

The Ancient Greek Historians
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LECTURE II

HERODOTUS

IN the last lecture the necessities of our subject obliged us to consider works of which only scraps have survived, and of which we can form only dim ideas by groping methods, although we may feel tolerably confident as to the general character and value of the literature to which they belong. The names of their authors are forgotten by the world, and their chief function now is to tantalise the special student of literature or history. To-day we come to a work which time has not been allowed to destroy or diminish.

Of the life of Herodotus, son of Lyxes, of Halicarnassus, we know hardly anything except what may be gleaned from his own statements. Born early in the fifth century, he left his birth-place before 454 B.C., banished by Lygdamis the tyrant, who put his cousin Panyassis, the epic poet, to death. He stayed apparently for some time in Samos, and then went to Athens, whence he proceeded to Italy as one of the first citizens of the new colony of Thurii (443 B.C.). He survived the first years of the Peloponnesian war

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(431-0 B.C.¹). Into this framework we have to fit his travels, which included the coasts of the Euxine, Babylon, Phoenicia, Egypt, and probably Cyrene. It is not necessary to discuss the disputed subject of the chronology of his journeys. I need only say that his most important journeys, those to Babylonia and Egypt, were probably undertaken in the later period of his life, while he was a citizen of Thurii. The years which elapsed between his banishment from his native city and his departure for his new home seem to have been spent in Greece, perhaps chiefly at Athens, and to have been devoted, as we shall see, to investigating and composing the story of the invasion of Xerxes. Though he may naturally have visited Athens again, on his way to or from the East, there is no evidence to entitle us to presume, as some have thought, that he deserted Thurii permanently and dwelled at Athens during the last years of his life.²

The argument of his history is a narrative of the relations between the Greeks and the oriental powers from the accession of Croesus to the capture of Sestos in 478 B.C.—a “modern” history in the fullest sense of the term. The division into nine Books is not due to the author himself, for

¹ There are passages which cannot have been written before 431-0 B.C. vii. 233 (cp. Thucydides ii. 2) and ix. 73 (cp. Thuc. ii. 23) imply 431 B.C.; vii. 137 (cp. Thuc. ii. 67) implies 430 B.C. Cp. also iii. 160; and v. 77. The reference to Artaxerxes in vi. 98 does not imply that the words were written after his death (425 B.C.); cp. Macan's note *ad loc.*

² Compare the pertinent remarks of Wachsmuth, *Rheinisches Museum*, vi. 215-8 (1901).

in his day such divisions had not yet come into fashion. But the Alexandrine editor who was responsible for it was a man of extraordinary insight. His distribution perfectly exhibits the construction of the book and could not be improved by any change. But it can be rendered more perspicuous by observing that each of the nine Books is truly a sub-division and that the primary partition is a threefold one.¹ The work falls naturally into three sections, each consisting of three parts. The first section, or triad of Books, comprises the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses, and the accession of Darius; the second deals with the reign of Darius; the third with that of Xerxes. The first is mainly concerned with Asia including Egypt; the second with Europe; the third with Hellas. The first displays the rise and the triumphs of the power of Persia; the last relates the defeat of Persia by Greece; while the middle triad represents a chequered picture, Persian failure in Scythia and at Marathon, Greek failure in Ionia. And each of the nine subdivisions has a leading theme which constitutes a minor unity. Cyrus is the theme of the first Book, Egypt of the second, Scythia of the fourth, the Ionian rebellion of the fifth, Marathon of the sixth. The seventh describes the invasion of Xerxes up to his success at Thermopylae; the eighth relates the reversal of fortune at Salamis; the final triumphs of Greece at Plataea and Mycale

¹ This has been well brought out by Macan.

occupy the ninth. In the third alone the unity is less marked; yet there is a central interest in the dynastic revolution which set Darius on the throne. Thus the unity of the whole composition sharply displays itself in three parts, of which each again is threefold.¹ The simplicity with which this architectural symmetry has been managed, without any apparent violence, constraint, or formality, was an achievement of consummate craft. The writer's management of the digressions, for which he is notorious, is hardly less striking, exhibiting a rare skill in the choice of the best and perhaps the only fitting places to stow away loose material he wished to make use of.

But, perfect as is the architectural unity of the work of Herodotus, it would seem that the plan as it was finally carried out was not conceived when he commenced to write, and that the unity was achieved not in conformity to a design thought out from the beginning, but by a process of expansion due to an after-thought. There is a variety of internal evidence which points convincingly to the conclusion that the last three Books were composed before the first six, and there are indications that he wrote this portion between 456 and 445 B.C., before he began his travels.² The natural inference is that he originally contemplated no more than a history of the

² In the last part the unity is much more marked than the triplicity; in fact, the division of Book vii. from Book viii. is somewhat arbitrary.

³ The most complete appreciation of the evidence will be found in the Introduction to Macan's ed. of *Herodotus*, vii.-ix. (§ 7 and § 8).

invasion of Xerxes; and that it was in the course of his travels that he conceived the idea of a larger work, of which the "Invasion of Xerxes" should form the finale. The idea doubtless shaped itself gradually; and the first six Books were not composed in the order in which they stand. But the author has worked with such skill that only a searching analysis has detected the series of facts which demonstrate the priority of the last three Books¹ and make it clear that the Persian war was his original inspiration.

At whatever moment the idea of expanding his original history to its fuller compass presented itself, whether it was suggested by his journeys or prompted him to become a traveller, it was certainly connected closely with his travels, and the occurrence of long geographical excursus is one of the most striking features of the expansion.

