

Surveys in the Classics 31, Oxford, 2001), and of several articles on the Greek and Roman historians. He is currently at work on a book on Hellenistic historiography.

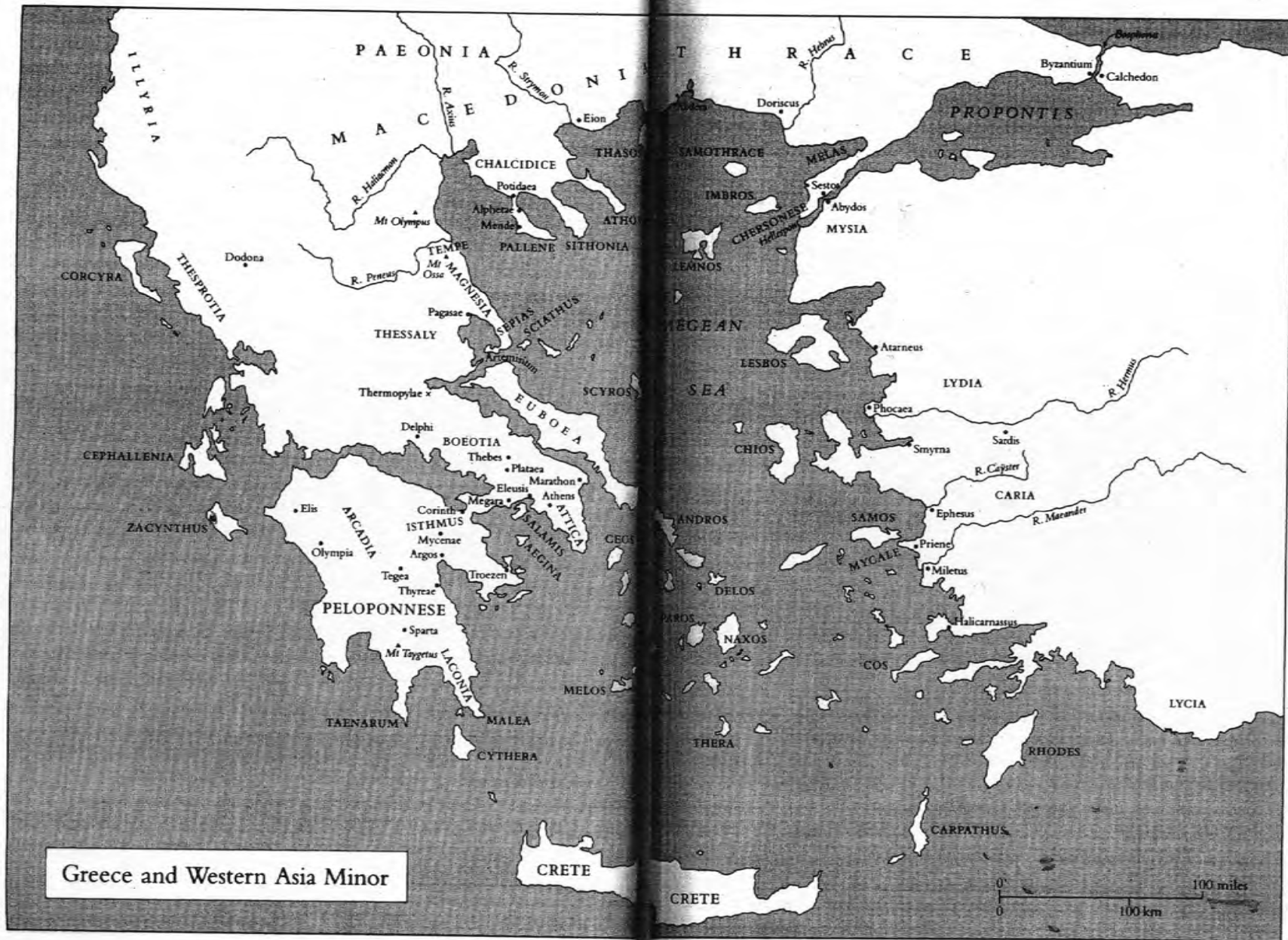
HERODOTUS

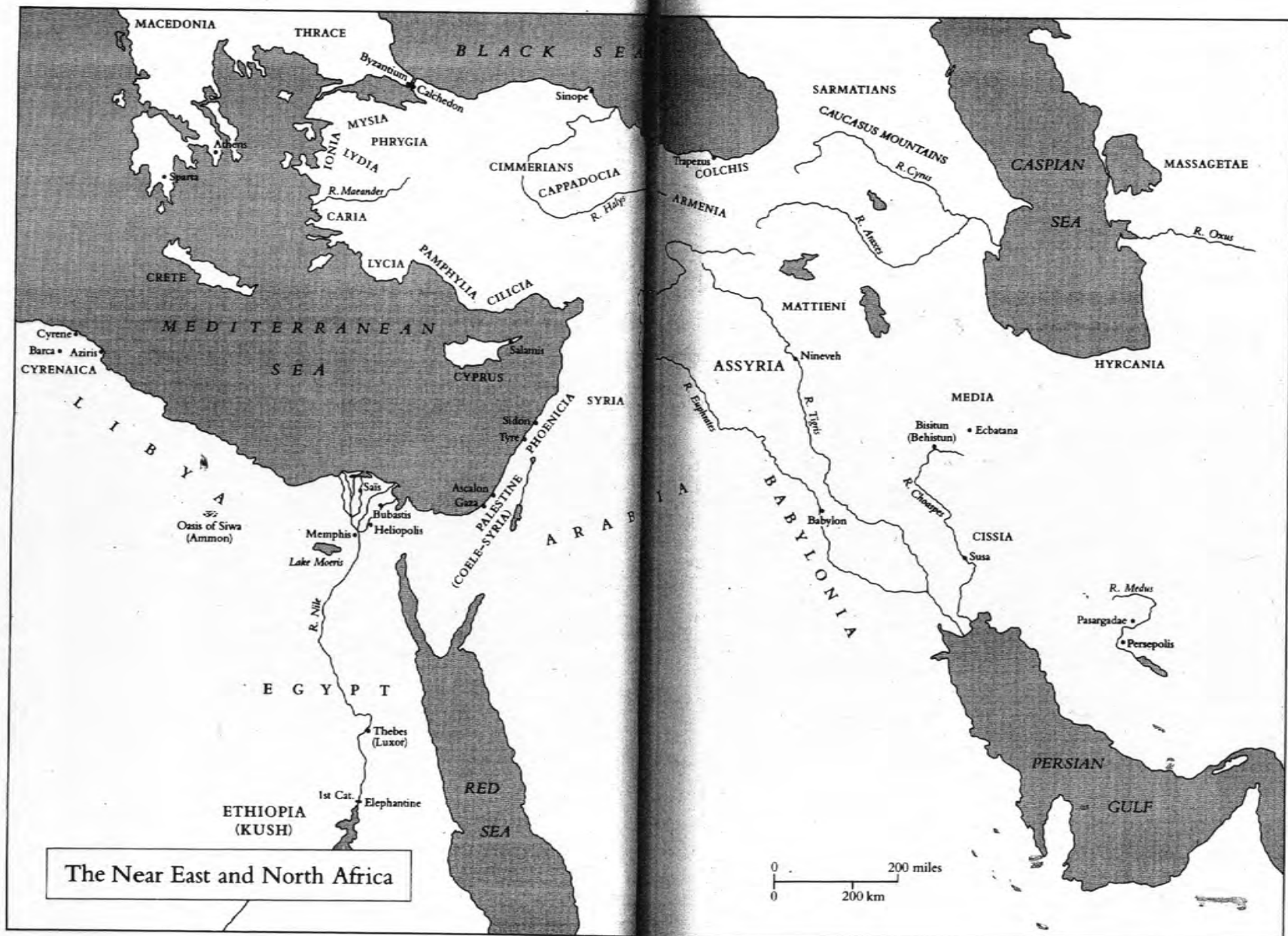
The Histories

Translated by AUBREY DE SÉLINCOURT
Revised with Introduction and Notes by
JOHN MARINCOLA

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author in his own right. All dates in the book, unless otherwise noted, are BCE.

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J.M.

Introduction

1. HERODOTUS' LIFE AND WORK

Not much is known of the life of Herodotus and the few items that have come down to us are not above suspicion. A late source, the eleventh-century Byzantine lexicon known as the *Suda*, preserves a number of biographical details: that Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, the son of Lyxes and Dryo, and the brother of Theodorus; that he was the nephew or cousin of an epic poet Panyassis, who wrote on historical themes (such as the foundings of Ionian cities); that he was exiled by the tyrant of Halicarnassus, Lygdamis, to the island of Samos, where he learned the Ionic dialect of Greek (in which his *Histories* are composed); that he afterwards returned to Halicarnassus, assisted in expelling Lygdamis, and then, seeing himself hated by his fellow citizens, went into exile and joined in the foundation of Thurii, an Athenian-led pan-Hellenic colony in southern Italy; and that he died there or perhaps in Macedonia at Pella.

It is impossible to say how much of this is reliable. We know that the biographies composed of ancient poets were made up largely of inferences from remarks made in their writings, and much the same thing may have happened in Herodotus' case.¹ He may thus have been thought a tyrant-slayer because of his obvious love of freedom as evidenced in his work, and Samos was assumed to be the place of his exile because he shows a great deal of knowledge about the island and its monuments, and is favourably disposed towards the Samians in his work. (Indeed, the assertion that he learned Ionic Greek there is patently absurd, since his own Dorian community of Halicarnassus

used the Ionic dialect for its public inscriptions.) Finally, the tradition of exile may be an explanation for the wide travels that Herodotus portrays in his work; and since exile was not uncommon for historians of later times (Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, to name a few), this may have been retrojected onto Herodotus, the 'father of history'.²

We hear that Herodotus approached both the Thebans and the Corinthians to request their patronage for his work but was rebuffed, and in return for this he wrote disparagingly of them in his history. By contrast, we are told, the people of Athens were so delighted with his work that they voted to give him the sum of ten talents – a fortune – from public funds to show their gratitude. These remarks, with their anachronistic notions of patronage and local pride, clearly come from a later time and are meant to explain why Herodotus wrote favourably towards one group and not another. Since ancient critics always maintained a keen eye for bias, it was not difficult for them to suppose that Herodotus' treatment of the participants was directly related to how he himself had been treated by them.³

A sojourn in Athens is also part of the traditional biography. In Athens Herodotus is said to have been a friend of the tragedian Sophocles: Plutarch records a poem that the playwright wrote for the historian and scholars have noted several correspondences between Herodotus' work and Sophocles' plays. There is a strong pro-Athenian bias in Herodotus' narrative, either in explicit praise or in implicit acceptance of the Athenian viewpoint in his evaluations of other states. Yet while there is no reason to doubt that he spent time in Athens, this does not mean (as is so often claimed) that he must have been friendly with the Alcmaeonids, a prominent Athenian clan, or that he must have admired and approved of the policies of Pericles, the Alcmaeonid who enjoyed an unparalleled influence in democratic Athens from 445 to his death in 429 BCE.⁴

Herodotus himself states that he came from Halicarnassus, a Dorian town on a promontory in the southwest corner of Asia Minor, the western coast of modern Turkey, which in antiquity was filled with Greek cities and Greek culture. There is abundant evidence that Halicarnassus, although a Greek city, had close

contact with the non-Greek Carians who occupied the hinterlands and were subject to Persia. It has been thought, not improbably, that this less insular atmosphere influenced the young Herodotus, broadening his inquisitiveness and tolerance towards Persians and non-Greeks in general. The exact date of his birth is unknown; the ancients put it in 484 and the date, although conjecture, is nevertheless not likely to be far off.

Herodotus gives every indication in his work of having travelled widely throughout the Mediterranean. He claims explicitly to have journeyed as far south as Elephantine at the first cataract of the Nile (II. 29), and as far north as the Black Sea area in his research on the Scythians (IV. 76–81). He says he visited Dodona in northwest Greece (II. 55), Zacynthus off the western coast of the Peloponnese (IV. 195) and Metapontum in southern Italy (IV. 15). He inspected temples in Phoenicia and at Thasos (II. 44), observed the remnants of a battle in the Egyptian Delta (III. 12), inspected monuments in Palestine (II. 106) and viewed the majestic Thessalian plain (VII. 129). By other remarks not as explicit, he strongly suggests that he travelled as far east as Babylon and as far west as Cyrene in Libya (I. 193; IV. 154). He saw inscriptions in Theban temples (V. 59), and his descriptions of the treasures at Delphi and Miletus indicate that he saw them for himself. Elsewhere he uses geographical comparisons that demonstrate his knowledge of Athens and the Peloponnese as well as Asia Minor (not surprisingly) and even the 'heel' of Italy. Given the difficulty, danger and expense of travel in the time of Herodotus, we should be justified in concluding that he must have been from the upper class. Although some scholars doubt the extent of Herodotus' travels (see below, pp. xxix–xxxi), the general opinion is that he was a man of indefatigable character, who spent many years researching the material that he eventually brought together in his *Histories*.

What audience Herodotus envisioned and what form the 'publication' of his work took are not easy to determine.⁵ He certainly saw himself as writing for a pan-Hellenic audience, and although better informed about some states than others, he presents in his work numerous perspectives and traditions without strict allegiance to any school of thought and for the

most part avoiding the promotion of any one group's political claims. His work is not in any sense provincial, and this is even more impressive when we consider the general insularity of the individual Greek city-states. The form in which he communicated his researches was the recital or public performance. Since he lived in a largely oral society where the level of functional literacy cannot have been high,⁶ most would have known of his work from oral presentations or performances. We may imagine that Herodotus gave readings from his work at religious festivals or in smaller intellectual gatherings such as symposia, of the sort familiar to us from Plato's *Symposium*.⁷ In the earlier books it is possible to see independent and almost detachable 'performance pieces', in which the author, with great emphasis, criticizes previous treatments of a subject and with much fanfare substitutes his own solution to a problem: the discussion of the Nile's inundation (II. 19-27) or the revisionary account of the Trojan War (II. 113-20) are good examples. This kind of performance, which finds parallels in the philosophers and medical writers of Herodotus' time, is part of the intellectual ferment of the fifth century, where reciters would lay claim to wisdom and openly debate issues before citizens and professionals.⁸

There is some uncertainty whether the *Histories* as we have them are complete. The chief grounds for doubt are three unfulfilled promises: two refer to a history of Assyria (I. 106; 184) and one to the capture of a Greek traitor (VII. 213). The failure to fulfil the promises may, however, be nothing more than lapses of memory, since in Herodotus' day the physical act of writing researches down would have involved long and cumbersome rolls of papyrus, and it would have been difficult to go back and revise once he had begun. Moreover, in supporting the argument that the work is finished, one might adduce the ending, which has a strong sense of thematic closure.⁹

The date of Herodotus' death is unknown. He makes several unmistakable references to the Peloponnesian War, the great war between Athens and Sparta that lasted from 431 to 404, with a period of nominal but suspect peace (the so-called 'Peace of Nicias') from 421 to about 414. The latest datable reference

in his work is to the year 430, and a remark that he makes about the Athenian *deme* of Declea (IX. 73 with n.) implies that he was probably not alive in 413 (unless we assume that only this passage is unrevised). The traditional date for his death is some time between 430 and 425. The latter date is chosen because it is assumed that a passage from Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (performed in 425) is a parody of Herodotus, and that therefore the work must have been published before that date. Others find allusions to Herodotus in the same poet's *Birds* (performed 414) and suggest therefore that the *Histories* were published around 415. These assume, then, that Herodotus lived through the first part of the Peloponnesian War (known as the Archidamian War) and died during the Peace of Nicias, which would put his death somewhere between 421 and 415. Such notions as 'publication' are probably anachronistic, and both passages attest only that Herodotus' work was well known in Athens, no doubt as a result of his own reading of it there.¹⁰

Whatever date we assign to his death, it is more important to recognize that Herodotus was doing most of his research, writing and performances from the 450s up to the 420s. This was a time not only of exciting inquiry carried out in many fields (some of which finds its place in Herodotus' own work) but also of increasing conflict between Sparta and Athens, which were then the two great powers in the Greek world – the powers, in fact, that had combined not so long before, in 490 and again in 480-479, to repel the Persians and ensure Greek freedom. It was in this environment, and perhaps because of it, that Herodotus decided to look back from his time of growing tensions and internecine strife to an era when the major powers and many of the Greeks had united, even if only temporarily and uneasily, in a common and glorious enterprise.¹¹

BOOK ONE

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds – some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians – may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other.¹

Learned Persians put the responsibility for the quarrel on the Phoenicians. These people came originally from the so-called Red Sea;² and as soon as they had penetrated to the Mediterranean and settled in the country where they are today, they took to making long trading voyages. Loaded with Egyptian and Assyrian goods, they called at various places along the coast, including Argos, in those days the most important place in the land now called Hellas.³

Here in Argos they displayed their wares, and five or six days later when they were nearly sold out, a number of women came down to the beach to see the fair. Amongst these was the king's daughter, whom Greek and Persian writers agree in calling Io, daughter of Inachus. These women were standing about near the vessel's stern, buying what they fancied, when suddenly the Phoenician sailors passed the word along and made a rush at them. The greater number got away; but Io and some others were caught and bundled aboard the ship, which cleared at once and made off for Egypt.

This, according to the Persian account (the Greeks have a different story), was how Io came to Egypt; and this was the first in a series of unjust acts.

