

The Matter of the Ahhiyans

The First Heroes New Tales of the Bronze Age

by Lois Tilton, 1946–

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Perhaps no event of the Bronze Age is better known than the Trojan War, and this is also one of its most famous puzzles. Homer's Iliad speaks of the sack of Ilios—of Troy. Heinrich Schlieman found the remains of a destroyed city in western Anatolia, a city contemporary with the Hittite empire farther to the east. The Hittite palace archives speak of „Wilusa“ and the „Ahhiyans“. Could they mean „Ilios“ and the „Acheans“? Historians and archaeologists can only speculate if the Hittite kings might have come to know the Trojan War centuries

before Homer sang his first verse. Lois Tilton, wise to the true nature of war, speculates how.

So now I am to be a spy.

Well, I have been many things besides a scribe in the service of the Great King Tudhaliya, ruler of the Land of Hatti, and his father before him. I have traveled to many foreign lands to set down the terms of the treaties made by his ambassadors. I have gone with him to his wars, writing accounts of his battles and victories for the palace archives.

Now the king of Wilusa has written to plead for aid against the sea-raiders from Ahhiya.

Priamos King of Wilusa to the Tabarna, the Great King Tudhaliya, the Sun, Lord of the Land of Hatti:

You know for how many years I have been your loyal servant and obeyed your commands, for how many years I have sent tribute to you, of gold and silver, and of high-necked horses, how I have sent soldiers to serve in your distant campaigns. Now my domain is threatened with destruction. The king of the Ahhiyans has come in his ships to lay waste the whole land of Wilusa. He has burnt my cities and carried off my people into slavery. My palace at Taraisa is now under siege.

Now if I have ever been the Great King's loyal servant, I beg you to come at once with your chariots and your footsoldiers to drive these invaders back into the sea, or else the land of Wilusa may be lost.

When I finished reading this letter, the Great King cursed the Ahhiyans. „Always, they cause trouble! Even in my father's day and his father's day they were always raiding our lands and inciting insurrection among our subjects, even when my father wrote to the Ahhiyan king as an equal and a brother, offering a treaty. They pledge their good faith, and at the same time they are conspiring with our enemies. Whenever our armies meet them on the battlefield, they retreat in their ships and we cannot touch them. We can drive them into the sea, but always they come back to make more trouble in our lands!“

Indeed, I knew the truth of this, for I had been on campaign with his father when he fought the Ahhiyans over the matter of Wilusa, years ago. Yet as I reminded Tudhaliya, we were now supposed to be at peace with Ahhiya. Perhaps this was the moment for diplomacy, not armies.

So I set down the words of the Great King, using the language of the Ahhiyans:

I, the Great King Tabarna, the Great King Tudhaliya, the Sun, Lord of the Land of Hatti, to Agamemnon King of Achaia:

King Priamos of Ilios writes to me saying: The king of the Achaians has attacked my lands. But the king of Ilios is my servant, and his lands are my lands. Why therefore have you attacked my lands? Are we not at peace? Is there not a treaty between us? Are we not as brothers?

Now if Priamos has given you just cause to make him your enemy, then tell me of it, and I will send my army to punish him. But if you have attacked Priamos without just cause, then know that I, the Sun, will come with my whole army, my chariots and my infantry, to drive you back into the sea.

This was the letter the Great King sent to the King of Ahhiya. But to me privately he admitted, „Hantili, you understand the problem I face in this matter. I dare not risk sending my army so far west as Wilusa, not now.“

I understood his reasons well. In the east, Assyrian armies were on the march in the borderlands near the Euphrates. In the north, the Kaska tribes were raiding again, probing for weakness. He dared not withdraw his armies from these borders just to repel a few sea-raiders from Wilusa, so far away from Hattusa, the center of the kingdom.

Yet if the Ahhiyans took the citadel of Taroisa, they would be in a position to control all the sea traffic through the straits into the Black Sea. They could strangle our trade. They might even make an alliance with the Kaska tribes along the coast. The Great King knew he could not allow this to happen.