So strongly marked indeed is the geographical element, so long are the geographical sections, in the work of Herodotus, that some critics have been led to think that considerable parts of it were originally intended to form part of a

¹ Some few additions were made subsequently: thus in vii. 93 and 108 there are references to passages in the books which are earlier in order but were later in composition. It is probable that the whole work never received a final revision, and this would be sufficient to explain the unfulfilled promise of vii. 213, which is the insufficient but only real argument for the hypothesis that the ninth Book is not complete. [How gratuitous this hypothesis is, Macan shows at length, *ib.* § 6.] On the other hand it seems not improbable that Herodotus intended to include in the early portion of his work a summary of Babylonian history (*Λαυδοίαι λόγος*): this seems to me more likely than that in i. 106 and 184 he is referring to another work.

geography, and were afterwards incorporated in his history. There is nothing that compels us to adopt a hypothesis of this kind. Association with geography was a characteristic of the early historical literature of the Greeks, and these excursus in Herodotus attest the influence of the Hecataean school, and were natural in the work of a historian who was himself a traveller. And it is worth observing that when he was writing, both Egypt and Scythia, the subjects of his longest historico-geographical digressions, had a particular practical interest for the Athenians; and of the Greek public it was unquestionably the Athenians to whom the historian designed his work pre-eminently to appeal. I need only remind you of the Athenian adventure in Egypt in the middle of the fifth century and of the voyage of Pericles in the Euxine Sea. It has even been conjectured that this Periclean expedition (444 B.C.) was the occasion of the historian's visit to the Pontic regions. However this may be, it is not insignificant, in judging these digressions, that Egypt and Scythia possessed, at the time Herodotus wrote, an interest of a political kind, subordinate indeed to that of Persia, but distinctly actual.

It is also to be noted that the digressions in general had an artistic justification. They are an epic feature, deliberately designed;¹ one of the epic notes of the work. Homer was the literary

¹ He says expressly that *πρὸς ἑῶν* are a feature of his work, iv. 30.

master of Herodotus; without imitating him in any obvious way, the first great master of prose studied and caught the secrets of his effects. By means of digressions he achieved epic variety. We cannot do better than read the observations of the accomplished literary critic Dionysius.¹ "Herodotus knew that every narrative of great length wearies the ears of the hearer, if it dwell without a break on the same subject; but, if pauses are introduced at intervals, it affects the mind agreeably. And so he desired to lend variety to his work and imitated Homer. If we take up his book, we admire it to the last syllable, and always want more."

Besides diversifying his work with digressions and episodes, Herodotus adopted another epic feature, not less characteristic. Like Homer, the historian makes his characters speak. He introduces not only short and pointed conversations, but dialogues and orations of considerable length. For instance, Xerxes, Mardonius, and Artabanus make each a speech in Council before it is decided to invade Greece. I may recall the conversations of Solon with Croesus, of Xerxes with Artabanus and with Demaratus; and the speech made by the Corinthian envoy when the Spartans were considering the policy of forcing Athens to restore the Peisistratids.² If the historian were charged

¹ *Letter to Pompeius*, 3. Longinus calls Herodotus *ὑπεκρίτατος*, *De subl.* 13. 4.

² v. 92. Compare Stahl's article mentioned in the Bibliography.

with abusing this artifice by introducing in the Corinthian envoy's speech a long episode from Corinthian history, which is really quite irrelevant, he could appeal to the discourses of Phoenix and Nestor in Homer; and this case illustrates the fact that in introducing speeches he was influenced by the Ionian epic and not by the Athenian drama. It is impossible to say whether any of the older prose writers had adopted this practice, which makes the scenes vivid and the work alive. The bits of Hecataeus we possess are too brief to judge; but I may note that in one case at least he put words into the mouth of an actor.¹

The Homeric qualities of Herodotus, which communicate to his history an epic flavour, accord with the object to produce a work which like Homer should fascinate the minds of men. It was his aim to hold his audience or readers entertained; to do for his own world in prose what Homer had done for the ancient world in numbers. We cannot tell how far any of his prose predecessors had sought to make their works attractive or entertaining,² or whether the influence of epic poetry affected their method of presentation. But we may confidently say that Herodotus was the first who discerned in "modern" history the possibilities of a treatment

¹ Fr. 353 (Longinus, *De subl.* 27). Cp. Mahaffy, *Prose Writers*, i. p. 38. The statement in Marcellinus, *Vita Thuc.* 38, has not much weight.

² Thucydides i. 23 (*ἀργυρολόφου*) is not conclusive; he was thinking chiefly, perhaps only, of Herodotus.

which was epic, and not Hesiodic but Homeric, in spirit and style.

His theme, the struggle of Greece with the Orient, possessed for him a deeper meaning than the political result of the Persian war. It was the contact and collision of two different types of civilisation, of peoples of two different characters and different political institutions. In the last division of his work, where the final struggle of Persia and Greece is related, this contrast between the slavery of the barbarian and the liberty of the Greek, between oriental autocracy and Hellenic constitutionalism, is ever present and is forcibly brought out. But the contrast of Hellenic with oriental culture pervades the whole work; it informs the unity of the external theme with the deeper unity of an inner meaning. It is the keynote of the history of Herodotus. The digressions and stories which delay the action, besides their intrinsic interest, and besides their epic use as pleasant pauses, have also the value of sounding that note, and of contributing distinctly, but without emphasis or iteration, towards impressing that contrast on the reader's mind. The interview, for example, of Croesus with Solon, the self-confident Eastern potentate with the thoughtful, self-controlled Greek, strikes this chord loudly; and most of the oriental and Hellenic stories are calculated to suggest the antithesis which finds its supreme expression, and is more elaborately wrought out, in the final collision of the Persian wars.

In the execution of this conception the Herodotean work has assumed the character of a study in the history of civilisation. Just as the Homeric poems present a large and living picture of the culture of ancient Greece, so the history of Herodotus gives us panoramic views of the Hellenic civilisation of the sixth century, and describes the cultures of all the Eastern peoples who directly or indirectly come within range.

And if it is a study in the history of civilisation, we may also say that it has certain features of a universal history. It is not universal either in space or in time. Not in time; it does not attempt to go back far in Greek history, and only touches upon the ancient period incidentally. Not in space, for it hardly touches upon the Western Greeks at all, and does not include what Hecataeus would have supplied about the peoples of the Western Mediterranean. But it has the higher quality of what we mean by universal history or *Weltgeschichte*, in focussing under one point of view, and fitting into a connected narrative, the histories of the various peoples who came into relations with one another, within a given range; so that they are drawn out of their isolation and recognised to have a meaning, greater or less, in the common history of man. Within that range, which is determined by his theme, Herodotus is irreproachably comprehensive; and his book, though he never formulates the idea, is a lesson in the unity of history.

