

SARPEDON

MYTHICAL KING OF LYKIA

1310-1279 B.C.

VINCENZO SANGUINETI

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CHRONOLOGY

Years BCE

A note to the reader

The numbering of years before the current era—BCE—runs in the opposite direction than the current one. Higher numbers indicate a more remote past—the year 1280 BCE comes before the year 1270 BCE and after the year 1290 BCE.

Spring, 1338	Bellerophon arrives at Arnna	August 5, 1289	The landing of the second expedition
Fall, 1336	Birth of Isandros	August, 1288	The treaty between Muwatalli and Alaksandus
October, 1332	Birth of Hippolochos	March 3, 1287	A Lykian contingent leaves for Troy
May, 1327	Birth of Laodameia	September, 1285	Death of Evander, Sarpedon is king
August 16, 1319	Birth of Hector	Spring-summer, 1284	The campaign at Termessus
Spring, 1317	Bellerophon leaves Arnna	Spring, 1283	Journey to the Hittite emperor
Early spring, 1314	Death of Isandros	April 28, 1280	Sarpedon leads the Lykians to Troy
March 21, 1314	Birth of Paris	July 1280	Arrival of the Amazons
May, 1311	Rape of Laodameia; her wedding to Evander	September 1280	Death of Penthesilea
February 11, 1310	Birth of Sarpedon	December 21, 1280	Royal wedding: Sarpedon and Crisoufieia
February 13, 1310	Birth of Glaukos	March 31, 1279	Raid in Lyrnessus. Chryseis at the Achaean camp
November, 1310	Death of Philone	June 9, 1279	Chryse, her father, to the Greek camp
May, 1301	Birth of Crisoufieia	July 8, 1279	Death of Sarpedon and Patroclus
June 8, 1299	Paris to Argos, abducts Helen	July 9, 1279	Death of Hector
February, 1298	Bellerophon's reappearance and burial	July 31, 1279	Burial of Hector
June 14, 1298	The first Greek expedition, the wasting of Teuthrania	August 16, 1279	Death of Achilles
September, 1298	Death of Laodameia	September 7, 1279	The Greek feint
Spring, 1296	Death of Hippolochus	September 10, 1279	Glaukos leaves Troy
April 14, 1294	The royal training ground at Arnna	September 11, 1279	Troy falls

INTRODUCTION

For ten centuries the kingdoms along the western seaboard of Bronze Age Anatolia had negotiated their national survival with their eastern neighbor, the empire of the Hittites. The ancient homeland of this empire lay far to the east, surrounded by the Halys River. This river, also known as the Marassantiya, carved a broad circle into the lands—an immense snake bent on biting its own tail—before it turned sharply to the northeast. It then continued its eastward course until it opened in the northern sea.

The territory within that circle was known as the land of Hatti. Here the empire took its shape and from this center it spread the power of its armies in all directions. To the north the empire set its new borders along the shores of the northern sea. To the east it reached the fabled Euphrates and the mythical realms of Nineveh and Mitanni. To the south it subjected the entire Anatolian peninsula and it continued its expansion southward to the great deserts and Kadesh, and the fringes of the empire of the Great Pharaoh. And to the west it came to face the seaboard kingdoms.

Repeatedly, the valleys of these kingdoms were filled with the thunder of innumerable chariots, and the dust from their passage blotted out the sun and covered fields and woods, and the waters of the rivers. Most kingdoms ended up subjected to territorial losses, were forced to ratify treaties of allegiance that effectively recognized the emperor as their liege lord, and had to accept Hittite garrisons on their lands. An exception was the Troad kingdom, in the northern corner of the seaboard, which maintained a practical state of independence, bound to Hatti by treaties of alliance and reciprocal support. Another exception was the fully independent kingdom of Lykia at the southern corner. It owed its freedom to the daunting mountains that ringed it from sea to sea, to the superior skills of its army, and to the diplomatic wisdom of its kings.

Then in the 13th century BCE a new and deadly threat faced the region. An immense Greek armada landed in front of Troy, bent on conquest and pillage. The Hittite emperor Muwatalli II, confronted with growing hostility and challenges from Nineveh and Egypt, was unable to send support. The local kingdoms were left to face the invaders on their own, and the brunt of the ordeal fell on the kingdom of Troad of King Priam, and even-

tually on the kingdom of Lykia of young King Sarpedon, the son of the great god.

This is the story of Sarpedon the hero, and how his fate became in many ways intertwined with the Greek invasion in the northern kingdom and the destiny of that war. These two actors—a man and a war—form the matrix of the epic.

Careful attention has been paid to the available historical material that guided the reconstructions of events and characters of the period. When the ancient sources offered differing information, preference was given to the one most fitting the narrative. Or, if feasible, a composite was used.

Sarpedon's unknown life, though, and the original impulse to write about this Bronze Age hero who had never really caught my attention before, emerged unexpectedly from some unknown realm within me. The epic wrote itself, repeatedly surprising me with evocative images that often found uncanny confirmations in ancient documents and historical findings. Time and again I perceived myself as simply a visual witness—a scribe of sort—to scenes that unfolded out of a collective unconscious until the entire saga was fully played out. It all started with an image, and a voice that said:

"His name is Sarpedon. As he holds his horse at the top of the mountain pass, facing the sun declining to the West, the resemblance to his grandfather, the dragon-slayer Bellerophon, is quite striking. Of his grandfather he carries indeed both the beauty and the power, and the royal standing. From his mother Laodameia, the "pearl of Lykia" and from her not-so-secret lover, Zeus/Tarhunt, he carries speckles of divine essence that shimmer upon the surface of his soul, akin to the shimmers of gold that the sun-god spreads upon the surface of the lower Scamander, flowing in its slow and sinuous course along the plain to distant Troy and to the barely visible sea."

I knew I was looking at an early afternoon on the Gargarus Mountain, on the 25th day of May, in the year 1280 BC. I did not know how I knew.

Another note to the reader: not infrequently the text contains expressions and sentences taken verbatim from ancient writings (as some of the exchanges between fighting warriors; exchanges that today, with the modern ways of killing each other in war, would sound ludicrous), and is constructed to resemble the style of those writers. In doing so it attempts to provide bridges to the way that a past long gone used to relate to the world—and its gods—and to express thoughts as well as feelings.



The kingdoms of Western Anatolia and the Hittite Empire ca. 1300 BCE



I

THE RAPE OF LAODAMEIA

May 1311 BCE: At Arnna, capital of Lykia

It is a calm day, and from the top of Arnna's towers Princess Laodameia can see in the distance the curls of mist that rise above the trees north of the town, in the middle of the cedar orchard. There from time immemorial hot, steamy water has flowed out of the small cave to fill the shallow basin of grey and white finely polished stone. It then spills down onto the creek that runs among the trees and joins the mighty Xanthos.