In due course there came a reply from the Ahhiyan king Agamemnon:

Indeed I am at peace with the Land of Hatti, my brother. I have only attacked Priamos at Troia because the gods require me to avenge a great sacrilege. Paris, son of Priamos, has violated the guest-friendship he had with my brother Menelaos, king of Sparta. He came to the palace of Menelaos and stole from the altar the golden figure of the goddess Helene. He took with him also treasure and women from the palace. The gods would destroy me if I ignored such a crime.

I have taken a sacred vow to punish Priamos and restore the golden goddess to her altar. But let this not be the cause of war between us, my brother, between the land of Achaia and the Land of Hatti. My quarrel is only with Priamos and Paris his heir, not with my brother the Great King of the Hittites. In token of my good will I send you these gifts, a gold and crystal flask of scented oil and a two-handled silver cup, embossed with images of the Wine God.

When I had finished reading the letter, the king was greatly troubled. „Sacrilege. This is a grave charge. But how can I be sure of Agamemnon? Gifts are no guarantee of the truth.“ He turned the silver cup in his hands, admiring its workmanship.

„Yes,“ I replied, „it is a gift fit for a king, but I have to wonder—was it looted from one of your subjects in Wilusa?“

„There is one way to find out,“ he said finally. „Hantili, I send you now to Wilusa so you can report to me on this matter as you see it with your own eyes. I know it may be hard to make such a journey at your age, but there is no one I trust more to tell me the truth. Let me know: Was there truly sacrilege committed by Priamos’s son Paris? Have the Ahhiyans attacked in force? With what strength—how many men, how many chariots? Do they come for conquest or only for revenge? Tell me whether I need to send my army to Wilusa.“

Now I am in all things the servant of the Great King. I go at his command.

By the time I arrived at the citadel of Taroisa in Wilusa, Agamemnon and his Ahhiyan sea-raiders had already sailed away, taking the spoils of their raids onto their ships and returning to their own lands in the west, across the sea. Men here tell me, men who know the sea, that contrary winds and the risk of storms make it impossible to set sail into open waters once the summer has come to an end.

Men here in Wilusa speak the language of the Ahhiyans, whom they call *Achaians*. Many of them have Achaian blood. In the past, in times of peace, much trade with the Achaian lands has passed through this harbor, making Wilusa a rich land and ripe for plunder.

Men tell me the Achaians were raiding up and down the coast, sacking the towns, carrying off the horses and livestock, carrying off the women into slavery. They say they struck the nearby islands, as well—Tenedos, Lesbos, Lemnos—though I have not seen these places with my own eyes. But with my own eyes I have seen the homesteads of Wilusa in ashes, the fields and groves despoiled. I have seen the orphans and the old people starving at the roadsides, begging for bread. This seems to me as if Agamemnon was more interested in plunder than in avenging sacrilege.

At Taroisa, which men here call *Troia*, the evidence of war is everywhere. I myself have seen the tar-stained marks at the shoreline where the Achaian ships were drawn up out of the water—a great host of ships, and men tell me that each one can hold fifty men, to row and to fight. This was a large force! I saw the earthen rampart, also, that they threw up to protect their ships, though the men of Troia have by now demolished it. They seem convinced the raiders will return in the next season.

Troia has the look of a place long besieged. It is evident that the hardest fighting has been on the plain that lies below the walls, between the city and the sea. The land there has been trampled to dust by the two contending armies, the hooves of their horses, the wheels of their chariots, the feet of their infantry. And there is the stench of the city, of too many bodies crowded together behind walls for too long. It is not a thing a man forgets, once he has known it: the odor of war, the odor of death.

Yet Troia's walls still stand. They are strong walls, well-built walls. I recall that the citadel fell in the time of the Great King Hattusili, but it is apparent that the ramparts since have been rebuilt, stronger than before. The citadel occupies the summit of a hill, and the walls rise above it, thick and well-sloped. There is a good, deep cistern inside the walls, and an ample supply of grain put by in the king's storehouses. I do not think Troia will fall easily.