Later on some Greeks, whose name the Persians fail to record – they were probably Cretans – put into the Phoenician port of

Tyre and carried off the king's daughter Europa, thus giving them tit for tat.

For the next outrage it was the Greeks again who were responsible. They sailed in an armed merchantman to Aea in Colchis on the river Phasis, and, not content with the regular business which had brought them there, they abducted the king's daughter Medea. The king sent to Greece demanding reparations and his daughter's return; but the only answer he got was that the Greeks had no intention of offering reparation, having received none themselves for the abduction of Io from Argos.⁴

3 The accounts go on to say that some forty or fifty years afterwards Paris, the son of Priam, was inspired by these stories to steal a wife for himself out of Greece, being confident that he would not have to pay for the venture any more than the Greeks had done. And that was how he came to carry off Helen.⁵

The first idea of the Greeks after the rape was to send a demand for satisfaction and for Helen's return. The demand was met by a reference to the seizure of Medea and the injustice of expecting satisfaction from people to whom they themselves had refused it, not to mention the fact that they had kept the girl.

4 Thus far there had been nothing worse than woman-stealing on both sides; but for what happened next the Greeks, they say, were seriously to blame; for it was the Greeks who were, in a military sense, the aggressors. Abducting young women, in their opinion, is not, indeed, a lawful act; but it is stupid after the event to make a fuss about avenging it. The only sensible thing is to take no notice; for it is obvious that no young woman allows herself to be abducted if she does not wish to be. The Asiatics, according to the Persians, took the seizure of the women lightly enough, but not so the Greeks: the Greeks, merely on account of a girl from Sparta, raised a big army, invaded Asia and destroyed the empire of Priam. From that root sprang their belief in the perpetual enmity of the Grecian world towards them – because the Persians claim Asia and the barbarian races dwelling in it as their own, Europe and the Greek states being, in their opinion, quite separate and distinct from them.

Such then is the Persian story. In their view it was the capture of Troy that first made them enemies of the Greeks. 5

As to Io, the Phoenicians do not accept the Persians' account; they deny that they took her to Egypt by force. On the contrary, the girl while she was still in Argos went to bed with the ship's captain, found herself pregnant, and, ashamed to face her parents, sailed away voluntarily to escape exposure.

So much for what Persians and Phoenicians say; and I have no intention of passing judgment on its truth or falsity. I prefer to rely on my own knowledge, and to point out who it was in actual fact that first injured the Greeks; then I will proceed with my history, telling the story as I go along of small cities of men no less than of great. For most of those which were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time. Knowing, therefore, that human prosperity never abides long in the same place, I shall pay attention to both alike. 6

probable

Croesus of Lydia, son of Alyattes, was tyrant of all the peoples to the west of the river Halys, which runs northward into the Black Sea and forms the boundary between Cappadocia and Paphlagonia. He was the first foreigner so far as we know to come into direct contact with the Greeks, both in the way of conquest and alliance, forcing tribute from Ionians, Aeolians, and Asiatic Dorians, and forming a pact of friendship with the Lacedaemonians. Before Croesus' time all the Greeks had been free; for the earlier Cimmerian attack on Ionia was not a conquest, but a mere plundering raid.⁷ 6

The sovereignty of Lydia, which had belonged to the Heraclids, passed into the family of Croesus – the Mermnadae – in the following way. Candaules, king of Sardis (the Greeks call him Myrsilus),⁸ was descended from Alcaeus, son of Heracles. His father was Myrsus, and he was the last of the Heraclids to reign at Sardis, the first being Agron, son of Ninus, grandson of Belus, and great-grandson of Alcaeus. Before the time of Agron, the reigning house had been of the family of Lydus, son of Atys: hence the name 'Lydians', the people being previously known as Maeonians. These princes turned over the management of affairs to the Heraclids, the descendants of Heracles and a 7

slave-girl belonging to Iardanus; the Heraclids later had their power confirmed by an oracle. They reigned for twenty-two generations, a period in all of five hundred and five years, son succeeding father right down the line to Candaules, son of Myrsus.

- 8 Now Candaules conceived a passion for his own wife, and thought she was the most beautiful woman on earth. So, having in his bodyguard a fellow he particularly liked whose name was Gyges, son of Dascylus, Candaules not only discussed his most important business with him, but even used to make him listen to eulogies of his wife's beauty.

One day the king (who was doomed to a bad end) said to Gyges: 'It appears you don't believe me when I tell you how lovely my wife is. Well, a man always believes his eyes better than his ears; so do as I tell you – contrive to see her naked.'

Gyges gave a cry of horror. 'Master,' he said, 'what an improper suggestion! Do you tell me to look at the queen when she has no clothes on? No, no: "when she takes off her clothing, she does away with her shame" – you know what they say of women. Let us learn from experience. Right and wrong were distinguished long ago – and I'll tell you one thing that is right: a man should mind his own business. I do not doubt that your wife is the most beautiful of women; so for goodness' sake do not ask me to behave contrary to custom.'

- 9 Thus he did his utmost to decline the king's invitation, because he was afraid of what might happen if he accepted it.

The king, however, told him not to distress himself. 'There is nothing to be afraid of,' he said, 'either from me or my wife. I am not laying a trap for you; and as for her, I promise she will do you no harm. I'll manage so that she doesn't even know that you have seen her. Look: I will hide you behind the open door of our bedroom. My wife will follow me in to bed. Near the door there's a chair – she will put her clothes on it as she takes them off, one by one. You will be able to watch her with perfect ease. Then, while she's walking away from the chair towards the bed with her back to you, slip away through the door – and mind she doesn't catch you.'

- 10 Gyges, since he was unable to avoid it, consented, and when

bedtime came Candaules brought him to the room. Presently the queen arrived, and Gyges watched her walk in and put her clothes on the chair. Then, just as she had turned her back and was going to bed, he slipped softly out of the room. But the queen saw him.

At once she realized what her husband had done. But she did not betray the shame she felt by screaming, or even let it appear that she had noticed anything. Instead she silently resolved to have her revenge. For with the Lydians, as with most barbarian races, it is thought highly indecent even for a man to be seen naked.⁹

For the moment she kept her mouth shut and did nothing; 11 but at dawn the next morning she sent for Gyges after preparing the most trustworthy of her servants for what was to come. There was nothing unusual in his being asked to attend upon the queen; so Gyges answered the summons without any suspicion that she knew what had occurred on the previous night.

'Gyges,' she said, as soon as he presented himself, 'there are two courses open to you, and you may take your choice between them. Kill Candaules and seize the throne, with me as your wife; or die yourself on the spot, so that never again may your blind obedience to the king tempt you to see what you have no right to see. One of you must die; either my husband, the author of this wicked plot; or you, who have outraged propriety by seeing me naked.'

For a time Gyges was too much astonished to speak. At last he found words and begged the queen not to force him to make so difficult a choice. But it was no good; he soon saw that he really was faced with the alternatives, either of murdering his master, or of being murdered himself. He made his choice – to live.

'Tell me,' he said, 'since you drive me against my will to kill the king, how shall we set on him?'

'We will attack him when he is asleep,' was the answer; 'and on the very spot where he showed me to you naked.'

All was made ready for the attempt. The queen would not let 12 Gyges go or give him any chance of escaping the dilemma: either Candaules or he must die. Night came, and he followed her into

the bedroom. She put a knife into his hand, and hid him behind the same door as before. Then, when Candaules was asleep, he crept from behind the door and struck.

Thus Gyges usurped the throne and married the queen. This is the Gyges whom Archilochus of Paros mentions as a contemporary in his *Satires*.¹⁰

13 Later he had his power confirmed by an oracle from Delphi.¹¹ The Lydians, indignant at the murder of Candaules, were prepared to fight; however, they managed to agree with the supporters of Gyges that he should continue to reign if the oracle declared that he was really the king; if on the other hand the oracle should declare against him, he should restore the throne to the Heraclids.

The answer of the oracle was in favour of Gyges, so his royal power was established. Nevertheless the Priestess of the Shrine added that the Heraclids would have their revenge on Gyges in the fifth generation: a prophecy to which neither the Lydians nor their kings paid any attention, until it was actually fulfilled.

14 This was the way in which the Mermnadae got rid of the Heraclids and assumed sovereign power. Gyges, as soon as he had made himself supreme, sent a number of presents to the shrine at Delphi; indeed, most of the silver there came from him, and in addition he presented a vast number of vessels of gold of various kinds, the most noteworthy being six golden mixing-bowls. These bowls weigh in all nearly 2,500 lb and stand in the Corinthian treasury – though to speak strictly it should not be called the public treasury of the Corinthians, but the treasury of Cypselus, son of Eëtion.

Gyges was the first foreigner we know of, after King Midas of Phrygia, son of Gordias, to dedicate offerings at Delphi. Midas presented the royal throne from which he used to give judgement; it stands with Gyges' bowls, and is well worth seeing.¹²

The Delphians call all this silver and gold which Gyges sent the Gygean Treasure, after the name of the donor.

Once established in power, Gyges sent a military expedition against Miletus and Smyrna and captured the citadel of Colophon. That, however, being his only act of any importance

during a reign of thirty-eight years, I will pass on without further comment and mention his son Ardys who succeeded him. 15

Ardys took Priene and attacked Miletus; and during his reign the Cimmerians, driven from their homes by nomadic Scythian tribes, came to Asia and captured Sardis, except for its citadel.¹³

Next on the throne after Ardys, who reigned forty-nine years, 16 was his son Sadyattes, who reigned twelve years and was succeeded by Alyattes. Alyattes made war on the Medes under Cyaxares, grandson of Deioces, expelled the Cimmerians from Asia, captured Smyrna, a city which had been founded by people from Colophon, and attacked Clazomenae – where he did not succeed as he hoped, but met with disaster.

Furthermore – to continue the tale of what was most memorable during his reign – Alyattes carried on the war which he had 17 taken over from his father, against the Milesians. His custom each year was to invade Milesian territory when the crops were ripe, marching in to the music of pipes, harps, and treble and tenor oboes. On arrival he never destroyed or burned the houses in the country, or pulled their doors off, but left them unmolested. He would merely destroy the trees and crops, and then retire. The reason for this was the Milesian command of the sea, which made it useless for his army to attempt a regular siege. The Lydians refrained from demolishing houses in order that the Milesians, having somewhere to live, might continue to work the land and sow their seed, with the result that they themselves would have something to plunder each time they invaded their country.

They employed this strategy for eleven consecutive years, 18 during which the Milesians suffered two serious defeats, one in the neighbourhood of Limeneium in their own country, the other in the plain of the Maeander.

For six out of the eleven years Sadyattes, son of Ardys, who began the invasion of Milesia and was the originator of the war, was still on the throne of Lydia; for the five which followed Alyattes, who, as I have already mentioned, inherited it from his father, carried it on with all possible energy.¹⁴

The Milesians received no help from any of the Ionians except the men of Chios, who fought by their side in payment of a debt

of honour, the Milesians having previously assisted them right through their war against the Erythraeans.

19 In the twelfth year of the fighting, the burning of the crops was the cause of an accident. No sooner had the fire taken hold, than the wind drove the flames on to the temple of Athene at Assesus, which was set alight and burnt down. Nobody bothered much about this at the moment; but on the army's return to Sardis, Alyattes fell ill. For a considerable time he got no better; so either on somebody's advice, or because he thought it the sensible thing to do, he sent to Delphi to inquire of the god about his health. When the messengers arrived, the Priestess of Apollo refused to give an answer until the Lydians had rebuilt Athene's temple, which they had burnt down at Assesus. I know
20 this at first hand, for I heard it from the Delphians; the Milesians, however, have something to add to the story. They say that Periander, son of Cypselus, who was a very close friend of Thrasybulus, tyrant of Miletus at that time, got to know of what the Delphic Priestess had said to Alyattes' messengers, and had thereupon sent to tell Thrasybulus all about it, knowing that to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

21 Now Alyattes, as soon as he received the message from Delphi, sent a herald to Miletus in the hope of concluding a truce until the temple could be rebuilt. Off went the herald – and Thrasybulus, meanwhile, thought of a clever plan. On the strength of the information he had received, he had made a good guess at the line Alyattes was likely to take; so he had all the grain in the city, both from his own and from private stores, collected in the public square, and issued an order that everyone in the town, on a given signal, was to start drinking and revelling.
22 His object was to get the messenger from Sardis to tell Alyattes about the enormous quantity of grain he had seen poured recklessly out in the street, and how the townspeople were enjoying themselves.

This is just what happened. The messenger, having seen the merry-making and delivered his master's message to Thrasybulus, returned to Sardis, and, so far as my information goes, peace was concluded for no other reason than because Alyattes, expecting to find the Milesians reduced to extremities by famine,

was told by the herald on his return to Sardis that this was not so: that the Milesians, in fact, were by no means hungry, but very much the reverse.

By the terms of the peace the two peoples afterwards became friends and allies; Alyattes built two temples for Athene at Assesus instead of one, and recovered his health.

This, then, is the story of Alyattes and his war with Thrasybulus and the Milesians.

Periander, who told Thrasybulus about the oracle, was the son of Cypselus, the despot of Corinth. The Corinthians tell of an extraordinary thing that occurred during his life, and the Lesbians confirm the truth of it. It concerns Arion of Methymna, the most distinguished musician of that date, and the man who first, so far as we know, composed and named the dithyramb, and trained choirs to perform it in Corinth. The tale is, that Arion rode on a dolphin's back to Taenarum. Most of his time Arion had spent with Periander, till he felt a longing to sail to Italy and Sicily. This he did; and after making a great deal of money in those countries, he decided to return to Corinth. He sailed from Tarentum in a Corinthian vessel, because he had more confidence in Corinthians than in anyone else. The crew, however, when the ship was at sea, hatched a plot to throw him overboard and steal his money. He got wind of their intention, and begged them to take his money, but spare his life. To no purpose, however; for the sailors told him either to kill himself if he wanted to be buried ashore, or to jump overboard at once.
24

Arion, seeing they had made up their minds, as a last resort begged permission to stand on the after-deck, dressed in his singing robes, and give them a song; the song over, he promised to kill himself. Delighted at the prospect of hearing a song from the world's most famous singer, the sailors all made their way forward from the stern and assembled amidships. Arion put on his full professional costume, took up his lute and, standing on the afterdeck, played and sang a lively tune. Then he leapt into the sea, just as he was, with all his clothes on.

The ship continued her voyage to Corinth, but a dolphin picked up Arion and carried him on its back to Taenarum. Here Arion landed, and made his way in his singing costume to

Corinth, where he told the whole story. Periander was not too ready to believe it; so he put Arion under strict supervision, keeping the ship's crew meanwhile carefully in mind. On their return he sent for them, and asked if they had anything to tell him about Arion. 'Oh yes,' they answered, 'we left him safe and sound at Tarentum in Italy.' But no sooner were the words out of their mouths than Arion himself appeared, just as he was when he jumped overboard. This was an unpleasant shock for the sailors. The lie was detected, and further denial useless.

That is the story as the Corinthians and Lesbians tell it. There is, moreover, at Taenarum today an offering of Arion's in the temple, a small bronze figure of a man on a dolphin.¹⁵

25 After bringing the war with Miletus to an end, Alyattes died, having reigned for fifty-seven years. He was the second of his family to send a present to Delphi, for in return for the recovery of his health he gave a large silver bowl, and a salver of welded iron – the most remarkable of all the offerings at Delphi. It was the work of Glaucus of Chios, the inventor of the art of welding.

26 Alyattes was succeeded by his son Croesus, a man of thirty-five. The first Greek city that Croesus attacked was Ephesus.¹⁶ The Ephesians, when he laid siege to them, ran a rope from their walls to the temple of Artemis, putting the town, by means of this link, under the goddess' protection. The distance between the temple and the old town which was then under siege is just under a mile. Having started with the Ephesians, Croesus subsequently attacked all the Ionian and Aeolian cities in turn on various pretexts, substantial or trivial, according to what ground of complaint he could find against them. He forced all
27 the Asiatic Greeks to pay him tribute, and then turned his attention to ship-building in order to attack the islanders. However, when everything was ready to begin building, something happened which persuaded him to desist. A certain Bias, of Priene – or some say it was Pittacus, a Mytilenaeon – came to Sardis, and in answer to Croesus' request for news from Greece, told him that the islanders were raising ten thousand horse to attack him in Sardis.

Croesus took the remark literally, and exclaimed: 'What? The

islanders mean to attack the Lydians with cavalry? I only wish they would!'

'Sire,' the man replied, 'I think you are longing to catch the islanders on horseback on the continent. Indeed, you are perfectly justified. But they know your intention of building a fleet to attack them – and what do you think they want more than a chance of catching the Lydians at sea? It would give them their revenge for their brothers on the mainland, whom you have enslaved.'