The princess and her young companions enter the clearing surrounding the pond, followed by the group of the older maidservants. The royal guards have discreetly stopped at the first trees, where they have fanned out to encircle the grove and protect their soon-to-be queen. With adolescent shrills and bursts of laughter the young women drop their light tunics and wade in the steamy water, chasing each other and disappearing in the thick fog that covers the entire pond.

Thunder rolls noisily along the cloudless sky all the way from the tall peaks to the north, above the sacred gorge where the Eliyana, the water deities, reside. It rolls south, getting louder as it gets closer, and it envelops the entire grove and its spring. A surge of water floods the pond. The mist thickens and rises to the treetops, like a solid body. The princess, aghast and bewildered, is lifted up by the wave and carried gently beyond the stony ridge of the basin, where she is left reclining on the dense grassy bed along the creek.

She does not have time to try and get up, or to be really frightened by the experience. She feels fully enclosed in a tight, invisible layer of strange energy. A highly titillating and lustful caress engulfs her, like a second skin. She, who has not really known what passion is, feels the passion of the god and it becomes her own. Her state of consciousness fading into confusion, altered by never before felt emotions, her breasts tingling, divine liquid fingers sliding on her sex, she arches back and her mouth opens in moans she has never uttered. The hungry tongue of the god enters her mouth, suckling,

fierce and tender. The god pushes his liquid probe, hard and hot, deep inside her, and Laodameia, semiconscious and panting, feels the movements in her belly and the throbbing response of her sex, and cries and briefly fades out where nothing exists but the sensations; the lusty god, the god of the sky and of storms and thunder, the first among all gods in the heavens, bellows again and a mighty, lurid spark cracks high above the trees as he pours his immortal seed into the young womb. Then he peels himself off the maiden whom he has coveted for so long, waiting for the proper moment. Before leaving, he brands her with the mark of his power and with images without words; he then speaks to her mind so: "You will carry my son. He will rule all of Lykia until he returns to Arnna accompanied by Sleep and Death, and Fame everlasting." And he is gone.

The mist begins to thin out. The companions of the princess, who have not been touched by the water surge, call out loudly for each other in the fog, and the maidservants hurry to the edge of the basin shouting the girls' names, trying to see through the swirls of steam. Old Merimawa, the princess' faithful and loving nurse, instinctively runs down the creek and finds Laodameia sitting on the grass, still confused and spent, sparkles of static energy lingering on her skin, a bluish halo shimmering on her groin, a tiny trickle of blood marking her thighs. Merimawa rushes forward and helps the young woman to her feet. In doing so she notices a blue mark in the fold under the girl's right breast: the small but very clear image of a lightning rod.

"Hush, my child," warns the old woman to the distraught princess who dizzily holds onto her; "This is not a portent to be revealed lightly. Hush!"

"The princess is down here!" she then shouts to the choir of voices calling for Laodameia, while she quickly washes away the blood—a telling sign, quite disturbing on a bride-to-be—and then slides the tunic over her head and onto her shoulders, and steadies her on her feet back toward the pond. "You recall only having been washed down the creek by the flow of the water. You must have hit your head and became briefly disoriented. Say no more." she quietly adds.

Others come running. The guards follow, alarmed by the thunder and the lightning and the shouts of the women. Their captain is troubled that the portentious events may continue and even get worse, and orders everyone back to Arnna, his men closely shielding the princess and her nurse all the way up the hill to her quarters in her father's palace. Only then, when she is safe and protected inside its thick walls, does the captain release his men. He then proceeds to the top of the hill and to the palace of king Evander, with the report of the disconcerting portent.

Laodameia dismisses her companions and retires to her private chamber, accompanied by Merimawa. Here the princess, still shaken and feeling weird sensations in her belly, recounts to the nurse her experience, and what she was told by the voice speaking in her mind.

Merimawa helps her to undress and examines her, gently but thoroughly. As she has suspected, she finds the unequivocal signs of a very recent defloration.

Laodameia is terrified: "What shall I do, my good Mewa?" she cries. "My wedding with king Evander, my fair uncle, is planned for tomorrow. I cannot go through that! I could not stand the shame of his finding out that his bride has already been broken into. He would never believe my story." she adds, sobbing in her nurse's arms.

"Hush, my child, hush!" whispers Merimawa, rocking her while stroking her long hair in a tender caress. "The captain of the guards is certainly making his report to the king, as we speak. Your uncle is learning that the sky-god made himself manifest, and that something extraordinary happened to you. Shortly, he will either come here or send for you, so that he may hear your version of the events." She takes the face of her princess in her hands and stares into her eyes, commandingly, "You just tell him that you were swept away by the water and then you must have passed out, remember? You came back to your senses with words in your head about having a child, a son, who will become king. The upcoming wedding, and your concern to satisfy your husband and king, have been foremost in your mind, therefore you gather that in your confused state these worries took a dream-like form, and you heard your uncle's voice..."

The old woman again embraces the princess and resumes the soothing strokes. "No one saw the blood but you and me, and your innocence still keeps you ignorant of what happened, that the god raped you." She then points to the blue zigzag under her breast: "Tomorrow night, when you and your new husband will share the nuptial bed and it is appropriate that he looks at your nakedness, you will show him this mark. You'll tell him that you had noticed it for the first time tonight, and you do not know what to make of it. The king is wise. I do not doubt that he will interpret the signs and your status correctly, and come to respect the workings of the god."

"Oh Mewa! If I did not have you," the princess cries between sobs, "I would have no one to turn to."

Indeed, neither of Laodameia's two brothers were with her. Isandros, the first born, had died less than a season ago, killed fighting the Solymi tribes who had been raiding Lykia from the North. Her other brother,

Hippolochos, had taken over that war, to revenge Isandros, and was now somewhere in the northern mountains. He had left his bride, fair-cheeked Coronis, lamenting and forlorn, trembling whenever a courier reaches the city with news from the North. Laodameia's mother, green-eyed Philonoe, had been like a broken doll, secluded in her chambers and totally listless, since her husband did not return from his last adventure.

"My father! Oh, Mewa, where is my dearest father? I cannot believe that he is dead. He is alive somewhere, but lost, I am so certain of it. If he could just come back to his kingdom, to us, then everything would be all right once more..."

