# ARCHEOSTORIE JOURNAL of PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

**VOLUME 2 / 2018** 

Topic of the Year: The Sublime Triangle

#### **3**OPEN ACCESS

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# ARCHEOSTORIE JOURNAL of PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

**VOLUME 2 / 2018** 

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# ARCHAEOTALES





## The Man in Chains from Baratti, the slave that dreamt of freedom

#### Mariangela Galatea Vaglio<sup>1</sup>

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#### **Abstract**

A possible narrative of the Man in Chains from Baratti, the slave hailing from Africa and buried with chains in an Etruscan tomb from the 4th century BC, recovered in Autumn 2016 in the Gulf of Baratti (Livorno) and displayed at Populonia in Summer 2017.

**3 Open Access** Translated by: Charles East

Neywords: Baratti, Man in Chains, Etruscans, Etruria, slavery

#### Baratti, second half of 4th century BC

Who knows how they accompanied him to the tomb. A small procession, two or three people, in the discolored dawn of an ordinary day. Their faces gaunt and gray, exhausted, overexerted, maybe fearful for those few stolen moments at work. Their feet in shackles, the same chains that he also wore. A silent procession of slaves that accompany him to his eternal resting place, he who, in life, never rested.

The Man in Chains from Baratti. We do not know his name, but rarely does time preserve the names of the conquered. He must have been defeated by life even before he was shut in that grave on the beach. He came from far away, from Africa. A dark-skinned, ebony-eyed giant who arrived through who knows what routes at that corner of Etruria. Perhaps a prisoner captured in some battle. His powerful limbs and massive size had determined his fate. A slave, his feet shut into chains that were connected by leather strips to a collar, making it possible for him to work with his hands but never escape. A beast, condemned to work the iron ore extracted from the mine until his last breath.

Cruel masters, the Etruscans. Lovers of the good life, of wine and banquets, but ruthless and cruel with their enemies, prisoners, and servants. Their rich, hedonistic civilization rested on the tears of those who had been sent off to the mines, to break open rocks one by one to extract precious

metals, iron for swords, shining ornaments for shields and armor.

He was one of these unfortunate souls, the Man in Chains from Baratti. Having come from far to die alone, exhausted from work and endless struggle.

Who knows whether his eyes turned towards the sea one last time, looking for that distant horizon from which he came. Who knows whether, between the mist of Elba and the fog of the sea, he dreamt of the sunny beaches of his homeland. Who knows whether he recognized in the chimeras and other fantastical beasts that decorated the vases and houses and temples of his masters, the profiles of the wild beasts he had known as a child, in his birth country. Who knows how many times he called to mind his past freedom while the grip of his shackles reminded him of his present misery.

A small procession, in the discolored dawn, towards a pitiable tomb. Slaves with feet locked in chains, who struggle to walk, leaving heavy footprints in the sand. The earth closes itself over the Man in Chains from Baratti, his companions mourning that his life was so unfortunate. No one seems destined to ever remember him, he who has no family, no relatives, not even a name. No one could ever imagine that millennia later, when there would no longer be any trace or memory of his masters, and their name would be lost in the dust of history, his skeleton would emerge again, for us, to tell his tale and, his ankles pressed by chains and eye sockets now empty, to look for freedom.

#### For more on the story

Baratti, G., Camilli, A. & Megale, C. 2018. Sepolti incatenati. Storie di schiavi e prigionieri in Etruria e nel Mediterraneo antico. Pisa: Pacini Editore.



### Medusa, the goddess of Poggio del Molino

#### Mariangela Galatea Vaglio<sup>1</sup>

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#### **Abstract**

In Roman times, there stood a fortress on the promontory of Poggio del Molino, in the province of Livorno, originally built as a defence against pirates before being transformed into a farm and later into a luxurious seaside villa. It is a marvelous places that Archeostorie® and the cultural association Past in Progress are planning to transform into a PArCo, a 'Park of Community Archaeology' where anyone will be able to spend their free time alongside archaeologists at work. We have been speaking about the project in the News section, but here we would like to tell the place's history, in our own way.

**3 Open Access** Translated by: Charles East

Neywords: Poggio del Molino, pirates, Roman villa, PArCo

"Master, we must go now..."

"Just a moment, Manius, just a moment..."