This way of putting the matter tickled Croesus' fancy. Moreover, it seemed so much to the point, that he abandoned the idea of building a fleet, and formed a treaty of friendship with the Ionian islanders.¹⁷

In the course of time Croesus subdued all the peoples west of the river Halys, except the Cilicians and Lycians. The rest he kept in subjection – Lydians, Phrygians, Mysians, Mariandynians, Chalybians, Paphlagonians, Thracians (both Thynian and Bithynian), Carians, Ionians, Dorians, Aeolians, and Pamphylians. 28

When all these nations had been added to the Lydian empire, and Sardis was at the height of her wealth and prosperity, all the great Greek teachers of that epoch, one after another, paid visits to the capital. Much the most distinguished of them was Solon the Athenian, the man who at the request of his countrymen had made a code of laws for Athens. He was on his travels at the time, intending to be away ten years, in order to avoid the necessity of repealing any of the laws he had made. That, at any rate, was the real reason of his absence, though he gave it out that what he wanted was just to see the world. The Athenians could not alter any of Solon's laws without him, because they had solemnly sworn to give them a ten years' trial.¹⁸ 29

For this reason, then – and also no doubt for the pleasure of foreign travel – Solon left home and, after a visit to the court of Amasis in Egypt, went to Sardis to see Croesus. 30

Croesus entertained him hospitably in the palace, and three or four days after his arrival instructed some servants to take him on a tour of the royal treasuries and point out the richness

Cyrus to appear before him; but Cyrus' answer was to send the messenger back with the threat that he would be there a good deal sooner than Astyages liked. Astyages thereupon armed the Medes to a man, and so far lost his wits as to appoint Harpagus to command them – having apparently forgotten how he had treated him. The result was that when they took the field and engaged the Persian army, a few who were not in the plot did their duty, but of the remainder some deserted to the Persians and the greater number deliberately fought badly and took to their heels. When Astyages learnt of the disgraceful collapse of the Median army, he swore that even so Cyrus should not get away with it so easily; then, having first impaled the Magi who had advised him to let Cyrus go, he armed all Medes, both under and over military age, who had been left in the city, led them out to battle and was defeated. His men were killed and he himself was taken alive.⁵⁷

129 After the capture of Astyages, Harpagus came and jeered at him, the most bitter of his insults being a reference to the supper at which the king had regaled him with his son's flesh, followed by the question of what it felt like to be a slave instead of a king. Astyages looked at him and countered the question by another: did Harpagus, he asked, claim responsibility for what Cyrus had done? Harpagus replied that he most certainly did, for it was he who wrote the letter urging Cyrus to revolt.

'Then,' said Astyages, 'you are not only the wickedest but the most stupid of men: you are stupid, because when you might have been king yourself (if you really were responsible for what has happened) you gave another man the power; and you are wicked, because merely on account of that supper you have brought the Medes into slavery. If you had to hand the throne over to somebody else rather than keep it to yourself, it would have been more proper to give so fine a prize to a Mede than to a Persian; but as things are, the innocent Medes have become slaves instead of masters, and the Persians masters of the Medes though they were once their slaves.'

130 Astyages had reigned for thirty-five years before he was deposed in the manner I have described. Because of his harsh rule the Medes, who had been masters of Asia beyond the Halys

for a hundred and twenty-eight years except for the period of Scythian domination, were forced to bow before the power of Persia. At a later period they regretted their submission and revolted from Darius, but were defeated and again reduced.⁵⁸ On the present occasion the Persians under Cyrus rose against the Medes and from then onwards were masters of Asia.

Cyrus treated Astyages with great consideration and kept him at his court until he died.

That, then, is the story of the birth and upbringing of Cyrus, and of how he seized the throne. I have already related his subsequent success in resisting the aggression of Croesus, a victory which gave him control of the whole of Asia.

The following are certain Persian customs which I can describe from personal knowledge.⁵⁹ The erection of statues, temples, and altars is not an accepted practice amongst them, and anyone who does such a thing is considered a fool, because, presumably, the Persian religion is not anthropomorphic like the Greek. Zeus, in their system, is the whole circle of the heavens, and they sacrifice to him from the tops of mountains. They also worship the sun, moon, and earth, fire, water, and winds, which are their only original deities: it was later that they learned from the Assyrians and Arabians the cult of Uranian Aphrodite. The Assyrian name for Aphrodite is Mylitta, the Arabian Alilat, the Persian Mitra.⁶⁰

As for ceremonial, when they offer sacrifice to the deities I mentioned, they erect no altar and kindle no fire; the libation, the flute-music, the garlands, the sprinkled meal – all these things they have no use for; but before a ceremony a man sticks a spray of leaves, usually myrtle leaves, into his headdress, takes his victim to some purified place and invokes the deity to whom he wishes to sacrifice. The actual worshipper is not permitted to pray for any personal or private blessing, but only for the king and for the general good of the community, of which he is himself a part. When he has cut up the animal and cooked it, he makes a little heap of the softest green-stuff he can find, preferably clover, and lays all the meat upon it. This done, a Magus (a member of this caste must be always present at sacrifices) utters an incantation over it in a form of words which is

supposed to recount the Birth of the Gods. Then after a short interval the worshipper removes the flesh and does what he pleases with it.

133 Of all days in the year a Persian most distinguishes his birthday, and celebrates it with a dinner of special magnificence. A rich Persian on his birthday will have an ox or a horse or a camel or a donkey baked whole in the oven and served up at table, and the poor some smaller beast. The main dishes at their meals are few, but they have many sorts of dessert, the various courses being served separately. It is this custom that has made them say that the Greeks leave the table hungry, because they never have anything worth mentioning after the first course: they think that if the Greeks did, they should go on eating. They are very fond of wine, and no one is allowed to vomit or urinate in the presence of another person.

If an important decision is to be made, they discuss the question when they are drunk, and the following day the master of the house where the discussion was held submits their decision for reconsideration when they are sober. If they still approve it, it is adopted; if not, it is abandoned. Conversely, any decision they make when they are sober, is reconsidered afterwards when they are drunk.

134 When Persians meet in the streets one can always tell by their mode of greeting whether or not they are of the same rank; for they do not speak but kiss – their equals upon the mouth, those somewhat superior on the cheeks. A man of greatly inferior rank prostrates himself in profound reverence. After their own nation they hold their nearest neighbours most in honour, then the nearest but one – and so on, their respect decreasing as the distance grows, and the most remote being the most despised. Themselves they consider in every way superior to everyone else in the world, and allow other nations a share of good qualities decreasing according to distance, the furthest off being in their view the worst. By a similar sort of principle the Medes extended their system of administration and government during the period of their dominance: the various nations governed each other, the Medes being the supreme authority and concerning themselves specially with their nearest neighbours; these in their

turn ruling *their* neighbours, who were responsible for the next, and so on.

No race is so ready to adopt foreign ways as the Persian; for 135 instance, they wear the Median costume because they think it handsomer than their own, and their soldiers wear the Egyptian corslet. Pleasures, too, of all sorts they are quick to indulge in when they get to know about them – a notable instance is pederasty, which they learned from the Greeks. Every man has a number of wives, and a much greater number of concubines. 136 After prowess in fighting, the chief proof of manliness is to be the father of a large family of boys. Those who have most sons receive an annual present from the king – on the principle that there is strength in numbers. The period of a boy's education is between the ages of five and twenty, and they are taught three things only: to ride, to use the bow, and to speak the truth. Before the age of five a boy lives with the women and never sees his father, the object being to spare the father distress if the child should die in the early stages of its upbringing. In my view this 137 is a sound practice. I admire also the custom which forbids even the king himself to put a man to death for a single offence, and any Persian under similar circumstances to punish a servant by an irreparable injury. Their way is to balance faults against services, and then, if the faults are greater and more numerous, anger may take its course. They declare that no man has ever yet killed his father or mother; in the cases where this has apparently happened, they are quite certain that inquiry would reveal that the son was either a changeling or born out of wedlock, for they insist that it is most improbable that the actual 138 parent should be killed by his child. What they are forbidden to do, they are forbidden also to mention. They consider telling lies more disgraceful than anything else, and, next to that, owing money. There are many reasons for their horror of debt, but the chief is their conviction that a man who owes money is bound also to tell lies. Sufferers from the scab or from leprosy are isolated and forbidden the city. They say these diseases are punishments for offending the sun, and they expel any stranger who catches them: many Persians drive away even white doves, as if they, too, were guilty of the same offence. They have a

139 profound reverence for rivers: they will never pollute a river with urine or spittle, or even wash their hands in one, or allow anyone else to do so. There is one other peculiarity which one notices about them, though they themselves are unaware of it: all their names, which express magnificence or physical qualities, end in the letter S (the Dorian 'san'). Inquiry will prove this in every case without exception.⁶¹

140 All this I am able to state definitely from personal knowledge. There is another practice, however, concerning the burial of the dead, which is not spoken of openly and is something of a mystery: it is that a male Persian is never buried until the body has been torn by a bird or a dog. I know for certain that the Magi have this custom, for they are quite open about it. The Persians in general, however, cover a body with wax and then bury it. The Magi are a peculiar caste, quite different from the Egyptian priests and indeed from any other sort of person. The Egyptian priests make it an article of religion to kill no living creature except for sacrifice, but the Magi not only kill anything, except dogs and men, with their own hands but make a special point of doing so; ants, snakes, crawling animals, birds – no matter what, they kill them indiscriminately. Well, it is an ancient custom, so let them keep it.⁶²

141 I will now resume the thread of my story. The Ionians and Aeolians immediately after the Persian conquest of Lydia sent representatives to Cyrus at Sardis, to try to obtain from him the same terms as they had had under Croesus, their former master. Cyrus replied to their request by the story of the fluteplayer who saw some fish in the sea and played his flute to them in the hope that they would come ashore. When they refused to do so, he took a net, netted a large catch, and hauled them in. Seeing the fish jumping about, he said to them: 'It is too late to dance now: you might have danced to my music – but you would not.' The point of the story was, that when Cyrus had sent to the Ionians to ask them to revolt from Croesus, they had been unwilling to do so, though they were ready enough to offer their allegiance now that everything was settled in his favour. Cyrus was angry with them – and hence his reply.

When the news reached the various cities, the Ionians began

to erect defences and held meetings at the Panionium. The meetings were attended by all except the Milesians, who were the only ones to have obtained the same terms from Cyrus as from Croesus. The others came to a common agreement to apply for help to Sparta.

142 These Ionians to whom the Panionium belongs had the good fortune to establish their settlements in a region which enjoys a better climate than any other we know of. It does not resemble what is found either further north, where there is an excess of cold and wet, or further south, where the weather is both too hot and too dry. There are four different dialects of the Ionic language, distributed as follows: the most southerly of the Ionian towns is Miletus, with Myrus to the north of it, and then Priene, these three being in Caria and speaking the same dialect. Ephesus, Colophon, Lebedus, Teos, Clazomenae, and Phocaea are in Lydia, and share a common dialect completely distinct from what is spoken at the places previously mentioned. There are three other Ionian settlements, two being the islands of Samos and Chios and one, Erythrae, a mainland town. The two latter use the same dialect, Samos a peculiar one of its own.

143 The Milesians were in no danger from Cyrus, because of the treaty they had made with him; and of the other Ionians the islanders had nothing to fear, because the Phoenicians were not yet subject to Persia and Persia herself was not a sea power.

144 The reason for the separation of Miletus from the other Ionian towns was simply the general weakness of the Hellenic peoples at that date, and particularly of the Ionians, who of all the Greek races had least power and influence. There was no Ionian settlement of any consequence except Athens. The nation as a whole, including Athens and with the exception only of the twelve cities previously mentioned, took a dislike to the very name 'Ionian' and refused to admit to it – and even today I believe that most of them are ashamed of it. The twelve cities, on the contrary, were proud of it and marked their pride by building a temple for their own use which they called the Panionium, and by excluding from it all the other Ionians – though in point of fact only Smyrna ever applied for admission. Something similar can be seen in the case of the Dorian Pentapolis (or

occasions. They were the only Carians who resisted Harpagus for any length of time, and they did in fact cause him a good deal of trouble by holding out behind the defences they erected on Mount Lida. But the place was ultimately taken.

176

The fate of the Lycians of Xanthus makes a different story. When Harpagus advanced into the plain of Xanthus, they met him in battle, though greatly outnumbered, and fought with much gallantry; at length, however, they were defeated and forced to retire within their walls, whereupon they collected their women, children, slaves, and other property and shut them up in the citadel, set fire to it and burnt it to the ground. Then having sworn to do or die, they marched out to meet the enemy and were killed to a man. Most of the Lycians who now claim to be Xanthians are foreign immigrants, except eighty families who happened on that occasion to be away from home, and consequently survived. The people of Caunus followed in most respects the example of the Lycians, and their town fell into Harpagus' hands in much the same way as Xanthus did.

177

While Harpagus was turning upside-down the lower, or western, part of Asia, Cyrus was engaged with the north and east, bringing into subjection every nation without exception. Most of his minor conquests I will say nothing about, but mention only those of his campaigns which gave him the greatest trouble and are in themselves the most interesting.

178

Having subdued the rest of the continent, he turned his attention to Assyria, a country remarkable for the number of great cities it contained, and especially for the most powerful and renowned of them all – Babylon, to which the seat of government was transferred after the fall of Nineveh.⁷⁰ Babylon lies in a wide plain, a vast city in the form of a square with sides nearly fourteen miles long and a circuit of some fifty-six miles, and in addition to its enormous size it surpasses in splendour any city of the known world. It is surrounded by a broad deep moat full of water, and within the moat there is a wall fifty royal cubits wide and two hundred high (the royal cubit is three inches longer than the ordinary cubit).⁷¹ And now I must describe how the soil dug out to make the moat was used, and the method of building the wall. While the digging was going on, the earth

179

that was shovelled out was formed into bricks, which were baked in ovens as soon as a sufficient number were made; then using hot bitumen for mortar the workmen began by revetting with brick each side of the moat, and then went on to erect the actual wall. In both cases they laid rush-mats between every thirty courses of brick. On the top of the wall they constructed, along each edge, a row of one-roomed buildings facing inwards with enough space between for a four-horse chariot to pass. There are a hundred gates in the circuit of the wall, all of bronze with bronze uprights and lintels.⁷²

Eight days' journey from Babylon there is a city called Is on a smallish river of the same name, a tributary of the Euphrates, and in this river lumps of bitumen are found in great quantity. This was the source of supply for the bitumen used in building the wall of Babylon. The Euphrates, a broad, deep, swift river which rises in Armenia and flows into the Persian Gulf, runs through the middle of the city and divides it in two. The wall is brought right down to the water on both sides, and at right angles to the wall, there is a low fencing wall of baked bricks, stretching down each bank of the river. There are a great many houses of three and four storeys. The main streets and the side streets which lead to the river are all dead straight, and for every one of the side streets or alleys there was a bronze gate in the river wall by which the water could be reached.

180

The great wall I have described is the chief armour of the city; but there is a second one within it, hardly less strong though narrower. There is a fortress in the middle of each half of the city: in one the royal palace surrounded by a wall of great strength, in the other the temple of Bel, the Babylonian Zeus.⁷³ The temple is a square building, two furlongs each way, with bronze gates, and was still in existence in my time; it has a solid central tower, one furlong square, with a second erected on top of it and then a third, and so on up to eight. All eight towers can be climbed by a spiral way running round the outside, and about half-way up there are seats and a shelter for those who make the ascent to rest on. On the summit of the topmost tower stands a great temple with a fine large couch in it, richly covered, and a golden table beside it. The shrine contains no image and

181

no one spends the night there except, as the Chaldaeans who are the priests of Bel say, one Assyrian woman, all alone, whoever it may be that the god has chosen. The Chaldaeans also say –
 182 though I do not believe them – that the god enters the temple in person and takes his rest upon the bed. There is a similar story told by the Egyptians at Thebes, where a woman always passes the night in the temple of the Theban Zeus and is forbidden, so they say, like the woman in the temple at Babylon, to have any intercourse with men; and there is yet another instance in the Lycian town of Patara, where the priestess who delivers the oracles when required (for there is not always an oracle there) is shut up in the temple during the night.

183 In the temple of Babylon there is a second shrine lower down, in which is a great sitting figure of Bel, all of gold on a golden throne, supported on a base of gold, with a golden table standing beside it. I was told by the Chaldaeans that, to make all this, more than twenty-two tons of gold were used. Outside the temple is a golden altar, and there is another one, not of gold, but of great size, on which full-grown sheep are sacrificed. (The golden altar is reserved for the sacrifice of sucklings only.) On the larger altar the Chaldaeans also offer something like twenty-eight and a half tons of frankincense every year at the festival of Bel. In the time of Cyrus there was also in this sacred building a solid golden statue of a man some fifteen feet high – I have this on the authority of the Chaldaeans, though I never saw it myself. Darius the son of Hystaspes had designs upon it, but he never carried it off because his courage failed him; Xerxes, however, did take it and killed the priest who tried to prevent the sacrilege.⁷⁴ In addition to the adornments I have described there are also many private offerings in the temple.