"Your father" echoes Merimawa, her face suffused with a dreamy expression. She seems to look beyond the wall to images far away in time and still so very poignant. "I well remember the first time we saw him, your mother and I, when he approached Arnna from the sea. I was so much younger then, caring for your mother who was not even your age." A smile warms her elderly, creased face. "We were up on a tower at the gate, watching the town below and the river, and the boat traffic near the landings. Your mother pointed to an imposing high beaked ship that had just appeared around the river bend. It was black as night, with two white eyes painted on the prow, and two tiers of oars pushed it forcefully ahead. We had never seen anything like it coming to Arnna. All about it was foreign, all about it spoke of distant lands, and amazing sea travels. Then, as it came closer to the piers, we saw the proud warrior standing at the prow, holding to the tall beak with one hand, a long spear in his other hand, the hilt of a long sword over his shoulder. We stood, riveted by the sight of him, who was to be your father..."

Spring 1338 BC; at Arnna

Bellerophon, the young son of the Corinthian King Glaukos, has kept a keen watch at both riverbanks, while the ship sailed up the yellow-silted Xanthos. His has been a journey of reparation, long and complex, since the fortuitous, fateful encounter in those miasma-ridden marshes. He was searching for the fabled winged horse Pegasus; he had found instead wild Belleros, who rushed at him, a menacing shadow in the thick fog, bellowing his challenge. The young man stood the challenge and emerged out of the wasted grey lands victorious, but there were consequences. His old name forgotten, he became Bellerophon, Belleros-killer, and he faced expiatory exile from the palace of his human father and from lovely Corinth, known also of old as Ephira-between-the-seas.

Now a supplicant, he had journeyed to Argolid and to the palace of



Bellerophon, Pegasus and the Chimera. Detail from a wine cup. Attributed to Boreads Painter, 570 - 565 B.C.

Proetus, the king of Tiryns. The king had cleansed him of the spilled blood, and eventually sent him to Arnna in Lykia, with a message "of the greatest importance" for his father-in-law, King Iobates, written and sealed on a folded tablet. Bellerophon had been relieved to be sent on the mission. His stay at the palace of Proetus had become tense after Anteia, the king's wife, had fallen into an unruly passion for the young hero, had tried to lure him to her bed, and had turned dangerous once her invitation was spurned.

So Bellerophon had sailed eastward and Poseidon the Earth-Shaker had gifted his crossing with favoring winds to fill the belly of the sail, and assured that the waves would sound merrily about the hull of the black ship as it went on its journey, along watery friendly trails all the way to the large mouth of the Xanthos. Once they had entered the deep river, the crewmen had furled the sail, stowed it in the ship's hollow, lowered the mast by the forestays and quickly brought it to the crutch. Then they had started at the oars.

For almost seven miles they have now traveled upriver, against the current. Lush, heavily flowered bushes and thickets of majestic cedars cast their

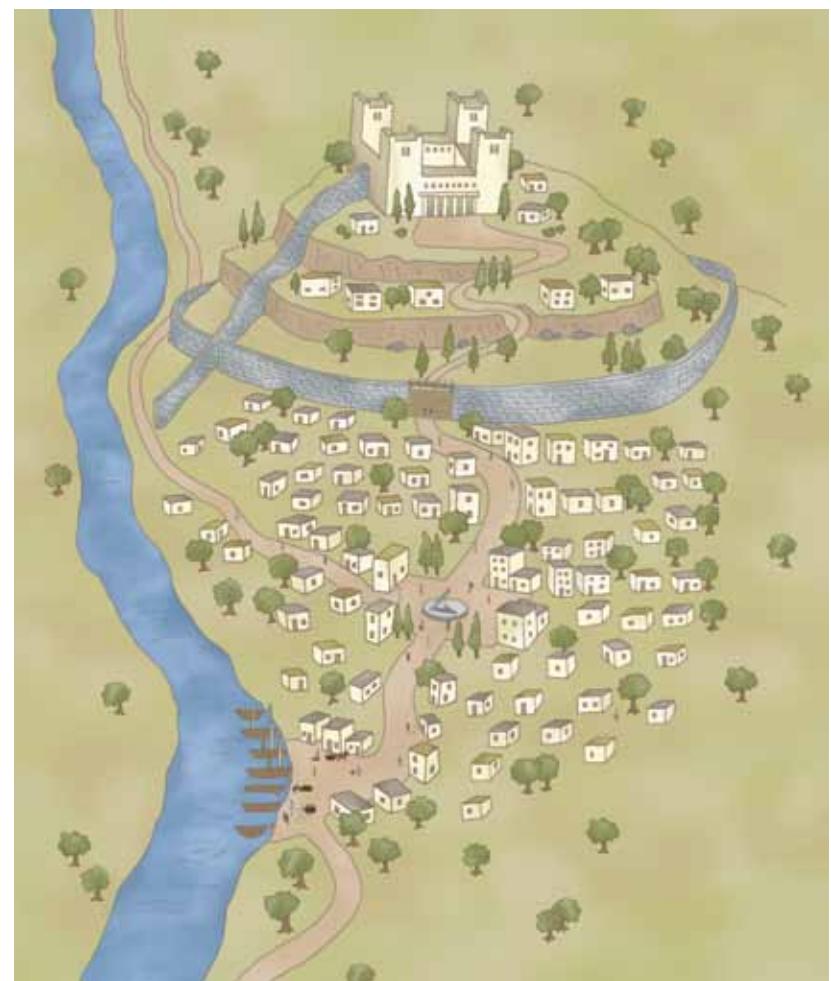
reflections in the silt-rich, yellow waters. Small villages of wooden, thatched huts make their way to the riverbanks. Behind them are well-tilled fields spread out in the fertile alluvial plain. Fishing boats have promptly given way, the fishermen looking in awe at the imposing black ship, at its double row of long oars, and at the arresting figure standing at the prow.



Young Bellerophon has anticipated with great concern the meeting with King Iobates, his first significant encounter since he had been purified. The cleansing had relieved the sweat-drenched nightmares and the scary flashbacks of Belleros, a menacing shadow half hidden among swirls of fog. He would still startle, however, heart jumping in his chest, at sudden noises, echoes of those death-carrying bellows. He has been keenly concerned that others could notice his tension, and his irrational fears. This weakness has added to the lingering shame attached to his condition of exile, and to the stain imbedded in his new name. (These more recent afflictions have triggered, and were amplified by, other wounds, much more grievous, very deep and very old. There was the death of his mother soon after childbirth, and the considerate but distant stance of his father, who had lost his beloved young wife to this child, and who secretly knew how he was father in name only, the true father being the mighty sea-god.)