The old Manius raised the collar of his cloak, holding back a gesture of irritation. The humidity rising from the sea as a thin mist in the midst of the bluish dawn penetrated into his very bones, making them creak. But, being a slave, his destiny was to obey the orders of his master, even when these were incomprehensible and lacked all common sense, as was now the case.

For that matter, his master had never possessed much common sense, and even less business acumen. He had known him since he was born, and his master had always been thus: not a bad man, not at all, but useless, and essentially unsuited to his times and circumstances.

Mild, well-mannered, and absent minded, he had always been lost in his fantasies and dreams, poring over tomes of mythology and history rather than account-books. And the consequences were what they were. Caecina Largus, the last descendant of a line that reached all the way back to the ancient Etruscans and that, barely a century earlier, dominated the sea all the way to the island of Elba from its villa on the promontory, now stood there, in the midst of his forebears' triclinium presently reduced to ruins. He wore a cloak of coarse wool and shoddy shoes barely worthy of a beggar and

was now about to set off for Rome to implore a distant senator cousin of his for some minor position that would allow him to survive.

"The road is long, Domine..."

"You're right," Largus sighed, his voice seemed to emerge from a distant, undefined place. "But I cannot separate myself from her, bid her farewell... I've always considered her the spirit of this house and I can't bear the thought of not seeing her again. Don't you also find her beautiful?"

Manius felt a shiver pass down his spine, but this time it had little to do with the fog. His glance moved along the flaking floor, passed over the infinite cracks and spots of cement, used to patch up the pieces of mosaic that time had degraded and that the owners — Largus, most recently — had not been able to restore. Finally, his glance reached her as she stood out in the cold and dark shadow of the hall: the Medusa with blue eyes and snakes for hair. The old man barely refrained from crossing himself to invoke the protection of Christ. He knew his master would not have appreciated the gesture.

Not that he had anything against Christians: Largus was tolerant of and even curious about all sorts of religions, perhaps because — as his servant thought with a hint of contempt — he secretly considered them all bizarre. Even before him, in the *domus* of the Caecinas, slaves

and servants could always practice any religion without running the risk of being punished. Even when, before Constantine some thirty vears earlier, adhesion to the Christian faith was considered a crime. But the tolerant and peaceable Decimus Caecina Largus would not have been able to forgive such a flagrant affront to his Medusa. Manius remembered him, as a child, crouched on the floor, following with his finger the outline of the mosaic's tessellation, as if those signs were roads that could lead him to a greater form of knowledge. He had never understood the fascination that that monster exerted on the family of his masters. Perhaps, he told himself, it was because of their Etruscan origins, because the ancient Tyrrhenians believed in a mysterious religion, in which halfhuman and half-bestial demons were the lords of nature and the cosmos, of life and death. But to him that figure had always resembled a hellish manifestation, a breath of the devil that corrupted with its miasma the air of that house.

"You hate it, I know," whispered Largus all of a sudden, with a voice resigned to defeat.

"Master, I..."

"No, I understand. You believe in your god, and at times I envy your fate... You know, I think that's exactly why the gods of Olympus weren't able to withstand the arrival of your Christ. They were so pale, so distant, so enclosed in their marble temples, and so far from life. They were evanescent, somewhat like myself. Not she, however. She is not at all detached or distant. She is a divinity, of course, but one of flesh and blood: she is a goddess dirty with life.

Do you know how she became a goddess, according to legend? Because at first she was a mortal like us. But then one day, Poseidon, who lusted after her because of her beauty, found her praying alone in the temple of Athena and, with no regard for the sacredness of the place, raped her. Instead of helping the poor girl out, what do you think Athena did? She took offence and transformed Medusa into a monster with serpents for hair!"

Largus shook his head with a sigh: "You understand now why you can't trust the Olympians, why we've stopped believing in them? Because that's how they are: fickle, unjust... But not Medusa, no! She has suffered and knows injustice and abjection, both human and divine. That's why she is the ideal guardian of a household: because only one who knows evil, Manius, can recognise and defeat it!"

"Master..."