Although Herodotus does not enter upon the history of the heroic period, he has frequently occasion to refer to mythical tradition, and here he shows himself distinctly a sceptic. Not that he was a rationalist in regard to theology generally, or had any clear and consistent philosophical view. He looked upon human life as under the control of superhuman powers, who in exercising their incalculable government were prompted by motives of envy and nemesis or righteous anger, who acted to some extent on principles of justice and retribution, and who might communicate knowledge to men by means of oracles, portents, or dreams. But any further converse of gods with men, any divine appearances alleged to have happened in recent times, Herodotus is not prepared to accept, though he is never dogmatic. His philosophy was not strong enough to deny that the gods had ever carried on the sort of intercourse with men that is described in the epics, or generated human progeny; for his ultimate line between the divine and the human was not fast. But it was a great comfort for common sense and everyday experience, to push the age in which such things could happen as far back as possible. Herodotus reveals unmistakably his incredulity about all the mythical wonders in which, according to tradition, ancestors of living people, some fifteen or twenty generations back, played bright or shady parts. He accepted the genealogies, but when he got to Perseus or Heracles, he did not regard them as sons of a god.

Heracles is the son of Amphitryon, Helen is the daughter of Tyndareus. Sometimes he relates legends or tells tales involving superhuman agency, but he never takes any responsibility for them, and occasionally treats them with delicate irony. He mentions a legend of the Thessalians that the ravine through which the Peneius makes its way to the sea was wrought by Poseidon. "Their tale is plausible; and any one who thinks that Poseidon shakes the earth and that clefts produced by earthquakes are the works of that god, would on seeing this mountain-ravine ascribe it to Poseidon. For it appeared to me to be the result of an earthquake." Gibbon might have taken lessons in the art of irony from Herodotus as well as from Pascal. Consider again the admirable caution with which he speaks of the divine snake said to live on the Athenian Acropolis. "The Athenians say that a great snake lives in the Sanctuary as guardian of the citadel; and they present a honey-cake every month as to a creature existing" (*ὡς ἐστίν*). This commits him to nothing.

But though disposed to accept only what experience led him to regard as possible, in any given case, Herodotus, as I have said, did not draw theoretically a hard and fast line between the human and the divine; and he did not find ridiculous the notion that at one time he was visibly on the earth and consort of the gods. Why then did he reject the divine heroes like Heracles and Perseus?

to comprehend the reason for this scepticism which he derived from Hecataeus. I touched on this point in the first lecture. It was not due to the canons of Ionian science or to the influence of Ionian philosophy. It was due to the study of comparative mythology which had opened for Hecataeus a new perspective of the world's history. The Egyptian studies which Herodotus pursued in the footsteps of the Milesian traveller taught him that human history in that country went back for thousands of years before the age of the gods was reached. The Egyptians, for instance, had a god corresponding to Heracles, and they reckoned that 17,000 years had elapsed since he had appeared in Egypt. Hence the conclusion which Herodotus accepts that there was an ancient god Heracles, but that he must be sharply distinguished from the human son of Amphitryon, ancestor of the Heracleidae.¹ The Greek tradition that the age in which gods walked the earth was still current some eight or nine hundred years ago could not be true. For even apart from the suggestions of comparative mythology, it was inadmissible to suppose that while Egypt was in a prosaic age of mere men, Greece was trodden by deities and the scene of miracles; and the Egyptian tradition was vouched for by records. The argument demolished the received mythology of the heroic age so far as it was superhuman.

¹ Similarly Pan son of Penelope, Dionysus son of Semele, are to be distinguished from the synonymous gods.

Herodotus deserves credit for having accepted the argument, to which contemporary writers like Pherecydes were deaf; and if he asks pardon from the gods and heroes for his boldness, this does not mean that he felt hesitation or reluctance; it was merely an insincere and graceful genuflection. He was doing what a Christian preacher sometimes does, when having delivered an extremely heterodox sermon he winds up with a formal homage to orthodox dogma. Herodotus is extremely courteous, perhaps ironically courteous, to both parties. He says, as it were, to the gods and heroes, "Please, do not be angry with me,—supposing you to exist. But at this time of day, you know, one must really draw the line somewhere." On the other hand he says to the infidels who disbelieve in oracular prophecy, "I know you will think me credulous. But still in this case the evidence is so remarkably clear that I do not see my way to resisting it."¹ The mythological argument, however, of which I am speaking was not due to Herodotus himself. He may have put it in his own way, and added some points, but he owed it, as I have said, to Hecataeus. It has long been recognised that his description of Egypt is not an original work, put together exclusively from his own observations and inquiries, but largely reproduces the account which Hecataeus had given in his *Map of the World*. When Herodotus visited Egypt, he doubtless had the book of

¹ Cp. viii. 77.

Hecataeus with him, and used it like a barrister's brief for cross-examining the temple-servants and guiding him in his investigations. He added corrections and new information, but the great Ionian supplied the groundwork. He does not say so; he does not acknowledge his debt to Hecataeus; for, as you know, the ancients had very different views from the moderns about literary obligations. It was not the fashion or etiquette to name your authorities except for some special reason,—for instance, to criticize them, or to display your own learning; and you were not considered a plagiarist if you plundered somebody else's work without mentioning his name. Hecataeus brought out the importance of the Nile by the striking phrase that Egypt was the gift of the river; Herodotus adopts the phrase as if it were his own. One of the most convincing tests by which suspected plagiarism can be established is the occurrence of the same mistakes. Now Herodotus reproduces the errors which Hecataeus had committed about the hippopotamus. But there are a whole series of points in which we can trace the contact between the two writers in regard to Egypt. As for the mythology, we are left in no doubt because Herodotus names Hecataeus in this connexion. "When Hecataeus was in Thebes he told his pedigree to the priests and connected himself with a god in the sixteenth generation. And the priests did to him what they did to me, though I did not relate *my* pedigree. They took him into

the hall of the temple and showed him wooden statues of the high priests. The high priesthood descends from father to son, and each high priest sets up his own statue in his lifetime. They counted 345 statues, and they set this genealogy against that of Hecataeus, but *they* did not derive their pedigree from a god or a hero."¹

The author's motive in naming his predecessor here is, obviously, to rally him for having "given himself away" by stating his own genealogy and divine ancestry to the priests. "I was not so incautious" is the implication. But we have no right to infer that Hecataeus had not already drawn the sceptical conclusions which Herodotus explains. The sceptical words with which Hecataeus introduced his *Genealogies* show that he was not deaf to the lessons in history which he learned in Egyptian temples. His very expression, when he says that "the *logoi* of the Hellenes are absurd," not "the stories of the poets," suggests the contrast of non-Hellenes whose *logoi* he had compared. The distinction of what the Greeks say from what the Persians, Phoenicians, or Egyptians say often recurs in Herodotus, and is an echo, I believe, from Hecataeus.² But we have another proof. Herodotus cites the Egyptian priests as dating the age of the gods in relation to the reign of

¹ ii. 143.