The young man knows none of this. He has never realized how all too often his life has been driven by a search for parental love and by the hidden conviction he does not deserve it. Perhaps, that is why he had been in those marshes, trying to capture Pegasus, the fabled, snow-white flying horse, a magical key to the heavens, and finding instead rage, and a death threat, and ultimate rejection.

Finally, the ship rounds one last bend and there is Arnna. Far from the majesty of Corinth, or the striking sight of Tiryns, it still radiates for Bellerophon the glamour of mysterious and exotic, faraway places, and he feels enchanted and awed. A hill rises steeply out of the left bank of the Xanthos, then slopes gently eastward, to join the alluvial plain. Its top is crowned with an imposing palace that dwarfs the three smaller structures alongside it. Other large homes cover a terrace half way down the hill, and a well-built crenellated wall surrounds them from east to west until it joins another imposing defensive wall that steeply links the hilltop to the riverbank. The lower town spreads under the citadel, alongside the river and on the plain. The houses are mostly one-storied, made of mud bricks and wooden beams. Two- or three-storied residencies—of noble families,



Arnna, Capital of Lykia, ca. 1300 BCE

of wealthy merchants, civil servants, and members of the priesthood—are scattered close to the citadel's gate and along a main avenue that runs from the gate to the small harbor at its southern edge, and then continues toward the sea. After mooring the black ship at the landing Bellerophon walks up the avenue all the way to the citadel's gate, escorted by a score of bronze-greaved Achaeans...



"He came up to the gate," recalls Merimawa, her gaze still lost in images from

the past, “accompanied by those warriors with their well-balanced shields hung behind the shoulders and the bronze of chain corselets sparkling in the sun. He carried a long-plumed helmet on his left arm, his blonde hair flowing to his shoulders, and he looked up at the two of us, bent over the parapet, and smiled at your mother before conferring with the gate’s guards.”

“What a strange story!” Merimawa continues. “I could never fathom what happened. He had arrived from fabled Ahhiyawa and from the land of king Proetus, where your aunt Anteia is queen. His companions spoke only barbarian words, but he had learned sufficient rudiments of our idiom from your aunt and her husband. He had come with an important message for your grandfather, King Iobates. That we all came to learn. The king initially treated him like a very dear son, had him sit at his left at the dinner table, close to your mother, openly encouraging the two of them to become acquainted. Your grandfather feasted him nine days, and killed nine heifers in his honor, but when rosy-fingered morning appeared upon the tenth day, the king’s attitude changed, abruptly. He remained hospitable, but there were no more dinners. Your mother was sent downriver to the sanctuary for Eni Mahanahi, the Great Mother, allegedly to be introduced by the high priestess to the rites for the Goddess, and the king committed Bellerophon to a series of impossibly dangerous tasks away from Arnna. It was even rumored that he tried to have his guest killed by ambush. Anyway, we—your mother and I—saw him again only when he once more approached the town by the sea, the waters following him, and the town’s women walked to meet him offering their naked bellies to placate him, and what a scene that was!”



Bellerophon is awakened by a knock from a servant. He has been summoned by the king. While getting quickly ready, he reviews with joy and excitement his first nine days in Arnna. The gods and Fate have become exceedingly fair: the king has treated him as a son, perhaps even a son-in-law. Why would he otherwise allow his lovely daughter, the green-eyed princess Philonoe, to be present all the time, and why smile sympathetically at the sight of the two youngsters becoming quickly attracted to each other? Yes, Arnna feels like a true home. Last night he asked the king how he could earn citizenship. Could the summons this morning be about that?

He quickly learns the answer to his question. It is the dawn of his mythical journey. The king curtly informs the youth that if he plans to stay in Lykia (citizenship is not mentioned) he must prove himself worthy.

As a start, Bellerophon has to provide King Iobates with the heads of the Chimera. (King Iobates does not mention to Bellerophon that he had forgotten the message from King Proteus. Last night he remembered, read it, and the content has greatly distressed him).

The meeting is brief and impersonal. Bellerophon leaves it dejected and very confused. He has heard about the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster, whose lair is beyond the high mountains, perched on the cliffs facing the Eastern shores, close to the war-loving Solymi. Cutting her heads looks to be an impossible task, sufficient to dishearten even the bravest warrior. But even more depressing is the startling change in the king’s attitude. It has happened again: his father, and then Proetus, and now Iobates, rejecting him for reasons he does not understand. Most dreadful of all is the threat to his dreams for Philonoe. The thought of losing her pierces his soul. He cannot allow it to happen.

Good intentions, however, are one thing, success another. The two-headed beast known as the Chimera has a lion’s front, a goat’s middle—with a watchful, back-turned goat’s head—and a snake’s tail, and is a sibling to Heracles’ nemesis, the many-headed Hydra, and to Cerberus, watchdog of Hades. An extremely dangerous monster, the Chimera reduces everything in her path to ashes.

Bellerophon sails to the cove of the monster, following the rocky southern coastline, and then north again, around cape Lekton and along the eastern shore. Finally he can see by night, up on the hillside, distant bursts of flame, the breathing of the Chimera resting in her den, one head sleeping, the other awake and watchful. Everywhere he notices obvious proofs of what he already knew. Heaps of melted bronze and charred whitened bones dot the hillside and indicate the fate of many a brave warrior who tried to acquire fame by killing the Chimera and instead met the end of their life.

There is no way to approach the beast undetected. The slope is a burnt waste, even its rocks are melted and consumed by fire. Swirls of smoke and poisonous miasma fill the opening of the burrow, out of which she could rush at any moment, pouring forward terrible blasts of flames. Bellerophon remembers the sudden rush of Belleros out of that other fog, ghostlike and deadly, and with that memory comes also the answer to the present predicament.

If only he could capture Pegasus, the magical flying horse, he could drop down on the Chimera from the sky, out of the morning mists.

It is the only answer. The black ship crosses again the grey, wind-swept

sea to the Achaean isthmus and Bellerophon travels under cover to the outskirts of lovely Corinth where he secretly seeks the soothsayer Polyeidos. The seer directs Bellerophon to spend the night in the temple of Athena, and to trust the advice of the goddess. He also instructs him to approach Pegasus while it drinks from the nearby sacred spring of Pyrene. While Bellerophon sleeps on the floor of the temple, Athena appears in his dream, and addresses him saying: "Sleepest thou, prince of the house of Aeolus? Come, take this charm for the steed and show it to the Tamer, your true father in the Heavens, as thou makest sacrifice to him of a white bull." In his dream she then sets a golden bridle beside him. That bridle is there when he wakes up.