All this I have seen myself, with my own eyes. But on the question of the sacrilege Agamemnon has claimed he must avenge, it is harder to discover the truth. Some men insist that Agamemnon lies and Paris committed no theft. Others tell me it was not the golden figure of Helene that he took from Menelaos, but Menelaos's wife, who was named Helene for the goddess. A few others say that Helene the wife of Menelaos is the goddess herself, but of course this is the sort of foolish notion that a man will hear if he goes seeking information from strangers in the marketplace and the harbor.

As far as I can tell the truth of it, this is what I have learned: Of all the sons of Priamos, and there are many, only two have ever been considered as heirs to his throne—Paris and Hektor. Paris is the elder, but he was passed over because of an unfavorable prophecy at his birth. Most men have always favored Hektor to be king after Priamos.

But several years ago, an oracle proclaimed to Paris: *When golden Helene comes as a bride to Troia, then will her bridegroom take a throne.* Or at least Paris claimed to have such an oracle, and Priamos believed it, for when Paris returned from his raid on the palace of Menelaos with the golden figure of Helene, the king named him heir and gave him the wife of Menelaos as his wife. Other men say it was Priamos who had this prophecy in a dream. In any case, say the supporters of Paris, the theft was the will of the gods, no sacrilege at all.

But the men who favor Hektor deny this, and many of them curse Paris as the cause of this war.

The people here are hungry and full of fear. The fields, the orchards and groves surrounding the city have all been despoiled, the herds all driven from the pastures. I have seen a few ships in the harbor, bringing grain, now that the Achaians have finally sailed away. But of course the price is high. The poorest people are already reduced to selling their children or themselves to buy food. So it is always in a siege.

But Priamos is still rich, and men say that he has sent word to the kings of nearby lands, offering them gold and silver if they will come to his aid. For men all say the Achaians will return in the spring to renew their attack on Troia, as soon as the winds allow them to sail.

I have found a house here and a couple of slaves to keep it, a woman and a boy. Now that the Achaians have returned to renew their war, they have plenty of captives to sell, and the price is low.

I deal in these matters with Agamemnon's steward, a man named Glaukos, a man of my own kind: men who write and keep accounts, the records of what goods have been taken and distributed to the soldiers in camp; men who know the price and cost of things. I have decided to set up as a merchant, a dealer in the spoils of war. This will give me a chance to observe the Achaians without arousing undue suspicion. I expect I will make a good profit from it as well, for the Achaians can only transport home as much plunder as will fit into their ships. The rest they must sell.

I have spoken with Glaukos over a cup of wine that should have gone to the king's table. The painted cups are really very fine work. There used to be an extensive trade in Achaian wares through this port. I would like to get more of such cups before I leave this place, for they would be worth a great deal in Hattusa.

Glaukos tells me that Agamemnon has brought to Troia not only his own army but soldiers from many other lands of the west. There is a company of soldiers here from Knossos and one from Rhodos, and many others from places I have never heard of. These seem for the most part to be his allies, not his subjects. Agamemnon is not a Great King, to command the obedience of other kings. Still, they follow him here, and it is a great host, many times outnumbering the army of

Priamos, which Hektor leads. And Glaukos says they are more men this year than the last, more men joining them to reap the spoils of war.

„Some men say,“ I suggested, „that your army has come here more to plunder the palace of Priamos than avenge the crime of sacrilege.“

„How can an army make war without plundering? How else can they eat, unless they take cattle from the enemy?“

„And what of the men who say this war is only being fought to take back the wife of Menelaos?“

„I tell you this,“ said Glaukos. „There is only one cause that would bring all the men of Achaia together in this way, and it would not be a woman! But we make a common cause when it comes to offenses against the gods.“

So we finished our wine and our bargaining, and I took my newly purchased captives away. The nearest large slave market in this region is on the island of Lesbos, but I can offer a better price, without the trouble of transportation by sea. I mean to send them overland, perhaps as far as Hattusa, where I will be able to get a good price.

Of course the real profit from war captives is in ransom, not sale. Despite the war, the nobles of Wilusa are still rich, and fathers still have storerooms full of gold which they will pay to spare their children slavery or death. But even a shepherd boy may have a father willing to part with a sheep if it will redeem his son, and I will not turn down such an offer if it is made. These are after all no strangers, but subjects of the Great King.