184 There have been many kings of Babylon who helped to fortify the city and adorn its temples, and I will tell their story in my History of Assyria.⁷⁵ There were also two queens, the earlier, Semiramis, preceding the later by five generations.⁷⁶ It was Semiramis who was responsible for certain remarkable embankments in the plain outside the city, built to control the river
 185 which until then used to flood the whole countryside. The later of the two queens, Nitocris, was a woman of greater intelligence

than Semiramis, and not only left as a memorial of her reign the works which I will presently describe, but also, having her eye on the great and expanding power of the Medes and the many cities, including Nineveh itself, which had fallen before them, took every possible measure to increase her security.⁷⁷ For instance, she changed the course of the Euphrates, which flows through Babylon. Its course was originally straight, but by cutting channels higher upstream she made it wind about with so many twists and turns that now it actually passes a certain Assyrian village called Ardericca three separate times, so that anyone today who travels from the Mediterranean to Babylon and comes down the Euphrates finds himself three times over at Ardericca, on three different days. In addition to this she constructed embankments on both sides of the river of remarkable strength and height, and a long way above the city, close beside the river, dug a basin for a lake some forty-seven miles in circumference. The depth of the basin was governed by the point at which the workmen came to water as they dug down. The soil from the excavation was used for the embankments. When the basin was finished, the queen had stone brought to the place and built up the edge of it the whole way round. The purpose both of the excavation and of the diversion of the river was to cause the frequent bends to reduce the speed of the current, and to prevent a direct voyage downstream to the city. A boat would be faced with a devious course, and at the end of her trip she would have to make the tedious circuit of the lake. Moreover, these works lay in the neighbourhood of the approaches to Assyria and on the direct route to Media, and the intention of the queen was to discourage the Medes from mixing with the peoples of Babylon and thus getting to know what was going on there. Besides these defences she was responsible for
 186 another undertaking of a less important kind: the city, as I have said, being divided in two by the river, it was necessary under its previous rulers for anyone who wanted to get from one half to the other to cross over by boat and no doubt this was a tiresome business. Nitocris, however, when she was having the basin dug for the lake, had the foresight to make that work a means of getting rid of the inconvenience as well as of leaving

yet another monument of her reign. She ordered long stone blocks to be cut, and when they were ready and the excavation complete, she diverted the river into the basin; and while the basin was filling and the original bed of the stream was drying up, she built with burnt brick, on the same pattern as the wall, an embankment on each side of the river where it flowed through the city, and also along the descent to the water's edge from the gates at the end of the side streets; then, as near as possible to the centre of the city, she built a bridge over the river with the blocks of stone which she had had prepared, using iron and lead to bind the blocks together. Between the piers of the bridge she had squared baulks of timber laid down for the inhabitants to cross by – but only during daylight, for every night the timber was removed to prevent people from going over in the dark and robbing each other. Finally when the basin had been filled and the bridge finished, the river was brought back into its original bed, with the result that the basin had been made to serve the queen's purpose, and the people of the town had their bridge into the bargain.

187 This same queen was also the perpetrator of a grim practical joke. She had a tomb made for herself over one of the main gateways of the city, right high up above the actual entrance, and caused the following inscription to be cut on it: 'If any king of Babylon hereafter is short of money, let him open my tomb and take as much as he likes. But this must be done only in case of need. Whoever opens my tomb under any other circumstances will get no good of it.' The tomb remained undisturbed till the reign of Darius, who resented being unable to use one of the city gates – for he never did use the one under the tomb because, had he done so, he would have had to drive directly under the corpse; moreover, he thought it was absurd, when treasure was lying there asking to be taken, not to take it. So he opened the tomb. He found, however, not a penny inside – but only the body of the queen and another inscription, which read: 'If you had not been insatiably greedy and eager to get money by the most despicable means, you would never have opened the tomb of the dead.'⁷⁸ So much, then, for the tradition about the character of Nitocris.

The expedition of Cyrus was directed against her son, who, like his father, was called Labynetus and was king of Assyria.⁷⁹ 188 When the Persian king goes to war, he is always well provided not only with victuals from home and his own cattle, but also with water from the Choaspes, a river which flows past Susa. No Persian king ever drinks the water of any other stream, and a supply of it ready boiled for use is brought along in silver jars carried in a long train of four-wheeled mule waggons wherever the king goes.

On his march to Babylon Cyrus came to the river Gyndes 189 which rises in the Matienian mountains, runs through the country of the Dardanes and then joins the Tigris which passes the city of Opis and flows into the Persian Gulf. Cyrus was preparing to cross this river, for which boats were needed, when one of his sacred white horses, a high-spirited creature, entered the water and attempted to swim across but was swept under by the rapid current and carried away. Cyrus was so furious with the river for daring to do such a thing, that he swore he would punish it by making it so weak that even a woman could get over in future without difficulty and without wetting her knees. He held up his march against Babylon, divided his army into two parts, marked out on each side of the river a hundred and eighty channels running off from it in various directions, and ordered his men to set to work and dig. Having a vast number of hands employed, he managed to finish the job, but only at the cost of the whole summer wasted. Then, having 190 punished the Gyndes by splitting it into three hundred and sixty separate channels, Cyrus, at the beginning of the following spring, resumed his march to Babylon.

The Babylonians had taken the field and were awaiting his approach. When he arrived near the city they attacked him, but were defeated and forced to retire inside their defences; they already knew of Cyrus' restless ambition and had watched his successive acts of aggression against one nation after another, and as they had taken the precaution of accumulating in Babylon a stock of provisions sufficient to last many years, they were able to regard the prospect of a siege with indifference. The siege dragged on, no progress was made, and Cyrus was beginning to

191 despair of success. Then somebody suggested or he himself thought up the following plan: he stationed part of his force at the point where the Euphrates flows into the city and another contingent at the opposite end where it flows out, with orders to both to force an entrance along the riverbed as soon as they saw that the water was shallow enough. Then, taking with him all his non-combatant troops, he withdrew to the spot where Nitocris had excavated the lake, and proceeded to repeat the operation which the queen had previously performed: by means of a cutting he diverted the river into the lake (which was then a marsh) and in this way so greatly reduced the depth of water in the actual bed of the river that it became fordable, and the Persian army, which had been left at Babylon for the purpose, entered the river, now only deep enough to reach about the middle of a man's thigh, and, making their way along it, got into the town. If the Babylonians had learnt what Cyrus was doing or had seen it for themselves in time, they could have let the Persians enter and then, by shutting all the gates which led to the waterside and manning the walls on either side of the river, they could have caught them in a trap and wiped them out. But as it was they were taken by surprise. The Babylonians themselves say that owing to the great size of the city the outskirts were captured without the people in the centre knowing anything about it; there was a festival going on, and they continued to dance and enjoy themselves, until they learned the news the hard way. That, then, is the story of the first capture of Babylon.⁸⁰

192 I will give several indications of the wealth and resources of Babylon, but the following is a specially striking one. Apart from normal tribute, the whole Persian empire is divided into regions for the purpose of furnishing supplies for the king and his army, and for four months out of the twelve the supplies come from Babylonian territory, the whole of the rest of Asia being responsible for the remaining eight. This shows that the resources of Assyria are a third part of the resources of Asia as a whole. It will be seen that the governorship (or satrapy, as the Persians call it) of Assyria is by far the most coveted of all their provincial posts, when one realizes that Tritantæchmes the son

of Artabazus, who held it from the king, received an *artaba* of silver every day – the *artaba* is a Persian dry measure of about five bushels, exceeding the Attic *medimnus* by three *choinikes*, or about five pints. He also had as his personal property, in addition to war horses, eight hundred stallions and sixteen thousand mares, twenty for each stallion, and so many Indian dogs that four large villages in the plain were exempted from other charges on condition of supplying them with food. This will give an idea of the wealth of the governor of Babylon.⁸¹

193 The rainfall of Assyria is slight and provides enough moisture only to burst the seed and start the root growing, but to swell the grain and bring it to maturity artificial irrigation is used, not, as in Egypt, by the natural flooding of the river, but by hand-worked swipes.⁸² Like Egypt, the whole country is intersected by dykes; the largest of them has to be crossed in boats and runs in a south-easterly direction from the Euphrates until it joins another river, the Tigris, on which Nineveh was built. As a grain-bearing country Assyria is the richest in the world. No attempt is made there to grow figs, grapes, or olives or any other fruit trees, but so great is the fertility of the grain fields that they normally produce crops of two-hundredfold, and in an exceptional year as much as three-hundredfold. The blades of wheat and barley are at least three inches wide. As for millet and sesame, I will not say to what an astonishing size they grow, though I know well enough; but I also know that people who have not been to Babylonia have refused to believe even what I have said already about its fertility. The only oil these people use is made from sesame; date-palms grow everywhere, mostly of the fruit-bearing kind, and the fruit supplies them with food, wine, and honey. The method of cultivation is the same as for figs, particularly in regard to the practice of taking the fruit of what the Greeks call the 'male' palm and tying it into the 'female' or date-bearing tree, to allow the gall-fly to enter the fruit and ripen it and prevent it from dropping off. For it is a fact that the male palms have the gall-fly in their fruit, like wild figs.

194 I will next describe the thing which surprised me most of all in this country, after Babylon itself: I mean the boats which ply down the Euphrates to the city. These boats are circular in shape

and made of hide; they build them in Armenia to the northward of Assyria, where they cut ribs of osiers to make the frames and then stretch watertight skins taut on the under side for the body of the craft; they are not fined-off or tapered in any way at bow or stern, but quite round like a shield. The men fill them with straw, put the cargo on board – mostly wine in palm-wood casks – and let the current take them downstream. They are controlled by two men; each has a paddle which he works standing up, one in front drawing his paddle towards him, the other behind giving it a backward thrust. The boats vary a great deal in size; some are very big, the biggest of all having a capacity of some hundred and thirty tons. Every boat carries a live donkey – the larger ones several – and when they reach Babylon and the cargoes have been offered for sale, the boats are broken up, the frames and straw sold and the hides loaded on the donkeys' backs for the return journey overland to Armenia. It is quite impossible to paddle the boats upstream because of the strength of the current, and that is why they are constructed of hide instead of wood. Back in Armenia with their donkeys, the men build another lot of boats to the same design.⁸³

195 The dress of the Babylonians consists of a linen tunic reaching to the feet with a woollen one over it, and a short white cloak on top; they have their own fashion in shoes, which resemble the slippers one sees in Boeotia. They grow their hair long, wear turbans, and perfume themselves all over; everyone owns a seal and a walking-stick specially made for him, with a device carved on the top of it, an apple or rose or lily or eagle or something of the sort; for it is not the custom to have a stick without some such ornament. I will say no more about dress and so forth, but
196 will go on to describe some of their practices. The most ingenious in my opinion is a custom which, I understand, they share with the Eneti in Illyria. In every village once a year all the girls of marriageable age used to be collected together in one place, while the men stood round them in a circle; an auctioneer then called each one in turn to stand up and offered her for sale, beginning with the best-looking and going on to the second best as soon as the first had been sold for a good price. Marriage was the object of the transaction. The rich men who wanted wives

bid against each other for the prettiest girls, while the humbler folk, who had no use for good looks in a wife, were actually paid to take the ugly ones, for when the auctioneer had got through all the pretty girls he would call upon the plainest, or even perhaps a crippled one, to stand up, and then ask who was willing to take the least money to marry her – and she was offered to whoever accepted the smallest sum. The money came from the sale of the beauties, who in this way provided dowries for their ugly or misshapen sisters. It was illegal for a man to marry his daughter to anyone he happened to fancy, and no one could take home a girl he had bought without first finding a backer to guarantee his intention of marrying her. In cases of disagreement between husband and wife the law allowed the return of the purchase money. Anyone who wished could come even from a different village to buy a wife.

This admirable practice has now fallen into disuse and they have of late years hit upon another scheme, namely the prostitution of all girls of the lower classes to provide some relief from the poverty which followed upon the conquest with its attendant hardship and general ruin.

Next in ingenuity to the old marriage custom is their treatment of disease. They have no doctors, but bring their invalids out into the street, where anyone who comes along offers the sufferer advice on his complaint, either from personal experience or observation of a similar complaint in others. Anyone will stop by the sick man's side and suggest remedies which he has himself proved successful in whatever the trouble may be, or which he has known to succeed with other people. Nobody is allowed to pass a sick person in silence; but everyone must ask him what is the matter. They bury their dead in honey, and their dirges for the dead are like the Egyptian ones. When a Babylonian has had intercourse with his wife, he sits over incense to fumigate himself, with his wife opposite doing the same, and at daybreak they both wash. Before they have washed they will not touch any household utensils. In this they resemble the Arabians.

There is one custom amongst these people which is wholly shameful: every woman who is a native of the country must once in her life go and sit in the temple of Aphrodite and there

give herself to a strange man. Many of the rich women, who are too proud to mix with the rest, drive to the temple in covered carriages with a whole host of servants following behind; and there wait; most, however, sit in the precinct of the temple with a band of plaited string round their heads – and a great crowd they are, what with some sitting there, others arriving, others going away – and through them all gangways are marked off running in every direction for the men to pass along and make their choice. Once a woman has taken her seat she is not allowed to go home until a man has thrown a silver coin into her lap and taken her outside to lie with her. As he throws the coin, the man has to say, 'In the name of the goddess Mylitta' – that being the Assyrian name for Aphrodite. The value of the coin is of no consequence; once thrown it becomes sacred, and the law forbids that it should ever be refused. The woman has no privilege of choice – she must go with the first man who throws her the money. When she has lain with him, her duty to the goddess is discharged and she may go home, after which it will be impossible to seduce her by any offer, however large. Tall, handsome women soon manage to get home again, but the ugly ones stay a long time before they can fulfil the condition which the law demands, some of them, indeed, as much as three or four years. There is a custom similar to this in parts of Cyprus.

200 In addition to the general practices I have mentioned, there is one which is peculiar to three of their clans: these people live entirely on fish which they catch and dry in the sun and then pound in a mortar: the smooth powder is then strained through muslin and eaten either kneaded into cakes or baked like a sort of bread, according to taste.

201 After the conquest of Assyria, Cyrus' next desire was to subdue the Massagetae, whose country lies far to the eastward beyond the Araxes, opposite the Issedones; they are reputed to be a numerous and warlike people and some suppose them to be of Scythian nationality.⁸⁴ The Araxes is said by some to be bigger than the Danube, by others to be not so big.⁸⁵ It is also said to have a number of islands in it as large as Lesbos, where men live during summer on various kinds of roots which they dig up, and for their winter supplies pick as it ripens and put

into store any sort of tree-fruit which they have found to be suitable for food. They have also discovered another tree whose fruit has a very odd property: for when they have parties and sit round a fire, they throw some of it into the flames, and as it burns it smokes like incense, and the smell of it makes them drunk just as wine does the Greeks; and they get more and more intoxicated as more fruit is thrown on until they jump up and start dancing and singing. Such at least are the reports on how these people live.⁸⁶

Like the Gyndes, which Cyrus divided into three hundred and sixty channels, the river Araxes rises in the country of the Matieni. It has forty mouths, all but one issuing into swamp and marshland, where men are said to live who eat raw fish and dress in seal-skins; by the remaining mouth it flows clear into the Caspian Sea. The Caspian is a sea in itself and has no connexion with the sea elsewhere, unlike the Mediterranean which the Greeks use, and what is called the Atlantic beyond the Pillars of Heracles, and the Indian Ocean, all of which are in reality parts of a single sea. The Caspian, however, is quite separate; in length it is a fifteen days' voyage, using the oars, and it is eight days' voyage across in its broadest part.⁸⁷ Along the west of it stretches the chain of the Caucasus, the longest and loftiest of all mountain ranges, inhabited by many different tribes, most of whom live off wild scrub. It is also said that there are trees here of which the leaves when crushed and mixed with water produce a dye with which the natives paint figures on their clothes, and the dye is so permanent that the designs never wash out but last as long as the material does, as if they had been woven into it when it was first made; and that these people copulate in the open like animals.

On the west, then, the Caspian is bounded by the Caucasus; eastwards lies an immense tract of flat country over which the eye wanders till it is lost in the distance. The greater part of this region is occupied by the Massagetae, whom Cyrus wished to attack. There were many things which roused his ambition and gave him courage to undertake this new war, the two most important being his belief in his superhuman origin and the success of all his previous campaigns; for it was a fact that till

the Persian dead for the body of Cyrus; and when it was found she pushed his head into a skin which she had filled with human blood, and cried out as she committed this outrage: 'Though I have conquered you and live, yet you have ruined me by treacherously taking my son. See now – I fulfil my threat: you have your fill of blood.' There are many accounts of Cyrus' death; I have given the one which I think most plausible.⁹⁰

215 In their dress and way of living the Massagetae are like the Scythians. Some ride, some do not – for they use both infantry and cavalry. They have archers and spearmen and are accustomed to carry the 'sagaris', or battle-axe. The only metals they use are gold and bronze: bronze for spearheads, arrow-points, and battle-axe, and gold for headgear, belts, and girdles. Similarly they give their horses bronze breastplates, and use gold about the bridle, bit, and cheek-pieces. Silver and iron are unknown to them, none being found in the country, though it
216 produces bronze and gold in unlimited quantity. As to their customs: every man has a wife, but all wives are used promiscuously. The Greeks believe this to be a Scythian custom; but it is not – it belongs to the Massagetae. If a man wants a woman, all he does is to hang up his quiver in front of her waggon and then enjoy her without misgiving. They have one way only of determining the appropriate time to die, namely this: when a man is very old, all his relatives give a party and include him in a general sacrifice of cattle; then they boil the flesh and eat it. This they consider to be the best sort of death. Those who die of disease are not eaten but buried, and it is held a misfortune not to have lived long enough to be sacrificed. They have no agriculture, but live on meat and fish, of which there is an abundant supply in the Araxes. They are milk-drinkers. The only god they worship is the sun, to which they sacrifice horses: the idea behind this is to offer the swiftest of mortal creatures to the swiftest of the gods.

BOOK TWO

Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyases, whose mother was Pharnaspes' daughter Cassandane. Cassandane had died while Cyrus was still alive, and he not only bitterly lamented her loss but issued a proclamation that all his subjects should go into mourning for her.