Bellerophon reverently celebrates the requested sacrifice to Poseidon. When the smoke rises high from the fat-covered thighs of the white bull, he lifts the bridle: "Oh God, you who command all waters that bathe the Earth and tame the horses and the wild animals of the sea, whom people call also the Earth Shaker and the Grey-eyed Virgin called my heavenly father, bless this godly bridle, that it may be well received by your offspring, divine Pegasus."

Indeed, as he arrives to the everlasting spring, Pegasus comes out of the orange grove, walks to the water, looks at the youth out of cerulean eyes, and lowers his head to drink. The long, lily-white mane quivers briefly when Bellerophon casts the bridle across the neck. Then Pegasus bends both forelegs, inviting the young man to mount. Bellerophon does so, the horse spreads immense wings, their long, swanlike feathers more white than snow, and it takes flight!

Thus, Bellerophon sends the black ship back to Arnna and travels by air to the high peaks of Görece, from where he plans his further step. He could afford only one surprise strike at the Chimera. Should he try to deliver another blow he would certainly be burnt to Hades, along with Pegasus. He needs to immediately extinguish the flames that thrust forward from the leonine head of the monster.

The heaps of melted bronze, remnants of others who sought to kill the creature, inspire him. He secures a large ball of lead to the tip of a long spear and then waits for a cloudy dawn, when banks of fog lift along the hillside from the valley below. Then, with a loud cry, he dives out of the clouds. Alerted, the Chimera rises from her burrow, scouting the land before she realizes that the threat is plunging down from above. She raises her lion head, opens her massive jaws, and breathes while Bellerophon throws

unerringly the long ashen spear down her throat. The wood burns immediately to ashes, the lead melts inside the throat. The monster convulses, suffocating, thrashing alongside the opening of her lair. Bellerophon sweeps back, jumps off Pegasus, and with two powerful strokes cuts off each of the monster's two heads.

Full of hope and rightful pride, he then rides his steed to Arnna, lands among awed onlookers at the doorsteps of Iobates' palace, and asks for the king to be informed that he has returned. Caught off guard, Iobates comes to the well-built doors. There stands the curse he has inherited from Proetus, young Bellerophon, holding high, one in each hand, the two heads of the hideous Chimera.

The king is utterly astonished. He was sure the prince would either flee Lykia for good, or die in the attempt. Either way, his obligation to Proetus would end. Now the dilemma is back at his doorstep.

Thus, Bellerophon receives the king's praise (Philonoe is still with the high priestess, he is told, and cannot be seen). After a night's sleep, another summons arrives. The king requests that the young man go and subdue the warlike Solymi, committing them to pay yearly tribute to the Lykian king. Without a second thought, the prince flies back to Görece and the hill of the Chimera, where some Solymi tribes reside, and summons their chieftains. Unbeknownst to him, the Solymi had witnessed the slaying of the Chimera by the warrior on the flying horse. They are both grateful and afraid, and the chieftains willingly submit to the requests of such a mighty warrior. They even send back hostages, as a sign of good faith.

A very frustrated Iobates now demands that Bellerophon subdue the tribes of the Amazons, the powerful women warriors who would occasionally raid northern Lykia. Bellerophon vanquishes them by dropping boulders from his winged horse. Iobates is running out of enemies, but he conjures another challenge. He sends the prince against a pirate from the Seha River Lands, ugly Cheirmarrhus, leader of three hundred men. The king reluctantly gives as well instruction that the elite corps of the royal guard be ready to ambush and kill Bellerophon, on his way back to Arnna, as a safeguard against the undesirable but not unlikely event that the prince should once more succeed.

Bellerophon easily sinks most of the pirate's ships, pelting them with big stones. However, he has become angered at Iobates for his empty and vague promises, and suspicious of the king's intentions. He approaches Arnna by foot and in disguise, and discovers the soldiers hidden in ambush near

Pegasus' stable. Furious, he calls for his men from the ship, which is moored at the landing, catches the Lykians by surprise, and slaughters them to a man.

He then sails to the mouth of the Xanthos where he sacrifices to Poseidon and prays to the god so: "Oh Earth Shaker, supreme master of the waters that bathe the Earth, rivers and seas alike: if indeed the Grey-eyed Virgin was right, and I am your son, then cast a compassionate eye on how I have been treated. Four times did the Lykian king, dismissive of my deeds, send me to my death. Finally, his soldiers tried to kill me by stealth, in the dark of night. Certainly the palace guards are by now marching down the plain in force, seeking revenge. I plead you, order the waters of this river and this sea to follow me in great fury, as I march back against them: a mighty flood that will sweep countryside and town alike, a severe reminder to King Iobates and to all Lykia of the sacred dues of hospitality."

The god hears his son and nods his consent. The waters rise and follow the prince, a living wall that sweeps everything in its path. Scores of terrified peasants cluster at the temple of the mother goddess, and the waters flow around the place, yellow with raised silt, their churning surface broken into myriad threatening whirlpools, and do not flood the sacred grounds, but they scatter the Lykian regiments in disorganized retreat. Bellerophon approaches the defenseless lower city in advance of the waters and the citizens recognize him, and loud wails rise from the populace, faced with their impending doom. Then, as Iobates watches, bewildered, from the height of the gate's tower, the women of the town run toward the prince, raising their garments and offering their bodies in exchange for mercy. Deeply impressed, startled and humbled, Bellerophon stops abruptly and turns his face, and the waters grow calm and begin to subside. To the watching king the piety and décor that shine through the young man's sudden restraint speak a very loud warning. How could he believe Proetus' message, after what he has just witnessed? His heart heavy with apprehension brought by knowing he has performed an impious action and angered the gods, Iobates walks through the gate toward the prince and publicly thanks him "in the name of Arnna and of my entire kingdom" for the great deeds he has performed. He then invites him to the palace and shows him Proetus' scroll, explaining how initially he had misplaced it and for the next nine days he had forgotten its existence, until he found it and opened it.

It reads: "Prince Bellerophon came to me as a suppliant in exile, seeking to be purified for having spilled blood, for having killed a man. I proceeded

to cleanse him with the required rites, and became bound to him by offering my hospitality. In exchange for my graciousness, the prince nurtured scandalous desires for my own wife, your daughter Anteia. He tried to force himself on her, in our bedchamber. My host duties to him prohibit me from harming him by seeking just revenge. Therefore, I beg you to dispense for me the retribution he deserves for his impious deed. Put him to death."

"By the time I read the message I was bound to you by the sacred obligation of hospitality," explains Iobates. "I could neither harm you nor refuse sanctuary. I could only force you to choose either almost sure death or running away from Lykia. I see now, from your deeds and your piety, that I erred. I should have asked for your version of Proteus' story and given you the chance to speak in your own defense."