"She's always protected us, you know? Initially, this wasn't a seaside villa for vacationing. It was a farm where my forebears produced garum for the seasoning of foods. The Caecinas mixed the innards of fermented fish in their basins... Even the ancestors of the noble senator whom we'll visit in Rome did so, mind you! Then, a century ago, when they wanted to affirm themselves as great lords living an aristocratic life - and mostly when producing garum in Italy no longer made sense because the Spanish version was much cheaper — they decided to transform the farm into a seaside villa. And who can blame them? Where else could you find a hill like this, overlooking the sea? The panorama that extends all the way to Corsica, the gulf to the south, the coastal lake... And so they transformed the giant fish-basins into luxurious baths, full of marble statues. And yet, perhaps it was merely my imagination, but I swear that ever since I was little, after I had heard this story, I've always sensed a smell of rotting fish in the baths, as if it had remained as a ghastly breath, a vestige of the past."

Manius shook his head: "Master, phantasms have nothing to do with it. It's that since the times of your grandfather we've never had the money to clean the piping..."

Largus burst out laughing. "Of course, you're right, how foolish of me! You know, it's when this place became a villa that my forebears wished to have a mosaic of Medusa here in the triclinium. It has always been with us, a testament to the long-begone times when we were rich, but also to our ruin. Do you see these cracks? They are the signs of an earthquake that happened almost a century ago. Half of the house collapsed, all of a sudden, and we were never able to restore it to its former splendour. That's when the decline started. Little by little, year after year, we hardly even noticed. Our revenue decreased, as did the family's vivacity. Before, we were shrewd and unscrupulous merchants, and before that, who knows, maybe even fearsome Etruscan pirates. Then gradually we became like me: peaceable, settled, inept. I know that you consider me a fool, Manius, a useless human being who was unable to revive the destiny of his family and household. Perhaps you're right. I'm incapable of such a thing; I have neither the temperament nor the ingenuity for it. Power and riches belong to the audacious, and I am not one of them. I have nothing left,

not even the esteem of an old slave who comes with me out of obligation rather than affection.

All I have left is her, my Medusa. She has accompanied our entire family history and has remained intact throughout the centuries, giving in neither to wars, nor revolts, nor even earthquakes. She has been the best guardian we could have chosen. In her blue eyes, you discern a threatening look whereas I, on the contrary, have always seen a protective force. As if she, who had suffered so much, wished to protects us from suffering. That's why my heart weeps to leave her here forever. I can't."

"But you can't bring a mosaic along, Master!"

exclaimed Manius in exasperation.

Largus smiled: "I know I may be mad, but not to that extent. We will take a little piece along. A single tessel to protect us on your journey and keep perils at bay along the way and when we'll be in Rome."

He leant down and picked out with his nails a small glassy stone from the eyes of Medusa, raised it to make it glimmer in the sunlight, and then enclosed it in his palm, like a talisman.

"Alright, we can go. To Rome, forever."

Old Manius shook his head, hurriedly crossing himself, furtively.

#### For more on the story

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### Ötzi, the last of the shamans

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#### **Abstract**

Who was Ötzi? What was he doing amidst the perennial snow on that day, more than five thousand years ago? And why was he treacherously struck by an arrow from behind? This tale offers an evocative and intriguing version that immerses us in Ötzi's world and makes us tremble for him.

**3 Open Access** Translated by: Max Matukhin

Neywords: Ötzi, Similaun, copper age, shaman, tattoo, mummy

He stopped and looked around, breathing heavily.

Only rocks, ice, and a dark blue sky that seemed to crush him with its weight. There wasn't even a boulder to hide behind. He would have to do it in open daylight.

He tightened his grip on the smooth wood of the bow. His throat burned as his sweat grew cold on his neck and forehead.

His prey was there, before him, seated in the sun with its back to him. He was chewing a strip of smoked meat. Judging by his grunts, the mastication cost him some effort: he no longer had the strong teeth he used to.

The hunter strung his bow with slow and precise movements, ignoring the voice inside his head that urged him to return to the valley. What had to be done had to be done, and he could not afford to miss. The curse of the shaman would plague him for generations to come.

He squinted. The reflection of the sun on the frozen puddles was blinding. The wind blew across the ridge, lifting a light dust of snow that obscured his vision.

He closed his eyes for a moment to collect his courage. His heart beat so strongly that he thought he could feel it reverberate amidst the mountain peaks.

Then he lifted his head and drew back the bowstring. Once, twice, thrice. At the fourth, the arrow flew from the bow, singing through the cold air.