The war does not go well for Priamos and the soldiers of Wilusa. I should rather say, it does not go well for Hektor, the Troian war-leader.

Some of my slaves—common men who cannot afford a ransom—say that if Hektor were king, he would repudiate his brother’s crime and offer to make restitution. But Paris always refuses to give up his prize, the golden goddess Helene. It would mean relinquishing his claim as heir to Priamos’s throne.

Even the Achaians seem to have respect for Hektor, as warriors will always respect a worthy enemy. Even they say he is to be feared in battle. None of them have anything but curses for Paris.

Yet even Hektor cannot defeat the vast numbers of the Achaians by himself. The men of this country are skilled with horses, skilled charioteers. But the vast host of the Achaian footsoldiers overwhelms them on the battlefield with spear and sword. The Achaians prize Wilusan horses as spoils of war. Their quality is renowned, and it would appear that Achaia is not a good horse-breeding land. But I wonder how long the men in Troia will have fodder to feed their animals, both the horses and the cattle kept inside their walls.

The situation for Priamos’s citadel is grave. I fear that Troia may fall if reinforcements do not arrive.

I have written to Hattusa to advise the Great King in this matter:

While I do not believe Agamemnon intends the permanent conquest and occupation of Wilusa, he has called in allies from far and wide, from lands as near to your kingdom as Rhodos, and as mighty as Knossos. The citadel of Troia is under siege by an overwhelming force of the enemy, and I fear it cannot continue to withstand their assault for long.

My king, if you wish to save Priamos and his city, you must send an army to his relief. But if it is not possible to send your own army because of the press of other military commitments, then I advise you to write urgently to your servants in the west, to the kings of Mysia and Lykia, and say to them: Send soldiers to the relief of Troia, and Priamos will reward you with silver and gold.

The news from Hattusa is not good. The Assyrians have dealt the Great King a severe defeat. Tudhaliya engaged the Assyrian chariots in battle at Nihriya and was driven back with heavy losses. Now the enemy presses harder along the Euphrates and the lands to the north. The Great King must marshal all possible resources to guard the Land of Hatti against a new Assyrian assault. He has made great sacrifices and prayers to the gods, that they may reveal the reason they have inflicted this defeat on the Land of Hatti.

I think it is well that he did not follow my advice and weaken his armed might by sending an army to Wilusa at the end of last year.

This year, the war goes well for the Troians, now that allies have come to join them on the battlefield. The Mysians have come in force, for the Achaians have been raiding into their lands as well as the Wilusan lands. Also men have come from Lykia, Karia, and Phrygia, as well as smaller places such as Maionia, where they breed fine horses below Mount Tmolos. There is even a company of soldiers from Melitos, which I had not expected, since Melitos has always been an Achaian colony, even when it has nominally submitted to the authority of the Land of Hatti.

At first I said to myself: Now the Achaians will learn what it means to invade the territory of the Great King of the Hittites! For I credited my letter to Tudhaliya, suggesting that he order the rulers of these lands to send soldiers to aid Priamos. Yet I have since learned that soldiers have come here as much for the reward and for spoils in battle as in obedience to orders from the Great King. Still, their presence has stiffened the resolve of Troia's defenders and turned back the invaders from its walls.

There was a recent truce in the fighting when Hektor arranged a single combat between his brother Paris and Agamemnon's brother Menelaos, king of Sparta, leaving the gods to choose between them. But Paris refused to come out from behind the walls and fight. He claims the golden goddess Helene reached out her hand and held him back from the battlefield.

Men have reviled him as a coward for this, men on both sides. And indeed I wonder how Priamos can still defend his heir against the charges of both cowardice and sacrilege. I think also that if it had not been for the appeals of Hektor, many of the newly arrived allies of Priamos would have returned to their homelands in disgust rather than fight for the cause of Paris.

But Hektor rallied them, and they pressed the Achaians hard until the invaders were forced to fall back and defend their ships.

So for this season, at least, I think that Troia may not fall. I will write to the Great King with a list of the lands who have sent soldiers to relieve the siege, at his command.