Bellerophon is stunned by the message. Tanned as he is, his face becomes an embarrassed mask of copper. Then words rush out, stuttering, confused, as he begins to give his version of the facts. King Iobates listens for a while, and then puts an arm around the youth's shoulders: "I believe you," he says reassuringly. "As a father I probably should not mention it, but my daughter Anteia has always been rather unpredictable, and too involved with the manners of Aphrodite. I had some hope that by becoming queen she would behave differently than she did here at home, but the goddess' hold on her is evidently too strong. She can become very unpleasant when she does not get the attention she demands. She is quite different from Philonoe."

The king notices that when he mentions his youngest daughter Bellerophon's expression changes. He continues: "You have shown how noble a person you are and what a great warrior. I have treated you dreadfully and I beg your forgiveness. This is how I plan to repay you. I am getting old and my son is but a baby..."



"And, shortly after the two of them met privately in the royal chambers," Merimawa continues, "I was told to accompany your mother to the king. This we did, and your mother was invited in. Shortly thereafter, they came out, smiling—your parents were radiant! The king called for a meeting of the Elders. He announced to them first, and then to the population by public edict, that your parents would be married and would rule Lykia together. So it happened, and years of peace and prosperity followed, under your father's rule. Your brothers and you were born, Lykia got stronger even in face of the Hittite expansion toward our shores." She stops for a while, remembering.

Laodameia waits, quietly but with great attention. Soon Merimawa resumes her story: "You were barely ten when I noticed a different sort of restlessness in your father. He seemed bored by the routine, yearning for something new to rekindle his interest in life. Not a new woman, it was not that. Neither a new war, he was tired of fighting. Then one morning, with the old sparkle in his eyes, he left, on that horse-friend of his, saying he would visit the gods, and then come back. He never returned. Your mother and your uncle—your grandfather had died by then—sent envoys to all the major temples around our sea, even to Hattusa and Memphis, to no avail. Your father simply disappeared..."

Spring 1317 BC: at Arnna

"No man could experience flying far and wide above the earth's high peaks and deep valleys, over the vast sea where the sky reflects its brilliant hue, and among clouds of all colors, and then give it up to an earth-bound life," muses Bellerophon. "We all strive, even if only in fantasy, to fly high, above all other men. Pegasus, my dearest friend, the gods reside above us all, on sacred Olympus. There we shall fly, and see the abodes of Zeus and all the deities."

He stirs the noble horse, and higher and higher his mount flies, beyond human dwellings and forests and banks of fog and layers of white clouds. Then the godhead sees him coming, through the clouds and the brilliant skies of the upper sphere, the divine Pegasus moving steadily his immense wings in the thinner air of the land of the gods.

Zeus is annoyed by the impudent arrogance of the man, who was not satisfied by all the riches he had received on Earth, and strives to share what belongs to the gods. He sends a forest fly, which obeys the command of the god and stings Pegasus on the tender flesh near the tail. It is a fierce sting and the horse bucks high, and throws Bellerophon from his back. The hero falls through the heavens, the speed of descent cutting his breath while he is buffeted by winds and blankets of water that his divine father, hurting for his son's fate, rises high, to soften the fall. He lands in a deep pond in the grey Aleion plain, also called "the Wandering" by those who know the Mysteries. He does not die, but remains crippled forever, doomed to wander around the grey wasteland, reminiscent of the marshes of his youth, shunned by men, searching without success a path to those places that he had once loved, and to those people so close to his heart, the memories of both losing brilliance as time passes, fading in the sorrow and misery of his loneliness.

Until at last Poseidon will plead with his brother to relent in the punishment of his son, and the king of the gods will acquiesce. When Dawn will tint Bellerophon's last day on this Earth, Poseidon will harness two horses to his chariot and deposit his sleeping son on it. Sleep and Death will drive the chariot to Arnna, to the hero's palace, high on the citadel, where people congregate to mark the twelfth birthday of young Sarpedon, Evander's child from Laodameia, and future king of Lykia. The crowd will truly marvel at the portent, aghast at the sight of their old king and the sea-colored horses, and the mighty vehicle with two ghostlike presences shimmering in the early morning sun. Eighteen years of Tarhunt, the storm god, will have passed since the king left Arnna on his divine steed. Laodameia will run to him, delight coloring her lovely cheeks. Pious Evander will remove the crown from around his temples and proffer it, but Bellerophon, while embracing his daughter, will raise his hand to stop him. "Stay, dear Evander. Tell me, instead, where is my beloved wife, green-eyed Philonoe? And my two sons, Isandros and Hippolochos?"

"Oh father!" will sob Laodameia, still within his embrace. "I wish I could bear better news, but grief upon grief has fallen on your house. Fair Philonoe descended to the underground, brought down by a broken heart. Isandros was killed by Ares, while fighting the Solymi, who rejected their pleas of peace with Lykia, after news of your disappearance reached them. Hippolochos took command from his brother. The fortunes of that war keep changing sides, and he is detained on the high, snow-covered mountain borders of Lykia. We have not heard of him since last fall, and now this winter is coming to its end and we are afraid we will never see him return to us alive."

"Now I will join them." will answer Bellerophon. "So it was written, so it will be. Do not cry, my daughter. I die content, after years of indescribable sorrow, a just punishment for my arrogance. I have again experienced the happiness of looking at your lovely face and the joy to see you queen of my Lykia, married to sweet Evander and mother of this handsome prince. I was allowed the delight to return to my beloved land, its sacred river, and the lofty peaks around us. Bury me up there." He will point to the northeast. "Up there, at Tlos, so that I could forever look down at the fertile plains of Xanthos, from the northern gorges, where my son may still struggle through the winter's rages, to the southern sea." Then death will take him, and his soul will part his body.

(For Pegasus, Zeus has a different fate. The horse keeps rising until he

reaches the sphere of the distant stars, and there he will remain, an eternal constellation.)



Merimawa falls silent. Laodameia is still deeply engrossed in the memories, as often happens when she listens to stories about her father. She has not paid attention to the voices outside the door to her chamber. But her nurse has, and she moves quickly to the door, as a king's maid servant makes her way in. "The king heard that the princess went through a harrowing experience," the maid servant says. "He wants to be reassured about her health and whether he should pay a visit. Or whether perhaps the princess would like to join him at the royal palace?"