Cambyases, the son of Cyrus and of this princess, on the ground that he had inherited his father's dominion over the Ionians and Aeolians, included them amongst his other subjects in the army he was preparing for an expedition against Egypt.¹

The Egyptians before the reign of Psammetichus used to think that of all races in the world they were the most ancient; Psammetichus, however, when he came to the throne, took it into his head to settle this question of priority, and ever since his time the Egyptians have believed that the Phrygians surpass them in antiquity and that they themselves come second.² Psammetichus, finding that mere inquiry failed to reveal which was the original race of mankind, devised an ingenious method of determining the matter. He took at random, from an ordinary family, two newly born infants and gave them to a shepherd to be brought up amongst his flocks, under strict orders that no one should utter a word in their presence. They were to be kept by themselves in a lonely cottage, and the shepherd was to bring in goats from time to time, to see that the babies had enough milk to drink, and to look after them in any other way that was necessary. All these arrangements were made by Psammetichus because he wished to find out what word the children would first utter, once they had grown out of their meaningless baby-talk. The plan succeeded; two years later the shepherd, who

during that time had done everything he had been told to do, happened one day to open the door of the cottage and go in, when both children, running up to him with hands outstretched, pronounced the word 'becos'. The first time this occurred the shepherd made no mention of it; but later, when he found that every time he visited the children to attend to their needs the same word was constantly repeated by them, he informed his master. Psammetichus ordered the children to be brought to him, and when he himself heard them say 'becos' he determined to find out to what language the word belonged. His inquiries revealed that it was the Phrygian for 'bread', and in consideration of this the Egyptians yielded their claims and admitted the superior antiquity of the Phrygians. That this was what really happened I myself learnt from the priests of Hephaestus at Memphis,³ though the Greeks have various improbable versions of the story, such as that Psammetichus had the children brought up by women whose tongues he had cut out. The version of the priests, however, is the one I have given. There were other things, too, which I learnt at Memphis in conversation with the priests of Hephaestus, and I actually went to Thebes and Heliopolis for the express purpose of finding out if the priests in those cities would agree in what they told me with the priests at Memphis. It is at Heliopolis that the most learned of the Egyptians are said to be found.⁴ I am not anxious to repeat what I was told about the Egyptian religion, apart from the mere names of their deities, for I do not think that any one nation knows much more about such things than any other; whatever I shall mention on the subject will be due simply to the exigencies of my story. As to human matters, they all agreed in saying that the Egyptians by their study of astronomy discovered the year and were the first to divide it into twelve parts – and in my opinion their method of calculation is better than the Greek; for the Greeks, to make the seasons work out properly, intercalate a whole month every other year, while the Egyptians make the year consist of twelve months of thirty days each and every year intercalate five additional days, and so complete the regular circle of the seasons.⁵ They also told me that the Egyptians first brought into use the names of the twelve gods,⁶ which the Greeks

took over from them, and were the first to assign altars and images and temples to the gods, and to carve figures in stone. They proved the truth of most of these assertions, and went on to tell me that the first man to rule Egypt was Min, in whose time the whole country, except the district around Thebes, was marsh, none of the land below Lake Moeris – seven days' voyage up river from the sea – then showing above the water. I have little doubt that they were right in this; for it is clear to any intelligent observer, even if he has no previous information on the subject, that the Egypt to which the Greeks sail nowadays is, as it were, the gift of the river and has come only recently into the possession of its inhabitants.⁷ The same is true of the country above the lake for the distance of a three days' voyage: the priests said nothing to me about it, but it is, in fact, precisely the same type of country.

The following is a general description of the physical features of Egypt. If you take a cast of the lead a day's sail off-shore, you will get eleven fathoms, muddy bottom – which shows how far out the silt from the river extends. The length of the Egyptian coastline (defining Egypt, as we usually do, from the gulf of Plinthine to Lake Serbonis which lies along the base of Mt Casius) is sixty *schoeni* – the *schoenus* being an Egyptian measure equivalent to sixty *stades*. The people there who own very little land measure it by fathoms; those not so poor, by *stades*, or furlongs; those with much land in *parasangs*, and those with vast estates in *schoeni*. The *parasang* is equal to thirty *stades*, the *schoenus*, as I have said, to sixty. Thus the coastline of Egypt is 3600 *stades* in length.⁸ From the coast inland as far as Heliopolis – just about the same distance as along the road from the altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens to the temple of Olympian Zeus at Pisa – the country is broad and flat, with much swamp and mud. In point of fact these two distances – from Heliopolis to the sea, and from Athens to Pisa – are not exactly the same, but very nearly: careful reckoning would show that they differ by only fifteen *stades*. The latter is fifteen short of fifteen hundred: the former just the round number – fifteen hundred precisely.⁹ Southward of Heliopolis the country narrows. It is confined on the one side by the range of the Arabian

mountains which run north and south and then continue without a break in the direction of the Arabian Gulf. In these mountains are the quarries where the stone was cut for the pyramids at Memphis. This is the point where the range changes its direction and bends away towards the Arabian Gulf. I learnt that its greatest length from east to west is a two months' journey, and that towards its eastern limit frankincense is produced. On the Libyan side of Egypt there is another range of hills where the pyramids stand; these hills are rocky and covered with sand, and run in a southerly direction like the Arabian range before it bends eastward. Above Heliopolis, then, for a distance of four days' voyage up the river Egypt is narrow, and the extent of territory, for so important a country, is meagre enough. Between the two mountain ranges – the Libyan and Arabian – it is a level plain, in its narrowest part, so far as I could judge, not more than about two hundred furlongs across. South of this the country broadens again.

9 From Heliopolis to Thebes is a nine days' voyage up the Nile, a distance of eighty-one *schoeni* or 4860 *stades*.¹⁰ Putting together the various measurements I have given, one finds that the Egyptian coastline is, as I have said, about 420 miles in length, and the distance from the sea inland to Thebes about 714 miles. It is another 210 miles from Thebes to Elephantine.¹¹

10 My own observation bears out the statement made to me by the priests that the greater part of the country I have described has been built up by silt from the Nile. I formed the opinion that the whole region above Memphis between the two ranges of hills was originally a gulf of the sea, and resembles (if I may compare small things with great) the country around Troy, Teuthrania, Ephesus and the plain of the Maeander – not that any of the rivers which have caused the alluvial deposits in those neighbourhoods are comparable in size to any one of the five mouths of the Nile. There are other rivers too I could mention, much smaller than the Nile, which have effected great changes in the coastline: for instance, the Achelous which flows through Acarnania and has already joined to the mainland half the islands of the Echinades group.

11 In Arabia not far from Egypt there is a very long narrow gulf

running up from the Red Sea¹² (as it is called). It is only half a day's voyage across in its narrowest part, but its length from its extreme limit to the open sea is a voyage of forty days for a vessel under oars. It is tidal. Now it is my belief that Egypt itself was originally some such arm of the sea – there were two gulfs, that is, one running from the Mediterranean southwards towards Ethiopia, and the other northwards from the Indian Ocean towards Syria, and the two almost met at their extreme ends, leaving only a small stretch of country between them. Suppose, now, that the Nile should change its course and flow into this gulf – the Red Sea – what is to prevent it from being silted up by the stream within, say, twenty thousand years? Personally I think even ten thousand would be enough. That being so, surely in the vast stretch of time which has passed before I was born, a much bigger gulf than this could have been turned into dry land by the silt brought down by the Nile – for the Nile is a great river and does, in fact, work great changes. So I not only believe the people who gave me this account of Egypt, but my own conclusions strongly support what they said. 12 I have observed for myself that Egypt at the Nile Delta projects into the sea beyond the coast on either side; I have seen shells on the hills and noticed how salt exudes from the soil to such an extent that it affects even the pyramids; I have noticed, too, that the only hill where there is sand is the hill above Memphis, and – a further point – that the soil of Egypt does not resemble that of the neighbouring country of Arabia, or of Libya, or even of Syria (the Mediterranean coast of Arabia is inhabited by Syrians), but is black and friable as one would expect of an alluvial soil formed of the silt brought down by the river from Ethiopia. The soil of Libya is, as we know, reddish and sandy, while in Arabia and Syria it has a larger proportion of stone and clay. I had from the priests another striking piece of evidence 13 about the origin of the country: namely that in the reign of Moeris the whole area below Memphis used to be flooded when the river rose only twelve feet – and when I got that information Moeris had been dead for less than nine hundred years. Today, however, the river never floods unless it rises at least twenty-three and a half, or twenty-four, feet. It seems to me therefore

that, if the land continues to increase at the same rate in height and extent, the Egyptians who live below Lake Moeris in the Delta and thereabouts will, if the Nile fails to flood, suffer permanently the same fate as they said would some day overtake the Greeks; for when they learned that all Greece is watered by rain and not, as Egypt is, by the flooding of rivers, they remarked that the day would come when the Greeks would be sadly disappointed and starve – in other words, if God sees fit to send no rain but afflicts the Greeks with a drought, they shall all die from famine because they have no source of water other than the rain which God chooses to grant them. All this is only too true – but let me point out in answer how the case stands with the Egyptians themselves: if, as I said before, the land below Memphis (for this is the part which is always rising) continues to increase in height at the same rate as in the past, is it not obvious that when the river can no longer flood the fields – and there is no chance of rain either – the people who live there will have to go hungry? As things are at present these people get their harvests with less labour than anyone else in the world, the rest of the Egyptians included; they have no need to work with plough or hoe, or to use any other of the ordinary methods of cultivating their land; they merely wait for the river of its own accord to flood their fields; then, when the water has receded, each farmer sows his plot, turns pigs into it to tread in the seed, and then waits for the harvest.¹³ Pigs are used also for threshing, after which the grain is put into store.

The Ionians maintain that Egypt proper is confined to the Nile Delta, a stretch of country running along the coast from what is known as Perseus' Watchtower to the Pelusian Salt-pans – a distance of forty *schoeni* – and inland as far as Cercasorus, where the Nile divides into the two branches which enter the sea at Pelusium and Canopus.¹⁴ The rest of what is usually called Egypt belongs, according to this view, either to Libya or Arabia. If, therefore, we accept it, we are forced to the conclusion that there was a time when the Egyptians had no country at all; for I am convinced – and the Egyptians themselves admit the fact – that the Delta is alluvial land and has only recently (if I may so put it) appeared above water. If, then, they once had no place

to live in, why did they make such a business of the theory that they are the oldest race in the world? Surely there was no need whatever to experiment with those two children to find out what word they would utter first. But the fact is, I do not believe that the Egyptians came into being at the same period as the Delta (as the Ionians call it); on the contrary, they have existed ever since men appeared upon the earth, and as the Delta increased with the passage of time, many of them moved down into the new territory and many remained where they originally were. The name of Egypt was in ancient times given to Thebes, the whole circumference of whose territory is only 6120 furlongs.¹⁵ If, then, my judgement is correct, the Ionians are mistaken in their opinions about Egypt; if, on the other hand, the Ionians are right, I am ready to prove that neither they nor the rest of the Greeks know how to count: for they hold that the world consists of three parts – Asia, Europe, and Libya – whereas it is obvious that they should add a fourth, namely the Egyptian Delta, since they do not include it in either Asia or Libya. According to their theory the Nile is the boundary between Asia and Libya; but the Nile splits at the apex of the Delta and flows round it, thus making it a separate tract of land lying between the two.

About the Ionians' opinion I have said enough; here now is my own: Egypt, I consider, is the whole extent of territory inhabited by Egyptians, just as Cilicia is the country occupied by Cilicians or Assyria the country occupied by Assyrians. The only true boundary between Asia and Libya is formed by the frontiers of Egypt. By the usual Greek reckoning we should have to suppose that Egypt, all the way from the Cataracts and Elephantine, is cut in two, one half belonging to Libya and the other to Asia; for the Nile divides, flowing from the Cataracts to the sea right through the middle of the country – as far as Cercasorus in a single stream, and below that city splitting into three branches, of which one trends eastward and is known as the mouth of Pelusium, and another trends westward and is called the mouth of Canopus. There remains the third branch which, coming down from the southward to the tip of the Delta, flows straight on and cuts it in two on its course to the sea. This

branch, issuing at what is called the mouth of Sebennytyus, is neither the least in volume, nor the least famous of the three. In addition to these there are two other mouths, the Saitic and Mendesian, which split off from the Sebennytic and so run into the sea. The Bolbitine and Bucolic mouths are not natural branches but excavated channels.

18 The opinion I have expressed about the extent of Egypt is supported by an oracle delivered from the shrine of Ammon which came to my notice after I had formed my own conclusions.¹⁶ The people of Marea and Apis, on the Libyan frontier, took a dislike to certain religious observances, especially the prohibition against eating the flesh of heifers; accordingly, they sent to the shrine of Ammon and said they were in no way bound by Egyptian custom as they considered themselves not to be Egyptians at all, but Libyans; they lived outside the Delta, had nothing in common with Egypt, and wished to be allowed to eat what they pleased. The oracle, however, refused their request, and declared that all the country irrigated by the Nile was Egypt and all the people who lived below Elephantine and drank the Nile's water were Egyptians. Now when the Nile
19 overflows, it floods not only the Delta but parts of the territory on either side supposed to be Libyan and Arabian respectively, to a distance of two days' journey – in some places more, in some less.

About why the Nile behaves precisely as it does I could get no information from the priests or anyone else.¹⁷ What I particularly wished to know was why the water begins to rise at the summer solstice, continues to do so for a hundred days, and then falls again at the end of that period, so that it remains low throughout the winter until the summer solstice comes round again in the following year. Nobody in Egypt could give me any explanation of this, in spite of my constant attempts to find out what was the peculiar property which made the Nile behave in the opposite way to other rivers, and why – another point on which I hoped for information – it was the only river to cause no breezes.

20 Certain Greeks, hoping to advertise how clever they are, have tried to account for the flooding of the Nile in three different

ways. Two of the explanations are not worth dwelling upon, beyond a bare mention of what they are: one is that the summer north winds cause the water to rise by checking the flow of the current towards the sea. In fact, however, these winds on many occasions have failed to blow, yet the Nile has risen as usual; moreover, if these winds were responsible for the rise, the other rivers which happen to run against them would certainly be affected in the same way as the Nile – and to a greater extent, in that they are smaller and have a less powerful current. There are many such rivers in Syria and Libya, but none of them are affected in the same way as the Nile. The second explanation is less rational, being somewhat, if I may so put it, of a legendary character: it is that the Nile exhibits its remarkable characteristics because it flows from the Ocean, the stream of which encircles the world. The third theory is much the most plausible, but at the same time furthest from the truth; according to this, the water of the Nile comes from melting snow, but as it flows from Libya through Ethiopia into Egypt, that is, from a very hot into a cooler climate, how could it possibly originate in snow? Obviously, this view is as worthless as the other two. Anyone who can use his wits about such matters will find plenty of arguments to prove how unlikely it is that snow is the cause of the flooding of the river: the strongest proof is provided by the winds, which blow hot from those regions; secondly rain and frost are unknown there – and after snow rain is bound to fall within five days. So that if there were snow in that part of the world, there would necessarily be rain too; thirdly, the natives are black because of the hot climate. Again, hawks and swallows remain throughout the year, and cranes migrate thither in winter to escape the cold weather of Scythia. But if there were any snow, however little, in the region through which the Nile flows and in which it rises, none of these things could possibly be; for they are contrary to reason. As to the writer
23 who mentions the Ocean in this connexion, his account is a mere fairy-tale depending upon an unknown quantity and cannot therefore be disproved by argument. I know myself of no river called Ocean, and can only suppose that Homer or some earlier poet invented the name and introduced it into poetry. If, after
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criticizing these theories, I must express an opinion myself about a matter so obscure as the reason why the Nile floods in summer, I would say (to put the whole thing in the fewest words) that during winter the sun is driven out of his course by storms towards the upper parts of Libya. It stands to reason that the country nearest to, and most directly under, the sun should be most short of water, and that the streams which feed the rivers in that neighbourhood should most readily dry up.

- 25 But let me explain in somewhat greater detail my view of what happens when the sun passes across the upper regions of Libya. The atmosphere there is always clear, the land is open to the sun, and there are no cold winds to temper the heat; and the result of this is that the sun, as it passes over, has the same effect as it normally has elsewhere in summer on its passage through the mid-heaven: namely, it draws the water towards itself and then thrusts it into those parts of the country still further inland, where it comes under the influence of the winds which scatter and disperse it in vapour – so naturally the winds (the south and south-west) which blow from this region, are the most rainy. It seems to me, moreover, that not all the moisture drawn each year from the Nile is dispersed but that a certain amount is retained, as it were, in the neighbourhood of the sun. When the rough winter weather is over, the sun resumes its normal course in mid-heaven, and from then on exercises an equal attraction upon all rivers. In winter, then, all rivers but the Nile run in flood, because a great deal of rainwater is added to their volume – the rain cutting watercourses all over the country – but in summer, when the attraction of the sun's heat is added to the lack of rain, their volume is diminished. The Nile, on the other hand, behaves in the opposite way, and for an obvious reason: being subject to evaporation by the sun and having no rain to swell it, it is the only river which is much lower in winter than in summer – for in summer it is subject to the same force of solar attraction as other rivers, but in winter it is the only one to feel it. These, then, are my reasons for thinking that the sun is the cause of this phenomenon, as also, I believe, of the dryness of the atmosphere in Egypt; the sun parching whatever lies in its path – so that in the upper parts of Libya it is always summer.
- 26

Suppose for a moment the relative positions of north and south were changed – suppose, that is, the north wind and the south wind each, so to speak, usurped that part of the heavens which now belongs to the other: if such a thing occurred, the sun, when driven from its normal course by the northerly gales of winter, would pass over the north of Europe instead of – as now – over the south of Libya, and I have no doubt that during its passage across Europe its effect upon the Danube would be precisely the same as its present effect upon the Nile. I mentioned the fact that no breeze blows from the Nile; I would suggest, in explanation of this, that the usual thing is for winds to originate in a cold region, not in a hot one.