Every year, this war expands. I begin to wonder how the Achaian camp can hold all the men who come here hoping to sack Troia. There is hardly room for their

ships on the beach, drawn up so close together a man can barely walk between them without getting his garments stained with tar. The stench is ripe in the summer heat, of garbage and ordure, of cookfires and the smith's forge. A man trying to pass through the camp must make way for soldiers in helmets and bronze armor who refuse to step aside, even for an old man such as I.

At the moment, the entire Achaian army is seething with excitement at the arrival of a new company. When I finally reach Glaukos in his place by the ships, he tells me that their leader is a famous warrior and that Agamemnon has promised him a share of the war spoils larger than any other man, excepting his own.

„It was an oracle,“ he says.

Another oracle? I wondered silently.

„The oracle said Agamemnon would never take Troia without the aid of Achilleus, so he sent ambassadors to promise Achilleus anything he wanted if he'd sail to join his army at Troia. Now that he's here, Priamos's walls won't stand for long!“

„Surely, with more soldiers, there will be less booty for each man,“ I remarked casually.

„They say that when we finally sack Troia there will be more than enough for everyone. Me, I wonder how much treasure is left in Priamos's storehouses. At least I won't have to be the one to divide it up between the leaders. Of course Menelaos will finally get his wife back, though by now she must be an old woman. But they say Priamos has twelve daughters, all beautiful as goddesses. So who will get which one of them as his share? That's Agamemnon's job, and he's welcome to it. He'd just better not slight Achilleus—there's one man who's quick to take offense!“

„Speaking of dividing the loot...“ I suggest, but Glaukos has to apologize that he has such scant takings to offer for sale. With more fighting men arriving to join in the war, more merchants are following them, eager for a share of the spoils. They are driving prices higher.

But there are also more men joining the Wilusan side of the conflict. Men say that a large company of warriors have come across the straits from Thrace to get their share of Priamos's silver.

„Much good it will do them in their graves,“ Glaukos says boastfully, „after they meet Achilleus and his Myrmidons in battle.“

I will say that Glaukos was right about this Achilleus—his presence has rallied the Achaians, and they press harder at the defenses of Troia. He was right, too, about Achilleus being quick to take offense. Already, he has been quarreling with Agamemnon. „Over women, what else?“ says Glaukos.

These disputes within the Achaian camp sometimes made me wonder if the various factions might be made to turn on each other, which could only be to the advantage of Hektor.

I must consider a scheme which could bring this about.

Now plague has struck the Achaian camp.

Such diseases spread quickly. The sickness is striking down kings and common men both, great warriors and their captives. I hear rumors that both Agamemnon

and Achilles are afflicted, that they lie groaning with fever in their huts. „The anger of the gods,“ men are saying fearfully. The Achaians are making great sacrifices and prayers in an attempt to appease whatever god has sent this affliction.

But I have seen such plague in many camps where soldiers are crowded together for long periods of time, as they are when conducting a siege. I cannot say this outbreak was unexpected—by me.

Yet perhaps the plague is indeed the answer the gods have finally decided to give the Wilusans after their many prayers and sacrifices. Now I wonder how they will take advantage of this gift.

Hektor has acted quickly, as I expected. With the Achaians stricken by plague, he has mounted a counterattack with all the forces he commands. His chariots have again driven back the Achaians from the walls of the citadel, back toward the sea. It is desperate battle. The Achaians, despite their weakness, defend their ground savagely. The Wilusans and their allies have to pay in blood for every spear's-length gained on that battlefield, but at last the invaders have found themselves with their backs against the rampart guarding their ships.

It is night now, as I write this. The plain is glowing with fires lit in both camps as sentries keep watch for the movements of the enemy and other men lie sleepless, waiting for dawn and the resumption of battle. I am not there with them in their camps, but I know it is so, for I have seen many battles in my lifetime.

The Achaians have retreated to their ships, behind their rampart and ditch, but I can see no sign that they mean to retreat farther, to abandon the siege and sail away to their homeland. For Hektor, this is the chance for victory finally granted him by the gods. Tomorrow's fighting may end this war at last.