² When Herodotus cites what αἱ Ἰωνεὶς say, it is sometimes assumed that he means Hecataeus (or some other Ionian writer). In that case he would have said αἱ Ἰωνεὶς. He is really quoting criticisms of Hecataeus αὐτοῦ αἱ Ἰωνεὶς, that is, on the current mythology of epic tradition.

Amasis. As the visit of Hecataeus to Egypt would have fallen not long after the death of Amasis, the dating indicates that Herodotus was copying the statement of Hecataeus.

The note of scepticism, perhaps we may say the characteristic note of Ionian scepticism, is struck in the first paragraphs of the Herodotean work. It opens with the statement of a theory that the wars of the Greeks and Persians were the manifestation of a secular antagonism between Asia and Europe—what our English historian, Freeman, was fond of calling the Eternal Question. This at least is the abstract way we should formulate the tenor of the statement which I may abbreviate as follows:—"The quarrel began thus: Phoenician traders carried off from Argos Io the king's daughter. Subsequently Greek adventurers from Crete carried off the princess Europa from Tyre. The next aggression came from the Greek side, when the Argonauts ravished Medea from Colchis. The Asiatic reply to this outrage was the rape of Helen by Paris. The Trojan war which followed generated in Asia a feeling of hostility to the Greeks, and the Persian war was the ultimate issue of this feeling." But the theory was not originated by Herodotus. He disavows all responsibility. It was a theory of the Persians, he tells us, and he states it only to set it aside in his ironical way.

The whole passage reads as if it might be the condensation of a friendly discussion between a

Greek and a Persian as to the responsibility for the Persian war. It was undeniable that the Persians and not the Greeks had been the aggressors; the conquest of Ionia by Cyrus had been the beginning. The Persian advocate could only remove the blame from Asia by going farther back. The summary I gave of the argument does not reproduce its flavour, and I will take the liberty of throwing it into the form of a dialogue.

Persian. The Greeks had no business in Asia. They belong to Europe, and they should have stayed there. Their expedition against Troy was the first trespass; it began their encroachments on a continent which belongs to Asiatic peoples of whom the Persians are the heirs.

Greek. Oh, but you are forgetting that on that occasion the Trojans were the offenders; Paris carried off Helen.

Persian. That was no sufficient reason; but even if it were, the act of Paris was only a reprisal for the Greek crimes of carrying off Medea and Europa. And the Asiatics were far too sensible to make a *causa belli* of such foolish elopements.

Greek. Well, if you go back so far, you must go back farther still. What about the rape of Io from Argos?

Persian. Well, yes, I admit it. That was a Phoenician business, and we Persians must allow that the Phoenicians began the mischief, though we hold you really responsible, through your folly

in taking such an affair seriously. Only fools would make war on account of such escapades. Men of the world know that, if these women were carried off, they were not more reluctant than they should be.¹

Evidently we have here an invention of Ionian *esprit*. The nature of the argument, dealing as it does entirely with Greek legend, shows that the Persian was a fictitious disputant; and the attribution of the theory to a Persian is an effect of literary subtlety quite in the manner of Voltaire. Though Herodotus thought little of this speculation about ancient wrongs, he seems to have taken it as seriously meant. "Whatever we think about all this," he says, "I will begin with the first Eastern monarch who undoubtedly committed injustice against Greece, Croesus, who subdued Ionia without provocation." But it is highly significant that he should place in the portals of his work a speculation which set mythical tradition in a ridiculous light.

The passage I have discussed is one of several that evince those acute tendencies in the Hellenic mind which culminated in the movement of the Sophists. For instance, the story of the wife of Intaphernes. She chose to save her brother rather than her husband or children, on the ground that husband and children might be replaced but she could never have another brother. That is a clever Ionian subtlety; there is no reason to suppose that it was invented in the period of the Sophists. Or

¹ Plutarch, Περὶ τῆς Ἡροδότου κακοηθείας, 2, takes this quite seriously.

take the demonstration of the power of custom by Darius. He dismayed some Greeks by the question what they would take to eat their dead fathers, and then equally horrified some Indians of a tribe who ate dead parents, by asking them how much they would take to cremate theirs. (The immense power of custom was an observation redolent of the age of the Wise Men; Pindar, whom Herodotus quotes, designated Custom as king of the world;) and the idea afterwards became the basis of sophistic theories. The story quoted by Herodotus is a drastic Ionian illustration.

Again, the famous discussion of the comparative merits of democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy by the seven Persian conspirators who overthrew the false Smerdis, belongs also to pre-sophistic speculation. It is obviously a fiction; for the discussion was appropriate in the Greek world, but was quite out of place in Persia. But it was not a fiction of Herodotus, for he states expressly (careful though he generally is not to commit himself) that these opinions were really uttered by the Persian noblemen, although some of the Greeks consider this incredible. (The historian was taken in, just as he was taken in by the persiflage about the rapes of the fair women of legend.) There can hardly be much doubt that some publicist threw his reflexions on the comparative merits of constitutions into the shape of this historical deliberation. The distinction of three fundamental types of constitution is older than the period of the Sophists; it is

recognised in an ode of Pindar not later than 473 B.C., and it was then probably a commonplace.¹ We may suspect that we have to do with some publication of the first half of the fifth century.

Now there is one feature common to these passages. Greek ideas and reflexions are transferred to an Eastern setting or connected with Persian history. Their origin was assuredly Ionian.² They betray the naïve interest of the Ionians in their masters, and show the Greek mind projecting its own reflexions into a world of which it had only a half-knowledge, with the instinct of making that world more interesting and sympathetic.³

But I must return to the scepticism of Herodotus. I have already observed that in the historical post-Homeric period the mythopoeic faculty of the Greeks did not slumber, but myth now took the form of the historical anecdote, or, as the Germans call it, "historische Novelle." Here

¹ *Pyth.* ii. 87-8.