Well, these things have been as they are since the beginning of time, and there is no changing them; so I will pass to another subject. Concerning the sources of the Nile, nobody I have spoken with, Egyptian, Libyan, or Greek, professed to have any knowledge, except the scribe who kept the register of the treasures of Athene in the Egyptian city of Sais.¹⁸ But even this person, though he pretended to exact knowledge, seemed to me hardly serious. He told me that between Syene, near Thebes, and Elephantine there were two mountains of conical shape called Crophi and Mophi; and that the springs of the Nile, which were of fathomless depth, flowed out from between them. Half of the water flowed northwards towards Egypt and half southwards towards Ethiopia. The fact that the springs were bottomless he said had been proved by the Egyptian king Psammetichus, who had a rope made many thousands of fathoms long which he let down into the water without finding the bottom. I think myself that if there is any truth in this story of the scribe's, it indicates the presence of powerful whirlpools and eddies in the water, caused by its impact upon the mountains, and it was these eddies which prevented the sounding-line from reaching the bottom.

On this subject I could get no further information from anybody. As far as Elephantine I speak as an eyewitness, but further south from hearsay.¹⁹ The most I could learn was that beyond Elephantine the country rises steeply; and in that part of the river boats have to be hauled along by ropes – one rope on each

side – much as one drags an ox. If the rope parts, the boat is gone in a moment, carried away by the force of the stream. These conditions last over a four days' journey, the river all the time winding greatly, like the Maeander, and the distance to be covered amounting to twelve *schoeni*. After this one reaches a level plain, where the river is divided by an island named Tachompso. South of Elephantine the country is inhabited by Ethiopians who also possess half of Tachompso, the other half being occupied by Egyptians. Beyond the island is a great lake, and round its shores live nomadic tribes of Ethiopians. After crossing the lake one comes again to the stream of the Nile, which flows into it. At this point one must land and travel along the bank of the river for forty days, because sharp rocks, some showing above water and many just awash, make the river impracticable for boats. After the forty days' journey on land one takes another boat and in twelve days reaches a big city named Meroë, said to be the capital city of the Ethiopians. The inhabitants worship Zeus and Dionysus alone of the gods, holding them in great honour. There is an oracle of Zeus there, and they make war according to its pronouncements, taking from it both the occasion and the object of their various expeditions.²⁰ Continuing upstream for the same length of time as it takes to travel from Elephantine to the capital, one comes to the Deserters – a people whose name is *Asmach*, a word which would mean in Greek 'those who stand on the left hand of the king'. They were a body of men two hundred and forty thousand strong, of the Egyptian warrior class, who went over to the Ethiopians during the reign of Psammetichus. The Egyptians had guard-posts in various parts of the country: one at Elephantine against the Ethiopians, another in Daphnae at Pelusium against the Arabians and Assyrians, and a third at Marea to keep a watch on Libya. The Persians have similar garrisons today both at Elephantine and Daphnae. Now it happened in Psammetichus' time that the Egyptians were kept on garrison duty for three years without being relieved, and this was the cause of their desertion. They discussed their grievances, came to a unanimous resolution, and went off in a body to Ethiopia. The king, on hearing the news, gave chase and overtook them;

and the story goes that when he besought them to return and used every argument to dissuade them from abandoning their wives and children and the gods of their country, one of their number pointed, in reply, to his private parts and said that wherever those were, there would be no lack of wives and children. So they continued their journey to Ethiopia and put themselves at the disposal of the Ethiopian king, by whom they were well rewarded, for he gave them permission to expel certain Ethiopians with whom he was on bad terms, and to settle on their land. The result of their living there was that the Ethiopians learned Egyptian manners and became more civilized.

The course of the Nile is, then, known not only where it traverses Egypt but as much further southward as one can travel by land or water in four months; for calculation will show that that is the time it takes to go from Elephantine to the Deserters. At that point the river runs from west to east; beyond, nobody knows its course with any certainty, for the country is uninhabited because of the heat. I did, however, hear a story from some people of Cyrene, who told me that during a visit to the oracle of Ammon they happened, in the course of conversation with Etearchus the Ammonian king, to get on to the subject of the Nile and the riddle of its source.²¹ Etearchus told them that he had once had a visit from certain Nasamonians, a people who live in Syrtis and the country a little to the eastward. Being asked if there was anything more they could tell him about the uninhabited parts of Libya, these men declared that a group of wild young fellows, sons of chieftains in their country, had on coming to manhood planned amongst themselves all sorts of extravagant adventures, one of which was to draw lots for five of their number to explore the Libyan desert and try to penetrate further than had ever been done before. The whole Mediterranean coast of Libya from Egypt to Cape Soloeis, where it ends, is inhabited by many different tribes of Libyans, except the portion which is possessed by Greeks and Phoenicians; but in the inland parts lying to the southward of the inhabited coastal district only wild beasts are to be found, and further still to the southward there is a waterless and sandy desert without life of any kind. The story then was that the young men, sent

off by their companions on their travels with a good supply of food and water, passed through the inhabited parts of the country to the region of wild beasts and then came to the desert, which they proceeded to cross in a westerly direction. After travelling for many days over the sand they saw some trees growing on a level spot; they approached and began to pick the fruit which the trees bore, and while they were doing so were attacked by some little men – of less than middle height – who seized them and carried them off. The speech of these dwarfs was unintelligible, nor could they understand the Nasamonians. They took their captives through a vast tract of marshy country, and beyond it came to a town, all the inhabitants of which were of the same small stature, and all black. A great river with crocodiles in it flowed past the town from west to east.²²

- 33 I have said enough about Etearchus the Ammonian and his story, and will merely add his statement – which I repeat on the authority of the men from Cyrene – that the explorers got safely home again, and that the people whose country they visited were a nation of wizards. The river which flows past their town was supposed by Etearchus, reasonably enough, to be the Nile; for the Nile does in fact flow from Libya, dividing it in two and (to argue by analogy from the known to the unknown) I am willing to believe that it rises at the same distance from its mouth as the Danube, which has its source amongst the Celts near Pyrene and flows right through the middle of Europe, to reach the Black Sea at the Milesian colony of Istria. (The Celts live beyond the Pillars of Heracles, next to the Cynesians who are the most westerly people of Europe.) Its course is quite familiar because it flows through inhabited country; but nobody, on the other hand, knows anything about the source of the Nile, because that river runs through a part of Libya which is uninhabited and desert. All I could possibly learn by inquiry about its course, I have here set down. It enters Egypt from the country beyond. Egypt is more or less opposite to, or south of, the mountainous part of Cilicia, from which the direct route to Sinope on the Black Sea takes five days for a man travelling light; and Sinope lies opposite the mouth of the Danube. It is my belief, then, that the Nile, as it traverses the whole of Libya,
- 34

is equal in length to the Danube – and on that subject I shall say no more.

About Egypt I shall have a great deal more to relate because 35 of the number of remarkable things which the country contains, and because of the fact that more monuments which beggar description are to be found there than anywhere else in the world.²³ That is reason enough for my dwelling on it at greater length. Not only is the Egyptian climate peculiar to that country, and the Nile different in its behaviour from other rivers elsewhere, but the Egyptians themselves in their manners and customs seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind. For instance, women attend market and are employed in trade, while men stay at home and do the weaving. In weaving the normal way is to work the threads of the weft upwards, but the Egyptians work them downwards. Men in Egypt carry loads on their heads, women on their shoulders; women urinate standing up, men sitting down. To ease themselves they go indoors, but eat outside in the streets, on the theory that what is unseemly but necessary should be done in private, and what is not unseemly should be done openly. No woman holds priestly office, either in the service of goddess or god; only men are priests in both cases. Sons are under no compulsion to support their parents if they do not wish to do so, but daughters must, whether they wish it or not. Elsewhere priests grow their hair long; in Egypt 36 they shave their heads. In other nations the relatives of the deceased in time of mourning cut their hair, but the Egyptians, who shave at all other times, mark a death by letting the hair grow both on head and chin. They live with their animals – unlike the rest of the world, who live apart from them. Other men live on wheat and barley, but any Egyptian who does so is blamed for it, their bread being made from spelt, or *Zea* as some call it. Dough they knead with their feet, but clay with their hands – and even handle dung. They practise circumcision, while men of other nations – except those who have learnt from Egypt – leave their private parts as nature made them. Men in Egypt have two garments each, women only one. The ordinary practice at sea is to make sheets fast to ring-bolts fitted outboard; the Egyptians fit them inboard. In writing or calculating, instead

of going, like the Greeks, from left to right, the Egyptians go from right to left – and obstinately maintain that theirs is the dexterous method, ours being left-handed and awkward.²⁴ They have two sorts of writing, the sacred and the common. They are religious to excess, beyond any other nation in the world, and here are some of the customs which illustrate the fact: they drink from brazen cups which they scour every day – everyone, without exception. They wear linen clothes which they make a special point of continually washing. They circumcise themselves for cleanliness' sake, preferring to be clean rather than comely. The priests shave their bodies all over every other day to guard against the presence of lice, or anything else equally unpleasant, while they are about their religious duties; the priests, too, wear linen only, and shoes made from the papyrus plant – these materials, for dress and shoes, being the only ones allowed them. They bathe in cold water twice a day and twice every night – and observe innumerable other ceremonies besides. Their life, however, is not by any means all hardship, for they enjoy advantages too: for instance, they are free from all personal expense, having bread made for them out of the sacred grain, and a plentiful daily supply of goose-meat and beef, with wine in addition. Fish they are forbidden to touch; and as for beans, they cannot even bear to look at them, because they imagine they are unclean (in point of fact the Egyptians never sow beans, and even if any happen to grow wild, they will not eat them, either raw or boiled). They do not have a single priest for each god, but a number, of which one is chief-priest, and when a chief-priest dies his son is appointed to succeed him.

Bulls are considered the property of the god Epaphus – or Apis – and are therefore tested in the following way: a priest appointed for the purpose examines the animal, and if he finds even a single black hair upon him, pronounces him unclean; he goes over him with the greatest care, first making him stand up, then lie on his back, after which he pulls out his tongue to see if that, too, is 'clean' according to the recognized marks – what those are I will explain later.²⁵ He also inspects the tail to make sure the hair on it grows properly; then, if the animal passes all these tests successfully, the priest marks him by twisting round

his horns a band of papyrus, which he seals with wax and stamps with his signet ring. The bull is finally taken away, and the penalty is death for anybody who sacrifices an animal which has not been marked in this manner. The method of sacrifice is as follows: they take the beast (one of those marked with the seal) to the appropriate altar and light a fire; then, after pouring a libation of wine and invoking the god by name, they slaughter it, cut off its head, and flay the carcase. The head is loaded with curses and taken away – if there happen to be Greek traders in the market, it is sold to them; if not, it is thrown into the river. The curses they pronounce take the form of a prayer that any disaster which threatens either themselves or their country may be diverted and fall upon the severed head of the beast. Both the libation and the practice of cutting off the heads of sacrificial beasts are common to all Egyptians in all their sacrifices, and the latter explains why it is that no Egyptian will use the head of any sort of animal for food. The methods of disembowelling and burning are various, and I will describe the one which is followed in the worship of the goddess whom they consider the greatest and honour with the most important festival.²⁶ In this case, when they have flayed the bull, they first pray and then take its paunch out whole, leaving the intestines and fat inside the body; next they cut off the legs, shoulders, neck, and rump, and stuff the carcase with loaves of bread, honey, raisins, figs, frankincense, myrrh, and other aromatic substances; finally they pour a quantity of oil over the carcase and burn it. They always eat before a sacrifice, and while the fire is consuming it they eat their breasts. When they have finished that, they serve a meal out of the portions left over.

All Egyptians use bulls and bull-calves for sacrifice, if they have passed the test for 'cleanness'; but they are forbidden to sacrifice heifers, on the ground that they are sacred to Isis. The statues of Isis show a female figure with cow's horns, like the Greek representations of Io, and of all animals heifers are universally held by the Egyptians in the greatest reverence. This is the reason why no Egyptian, man or woman, will kiss a Greek, or use a Greek knife, spit, or cauldron, or even eat the flesh of a bull known to be clean, if it has been cut with a Greek knife.

They have a curious method of disposing of dead bulls and cows: cows are thrown into the river, but bulls are buried on the outskirts of towns, with one horn, or sometimes both, sticking out from the ground to mark the place. In due time, when the carcase has rotted, a barge comes from the island called Prosopitis to collect the bones. This island is part of the Delta and is nine *schoeni* in circumference; it contains a number of towns, the one from which the barges come being Atarbechis, where there is a temple of much sanctity dedicated to Aphrodite. From Atarbechis many people go round to the various towns to dig up the bones, which they take away and bury again all together in one spot. Other cattle which die a natural death are disposed of in the same way as bulls – for that is the law. None of them are slaughtered. The Egyptians who possess a temple 42 dedicated to the Theban Zeus, or live in the province of Thebes, never sacrifice sheep but only goats; for not all Egyptians worship the same gods – the only two to be universally worshipped are Isis and Osiris, who, they say, is Dionysus. On the other hand, those who have a temple dedicated to Mendes, or live in the Mendesian province, never sacrifice goats but only sheep. The Thebans and those who follow them explain the origin of their custom of abstaining from the sacrifice of sheep by a story of Heracles,²⁷ who, they say, wished above all things to see Zeus. Zeus, however, was unwilling that his wish should be gratified. Heracles persisted, and Zeus had to devise a means of getting out of the difficulty. His plan was to skin a ram and cut off its head; then, holding the head before him and covering himself in the fleece, he showed himself to Heracles. This story explains why the Egyptians represent Zeus with a ram's head – a practice which has extended to the Ammonians, who are a joint colony of Egyptians and Ethiopians and speak a language which has points of resemblance to both.²⁸ So far as I can see, the Ammonians took their name too from this circumstance; for Amun is the Egyptian name for Zeus. So much, then, for the reason why the Thebans do not sacrifice rams but consider them to be sacred animals. Nevertheless on the festival of Zeus, which occurs once a year, they break this custom and do, in fact, slaughter a ram – but only one. They cut the animal in

pieces, skin it, and put the fleece upon the statue of Zeus, just as Zeus once put it upon himself, and then lead towards the statue of Zeus a statue of Heracles. Then all who are engaged in the ceremony beat their breasts as if in mourning for the ram's death, and afterwards bury the carcase in a sacred sepulchre.

I was told that this Heracles was one of the twelve gods. Of 43 the other Heracles, with whom the Greeks are familiar, I could get no information anywhere in Egypt.²⁹ Nevertheless it was not the Egyptians who took the name Heracles from the Greeks. The opposite is true: it was the Greeks who took it from the Egyptians – those Greeks, I mean, who gave the name to the son of Amphitryon. There is plenty of evidence to prove the truth of this, in particular the fact that both parents of Heracles – Amphitryon and Alcmena – were of Egyptian origin.³⁰ Again, the Egyptians say they do not know the names of Poseidon or the Dioscuri, or receive them as gods amongst the rest. But surely, if they had taken the name of any gods from the Greeks, it is precisely these they would have been most likely to notice – unless I am greatly mistaken in my belief that the Egyptians were already at that time a sea-faring nation, and that some of the Greeks, too, used the sea. Being sailors, the Egyptians would have learnt the name of Poseidon and the Dioscuri even before that of Heracles.³¹

Nevertheless the Egyptians have had a god named Heracles from time immemorial. They say that seventeen thousand years before the reign of Amasis the twelve gods were produced from the eight;³² and of the twelve they hold Heracles to be one. To 44 satisfy my wish to get the best information I possibly could on this subject, I made a voyage to Tyre in Phoenicia, because I had heard that there was a temple there, of great sanctity, dedicated to Heracles.³³ I visited the temple, and found that the offerings which adorned it were numerous and valuable; not the least remarkable being two pillars, one of pure gold, the other of emerald which gleamed in the dark with a strange radiance. In the course of conversation with the priests I asked how long ago the temple had been built, and found by their answer that they, too, did not share the Greek view; for they said that the temple

was as ancient as Tyre itself, and that Tyre had already stood for two thousand three hundred years. I also saw another temple there, dedicated to the Thasian Heracles; and I also went to Thasos, where I found a temple of Heracles built by the Phoenicians who settled there after they had sailed in search of Europa. Even this was five generations before Heracles the son of Amphitryon made his appearance in Greece. The result of these researches is a plain proof that the worship of Heracles is very ancient; and I think that the wisest course is taken by those Greeks who maintain a double cult of this deity, with two temples, in one of which they worship him as Olympian and divine, and in the other pay him such honour as is due to a hero. 45 The Greeks tell many stories with no thought. One of the silliest is the story of how Heracles came to Egypt and was taken away by the Egyptians to be sacrificed to Zeus,³⁴ with all due pomp and the sacrificial wreath upon his head; and how he quietly submitted until the moment came for the beginning of the actual ceremony at the altar, when he exerted his strength and killed them all. For me at least such a tale is proof enough that the Greeks know nothing whatever about Egyptian character and custom. The Egyptians are forbidden by their religion even to kill animals for sacrifice, except sheep and such bulls and bull-calves as have passed the test for 'cleanness' – and geese: is it likely, then, that they would sacrifice human beings? Besides, if Heracles was a mere man (as they say he was) and single-handed, how is it conceivable that he should have killed tens of thousands of people? And now I hope that both gods and heroes will forgive me for saying what I have said on these matters!