The cry that rang out from the snowy hollow echoed amidst the rocks, before becoming lost in the howling of the wind.

The hunter did not stay to await the end. His hands trembling nervously, he loosened the string, tied the bow to his back and started out towards the valley, straight to the village and the warm fire of his house, leaving the old man to his fate as he exhaled his final breaths amidst the perennial snow.

#### A few days earlier

"Your problem," Volor observed, "is that you're an only child."

Idan sighed and prodded the crackling logs with a stick.

It was a lovely early summer evening and a light wind rustled the grass. The last rays of the setting sun warmed their backs. Any moment now it would disappear behind the mountains, plunging the valley into a dim, bluish light.

Smoke rose from the roofs of huts where families were sitting down for supper. In the village's streets, the only beings that remained were dogs, some goats, Idan and an old man clothed in a wolf's hide, who was observing him furtively, with an understanding smile.

"The problem," Idan responded grimly, "is that my father is a megalomaniac."

Volo laughed. "Don't exaggerate. He's just ambitious. And that's not necessarily a bad thing."

"That's not what you thought the other evening."

Volor's smile disappeared. "You heard us?"

"Are you kidding me? You were yelling so loudly that even the rock goats on the mountains probably heard you." Idan set down his stick and looked the old man in the eye. "May one known what he said that made you so angry?"

"I wasn't all that angry. Old friends can sometimes get hot-headed over nothing at all."

"Volor, you threatened to unleash the Spirits of the Mountain against him."

"Hm, I lost my temper." Volor scratched his thick chestnut beard with a frown. "I shouldn't have said it. The Spirits mustn't be disturbed for no reason."

"For no reason, you say? His warriors insulted you during the ceremony for the invocation of the harvest."

Volor waved his wounded hand, which was wrapped in a linen bandage. "Drunk brawls. Don't lend it too much weight. It's just young bucks showing their horns."

"Drain tried to stab you with a knife!"

"And I disarmed him with a single hand, didn't I? And how did we even start talking about me? You were telling me about your problems with your father. Come on, go on."

Idan lowered his gaze till it rested on the flame. The wood, still green, was having a hard time catching fire. The acrid smell of smoke insinuated itself into clothes and hair. "There isn't much else to say. As he keeps on repeating, he only wants the best for me. But the best isn't what he thinks it is."

"Why don't you try talking to him?"

"Talking? With my father? It would be easier to have your Spirits listen."

"Don't blaspheme," interrupted Volor, gently but firmly. He stretched out his legs towards the fire with a grimace of pain. "Ah, my knees! Maybe I should add another curative tattoo on my joints."

"Or just stop climbing up mountains like a chamois. You're no longer the right age for certain things."

"If not I then who else? I'm still the shaman of this village, as much as it may annoy your father." Volor winked at him. "It was the Spirits who chose him as the new leader before you were born, you know. While I was climbing towards the glacier, a great crow landed on a rock before me. And thus I knew."

"Um... knew what? That crows like your spelt bread?"

Volor gave him a severe look. "It was a sign! As a young man, Tabor always bore a crow's feather in his hat. To impress your mother, I suppose." He lifted his eyes to the sky. "That stupid show-off."

"And now you'd like to climb back up there to ask the Spirits for advice?"

"Something like that." Volor smiled, but the expression in his brown eyes remained serious. "We live in uncertain times. Warriors champ at the bit: metal has made them covetous and powerful. New winds blow, and the old traditions disappear like smoke." He knit his brow. "I have yet to understand if this is a good thing or not."

"This is what you were discussing with my father the other night, right?"

Volor lowered his head, tacitly agreeing.

"What did he tell you?" Idan insisted.

Silence fell. With the last ray of sunlight gone, shadows quickly descended to fill every ravine of the valley. The fire had finally taken hold and the logs burned, snapping and whistling. Idan nudged one with his foot, triggering a cloud of sparks, while he waited for the old man to resolve to speak again.

At last Volor answered, with a voice so quiet that it resembled the crackling of the kindling in the fire:

"Tabor wants to pick his successor himself."

"What? But he can't! And then who would it be?"

The old mad lifted his eyes and looked at him with a glance full of affection and melancholy.

"What... you mean..." Idan coughed to clear his throat. "Are you pulling my leg?"