² The clear allusion of Otanes, in his defence of democracy, to the Athenian constitution under the lot-system does not necessitate by any means an Athenian origin.—It may be conjectured that the peculiar privileged position which Otanes and his descendants were said to have held in the Persian realm suggested the idea of transferring this singularly Hellenic discussion to Susa. Otanes, it is said, was exempted from subjection to the kings because, though he was the leading organizer of the conspiracy, he resigned all claims to the throne which Darius secured. He was thus neither ruler nor subject, an anomalous position which in Greece had a sort of parallel in the membership of a democracy. Hence the suggestion that Otanes believed in democracy, and, when he did not convince his fellow-conspirators, obtained for himself personally and his family the freedom which a democracy bestows.

³ I have been here expressing dissent from the view of some critics that the passages enumerated indicate sophistic influence.

they showed consummate felicity in constructing stories with historical background, historical actors, historical motives, and possessing, many of them, a perpetual value because they are seasoned with worldly wisdom and enshrine some criticism of life. These tales differ from the old myths not only in the tendency to point a moral, but also in the circumstance that for the most part they do not involve physical impossibilities, though they may imply highly improbable coincidences, or what we may call psychical or political impossibilities. The work of Herodotus is richly furnished with these tales; he had a wonderful *flair* for a good story; and the gracious garrulity with which he tells his- torical anecdotes is one of the charms which will secure him readers till the world's end. Gibbon happily observed that Herodotus "sometimes writes for children and sometimes for philosophers"; the anecdotes he relates often appeal to both. He accepts them generally at their face value, and most of them have been taken as more or less literally true till very recent times. The story of the intercourse between Croesus and Solon was rejected as fiction only because it seemed impossible to reconcile it with chronology.¹ But we are now more sceptical about good stories of this type, and we have come to see how often they

¹ It may be held, however, that this is still an open question. A fragment of an anonymous Dialogue, discovered by Grenfell and Hunt (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, iv. No. 664), represents Solon as in Ionia when Peisistratus became tyrant (560 B.C.). If this were so, the meeting with Croesus would become chronologically possible.

are wrought upon, or woven into, some ancient *motif*, which is adapted to a historical setting. The tale of the funeral pyre of Croesus sprang from the burning of the Assyrian god Sandan; it was an up-to-date version of the legend of Sar-danapalus. The story of the ring of Polycrates turns on an old motive, the finding of something lost in a fish's belly, but its point in connexion with Polycrates has been explained only the other day. The casting of the ring into the sea was symbolic of thalassocracy; it was the same mythical ring as that of Minos, which in the poem of Bacchylides Theseus sought in the halls of Amphitrite; its recovery was fatal to the ruler of the seas.¹

Herodotus is the Homer of this later form of historical myths, in which the supernatural machinery consisted of oracles or significant dreams or marvellous coincidences. They corresponded to his wavering standard of the credible and probable, which generally excluded what seemed physically impossible. For instance, he positively refuses to believe that statues assumed a sitting posture.² He duly records the story that a certain man dived under water a distance of several miles. It was 'the private opinion of Herodotus that that man arrived in a boat.'³

¹ S. Reinach, "Xerxès et l'Hellespont," in the *Revue archéologique*, sér. 4, vol. vi. pp. 1 sqq., 1905. The symbolic marriage of the Doges of Venice with the Adriatic is the same story, and Reinach also finds the same *motif* underlying the story of Xerxes and the Hellespont (Herod. vii. 35) and the rite practised by the Phocæans, *ib.* i. 165, and by the Ionians, Aristotle, *Met.* xi. 23.

² v. 86.

³ viii. 8.

Perhaps the story of the miraculous deliverance of Delphi from the Persians¹ may be taken to illustrate the ill-defined limits of his faith. Their oracle declared to the Delphian priests that the god would himself provide for the safety of his sanctuary, and when the Persians came they were repelled, with great havoc, by lightning and by the fall of huge boulders from Parnassus. Herodotus relates this without any hint of scepticism, though he emphasizes the miraculous nature of the events. Now you observe that there is nothing impossible in the alleged physical occurrences; the marvel lies in the opportunity of the coincidence and the fulfilment of the oracular announcement. Against a marvel of this order Herodotus had no prejudice. But another miracle was said to have happened on the same occasion. Certain sacred arms, which were preserved within the shrine and were too sacred to be profaned by human touch, were suddenly discovered lying in a heap in front of the temple. A rationalist—Euripides, for instance—would find no difficulty in such an occurrence, assuming the fact to be certain. Herodotus accepts it as a genuine marvel, without any suggestion that human agency, notwithstanding Delphic asseverations to the contrary, might have been concerned in the matter; and the notable thing is that he considers it less wonderful than the intervention of the physical forces which overwhelmed the Persians. If such a phenomenon as

¹ viii. 36-39.

the removal of the arms presented itself to us for criticism—supposing the fact were assured beyond a doubt, and supposing human agency were absolutely excluded by the circumstances—we should regard it as something incomparably more extraordinary than the unquestionably wonderful coincidence of the storm of lightning.¹ Here, in fact, Herodotus has failed to draw the line at what is physically impossible. The truth is that his faith and doubt are alike instinctive; he had never thought the problem out for himself; he had never clearly defined the border between the domains of the credible and the incredible. And so in this episode he has no sooner given us a lesson in faith than he relapses into reserve. For there was yet another marvel to be told. It was said that two armed warriors of superhuman stature pursued the flying Persians and dealt death among their broken ranks. But Herodotus carefully avoids the responsibility of accepting this story. He gives it on the authority of the Persians; he qualifies it by the phrase “as I am informed”; and he adds that the Delphians identified the two warriors with local heroes.

