

The Persian Wars Herodotus

Introduction
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THESE are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus,¹ which he publishes, in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the Barbarians from losing their due meed of glory; and withal to put on record what were their grounds of feud.

1. According to the Persians best informed in history, the Phoenicians began the quarrel. This people, who had formerly dwelt on the shores of the Red Sea,² having migrated to the Mediterranean and settled in the parts which they now inhabit, began at once, they say, to adventure on long voyages, freighting their vessels with the wares of Egypt and Assyria. They landed at many places on the coast, and among the rest at Argos, which was then pre-eminent above all the states included now under the common name of Hellas. Here they exposed

¹This is the reading of all our MSS. Yet Aristotle, where he quotes the passage (Rhet. iii. 9), has Thurium in the place of Halicarnassus; that is, he cites the final residence instead of the birth-place of the writer. (See the sketch of Herodotus's Life prefixed to this volume.) The mention of the author's name and country in the first sentence of his history seems to have been usual in the age in which Herodotus wrote. The "Genealogies" of Hecataeus commenced with the words, *Ἐκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται*. (Müller's Fragm. Hist. Gr. vol. i. Fr. 332.) And the practice is followed by Thucydides.

²By the Red Sea Herodotus intends, not our Red Sea, which he calls the Arabian Gulf, but the Indian Ocean, or rather both the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, which latter he does not consider distinct from the Ocean, being ignorant of its shape.

their merchandise, and traded with the natives for five or six days; at the end of which time, when almost everything was sold, there came down to the beach a number of women, and among them the daughter of the king, who was, they say, agreeing in this with the Greeks, Io, the child of Inachus. The women were standing by the stern of the ship intent upon their purchases, when the Phoenicians, with a general shout, rushed upon them. The greater part made their escape, but some were seized and carried off. Io herself was among the captives. The Phoenicians put the women on board their vessel, and set sail for Egypt. Thus did Io pass into Egypt, according to the Persian story, which differs widely from the Phoenician: and thus commenced, according to their authors, the series of outrages.

2. At a later period, certain Greeks, with whose name they are unacquainted, but who would probably be Cretans, made a landing at Tyre, on the Phoenician coast, and bore off the king's daughter, Europe. In this they only retaliated; but afterwards the Greeks, they say, were guilty of a second violence. They manned a ship of war,² and sailed to Aea, a city of Colchis, on the river Phasis; from whence, after despatching the rest of the business on which they had come, they carried off Medea, the daughter of the king of the land. The monarch sent a herald into Greece to demand reparation of the wrong, and the restitution of his child; but the Greeks made answer, that having received no reparation of the wrong done them in the seizure of Io the Argive, they should give none in this instance.

3. In the next generation afterwards, according to the same authorities, Alexander the son of Priam, bearing these events in mind, resolved to procure himself a wife out of Greece by violence, fully persuaded, that as the Greeks had not given satisfaction for their outrages, so neither would he be forced to make any for his. Accordingly he made prize of Helen; upon which the Greeks decided that, before resorting to other measures, they would send envoys to reclaim the princess and require reparation of the wrong. Their demands were met by a reference to the violence which had been offered to Medea, and they were

²This is the expedition of Jason and the Argonauts.

asked with what face they could now require satisfaction, when they had formerly rejected all demands for either reparation or restitution addressed to them.⁴

4. Hitherto the injuries on either side had been mere acts of common violence; but in what followed the Persians consider that the Greeks were greatly to blame, since before any attack had been made on Europe, they led an army into Asia. Now as for the carrying off of women, it is the deed, they say, of a rogue; but to make a stir about such as are carried off, argues a man a fool. Men of sense care nothing for such women, since it is plain that without their own consent they would never be forced away. The Asiatics, when the Greeks ran off with their women, never troubled themselves about the matter; but the Greeks, for the sake of a single Lacedaemonian girl, collected a vast armament, invaded Asia, and destroyed the kingdom of Priam. Henceforth they ever looked upon the Greeks as their open enemies. For Asia, with all the various tribes of barbarians that inhabit it, is regarded by the Persians as their own; but Europe and the Greek race they look on as distinct and separate.⁵

5. Such is the account which the Persians give of these matters. They trace to the attack upon Troy their ancient enmity towards the Greeks. The Phoenicians, however, as regards Io, vary from the Persian statements. They deny that they used any violence to remove her into Egypt; she herself, they say, having formed an intimacy with the captain, while his vessel lay at Argos, and suspecting herself to be with child, of her own

⁴Aristophanes in the *Acharnians* (524-529) wittily parodies the opening of Herodotus' history. Professing to give the causes of the Peloponnesian war, he says, "But now some young drunkards go to Megara and carry off the harlot Simaetha; the Megarians, hurt to the quick, run off in turn with two harlots of the house of Aspasia; and so for three whores Greece is set ablaze." This is the earliest indication (425 B.C.) of a knowledge of the work of Herodotus on the part of any other Greek writer. Herodotus uses Homer's Alexander for the more familiar Paris, son of Priam.