All day the armies have battled at the earthen rampart protecting the Achaian ships. It is the invaders who are now forced onto the defensive, to fight from behind their walls. The ships—they are the prize. If the Wilusans can manage to burn the Achaian ships, Agamemnon's army will be trapped on the shore with no way of escape. But the Achaians defend them with fierce desperation.

All day the battle has gone first one way, then the other. At least once Hektor's men broke over the wall and began to set fire to the ships, but the Achaians threw them back, at great cost in life to both sides. Savage fighting! The Wilusans have left their chariots behind in their camp. This is close combat, where a man will find his face spattered with his enemy's warm blood and trample his companion's entrails underfoot as he struggles to press forward. Men use their shattered spearshafts as clubs, they pick up rocks from the ground to shatter the skulls of their enemies.

There will be no captives for sale at the end of this day's fighting. There will be no ransom, no quarter given, no mercy. No one would hear such an appeal over the din of clashing bronze, the screams of wounded and dying men.

Such a terrible thing is war!

Now it seems that the gods have turned against the people of Troia. Their great war-leader Hektor is dead, and once again the Achaian forces are at the walls of the citadel.

Even before dawn, the sound of men arming for war could be heard across the battle plain. All through the night, I could hear the groaning of dying men as they lay in the dark with the stiffening corpses of companions and enemies who had gone ahead of them into death. So hard the fighting had been, so long, that the armies had not been able to gather in all the bodies.

Then at dawn came the Achaian charge. The Wilusans had again kept their chariots in the rear, anticipating another day of close fighting. But the Achaians put their chariots at the spearhead of the attack, led by the formidable Achilles. They cracked the Wilusan line, with the great mass of their footsoldiers rushing in behind.

Men who have been in battles know this moment, when the line breaks, when men see their companions falling on either side, and others fighting beside them begin to look nervously toward the rear. A man can hold firm then, he can take a tighter grip on his sword or spear and call to his companions to stand fast against the enemy. He can press forward, hoping they will follow. Or he can turn and run.

This is how armies die, when men panic, when they try to flee death. Rout is the older brother of defeat.

At the center of his line, Hektor tried to rally his soldiers, he strode forward to meet the Achaian charge. But the force of the Achaian assault was too great. One after the other, the men who had followed him fell to the spears of the enemy, and Hektor was forced to give ground.

The army of Troia broke and ran for the citadel, but few of them ever reached the safety of the gates. Behind them in their chariots came the vanguard of the Achaian host in bloodthirsty pursuit. One after another, men fell with Achaian spears through their backs.

Some of the Wilusans, cut off in their retreat, turned to flee across the river called Skamandros to what they imagined was the safety of its far bank. But Achilles pursued them, he and his men cutting down so many that the bodies dammed the sluggish summertime flow and the river became a lake of blood.

As the panicked survivors of Troia's army fled through the gates, a small company of brave men, led by Hektor, made a fighting retreat, attempting to hold back the enemy. One by one they fell into the dust under the feet of the Achaians battling their way forward. At last, as the enemy was almost at the western gate, threatening at any moment to break through, the men inside managed to swing it shut and bar it.

Trapped outside with the wall at their backs, Hektor and the few companions with him tried to flee for the south gate in hope they might still win their way through to safety. But the Achaians swarmed over them, stabbing with their spears and swords.

When I heard them raise the triumphant shout: *Achilleus! Achilleus!* then I knew that Hektor was killed, and the hope of Troia with him.

I must write to the Great King to tell him all these things. If he does not send his army, then the citadel will certainly fall, and all Wilusa will be lost.

But now I see that the river has broken the dam of corpses, and a crimson floodtide is rushing to the sea, bearing the bodies of the dead on its crest.

The remaining allies of the Troians left them at the end of the last season, and they have not returned. For a brief time then, when Paris killed the great Achaian captain Achilleus, the Troians had hope, but no more. The city's defenders still fight from its walls, yet they must know the end will come soon. Their enemies are relentless. Last month, after Paris was killed, Priamos finally sent out heralds to Agamemnon offering to return the golden figure of Helene and all the treasure in his palace besides, but the Achaian king sent back word that the time to make restitution had passed.