46 I mentioned the fact that certain Egyptians (the Mendesians) will not sacrifice goats, either male or female. The reason is this: they believe Pan to be one of the eight gods who existed before the subsequent twelve, and painters and sculptors represent him just as the Greeks do, with the face and legs of a goat.³⁵ Not that they think he is, in fact, like that – on the contrary they do not believe he differs in form from the rest of the gods. But that is how they paint him – why, I should prefer not to mention. The Mendesians hold all goats in veneration, especially male ones, whose keepers enjoy special honours. One of them is held

in particular reverence, and when he dies the whole province goes into mourning. Mendes is the Egyptian name both for Pan and for a goat. In this province in my lifetime a goat had intercourse with a woman, in full view of everybody – a most surprising incident, which became publicly known.

Pigs are considered unclean. If anyone touches a pig accidentally in passing, he will at once plunge into the river, clothes and all, to wash himself; and swineherds, though of pure Egyptian blood, are the only people in the country who never enter a temple, nor is there any intermarriage between them and the rest of the community, swineherds marrying their daughters and taking their wives only from amongst themselves. 47

The only deities to whom the Egyptians consider it proper to sacrifice pigs are Dionysus and the Moon.³⁶ To both of these they offer pigs at the same time, at the same full moon, and afterwards eat the flesh. To explain the reason why they abhor the notion of sacrificing swine at any festival except this one, there is a legend current amongst them, which I know but think it seemly not to mention. The method of sacrificing a pig to the Moon is to slaughter the animal, put together the tip of the tail, the spleen, and the caul, cover them with all the fat found in the belly, and burn them; the rest of the meat is eaten on the same day as the sacrifice is offered – the day of the full moon; on no other day would they consent to taste it. People of slender means make models of pigs out of dough, which they bake and offer in sacrifice instead of real ones.

Everyone, on the eve of the festival of Dionysus, sacrifices a hog before the door of his house. When the animal is slaughtered, it is given back to the swineherd from whom it was procured. The swineherd then removes the carcass. In other ways the Egyptian method of celebrating the festival of Dionysus is much the same as the Greek, except that the Egyptians have no choric dance. Instead of the phallus they have puppets, about eighteen inches high; the genitals of these figures are made almost as big as the rest of their bodies, and they are pulled up and down by strings as the women carry them round the villages. Flutes lead the procession, and the women as they follow sing a hymn to Dionysus. There is a religious legend to account for the 48

size of the genitals and the fact that they are the only part of the puppet's body which is made to move.

49 Now I have an idea that Melampus the son of Amythaon knew all about this ceremony; for it was he who introduced the name of Dionysus into Greece, together with the sacrifice in his honour and the phallic procession.³⁷ He did not, however, fully comprehend the doctrine, or communicate it in its entirety; its more perfect development was the work of later teachers. Nevertheless it was Melampus who introduced the phallic procession, and from Melampus the Greeks learned the rites which they now perform. Melampus, in my view, was an able man who acquired the art of divination and brought into Greece, with little change, a number of things which he had learned in Egypt, and amongst them the worship of Dionysus. I will never admit that the similar ceremonies performed in Greece and Egypt are the result of mere coincidence – had that been so, Greek rites would have been more Greek in character and less recent in origin. Nor will I allow that the Egyptians ever took over from Greece either this custom or any other. Probably Melampus got his knowledge of the worship of Dionysus through Cadmus of Tyre and the people who came with him
50 from Phoenicia to the country now called Boeotia.³⁸ The names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt. I know from the inquiries I have made that they came from abroad, and it seems most likely that it was from Egypt, for the names of all the gods have been known in Egypt from the beginning of time, with the exception (as I have already said) of Poseidon and the Dioscuri – and also of Hera, Hestia, Themis, the Graces, and the Nereids. I have the authority of the Egyptians themselves for this. I think that the gods of whom they profess no knowledge were named by the Pelasgians – with the exception of Poseidon, of whom they learned from the Libyans; for the Libyans are the only people who have always known Poseidon's name, and always worshipped him. Heroes have no place in the religion of Egypt.³⁹

51 These practices, then, and others which I will speak of later, were borrowed by the Greeks from Egypt. This is not the case, however, with the Greek custom of making images of Hermes

with the phallus erect; it was the Athenians who first took this from the Pelasgians, and from the Athenians the custom spread to the rest of Greece.⁴⁰ For just at the time when the Athenians were assuming Hellenic nationality, the Pelasgians joined them, and thus first came to be regarded as Greeks. Anyone will know what I mean if he is familiar with the mysteries of the Cabiri – rites which the men of Samothrace learned from the Pelasgians, who lived in that island before they moved to Attica, and communicated the mysteries to the Athenians.⁴¹ This will show that the Athenians were the first Greeks to make statues of Hermes with the erect phallus, and that they learned the practice from the Pelasgians – who explained it by a certain religious doctrine, the nature of which is made clear in the Samothracian mysteries.

In ancient times, as I know from what I was told at Dodona, 52 the Pelasgians offered sacrifices of all kinds, and prayed to the gods, but without any distinction of name or title – for they had not yet heard of any such thing. They called the gods by the Greek word *theoi* – 'disposers' – because they had 'disposed' and arranged everything in due order, and assigned each thing to its proper division. Long afterwards the names of the gods were brought into Greece from Egypt and the Pelasgians learnt them – with the exception of Dionysus, about whom they knew nothing till much later; then, as time went on, they sent to the oracle at Dodona (the most ancient and, at that period, the only oracle in Greece) to ask advice about the propriety of adopting names which had come into the country from abroad. The oracle replied that they would be right to use them. From that time onward, therefore, the Pelasgians used the names of the gods in their sacrifices, and from the Pelasgians the names passed to Greece.

But it was only – if I may so put it – the day before yesterday 53 that the Greeks came to know the origin and form of the various gods, and whether or not all of them had always existed; for Homer and Hesiod are the poets who composed theogonies and described the gods for the Greeks, giving them all their appropriate titles, offices, and powers, and they lived, as I believe, not more than four hundred years ago. The poets who are said to have preceded them were, I think, in point of fact

later. This is my personal opinion, but for the former part of my statement on these matters I have the authority of the priestesses of Dodona.⁴²

- 54 About the oracles – that of Dodona in Greece and of Ammon in Libya – the Egyptians have the following legend: according to the priests of the Theban Zeus, two women connected with the service of the temple were carried off by the Phoenicians and sold, one in Libya and the other in Greece, and it was these women who founded the oracles in the two countries. I asked the priests at Thebes what grounds they had for being so sure about this, and they told me that careful search had been made for the women at the time, and that though it was unsuccessful, they had afterwards learned that the facts were just as they had reported them. At Dodona, however, the priestesses who deliver the oracles have a different version of the story: two black doves, they say, flew away from Thebes in Egypt, and one of them alighted at Dodona, the other in Libya. The former, perched on an oak, and speaking with a human voice, told them that there, on that very spot, there should be an oracle of Zeus. Those who heard her understood the words to be a command from heaven, and at once obeyed. Similarly the dove which flew to Libya told the Libyans to found the oracle of Ammon – which is also an oracle of Zeus. The people who gave me this information were the three priestesses at Dodona – Promeneia the eldest, Timarete the next, and Nicandra the youngest – and their account is confirmed by the other Dodonaeans connected with the temple.
- 55 Personally, however, I would suggest that if the Phoenicians really carried off the women from the temple and sold them respectively in Libya and Greece, the one who was brought to Greece (or Pelasgia as it was then called) must have been sold to the Thesprotians; and later, while she was working as a slave in that part of the country, she built, under an oak that happened to be growing there, a shrine to Zeus; for she would naturally remember in her exile the god whom she had served in her native Thebes. Subsequently, when she had learned to speak Greek, she established an oracle there, and mentioned, in addition, that the same Phoenicians who had sold her, also sold her sister in
- 56 Libya. The story which the people of Dodona tell about the
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doves came, I should say, from the fact that the women were foreigners, whose language sounded to them like the twittering of birds; later on the dove spoke with a human voice, because by that time the woman had stopped twittering and learned to talk intelligibly. That, at least, is how I should explain the obvious impossibility of a dove using the language of men. As to the bird being black, they merely signify by this that the woman was an Egyptian. It is certainly true that the oracles at Thebes and Dodona are similar in character. Another form of divination – by the inspection of sacrificial victims – also came from Egypt.⁴³

It was the Egyptians too who originated, and taught the 58
Greeks to use ceremonial meetings, processions, and procession-
al offerings: a fact which can be inferred from the obvious
antiquity of such ceremonies in Egypt, compared with Greece,
where they have been only recently introduced. The Egyptians 59
meet in solemn assembly not once a year only, but on a number
of occasions, the most important and best attended being the
festival of Artemis at Bubastis: second in importance is the
assembly at Busiris – a city in the middle of the Delta, containing
a vast temple dedicated to Isis, the Egyptian equivalent of
Demeter, in whose honour the meeting is held. Then there
are the assemblies in honour of Athene at Sais, of the Sun
at Heliopolis, of Leto at Buto, and of Ares at Papremis. The 60
procedure at Bubastis is this: they come in barges, men and
women together, a great number in each boat; on the way, some
of the women keep up a continual clatter with castanets and
some of the men play flutes, while the rest, both men and
women, sing and clap their hands. Whenever they pass a town
on the river-bank, they bring the barge close in-shore; some of
the women continuing to act as I have said, while others shout
abuse at the women of the place, or start dancing, or stand up
and pull up their skirts. When they reach Bubastis they celebrate
the festival with elaborate sacrifices, and more wine is consumed
than during all the rest of the year. The numbers that meet
there are, according to native report, as many as seven hundred
thousand men and women – excluding children. I have already 61
mentioned the festival of Isis at Busiris: it is here that everybody

– tens of thousands of men and women – when the sacrifice is over, beat their breasts: in whose honour, however, I do not feel it is proper for me to say.⁴⁴ Any Carians who happen to live in Egypt go even further and cut their foreheads with knives, thus
 62 proving that they are foreigners and not Egyptians. At Sais, on the night of the sacrifices, everybody burns a great number of lights in the open air round the houses; the lamps they use are flat dishes filled with oil and salt, with a floating wick which keeps burning throughout the night. The festival is called the Festival of Lamps, and even the Egyptians who cannot attend it mark the night of the sacrifice by lighting lamps, so that on that night lamps are burning not in Sais only but throughout the country. There is a sacred tradition which accounts both for the date and for the manner of these observances.

63 At Heliopolis and Buto the assemblies are for the purpose of sacrifice only; but at Papremis there is a special ceremony in addition to the ordinary rites and sacrifices as practised elsewhere. As the sun draws towards setting, only a few of the priests continue to employ themselves about the image of the god, while the majority, armed with wooden clubs, take their stand at the entrance of the temple; opposite these is another crowd of men, more than a thousand strong, also armed with clubs and consisting of men who have vows to perform. The image of the god, in a little wooden gold-plated shrine, is conveyed to another sacred building on the day before the ceremony. The few priests who are left to attend to it, put it, together with the shrine which contains it, in a four-wheeled cart which they drag along towards the temple. The others, waiting at the temple gate, try to prevent it from coming in, while the votaries take the god's side and set upon them with their clubs. The assault is resisted, and a vigorous tussle ensues in which heads are broken and not a few actually die of the wounds they receive. That, at least, is what I believe, though the Egyptians told me that nobody is ever killed. The origin of this festival is explained locally by the story that the mother of Ares once lived in the temple; Ares himself was brought up elsewhere, but when he grew to manhood he wished to get to know his mother and for that purpose came to the temple where she was.⁴⁵ Her attend-

ants, however, not knowing him by sight, refused him admission, and succeeded in keeping him out until he fetched help from another town and forced his way in by violence. This, they say, is why the battle with clubs is part of the ceremony at the festival of Ares.

It was the Egyptians who first made it an offence against piety
 64 to have intercourse with women in temples, or to enter temples after intercourse without having previously washed. Hardly any nation except the Egyptians and Greeks has any such scruple, but nearly all consider men and women to be, in this respect, no different from animals, which, whether they are beasts or birds, they constantly see coupling in temples and sacred places – and if the god concerned had any objection to this, he would not allow it to occur. Such is the theory, but, in spite of it, I must continue to disapprove the practice. The Egyptians are meticulous
 65 in their observance of this point, as indeed they are in everything else which concerns their religion.

There are not a great many wild animals in Egypt, in spite of the fact that it borders on Libya. Such as there are – both wild and tame – are without exception held to be sacred. To explain the reason for this, I should have to enter into a discussion of religious principles which is a subject I particularly wish to avoid – any slight mention I have already made of such matters having been forced upon me by the needs of my story. But, reasons apart, how they actually behave towards animals I will proceed to describe. The various sorts have guardians appointed for them, sometimes men, sometimes women, who are responsible for feeding them; and the office of guardian is handed down from father to child. Their manner, in the various cities, of performing vows is as follows: praying to the god to whom the particular creature, whichever it may be, is sacred, they shave the heads of their children – sometimes completely, sometimes only a half or a third part – and after weighing the hair in a pair of scales, give an equal weight of silver to the animals' keeper, who then cuts up fish (the animals' usual food) to an equivalent value and gives it to the animal to eat. Anyone who deliberately kills one of these animals, is punished with death; should one be killed accidentally, the penalty is whatever the priests choose

to impose; but for killing an ibis or a hawk, whether deliberately or not, the penalty is inevitably death.

66 The number, already large, of domestic animals would have been greatly increased, were it not for an odd thing that happens to the cats. The females, when they have kittens, avoid the toms; but the toms, thus deprived of their satisfaction, get over the difficulty very ingeniously, for they either openly seize, or secretly steal, the kittens and kill them – but without eating them – and the result is that the females, deprived of their kittens and wanting more (for their maternal instinct is very strong), go off to look for mates again. What happens when a house catches fire is most extraordinary: nobody takes the least trouble to put it out, for it is only the cats that matter: everyone stands in a row, a little distance from his neighbour, trying to protect the cats, who nevertheless slip through the line, or jump over it, and hurl themselves into the flames. This causes the Egyptians deep distress. All the inmates of a house where a cat has died a natural death shave their eyebrows, and when a dog dies they
67 shave the whole body including the head. Cats which have died are taken to Bubastis, where they are embalmed and buried in sacred receptacles; dogs are buried, also in sacred burial-places, in the towns where they belong. Mongooses are buried in the same way as dogs; field-mice and hawks are taken to Buto, ibises to Hermopolis. Bears, which are scarce, and wolves (which in Egypt are not much bigger than foxes) are buried wherever they happen to be found lying dead.

68 The following is an account of the crocodile. During the four winter months it takes no food. It is a four-footed, amphibious creature, lays and hatches its eggs on land, where it spends the greater part of the day, and stays all night in the river, where the water is warmer than the night-air and the dew. The difference in size between the young and the full-grown crocodile is greater than in any other known creature; for a crocodile's egg is hardly bigger than a goose's, and the young when hatched is small in proportion, yet it grows to a size of some twenty-three feet long or even more. It has eyes like a pig's but great fang-like teeth in proportion to its body, and is the only animal to have no tongue and a stationary lower jaw; for when it eats it brings the upper

jaw down upon the under. It has powerful claws and a scaly hide, which on its back is impenetrable. It cannot see under water, though on land its sight is remarkably sharp. One result of its spending so much time in the water is that the inside of its mouth gets covered with leeches. Other animals avoid the crocodile, as do all birds too with one exception – the sandpiper, or Egyptian plover; this bird is of service to the crocodile and lives, in consequence, in the greatest amity with him; for when the crocodile comes ashore and lies with his mouth wide open (which he generally does facing towards the west), the bird hops in and swallows the leeches. The crocodile enjoys this, and never, in consequence, hurts the bird. Some Egyptians reverence the crocodile as a sacred beast; others do not, but treat it as an
69 enemy. The strongest belief in its sanctity is to be found in Thebes and round about Lake Moeris; in these places they keep one particular crocodile, which they tame, putting rings made of glass or gold into its ears and bracelets round its front feet, and giving it special food and ceremonial offerings. In fact, while these creatures are alive they treat them with every kindness, and, when they die, embalm them and bury them in sacred tombs. On the other hand, in the neighbourhood of Elephantine crocodiles are not considered sacred animals at all, but are eaten. In the Egyptian language these creatures are called *champsae*. The name crocodile – or 'lizard' – was given them by the Ionians, who saw they resembled the lizards commonly found on stone walls in their own country.⁴⁶

Of the numerous different ways of catching crocodiles I will
70 describe the one which seems to me the most worthy to report. They bait a hook with a chine of pork and let it float out into midstream, and at the same time, standing on the bank, take a live pig and beat it. The crocodile, hearing its squeals, makes a rush towards it, encounters the bait, gulps it down, and is hauled out of the water. The first thing the huntsman does when he has got the beast on land is to plaster its eyes with mud; this done, it is dispatched easily enough – but without this precaution it will give a lot of trouble.