⁵The claim made by the Persians to the natural lordship of Asia was convenient as furnishing them with pretexts for such wars as it suited their policy to engage in with non-Asiatic nations.

free will accompanied the Phoenicians on their leaving the shore, to escape the shame of detection and the reproaches of her parents. Which of these two accounts is true I shall not trouble to decide. I shall proceed at once to point out the person who first within my own knowledge commenced aggressions on the Greeks, after which I shall go forward with my history, describing equally the greater and the lesser cities. For the cities which were formerly great, have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful, were weak in the olden time.⁶ I shall therefore discourse equally of both, convinced that human happiness never continues long in one stay.

6. Croesus, son of Alyattes, by birth a Lydian, was lord of all the nations to the west of the river Halys.⁷ This stream, which separates Syria from Paphlagonia, runs with a course from south to north, and finally falls into the Euxine. So far as our knowledge goes, he was the first of the barbarians who held relations with the Greeks, forcing some of them to become his tributaries, and entering into alliance with others. He conquered the Aeolians, Ionians, and Dorians of Asia, and made a treaty with the Lacedaemonians. Up to that time all Greeks had been free. For the Cimmerian attack upon Ionia, which was earlier than Croesus, was not a conquest of the cities, but only an inroad for plundering.

7. The sovereignty of Lydia, which had belonged to the Heraclidae, passed into the family of Croesus, who were called the Mermnadae, in the manner which I will now relate. There was a certain king of Sardis, Candaules by name, whom the Greeks call Myrsilus. He was a descendant of Alcaeus, son of Heracles. The first king of this dynasty was Agron, son of Ninus, grandson of Belus, and great-grandson of Alcaeus; Candaules, son of Myrsus, was the last. The kings who reigned before Agron sprang from Lydus, son of Atys, from whom the people of the

⁶Thucydides (i. 10) remarks on the small size to which Mycenae had dwindled compared with its former power.

⁷By Syria Herodotus here means Cappadocia, the inhabitants of which he calls Syrians or Cappadocian Syrians. Herodotus regards the words Syria and Assyria, Syrians and Assyrians, as in reality the same.

land, called previously Maeonians, received the name of Lydians. The Heraclidae, descended from Heracles and the slave-girl of Jardanus, having been entrusted by these princes with the management of affairs, obtained the kingdom by an oracle. Their rule endured for twenty-two generations of men, a space of 505 years,⁸ during the whole of which period, from Agron to Candaules, the crown descended in the direct line from father to son.

8. Now it happened that this Candaules was in love with his own wife; and not only so, but thought her the fairest woman in the whole world. This fancy had strange consequences. There was in his bodyguard a man whom he specially favoured, Gyges, the son of Dascylus. All affairs of greatest moment were entrusted by Candaules to this person, and to him he was wont to extol the surpassing beauty of his wife. So matters went on for a while. At length, one day, Candaules, for he was fated to end ill, thus addressed his follower, "I see you do not credit what I tell you of my lady's loveliness; but come now, since men's ears are less credulous than their eyes, contrive some means whereby you may behold her naked." At this the other loudly exclaimed, saying, "What most unwise speech is this, master, which you have uttered? Would you have me behold my mistress when she is naked? Remember that a woman, with her clothes, puts off her bashfulness. Our fathers, in time past, distinguished right and wrong plainly enough, and it is our wisdom to submit to be taught by them. There is an old saying, 'Let each look on his own.' I hold your wife for the fairest of all womankind. Only, I beseech you, ask me not to do wickedly."

9. Gyges thus endeavoured to decline the king's proposal, trembling lest some dreadful evil should befall him through it. But the king replied to him, "Courage, friend; suspect me not of the design to prove you by this discourse; nor dread your mistress, lest mischief befall you at her hands. Be sure I will so

⁸Herodotus professes to count three generations to the century (ii. 142), thus making the generation thirty-three and one-third years. In this case the average of the generations is but twenty-three years. Herodotus does not here calculate, but intends to state facts though the figures have no historic value.