted a fearsome crop
An army of iron-clad warriors.
They slaughtered each other,
Returned to the earth.
Soaking with blood [675]
the land that had borne them
into the sunlit winds of heaven.

Epode (sung)

Epaphus, hear us! Child of Io, daughter of Zeus,
Ancestral father
Come down, come down, you loved this land!
Your blood lives on through Theban blood!
Demeter and Persephone [685]

Queen, nurse,
Mother of all, The Earth.
Protect this land!
O gods you who can do all things.
Send, o send your signal fires
Blazing, blazing, light the way to peace! [690]



Ode 2

Chorus

Strophe

O Ares, War God, god of suffering!
Why, why are you so possessed with love for blood and death? [785]
Why so out of tune with Dionysus' feasts?
You never toss your hair with Theban girls
Entwined, with lovely vines to bind their hair
Singing with the Graces to the flutesong
Words to charm young dancers' feet.
No, you lead a dance of iron,
Your revelry soaked in blood.
You come with chariots, clattering cavalry,
You arrive at the river inspiring hate. [795]
A circle of revelers carrying bronze – itching to kill.
O Ares, your cruel designs for the princes of Thebes have been
Winding them towards their fate,
their date with destiny,
since the city was born long ago. [800]

Antistrophe

O secret snow-swept forests of Kithaeron,
O desolate wilderness of Artemis
You nourished a baby abandoned to die,
High up on your slopes, exposed ...
Oedipus, Jokasta's child, hobbled by pins.
Never meant to live. [805]
Why did you save him?
And then that hell-born mountain witch, the Sphinx
Sent by Hades to plague the men of Thebes;
Diving shrieking screaming down out of the sky
Snatching the children of Thebes
To carry forever away
Into the far-reaches of heaven... [810]
And now again it comes; new strife new pain
New evil blooms between the sons of Oedipus.
Corrupting all it touches...
For never can wrong be right, [815]
Unnatural incest-born children, their mother's labor, their father's pollution;
She came to the bed of her son. . . .



Epode

I hear, O Earth, you once gave birth --
so I heard in my faraway home -- [820]

You bore a race which sprang from the teeth of a dragon
To Thebes' great glory and shame.

In days long past
the Sons of Heaven attended Harmonia's wedding.

In days long past
The towers and walls of Thebes
rose to the music of Amphion's lyre, [825]

midway between the double streams that water the thick green fields
Proud Dirke and mighty Ismenus;

In days long past
Io, our horned ancestress,
was mother to kings of Thebes; [830]

This city, so endlessly honored and blessed in ages past,
Now stands high above the yawning gulf of war.



Ode 3

Chorus

Strophe

You came to bring the city to its knees
Winged fiend [1020]

Earthborn viper-child
Hideous creature
With wandering wings and carrion claws; [1025]

You swooped upon fresh-faced youths
Enjoying Dirke's river haunts,
Crying your Fury's shriek
And carried them, screaming, away. [1030]

You brought a deadly curse,
You brought an aching grief,
And terror reigned in Thebes.
What terrible god had brought all this to pass?
Wailing cries of mothers, [1035]

Wailing cries of young women,
Homes filled with sorrow;
One cry answering another,
in turn throughout the stricken city. [1040]
A groaning like rolling thunder,
Each time the winged maiden
carried another man out of sight.

Antistrophe

And then in time
Came Oedipus to Thebes,
Sent by Apollo's oracle. [1045]

First to the people's joy
But after to their grief;
for he formed an evil union
when he vanquished the murderous Sphinx.
He guessed her riddle, poor wretch
But then he coupled with his mother, [1050]
Staining the city.
And he struck down his sons with curses,



And he led them to murderous strife.

(sung)

Praise him, praise him [1055]
who now offers his life
to purify this land.

Kreon will weep,
but the boy will crown [1060]
The towers of Thebes with victory.

(spoken)

Dearest Athene, [1065]
You who gave courage to Kadmos
To slay the dragon with a crushing stone,
May we be mothers of sons as true and good
Make noble the fruit of our wombs...