I observe that the battering ram moves closer to the western gate, despite all the Troians can do to prevent it. The Achaians have covered the framework with wet hides and armored it with bronze, so that the men who propel it forward are protected from weapons hurled down from the walls above. A ram is what we call such a machine in the Land of Hatti, but men here name it a horse.

I have set my slaves to packing up my goods, everything I will be transporting back to Hattusa. There is no more reason for me to stay. The Great King has sent me his answer with a copy of his latest letter to Agamemnon:

My brother, I am willing to accept your oath as you have written it to me. In exchange I, the Sun, grant you your vengeance on Priamos and his heir for the sacrilege they have done. Before all else, men must respect the gods.

If you can take Priamos's citadel of Taroisa, all that is within it is yours. I will not send my army to prevent you or to defend the city against you. Out of respect for the gods I do this, because of the crime the king of Wilusa and his heir have committed against the gods.

But as you have sworn your sacred oath, then when you have taken Taroisa and all its goods, you will go to your ships and depart from my land of Wilusa, nor will any force of yours remain there, nor will you return to the lands that are mine. And if you return to Wilusa, breaking your oath, or to any of the lands that are mine, then I, the Sun, will send my chariots and my footsoldiers to destroy you utterly without mercy.

Now the Storm God of the Land of Hatti and the Storm God of Ahhiya are witness to your oath, and they have seen your words. And if you fail to keep your oath, then shall the Storm God of Hatti and the thousand gods of Hatti destroy you and all your household and all your servants, and the Storm God of Ahhiya and all the gods of Ahhiya shall destroy you as an oathbreaker and a man hateful to all the gods.

So the Great King has written. I have to suppose that Tudhaliya has relied at least in part on my own reports in making his decision. I pray to the gods that it was the truth I told him.

Now the killing is finished, the ashes of the citadel are cooling, the taint of smoke is finally leaving the air. The Achaians have packed their tarred ships to the rails with their spoils of war, and many of them are already sailing away with weeping captive women stretching out their white arms toward their homeland as they see it fade out of sight.

But Agamemnon, at least, is keeping his word about leaving the Great King's lands.

I have my own goods packed and ready to leave, but I found myself first compelled to go one more time to the ruins of the citadel, to stand as a witness to all that has happened in this war. Men will say the end of Troia was the judgment of the gods on the crime of Paris, son of Priamos. Perhaps—yet brave men died here, men on both sides.

But what I saw today in the ruins...

Now I will not report this to the Great King. I may not ever speak of it to any man. But men do say that the golden figure of the goddess stolen by Paris was never recovered from the ashes of Priamos's citadel. Agamemnon had the palace searched before it was put to the torch, and all the city, but the golden goddess was never found.

Yet today in the ruins of Troia, I came upon a woman, one who had survived the sack of the palace, or so at first I supposed. A golden woman, with burnished hair and skin that glowed with softness, as a man would imagine a goddess. Before I could think, I blurted out her name: „Helene?“

The woman smiled at me, and though I am an old man, I felt the sap stirring in my veins at the sight of her. „You call me Helene? But Menelaos already has his wife again. She sits in his ship, weeping for dead Paris, sailing back to his palace in Sparta.“

I had to take a breath before I could speak. „I did not mean Helene who is the wife of Menelaos.“

She beckoned me closer, and her face glowed with her beauty. No man could fail to desire her. No man could not want to carry her away. Her voice, so compelling...

„My name is Eris. I used to belong to Paris, but I can be yours now. Will you carry me away with the rest of your captive women to Hattusa?“

It may be that it was my old age which let me resist her temptation. If so, I am glad of it. „No, Lady. I will not.“

I left the ruins. I went back to my house and gathered my possessions to depart that place without looking back.

For I know her. Even before I knew her name, I knew her. And now I know how poor dead Paris was deceived, the real reason the citadel of Priamos was doomed to destruction.

I only pray to all the gods that the Land of Hatti is never likewise visited by Strife.