The contrast of the *naïveté* of Herodotus with his scepticism imparts to his epic a very piquant quality. Credulity alternates with a cautious reserve, which is especially noticeable when he is

¹ I do not add the fall of the rocks; for this might have been engineered. The rocks were shown to Herodotus in the temple of Athena Pronaia (ch. 39); this was just the sort of evidence which would impress him.

aware of more than one version of an occurrence. He is an expert in the art of not committing himself. He says in one passage, “I am bound to state what is said, but I am not bound to believe.”¹ Of the tale that Zalmoxis lived for three years in a subterranean chamber, he professes agnosticism; “I do not disbelieve nor do I absolutely believe it.”² Occasionally he criticizes and rejects a story, for instance the charge against the Alcmaeonids of treachery at Marathon; but his common practice is to state conflicting accounts and leave the matter there. This method, as it happens, is much more satisfactory to a modern critic than if Herodotus had selected one version, or had attempted to blend different versions together. But it shows him in the light of a collector of historical material, and an accomplished artist in arranging and presenting it, rather than as what we mean by a historian, who considers it his business to sift the evidence, and decide, if possible, between conflicting accounts.

We are often tempted to think of Herodotus as an Ionian, although he was not a native of Ionia. He wrote in Ionic; and he cannot be severed from the school of the Ionian historians, to whom his work owed a great deal more than appears on the surface. But if he had heard himself described as an Ionian writer, he would have been vastly indignant. He is at great pains to dissociate himself from Ionia and Ionian interests. In his

¹ vii. 152.

² iv. 96.

account of the Ionian revolt and of the part which the Ionians played in the war with Xerxes, he shows a hardly veiled contempt for a people which, as he says, had been thrice enslaved. He tells us that the name "Ionian was one of no great repute." He is careful to record, without any comment, the Scythian opinion that the Ionians were the most cowardly and unmanly people in the world.¹ He takes frequent opportunities of criticizing adversely the views of Ionian writers. Now I think we may say that this antagonistic attitude was not due entirely or principally to the fact that he belonged by birth to Dorian Halicarnassus. He does indeed insist on the difference of Dorian and Ionian, but the contrast on which his anti-Ionian feeling depended was one within the Ionian race itself—the distinction of the Athenians from the Ionians of Asia. We saw that Herodotus was at Athens before he went to Italy, and his connexion with Athens impressed its mark on his political views. He was a warm admirer of the Athenians, and looked with favour and enthusiasm on their empire. He participated in their experiment of colonising Thurii, became a citizen of their daughter-city. But even if we had not this external proof of his political sympathy, his work testifies to it abundantly. The whole account not only of the Marathonian campaign but of the war with Xerxes is one that redounds to the glory of Athens and flatters Athenian pride. It is, in fact, written mainly from the Athenian point of

¹ iv. 142.

view, and represents largely, though not exclusively, the Athenian version. ¶ The Spartans and the part they took in the war are often handled with irony—for example, they were always arriving too late because they were celebrating a feast. | The Corinthians are treated almost with malice. The story would have had a very different complexion if it had been written in the Spartan interest; and even though we have no philo-Spartan historian of the time, a very good case has been made out for the view that Sparta showed as true heroism as Athens.¹ Further, Herodotus takes opportunities to set forth the mythistorical claims of Athens to a hegemony of the Greeks, and represents Athens as asserting those claims at the time of the Persian war.² This is an anachronism. At that time Sparta was admittedly the leader and dictator; Athens was a member of the Peloponnesian confederacy, and the strife for supremacy had not begun. Thus the situation is construed in the light of the sequel; history is distorted in the interest of politics; and the grounds of the claim to hegemony which Herodotus ascribes to the Athenians of that time are the stock arguments which we find used in Athenian funeral orations to illustrate and justify the Athenian empire. In the Epitaphios which Pericles pronounced over the citizens killed in the Samian war (469 B.C.) these arguments from myth and history were doubtless marshalled; and that Herodotus was present and

¹ By E. Meyer.

² vii. 161; ix. 27.

listened to it is a conjecture of Eduard Meyer, which has some plausibility, since we find that a famous picturesque phrase used by the orator, likening the dead soldiers to the spring taken out of the year, was adopted by the historian and placed in a new setting.¹

Admiration for the Athenian empire in the third quarter of the fifth century meant admiration for Pericles, the chief inspirer of Athenian policy, and the sympathy of Herodotus with Pericles is revealed in the single passage in which he mentions him, where he records the anecdote of his mother's dream that a lion would be born to her.² It is revealed, too, in sympathy with the Alcmaeonid family.³

His strong phil-Athenian feelings cannot be disconnected from his tone of prejudice and disparagement in treating the Ionians. When the immediate danger of Persian subjection was over, and the Ionian cities which had been leagued with Athens as an equal were brought to submit to her as a mistress, there was little love lost. The Ionian record of the war was one which would have failed to satisfy Athenian patriots as certainly

¹ vii. 162.

² vi. 121.

³ v. 71 rests on the Alcmaeonid tradition. It has been suggested that this sympathy of Herodotus may explain his curious treatment of Themistocles. To this statesman Athens chiefly owed the decisive rôle she played in the war, and though his good counsels are recognised, he is also treated in an unfriendly spirit of detraction, and represented as an intriguer rather than as a statesman. This looks as if the memory of Themistocles were under a cloud, and this partial obscuration were reflected in Herodotus. Afterwards, Thucydides made a point of doing him justice.

as the Herodotean narrative must have failed to please the Ionians. Herodotus expressly argued that the Athenians were "truly the saviours of Greece";¹ but he did more: he gave currency and authority to a story which embodied Athenian tradition and justified Athenian empire, and with such cunning and tact that it has been permanently effective. His admiration for Athens was bound up with his belief in democratic freedom. Until the Peisistratids were overthrown, he says, Athens was an ordinary undistinguished city; but when the Athenians abolished the tyranny and won their freedom, they became by far the first state in Greece.²

Herodotus then was a phil-Athenian democrat. If the story is true that the Athenians bestowed on him ten talents (about 12,000 dollars) in recognition of the merits of his work, it was a small remuneration for the service he rendered to the renown of their city.³ But that he did this service does not degrade his work into anything that could be described as a partisan publication in the offensive sense. It was pragmatical; it reflected the author's political beliefs, and exhibited a strong bias in the preference given to Athenian sources. But it was the work of a historian who cannot help being partial; it was not the work of a partisan who becomes a historian for the sake of his cause.