"I would never."

"But he considers me incompetent! I've never been patient enough as a hunter, strong enough as a warrior, careful enough as a prospector, able enough as an artisan..."

Volor shook his head. "It's not easy being the only child of a chief who is both feared and respected. The expectations are great."

"But power has never passed from father to son. It's never happened!"

"The times are changing, aren't they?" He gave him a sideways glance. "The real question is, would you want it?"

Confused, Idan grew silent. Did he want it? Did he want to become a chief? To manage exchanges, the livestock, the farms? To guide the hunters, to make decisions that could save or doom the lives of everyone? Did he want to live always looking behind his back, always with a hand ready on his knife?

In a flash, he saw before him the impatient face of his father, exasperated by his indecisiveness. How many times, as a young lad, had he fantasised about filling his sack and going off to herd sheep, far from the village folk, from their envies, and from those eternal family feuds...

"You look unhappy," said Volor. He was observing the young man's face, watching his reaction. "Many others would jump for joy in your situation."

Idan quickly composed himself under that penetrating gaze. "I have to go home. They're waiting for me."

Volor nodded and continued to observe him while the young man walked off amidst the huts, his shoulders hunched under a new weight.

Idan could feel the old man's sharp gaze on his back till he disappeared in the rapidly growing darkness.

In the village's most imposing hut, decorated by a double row of horns hung above the door, the inhabitants dined in silence.

Idan nibbled reluctantly on a slice of cheese, absorbed in his own thoughts. His mother observed him without a word. Tabor, unaware of the tension that filled the room, was swallowing large spoonfuls of grain soup with his usual voracity. When he was done, he put down his spoon and looked at his son for the first time. "Yesterday Volor told me that you offered to accompany him up the mountain."

Idan froze. The question had come earlier than he expected. "He's old. He can't go alone." "Agreed."

Idan lifted his gaze, convinced he had misheard. But when Tabor smiled at him with an air of agreement, he became certain: his father had gone mad.

"He has been a great shaman for our village, but now his days are over," Tabor said. "He can no longer keep pace. The world is changing but he continues to wander among rocks talking to crows and invoking spirits..."

Idan straightened himself up. "You can't discharge him! He is a shaman, not one of your subjects."

"I know, my son. That's why you'll have to be the one to do it."

"To do...what?"

"Do I really have to explain it to you?" Tabor

was already rising to his feet. He threw a fur over his shoulders and picked up the spear standing next to the door. "One must be ready to make sacrifices to obtain what one wants, Idan. If you are not brave enough to endure it, you can remain the coward that you have always been... but don't come to me begging for help when the men of the village start cutting each other's throats for the spear of command."

Idan's eyes remained immobile on the piece of cheese in his hands.

His father paused on the doorstep to give him a final warning: "You won't have other chances. Disappoint me again and I will forget I ever had a son."

When he left, the hut became silent. Idan clenched his fist till the cheese, reduced to pulp, oozed from between his fingers.

His mother sat down next to him and gently cleaned his hand with a cloth, without uttering a word.

"What should I do?" asked Idan.

"You don't have a choice," she answered, with a touch of sadness in her voice. "If you don't do it, Tabor will entrust one of his faithful men with the task. And then he'll become the new chief."

Idan imagined his father's warriors entering into the old shaman's hut, laughing and yelling, drunk on fermented beverages. Their unsheathed daggers, the desperate cries of Volor, the chestnut beard stained with blood...

Despite the heat from the fire that burned his face, a violent shudder ran down his spine.

"If you care for him, you must do it yourself," his mother said.

"I could tell him to flee."

"Do you think Volor doesn't know what fate awaits him? He has decided to stay here and confront it. He has always been a brave man. He deserves your respect."

"Does killing an old man really require a lot of courage, mother?" Idan asked bitterly.

His mother stroked his cheek. "Much more than you think," she whispered, before leaving the room.

Once he was alone, Idan bowed his head and began to cry silently. He was still weeping when the last glimmers of the fire went out amidst the ashes.

As soon as the weather allowed it, they set off. Volor wore his old patched pelt, composed of sheep and goat skins stitched together, and a fur cap on his head. On his shoulders he carried

a basket, a quiver, and a half-finished yew bow. A bronze axe glistened at his side, attracting many an envious glance.