"Tell our good king that the princess is doing well and resting. She suffered no physical injury, although her mind had gone dark when she was washed away by the mysterious flooding from the spring." Merimawa screens the sight of her charge on the big bed, and steers the maid servant from the room. "The princess truly appreciates her king's kindness and concern, but there is no reason for him to worry. She just needs a good night rest, to be at her best for the nuptial ceremony tomorrow."

"The poor child," she adds, in secret prayer, after the messenger has left: "She is still so distraught and shaken. Her uncle would not fail to notice that something grave has happened to her. Tomorrow, the excitement and formality of the ceremony may help to divert her mind from today's events. Barely sixteen, she has to face the complex mysteries of womanhood through marriage and rape, all by herself. Instead of the reassuring, nurturing warmth of a mother's counsel, she can only turn to an insignificant old slave such as me. Her mother is lost in the dark caves of relentless grief, a mere shadow of her vibrant past, shunning sunlight, seeking seclusion even from her children, calling on Death to take away her sufferings. Perhaps, Mother Goddess, mighty Eni Mahanahi, you may graciously consider to visit this child's mind as she sleeps, and soothe her anguish, restore her innocence, dim the memories of this day, as if they were nothing but a dream..."



Evander looks with surprise at his surroundings. He recognizes the little valley carpeted with waist-high rhododendrons, but he cannot see past its boundaries. The place seems to be entirely surrounded by a bluish mist, thick, alive in the brisk and cool mountain air. He can hear the sound from the tall waterfalls and from the white-foaming waters that run at the bot-

tom of the deep gorge where the water deities live, but the gorge itself is hidden in the mist. Where are the rocky ravines and steep walls of granite that run all the way up the side of the mountain, to the abode of Tarhunt the Storm God, among the sacred high peaks?

From within the depth of his psyche comes the recognition that he is living a dream, poignant and full of magical energy. Across the expanse of rhododendrons a huge face is taking shape within the mist, so huge that it dwarfs the valley, tremendously imposing and still escaping full recognition. Dark-haired, the image looks directly at him. When the godhead blinks, the entire valley shakes. When He starts to speak, vortices of fog form around his moving lips and words of power cross the space between the god and the man.

"Oh king, pious Evander. The bride whom tonight you will take to the nuptial bed must be treated with the utmost piety. She will give you a divine son, a first-born, your son, my son. He will bring incomparable glory to Lykia, and sorrow to my grief-stricken heart."

Evander awakens, with the coolness of the mountain still on his skin, a leaf of rhododendron caught between his toes. He recognizes that the dream has been a profound and transcendent experience, and that he was transported to the abode of Tarhunt, where he was spoken to by the god. The message stands clear in his soul. He has now no difficulty interpreting Laodameia's adventure and the portents described by the captain of the guards. Tonight, before the nuptial day has come to its end, he will find further unequivocal signs of the god's presence on the exquisite body of his lovely bride, his young niece, the new queen of Lykia.



Meanwhile, Laodameia has also awakened from a prolonged sleep to rapidly vanishing dreamy images of encounters with indefinable beings. With more curiosity than distress she recalls yesterday's strange experience of floating away, seized by the warm rushing waters, but the rest of the experience is foggy, and her head still hurts a little... and then she is swept into the frenetic activities of her wedding day. Yesterday she was still an adolescent girl. Today she has awakened as a bride and a queen. She becomes quickly absorbed by the complexities of the rite, its formulaic process and well-rehearsed steps, and her official introduction to the Lykian court.

Laodameia pleaded with her mother to supervise the anointment, to apply the precious oils to her daughter's body, but Philone has not come. Instead, Laodameia's nurse joins her, and her sister-in-law, sweet Coronis.

They lead the procession of maidens to the altar of the Mother Goddess for the ceremonial prayer, at the end of which Laodameia recites:

*I will bathe for the mighty king
I will bathe for the shepherd king
I will anoint myself with scented oil
I will coat my mouth with sweet-smelling amber
I will paint my eyes with kohl
I will cover my body with the royal white robe
I will ready my dowry
I will arrange the precious lapis beads around my neck
I will take the seal in my hand
I will spread the bridal sheet across the bed
I will call to the king: "The bed is ready!"
I will call to my bridegroom: "The bed is waiting!"*

The hymn belongs to the ancient tradition. It was first sung by the Goddess of Love, Morning and Evening Star, at her wedding to Isuzu, the Shepherd King. It opens the ceremony of the anointment and dressing of the bride.

When the women return to Laodameia's chambers they hear excited shrills and a man's voice bellows: "Where are my precious sister and my wife? Let me pass!"

"Hippolochus!" shouts Coronis, bolting toward the door, which slams open as a tall warrior pushes his way into the chamber. She flies into his arms and he swirls her around once, in a tight embrace. He then releases her and turns his attention to Laodameia, who is approaching, joy burning in her eyes and on her cheeks. "We will have time for each other, my beloved." He tells fair Coronis, "Let me, though, tend to my sister and queen." Half seriously and half jokingly he kneels in front of Laodameia.

"My queen, your faithful general has rushed from Lykia's northern frontiers to your wedding and coronation. Here I stay, dusty and proven from a full night's hard riding, to bring you news that peace is near. The Solymi have retreated to their mountains and we are pushing them still. It will not be long, before they will again respect the pledges they made to our father..."

"Oh dearest brother!" Laodameia bends to embrace his face and pulls him up: "The bravest to my eyes among all Lykians, my heart sings with joy. Now I do not have to walk alone. You will walk at my side, my family, my father's son. And fair-cheeked Coronis, my much-loved sister-in-law, will share this time with us."

Yes, she will now go through the rites and enter the Court of Lykia feeling taller, and safer, and not alone...

February 14, 1310 BC; At Arnna

"I wander what sort of divine plan ties these babies to each other," muses Merimawa, bending over the cribs to check the wrappings of the newborn infants. Laodameia's first-born is a big boy indeed. Merimawa delivered him and could not believe that her little princess did not need the intervention of Sideriya, the royal healer, who had been summoned by the king and stood at the bedside, either to perform the facilitating cuts or to stitch the lacerated flesh, or both. "You carry already a resemblance to your grandfather," whispers the nurse to the three days old child, who seems attentive to her voice and words, "and you will grow to become as big and tall and handsome as he was."

By contrast, Coronis' child, conceived on Laodameia's bridal night and not even a day old, is small, and slender in features. "And what about you, little babe?" She picks up the newborn and nestles him in her bosom: "How much will you share of your cousin's fortunes and fate? Inscrutable are indeed the designs of the gods."