¹ vii. 139.

² *μακρῶ πύρρου*, v. 78.

³ Plutarch, *Περί τῆς Ἡροδότου κακοφύειας*, 36. There is nothing incredible in the story that he recited part of his work at Athens c. 445 B.C. His work then consisted of the last three Books.

Something more particular must be said about the Herodotean story of the Persian invasion. A self-flattering version of the war had become a tradition at Athens. We have an early sketch of it, in a poetical form, in the *Persae* of Aeschylus (472 B.C.); but Herodotus was probably the first to write it down in a historical form, some twenty years later. Oral traditions (gathered at Athens, Sparta, Delphi, and elsewhere) appear profusely in his work, as every one knows. But he could not have constructed his history of the course of the war from oral traditions alone, or composed such a narrative of events, in which he was too young to take part, thirty years or so afterwards, without the help of some earlier record. We have seen that he depended on Hecataeus for Egypt, though this was just one of the portions of his work where autopsy, and information collected orally, might have sufficed. There is little doubt that Hecataeus was his main guide for early oriental history, and that the same writer was also used for the descriptions of Scythia and Libya, along with other geographical works of the Ionian school. When we come to the invasion of Darius and Xerxes, we find, as we might expect, clear indications that Herodotus here too had a written guide. Throughout the narrative, in the last three Books, of the events after Marathon to the end of the second invasion, the historian has naturally to pass backwards and forwards from the Persians to the Greeks. Now there is a remarkable contrast

between the character of the narrative when the writer takes us to Susa or to the Persian camp, and when he transports us to the cities or tents of the Greeks. In the accounts of what the Greeks did, we are constantly confronted with more than one story, representing various oral traditions which reflect different local interests. But when we follow the movements of the Persians, we have a continuous chronological narrative, by no means always credible, but all of a piece and marked by enumerations and details which point to a more or less contemporary written source, and a source of which Persian, not Greek, history was formally the subject. This source contributes the main thread of the narrative, round which Herodotus has wrought all the additional supplementary and illustrative material he managed to collect. The chronology of Persian events after Marathon is orderly and distinct, contrasting with the uncertainties which beset the digressions on Greek history, such as that on the Spartan kings Cleomenes and Demaratus. Now we know of a history of the Persian war prior to Herodotus, the book of Dionysius of Miletus. I spoke of it in the last lecture, and I also pointed out that the Persian history of Charon of Lamp-sacus may, not improbably, have come down to the invasion of Xerxes. Either of these books would satisfy the condition that the war was treated as an episode in Persian, not Greek, history, so that it is not unlikely

that one of these may have been the source of Herodotus.¹

Into the warp thus furnished by an older writer is wrought a woof of Athenian tradition, varied here and there by tissue from other sources. And it is noteworthy how in the last three Books, comprising the invasion of Xerxes, the imminence of a divine direction of human affairs is strongly accentuated. The sceptical tone is less apparent here than in other parts of the work. From the beginning of the seventh Book the dominant note is changed, at least this is the impression I receive; the atmosphere becomes charged with a certain solemnity; it is, I think we might say, rather Athenian than Ionian. Is this difference due to the influence of those Athenian dramas which had glorified the subject, the tragedies of Phrynichus and Aeschylus?

The catastrophe which befalls the Persian expedition is not coincided as the work of jealous gods annoyed by the conspicuous wealth or success of mere mortals. It is rather a divine punishment of the insolence and rashness that are often born of prosperity. This is the Aeschylean doctrine:

*Ζεὺς τοὶ κολαστῆς τῶν ὑπερκόμπων ἄγαν
φρονημάτων ἐπέστην εὐθύνος βασιῶς.*²

¹ So Lehmann-Haupt. There is little evidence for a source of this kind in the history of the years 500-490 B.C. = Books v. vi. Chronology is conspicuously absent, but the few dates we get suggest a Persian history as their source (Charon or Dionysius?). See vi. 18, 49 *ad init.*, 43 *ad init.*, 46 *ad init.*

² *Persae* 827. In *Agam.* 749, Aeschylus rejects the vulgar doctrine (*παραλόφωτος ἐν βίωσις γέρον λόγος*) that wealth, inordinately increased, necessarily leads to unappeasable woe.

Zeus is a judge who visits heavily
All whose self-glorious spirit vaults too high.

This Athenian influence in the last Books of Herodotus accords with my conjecture that Athens was his headquarters during a part of the ten years or so which elapsed between his banishment and his sailing for Italy.

Herodotus then made a considerable use of older writers¹—of whom he only names Hecataeus, and usually for the purpose of hinting something uncomplimentary. As the works of these writers have perished, it is very difficult to form a fair estimate of the achievements of Herodotus himself as a historical investigator—apart from his transcendent gifts as an artist and man of letters. His great service consisted probably in the collection of unwritten material concerning modern Greek history; this floating matter he wrought with masterly skill into a framework of facts constructed by predecessors. His maxims of historical criticism may be set down as three: (1) Suspect superhuman and miraculous occurrences, which contradict ordinary experience. But this, in his application

¹ A complete library of Greek prose works on history would have been very small in 450 B.C., and it would not have been very much larger in 480 B.C. It is difficult to suppose that Herodotus would not have been acquainted with all the historical literature that had been published, or that the works of Dionysius and Charon could have escaped him. Besides Hecataeus the only historian to whom he refers is Scylax (iv. 44), but he mentions him as an explorer and not as an author, though obviously his brief account of the exploration is taken from the report of Scylax. Could he have failed to know the book of this Carian writer on Heracleides of Mylasa? It is remarkable that he ignores the part played by Heracleides of Artemisium (see Sosylus fragment, mentioned above, p. 25). Heracleides is mentioned v. 121. The geographical works of the Ionians are referred to in iv. 36.

of it, leaves a wide room for portents, and it does not cover oracles and dreams. (2) When you are confronted by conflicting evidence or differing versions of the same event, keep an open mind; *audi alteram partem*. But this does not save him from a biased acceptance of Athenian tradition. (3) Autopsy and first-hand oral information are superior to stories at second hand, whether written or oral.¹ This tends to take the naïve form, "I know, for I was there myself," and it placed the historian at the mercy of the vergers and guides in Egyptian temples.