It was the only weapon he had, aside from a small knife: the bow still had to be sanded and polished, as did the arrows that he carried in his sheath.

"On the mountain I have no need for weapons," he explained to Idan, who observed him in silence. "Up there the Spirits protect me."

Idan avoided his gaze, biting his lip.

As they left the village, the road was lined with people who remained silent. It was as if all of the inhabitants had gathered to see them go, and yet no one greeted them or bid them a good voyage. Even the children were quiet.

Tabor's warriors were lined up at the margins of the village, with lances in hand, and rough faces under head-coverings made of wolf's or fox's heads. Some wore pelts; others were barechested to show the scars left by fights and hunts. Feathers of eagles and crows hung down from their hair.

They did not try to stop the shaman, but they gave Idan a menacing glance, full of tacit insinuations, while putting a hand to the daggers they kept at their waist.

He kept his eyes on the ground until the last trace of smoke from the roofs disappeared behind their backs.

"Finally," exhaled Volor. "I couldn't stand those long faces any more."

When Idan didn't respond, he observed him pensively, but soon the climb became arduous and they were both breathing too hard to speak.

Although they were good walkers, almost half of the day had passed when they stopped in a hollow that sheltered them from the wind, not too far away from the pass that crossed the mountain. The sun shone on the snow, but the cold was bitter.

"I'll go scout out the way," Idan said.

Volor sat down and took out a piece of meat. "What do you want to scout out? There's only one passable way. If they had followed us we would have already noticed."

"I'd rather be certain. And then I could always catch something to eat."

The shaman frowned, then shrugged and nodded.

Idan went off with his bow and a heavy heart. When he arrived in sight of the village it was almost dark. The warriors were waiting for him on the path, as if they hadn't moved since their

departure. Their silent, hostile, probing glances scrutinised him from head to toe.

Idan knew what they were looking for. He lifted his arms to show that he had returned empty-handed. He had done what they wished of him, but he had refused to inflict the ultimate violence on the body of his aged friend: the bronze axe would remain at Volor's side, in his tomb of ice and snow, to accompany him on his last journey towards the land of the fathers.

Who knows whether one day the sun would return to shine on that tempered blade.

"I demand the spear of my father," he said once he was within earshot. His voice sounded rough and foreign, like that of a stranger.

The warriors let him through and then arranged themselves behind him to form a silent retinue, their expressions unchanged.

Idan passed through the village. The high seat of his father had been transported to the central square in between the huts. Tabor awaited him there, dressed in his finest garb, adorned with jewels and armed. He smiled with pride when he saw him appear alone, accompanied at a distance by the warriors.

Idan took the spear from his hands and sat down on the seat. He lifted his gaze up to the mountains enveloped in the evening light. Immobile, jagged giants, bound to the earth. Their contours faded into an indistinct blue. They had existed before him and would continue to exist afterwards. One day the village would be burned and abandoned, and the names of Idan, Volor, Tabor and all of the others will have been swept away by the wind together with their stories. But those peaks, heavy with snow, would remain where they were, indifferent to the suffering and pain of the small, insignificant beings crawling at their feet

How ridiculous it seemed, from that perspective, all of this trouble just to obtain an extra crumb of power...

"The village has a new chief!" exclaimed Tabor. The warriors echoed his words with a cry, shaking their weapons. Then they kneeled one by one, as did the women, the old folk, and the children.

Idan tried to focus on that multitude of bowed heads, but his gaze wandered restlessly and lost itself in the colours of the dusk. He closed his eyes.

A young man wearing a pelt and a scrawny boy were walking side by side along a mountain

path. The shaman indicated plants with curative qualities and jokingly scolded the boy who kept on getting distracted. The wind brought a distant echo of laughter.

Idan pressed his eyelids together but the memory didn't disappear.

"The times are changing," Volor said in his mind.

"I didn't want to," mumbled Idan.

Nobody answered.

He reopened his eyes. A few heads were

beginning to rise: curious, frowning, or fearful faces that awaited his words.

He took a deep breath. "The times are changing," he began. "New winds are blowing. Metal has made us covetous and powerful..."

And he was certain he could hear the raucous laughter of Volor echoing in the distance, beyond the pastures, the woods, and the roofs of the village, amidst the mountains enveloped in blue fog.

#### For more on the story

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