At the naming ceremony the son of Laodameia receives the name of Sarpedon, the mythical founder of the kingdom, ancestor to a long line of rulers, all the way down to King Iobates and his son Evander. Heroes the like of Kukunnis the conqueror, whose name was revered as far as legendary Mitanni and fabled Carchemish. Those who dwelled in Gubla fragrant with cedars praised him in songs and on carved stone, when he responded to the plea from their king Yapachemou Abi I. He accomplished the overthrow of the Amurru invaders from the east, their wide spreading host he destroyed, and restored the king and the people to their city. The son of Coronis receives the name of Glaukos, in memory of Bellerophon's father. "Embedded in your name will go the inheritance from a long and illustrious lineage among the Ahhiyawans," whispers Coronis as she cradles her son to her bosom. "There is a city beyond the sea, in the heart of Argos, pasture land of horses, called Ephyra, where King Glaukos reigned. Your grandfather was his son, he whom heaven endowed with the most surpassing beauty."

Evander officiates the ceremony for his own child as well as on behalf of Hippolochus, who could not be present at his child's birth and naming,

entangled as he is with a resurgence of the war in the North, where the Solymi in the middle of winter have unexpectedly poured in full force down snow-filled valleys, have caught many garrisons by surprise, and are spreading havoc and desolation on their path. By officiating for Hippolochus, Evander is now the official putative father of Glaukos, too.

The king throws the sacred grains in the basin filled with burning myrrh and sacrifices two perfect lambs to Tarhunt. But when Tersikhle the diviner examines the entrails of the first one he recoils astounded by the marvelous sight. Half of them are missing! With trembling hands he opens the second victim, to find that its entrails are also only half formed. Thus, a great portent is revealed: each half matches exactly with the other.

"These two children shall be inseparable until death parts them." Tersikhle proclaims; "They are a perfect match each to the other..."

Shortly after, a messenger enters the chamber, with the oracle from the god:

*Along yellow banks children grow
One mother and one father they come to share
Along red banks each man meets his fate.*

"Lykia may face unquiet tidings, in times to come." Tersikhle utters, after hearing the report of the messenger. "Our river's banks are yellow and will see the children grow peacefully to adulthood. Then war may come to our shores. The cousins' loyalties will then be bound to their motherland, and to our common father the king. Blood will redder the riverbanks and men will face the uncertain fate of battle. This is how I read the words of the god."

Spring 1296 BC: At Arnna

"Ahoi! Grief is indeed a common companion to mankind, an inescapable source of misery."

So silently laments Merimawa, walking down the corridor. The old servant's frail shoulders are bent by the weight of deep sorrow. Years have gone by since she rejoiced at the birth of the two children, and multiple sufferings have added to the white of her hair and to the wrinkles in her face. "I am such an old crone," she adds, "of not much use but for lamenting and beating my aching heart behind shriveled breasts."

At the end of the corridor Sarpedon holds Glaukos in a tender embrace, and is whispering words to him, quietly, lovingly. Merimawa knows she cannot offer greater solace to Glaukos than what he is getting, and prefers

to leave the two adolescents alone with each other. "The true meaning of the oracle shows itself," she reflects: "now they indeed share one mother and one father, as the oracle predicted."

The thought rekindles the memories of all the tribulation that have plagued the house of Evander. The disappearance of Bellerophon, and the unrelenting grief of Philonoe. The death of Isandros, shortly followed by that of his mother, her heart now doubly broken. The prolonged war in the north, where so many Lykian youths met the end of their lives, spreading grief and lamentations across the country. The final burial of Bellerophon, which reawakened old wounds, and soon after that the death of her princess. Merimawa is filled anew with the excruciating pain that has never left her since the terrible event.

It was shortly after the funeral of her father that Laodameia, incautious, commented how her son, gifted with the semblance of her father, was even more beautiful than god Iyarri. The god's sister, Ertemi the Huntress, heard her. Angry, the goddess stormed down from her abode and struck Laodameia with a deadly arrow. Since then, two full turns of seasons, Coronis has become like mother to the prince. And now news has arrived from the north that the Solymi have pledged for peace and offered hostages, but Hippolochus has died from a grievous wound. Merimawa has just finished comforting Coronis into sleep. "Evander is now the true only father," she concludes. "The second line of the oracle is complete. I dread to find out what the last line really means: 'Along red banks each man meets his fate.'"

II

INTERLUDE

May 25 1280 BCE: Early afternoon on the Gargarus

Sarpedon holds his horse at the top of the mountain pass, facing the sun declining to the West. The sun-god spreads shimmers of gold upon the surface of the lower Scamander, flowing in its slow and sinuous course along the plain to Troy, and to the barely visible sea.

Behind him, the Lykian army is still climbing the pass along the eastern flank of the Gargarus, the hike now made easier by the deep and cool shade that covers the road. By contrast, to his right the top of divine Mount Ida shines, bathed by sunlight. Up there his Father—it is told—often comes to follow the events that darken with so much blood the Trojan plain, and to decide the fate of men, including that of his own son.

Down the northern slope of the Gargarus, and by now close to the plain below, the Lykian advanced detachment of mounted scouts comes intermittently in sight, among low, bright green trees, and boulders of blue-gray stone.

Further ahead, a series of low hills marks the meanders of the upper Scamander, as it flows out of Ida's sacred spring. Beyond the hills, the light suffuses with a rosy color the tall, white walls of Troy, perched high above the plain. Even from this distance one could see movements of troops in front of the city, and the dust trails raised by racing war chariots. All movement, though, appears limited to the expanse between the Scamander and the Simois rivers. Further north and west, toward the Greek camp, the plain is empty and still.

He turns to Glaukos, the Commander of the Lykian Cavalry and his sacred-banded cousin, who has pulled up at his side, followed by a score of horsemen.

"Look, Glaukos. Look, for one last time at unconquered Troad. I sense the grief, in me, of my divine Father. A foreboding tells me that I shall not return to our beloved Lykia by the same road we came. We will not be able to stop once more at this place and turn, and see Troy and its white towers still standing, proud and powerful, above the plain. It is written that our



View of the Scamander plain, from the Ida Mountain to the Bay of Troy, ca. 1300 BCE

names shall be sung along with other names, along with all those who will die, felled by divine decree."

"And yet unconquered," retorts Glaukos: "If that is our fate, my king, then let us die as heroes. Let our bravery, and our death, fill those songs with wonder, and with the message that two Lykian cousins struck terror into the hearts of the bronze-greaved Achaeans, and dispatched scores of them to Hades before succumbing to Fate, the God without resort."

After a brief pause he adds: "Do you remember? Another oracle spoke of the two of us. We were sixteen then, when we stumbled into it..."