I may illustrate by a couple of examples how Herodotus was sometimes unfortunate in his information gathered on the spot. When he visited Egypt he saw on the great Pyramid inscriptions which disappeared in the Middle Ages. Probably they were of religious import, appropriate to a royal tomb. But Herodotus tells us that they enumerated the ~~costly~~ money which were expended on the ~~columns~~ and leeks consumed by the workmen who built the pyramid. This was the interpretation with which the guide satisfied the Greek traveller's curiosity.² The other instance

¹ Compare, e.g., ii. 99. I have little doubt that Herodotus visited and examined the battlefield of Plataea. Our difficulties in reconstructing the battle (elucidated by Grundy, Woodhouse, and Macan) from his description are not an objection. We may remember that the account of the battle of Trasimene by Polybius, who had visited the place and was a master of military science, lends itself to different interpretations. The features of the Pass of Thermopylae as described by Herodotus can be recognised by any traveller to-day; but he can hardly have been there, for he orients it N.S. instead of E.W.

² See Wiedemann, *ad* Her. ii. 125.

I will quote appertains to Babylonian history. Herodotus saw at Babylon the great buildings of a king, with whose name even those of us who have not studied Babylonian annals are probably familiar—King Nebuchadnezzar. He is correctly informed as to the time at which they were built—five generations after the reign of Queen Samsuramat whom he calls Semiramis. But autopsy did not keep him from falling into a droll error about the potentate who built them. Nebuchadnezzar has had rather bad luck. In the book of Daniel he is metamorphosed into a beast of the field; in Herodotus he is forced to masquerade as a woman. We have to discover his identity under the mask of Queen Nitocris.¹

We must give full credit to Herodotus for having recognised the principles of criticism which I have indicated, though his application of them is unsatisfactory and sporadic. They are maxims of permanent validity; properly qualified they lie at the basis of the modern developments of what is called historical methodology. But notwithstanding the profession of these axioms of common sense, he was in certain ways so lacking in common sense that parts of his work might seem to have been written by a precocious child. He undertook to write the history of a great war; but he did not possess the most elementary knowledge of the conditions of warfare. His fantastic state-

¹ This has been shown by Lehmann-Haupt in his paper on Semiramis (see Bibliography). Herodotus is similarly unlucky about Mithra. He makes him a goddess, i. 131.

ment of the impossible numbers of the army of Xerxes exhibits an incompetence which is almost incredible and is alone enough to stamp Herodotus as more of an epic poet than a historian. It matters not whether he worked out the arithmetic for himself or accepted it entirely on authority; this is a case in which to accept is as heinous as to invent. Heinous for a historian; and if we judge Herodotus by the lowest standard as a historian of a war, this case invalidates his claim to competence. But as an epic story-teller he escapes triumphantly. His catalogue of the Persian host is a counterpart to the Catalogue of the *Iliad*:

μύθον δ' ὡς ἑρ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπιπαραμένους κατέλεξας.

His incompetence in military matters is shown, in another way, in his account of the campaign of Thermopylae and Artemisium. The key to their actions lay—and it required no technical training or experience to discern this—in the close connexion and interdependence of the Persian land army and the Persian fleet, a fact which governed the Greek measures for defence. Herodotus, though he mentions several things which imply this and enable us more or less to penetrate the strategy of the combatants, fails completely to realise the situation and treats the naval and the land operations as if they were independent.

In his relation of the Persian war, Herodotus does not neglect the chronology, and it is perhaps as satisfactory as we could expect. But it may

fairly be questioned whether the credit for this is not to be imputed to an earlier writer—Dionysius or Charon—whom he had the discretion to follow. It is significant that he does not give any formal date which a Greek reader could easily interpret, until he mentions, almost by the way, that the Persian invasion of Attica occurred in the archonship of Calliades.¹ But while chronology fares pretty well in the last three Books, the whole work shows that, while the author copied the dates which his sources supplied, he never attempted to grapple with the chronological difficulties of Greek history, although so many of the episodes which he related raised the problem of synchronizing Hellenic tradition with oriental records. We have no reason to suppose that he avoided the problem because he judged it insoluble; his indifference to it is another manifestation of his epic, quasi-historical mind.

The first phase of Greek historiography culminates and achieves its glory in Herodotus. He reflects its features—its eager research into geography and ethnography (the indispensable groundwork of history), and its predominant interest in the East. He adopts from Hecataeus a critical attitude towards the ancient myths, aided by a rudimentary comparative mythology. But these

¹ He signalises the years 490-481 by reference to the year of Marathon, but he does not mention the eponymous archon of that year. Even if he had done so a reader would have required a list of Attic archons, in order to follow his dates intelligently. Herodotus does not assist his readers by reckoning back from a fixed point which they could realise. Thucydides saw that without such a point dates were entirely in the air, and he dated backward from the first year of the Peloponnesian war.

elements are transfigured by the magic of his epic art and the spell of a higher historical idea. He was the Homer of the Persian war, and that war originally inspired him. His work presents a picture of sixth-century civilisation; and it is also a universal history in so far as it gathers the greater part of the known world into a narrative which is concentrated upon a single issue. It is fortunate for literature that he was not too critical; if his criticism had been more penetrating and less naïve, he could not have been a second Homer. He belonged entirely in temper and mentality to the period before the sophistic illumination, which he lived to see but not to understand. Before his death, the first truly critical historian of the world had begun to compose. Our attention will next be claimed by Thucydides.

LECTURE III

THUCYDIDES

§ 1. *His life and the growth of his work*

THUCYDIDES belonged by descent to the princely family of Thrace into which Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, had married. He was thus a cousin of the statesman Cimon, and he inherited a rich estate with gold mines in Thrace. And so, while he was an Athenian citizen and connected with a distinguished family of Athens, he had an independent *piéd à terre* in a foreign country. His mind was moulded under the influence of that intellectual revolution which we associate with the comprehensive name of the Sophists, the illumination which was flooding the educated world of Hellas with the radiance of reason. Without accepting the positive doctrines of any particular teacher, he learned the greatest lesson of these thinkers: he learned to consider and criticize facts, unprejudiced by authority and tradition. He came to be at home in the "modern" way of thinking, which analysed politics and ethics, and applied logic to every-