The hippopotamus is held sacred in the district of Papremis,
71 but not elsewhere. This animal has four legs, cloven hoofs like

an ox, a snub nose, a horse's mane and tail, conspicuous tusks, a voice like a horse's neigh, and is about the size of a very large ox. Its hide is so thick and tough that when dried it can be made
 72 into spear-shafts.⁴⁷ Otters, too, are found in the Nile; they, and the fish called lepidotus, and eels are all considered sacred to
 73 the Nile, as is also the bird known as the foxgoose. Another sacred bird is the phoenix; I have not seen a phoenix myself, except in paintings, for it is very rare and visits the country (so they say at Heliopolis) only at intervals of 500 years, on the occasion of the death of the parent-bird. To judge by the paintings, its plumage is partly golden, partly red, and in shape and size it is exactly like an eagle. There is a story about the phoenix which I do not find credible; it brings its parent in a lump of myrrh all the way from Arabia and buries the body in the temple of the Sun. To perform this feat, the bird first shapes some myrrh into a sort of egg as big as it finds, by testing, that it can carry; then it hollows the lump out, puts its father inside and smears some more myrrh over the hole. The egg-shaped lump is then just of the same weight as it was originally. Finally it is carried by the bird to the temple of the Sun in Egypt. Such, at least, is the story.⁴⁸

74 Near Thebes a species of snake is found said to be sacred to Zeus; these snakes are small and quite harmless, and have two horns growing from the top of their heads. Such as are found dead are buried in the temple of Zeus.

75 There is a place in Arabia more or less opposite the city of Buto, where I went to try to get information about the flying snakes. On my arrival I saw their skeletons in incalculable numbers; they were piled in heaps, some of which were big, others smaller, others smaller still, and there were many piles of them. The place where these bones lie is a narrow mountain pass leading to a broad plain which joins on to the plain of Egypt, and it is said that when the winged snakes fly to Egypt from Arabia in spring, the ibises meet them at the entrance to the pass and do not let them get through, but kill them.⁴⁹ According to the Arabians, this service is the reason for the great reverence with which the ibis is regarded in Egypt, and the
 76 Egyptians themselves admit the truth of what they say. The ibis

is jet-black all over; it has legs like a crane's, a markedly hooked beak, and is about the size of a crane. That, at any rate, is what the black ibis is like – the kind namely that attacks the winged snakes; there is, however, another sort, more commonly found in inhabited districts; this has a bald head and neck and is white except for the head, throat, wing-tips, and rump, which are jet-black; its legs and beak are similar to those of the black ibis. The winged snakes resemble watersnakes; their wings are not feathered, but are like a bat's. I will now leave the subject of sacred animals and say something of the people.

The Egyptians who live in the cultivated parts of the country, 77 by their practice of keeping records of the past, have made themselves much the most learned of any nation of which I have had experience. I will describe some of their habits: every month for three successive days they purge themselves, for their health's sake, with emetics and clysters, in the belief that all diseases come from the food a man eats; and it is a fact – even apart from this precaution – that next to the Libyans they are the healthiest people in the world. I should put this down myself to the absence of changes in the climate; for change, and especially change of weather, is the prime cause of disease. They eat loaves made from emmer – *cyllestes* is their word for them – and drink a wine made from barley, as they have no vines in the country. Some kinds of fish they eat raw, either dried in the sun, or salted; quails, too, they eat raw, and ducks and various small birds, after pickling them in brine; other sorts of birds and fish, apart from those which they consider sacred, they either roast or boil. When the rich give a party and the meal is finished, a man carries 78 round amongst the guests a wooden image of a corpse in a coffin, carved and painted to look as much like the real thing as possible, and anything from eighteen inches to three foot long; he shows it to each guest in turn, and says: 'Look upon this body as you drink and enjoy yourself; for you will be just like it when you are dead.'

The Egyptians keep to their native customs and never adopt 79 any from abroad. Many of these customs are interesting, especially, perhaps, the 'Linus'⁵⁰ song. This person, under different names, is celebrated in song not only in Egypt but in Phoenicia,

Cyprus, and other places, and appears to be the person whom the Greeks celebrate as Linus; if this is so, it is yet one more of the many surprises that Egypt has to offer; for where did the Egyptians get this song from? It is clearly very ancient; the Egyptian name for Linus is Maneros, and their story is that their first king had an only son, who died young, and that this dirge – their first and only melody – was invented to be sung in his honour.

80 There is another point in which the Egyptians resemble one section of the Greek people – the Lacedaemonians: I mean the custom of young men stepping aside to make room for their seniors when they meet them in the street, and of getting up from their seats when older men come in. But they are unlike any of the Greeks in that they do not greet one another by name in the streets, but make a low bow and drop one hand to the
81 knee. The clothes they wear consist of a linen tunic with a fringe hanging round the legs (called in their language *calasiris*), and a white woollen garment on top of it. It is, however, contrary to religious usage to be buried in a woollen garment, or to wear wool in a temple. This custom agrees with the rites known as Orphic and Bacchic (actually Egyptian and Pythagorean); for anyone initiated into these rites is similarly debarred from burial in a garment of wool. They have a sacred story which explains the reason for this.

82 The Egyptians were also the first to assign each month and each day to a particular deity, and to foretell by the date of a man's birth his character, his fortunes, and the day of his death – a discovery which Greek poets have turned to account.⁵¹ The Egyptians, too, have made more use of omens and prognostics than any other nation; they keep written records of the observed results of any unusual phenomenon, so that they come to expect a similar consequence to follow a similar occurrence in the
83 future. The art of divination is not attributed by them to any man, but only to certain gods: for instance, Heracles, Apollo, Athena, Artemis, Ares, and Zeus all have an oracle in the country, while the oracle of Leto in Buto is held in greater repute than any of them. The method of delivering the responses varies in the different shrines.

The practice of medicine they split up into separate parts, 84 each doctor being responsible for the treatment of only one disease. There are, in consequence, innumerable doctors, some specializing in diseases of the eyes, others of the head, others of the teeth, others of the stomach, and so on; while others, again, deal with the sort of troubles which cannot be exactly
85 localized.⁵² As regards mourning and funerals, when a distinguished man dies all the women of the household plaster their heads and faces with mud, then, leaving the body indoors, perambulate the town with the dead man's female relatives, their dresses fastened with a girdle, and beat their bared breasts. The men too, for their part, follow the same procedure, wearing a girdle and beating themselves like the women. The ceremony over, they take the body to be mummified.

Mummification is a distinct profession. The embalmers, when 86 a body is brought to them, produce specimen models in wood, painted to resemble nature, and graded in quality; the best and most expensive kind is said to represent a being whose name I shrink from mentioning in this connexion; the next best is somewhat inferior and cheaper, while the third sort is cheapest of all. After pointing out these differences in quality, they ask which of the three is required, and the kinsmen of the dead man, having agreed upon a price, go away and leave the embalmers to their work. The most perfect process is as follows: as much as possible of the brain is extracted through the nostrils with an iron hook, and what the hook cannot reach is rinsed out with drugs; next the flank is laid open with a flint knife and the whole contents of the abdomen removed; the cavity is then thoroughly cleansed and washed out, first with palm wine and again with an infusion of pounded spices. After that it is filled with pure bruised myrrh, cassia, and every other aromatic substance with the exception of frankincense, and sewn up again, after which the body is placed in natrum, covered entirely over, for seventy days – never longer. When this period, which must not be exceeded, is over, the body is washed and then wrapped from head to foot in linen cut into strips and smeared on the under side with gum, which is commonly used by the Egyptians instead of glue. In this condition the body is given back to the family,

who have a wooden case made, shaped like the human figure, into which it is put. The case is then sealed up and stored in a sepulchral chamber, upright against the wall. When, for reasons of expense, the second quality is called for, the treatment is different: no incision is made and the intestines are not removed, but oil of cedar is injected with a syringe into the body through the anus which is afterwards stopped up to prevent the liquid from escaping. The body is then pickled in natrum for the prescribed number of days, on the last of which the oil is drained off. The effect of it is so powerful that as it leaves the body it brings with it the stomach and intestines in a liquid state, and as the flesh, too, is dissolved by the natrum, nothing of the body is left but the bones and skin. After this treatment it is returned to the family without further fuss.

88 The third method, used for embalming the bodies of the poor, is simply to clear out the intestines with a purge and keep the body seventy days in natrum. It is then given back to the family to be taken away.

89 When the wife of a distinguished man dies, or any woman who happens to be beautiful or well known, her body is not given to the embalmers immediately, but only after the lapse of three or four days. This is a precautionary measure to prevent the embalmers from violating the corpse, a thing which is said actually to have happened in the case of a woman who had just died. The culprit was given away by one of his fellow workmen.

90 If anyone, either an Egyptian or a foreigner, is found drowned in the river or killed by a crocodile, there is the strongest obligation upon the people of the nearest town to have the body embalmed in the most elaborate manner and buried in a consecrated burial-place; no one is allowed to touch it except the priests of the Nile – not even relatives or friends; the priests alone prepare it for burial with their own hands and place it in the tomb, as if it were something more sacred than the body of a man.

91 The Egyptians are unwilling to adopt Greek customs, or, to speak generally, those of any other country. There is, however, one exception to this almost universal rule in the case of Chemmis, a large town near Neapolis in the district of Thebes. In this place there is a square of enclosed ground sacred to

Perseus the son of Danae; palm trees grow round it, and there is a stone gateway of great size surmounted by two very large stone figures. Within the enclosure is a shrine containing a statue of Perseus. According to the people of Chemmis, Perseus is frequently to be seen in the neighbourhood, and also within the temple; sometimes a sandal which he has worn, three feet long, is found – a sign, they say, of the approach of a period of great prosperity for the whole of Egypt. In the worship of Perseus Greek ceremonies are used, athletic contests with all the usual events, and prizes of cattle, cloaks, and skins. When I asked why it was that Perseus revealed himself only to the people of Chemmis, and why they alone of the Egyptians celebrated games in his honour, the answer was that Perseus belonged by birth to their city; Danaus and Lynceus, they said, were Chemmites before they sailed to Greece, and from them they traced Perseus' descent. Further, when he came to Egypt from Libya with the Gorgon's head (which is the reason the Greeks also assign for his going there) he paid a visit to Chemmis, having previously learned the name of the place from his mother, and there acknowledged all his kinsmen. On his arrival he instructed them to celebrate games in his honour, and they accordingly did so.⁵³

Up to this point I have described the life of the Egyptians who live south of the marsh-country; those who inhabit the marshes are in most things much the same as the rest; and they also practise monogamy, as the Greeks do; nevertheless they are peculiar in certain ways which they have discovered of living more cheaply: for instance, they gather the water-lilies (called lotus by the Egyptians), which grow in great abundance when the river is full and floods the neighbouring flats, and dry them in the sun; then from the centre of each blossom they pick out something which resembles a poppy-head, grind it, and make it into loaves which they bake. The root of this plant is also edible; it is round, about as big as an apple, and tastes fairly sweet. There is another kind of lily to be found in the river; this resembles a rose, and its fruit is formed on a separate stalk from that which bears the blossom, and has very much the look of a wasps' comb. The fruit contains a number of seeds, about the

size of an olive-stone, which are good to eat either fresh or dried. They pull up the annual crop of papyrus-reed which grows in the marshes, cut the stalks in two, and eat the lower part, about eighteen inches in length, first baking it in a closed pan, heated red-hot, if they want to enjoy it to perfection. They also sell it. The upper section of the stalk is used for some other purpose. Some of these people, however, live upon nothing but fish, which they gut as soon as they catch them, and eat after drying them in the sun.

93 Gregarious fish are not found in large numbers in the rivers; they frequent the lakes, which they leave at the breeding season to swim in shoals to the sea. In front go the males, dropping their milt, which the females, following behind, gulp down. It is this that causes the females to conceive, and after a period in the sea, when they are about to spawn, the whole shoal returns to its former haunt in the inland lakes. This time, however, it is the females who lead the way, and as they swim along in their hundreds they do just what the males did on the way out, dropping their grains of spawn, a little here, a little there, while the males who follow behind swallow them up. Each of these grains of spawn is a fish in embryo; some of them escape and are not swallowed by the males, and it is these which afterwards grow to maturity. Fish which are caught on their way to the sea are found to have their heads bruised on the left side, while those taken as they return upstream have similar bruises on the right side. The reason is that as they swim down river to the sea they keep close to the bank on their left, and still stick to the same side of the river on their return, keeping as near the bank as they possibly can and continually brushing against it, for fear of being carried out of their course by the strength of the stream.

When the Nile begins to rise, the hollows and marshy ground close beside it are the first to fill, the water from the river seeping through the banks, and no sooner are these low-lying bits of ground formed into lakes than they are found to contain a multitude of small fish. I think I understand the probable reason for this: the fish, I should say, when the river is falling the previous year, lay their eggs in the mud just before they get away with the last of the water, so that when the flood comes round

again in due course, the eggs at once hatch and produce the fish. These are the facts about the fish in the Nile.

The Egyptians who live in the marsh-country use an oil 94 extracted from the castor-oil plant. This plant, which grows wild in Greece, they call *Kiki*, and the Egyptian variety is very prolific and has a disagreeable smell. Their practice is to sow it along the banks of rivers and lakes, and when the fruit is gathered it is either cut and pressed, or else roasted and boiled down, and the liquid thus obtained is of an oily nature and quite as good as olive-oil for burning in lamps, though the smell is unpleasant.

The country is infested by swarms of mosquitoes, and the 95 people have invented various methods of dealing with them; south of the marshes they sleep at night on raised structures, which is a great benefit to them because the mosquitoes are prevented by the wind from flying high; in the marsh-country itself they do not have these towers, but everyone, instead, provides himself with a net, which during the day he uses for fishing, and at night fixes up round his bed, and creeps in under it before he goes to sleep. For anyone to sleep wrapped in a cloak or in linen would be useless, for the mosquitoes would bite through them; but they do not even attempt to get through the net.

The Nile boats used for carrying freight are built of acacia 96 wood – the acacia resembles in form the lotus of Cyrene, and exudes gum. They cut short planks, about three feet long, from this tree, and the method of construction is to lay them together like bricks and through-fasten them with dowels set close together, and then, when the hull is complete, to lay the benches across on top. The boats have no ribs and are caulked from inside with papyrus. They are given a single steering-oar, which is driven down through the keel; the masts are of acacia wood, the sails of papyrus. These vessels cannot sail up the river without a good leading wind, but have to be towed from the banks; and for dropping downstream with the current they are handled as follows: each vessel is equipped with a raft made of tamarisk wood, with a rush mat fastened on top of it, and a stone with a hole through it weighing some hundred pounds;

the raft and the stone are made fast to the vessel with ropes, fore and aft respectively, so that the raft is carried rapidly forward by the current and pulls the 'baris' (as these boats are called) after it, while the stone, dragging along the bottom astern, acts as a check and gives her steerage-way. There are a great many of these vessels on the Nile, some of them of many tons' carrying capacity.

97 When the Nile overflows, the whole country is converted into a sea, and the towns, which alone remain above water, look like the islands in the Aegean. At these times water transport is used all over the country, instead of merely along the course of the river, and anyone going from Naucratis to Memphis would pass right by the pyramids instead of following the usual course by Cercasorus and the tip of the Delta. If you go by boat from Canopus on the coast across the flats to Naucratis, you will pass Anthylla and Archandropolis, of which the former, a city of
98 some repute, has been made over ever since the Persian conquest of Egypt to the wife of the reigning monarch to keep her in shoes. The latter town, I fancy, took the name of Archandropolis from Archander the son of Phthius, grandson of Achaeus and son-in-law of Danaus. There may, of course, have been another Archander; but the name in any case is not Egyptian.

99 Up to this point I have confined what I have written to the results of my own direct observation and research, and the views I have formed from them; but from now on the basis of my story will be the accounts given to me by the Egyptians themselves – though here, too, I shall put in one or two things which I have seen with my own eyes.⁵⁴

The priests told me that it was Min, the first king of Egypt, who raised the dam which created Memphis. The river used to flow along the base of the sandy hills on the Libyan border, and this monarch, by damming it up at the bend about a hundred furlongs south of Memphis, drained the original channel and diverted it to a new one half-way between the two lines of hills. To this day the elbow which the Nile forms here, where it is forced into its new channel, is most carefully watched by the Persians, who strengthen the dam every year; for should the river burst it, Memphis might be completely overwhelmed. On

the land which had been drained by the diversion of the river, King Min built the city which is now called Memphis – it lies in the narrow part of Egypt – and afterwards on the north and west sides of the town excavated a lake, communicating with the river, which itself protects it on the east. In addition to this the priests told me that he built there the large and very remarkable temple of Hephaestus.⁵⁵

Next, the priests read to me from a written record the names of three hundred and thirty monarchs, in the same number of generations, all of them Egyptians except eighteen, who were Ethiopians, and one other, who was an Egyptian woman. This last had the same name – Nitocris – as the queen of Babylon. The story was that she ensnared to their deaths hundreds of Egyptians in revenge for the king her brother, whom his subjects had murdered and forced her to succeed; this she did by constructing an immense underground chamber, in which, under the pretence of opening it by an inaugural ceremony, she invited to a banquet all the Egyptians whom she knew to be chiefly responsible for her brother's death; then, when the banquet was in full swing, she let the river in on them through a large concealed conduit-pipe. The only other thing I was told about her was that after this fearful revenge she flung herself into a room full of ashes, to escape her punishment. The other kings, the priests told me, were in no way distinguished and left nothing to commemorate their reigns, with the exception of the last of them, Moeris, who is remembered by the northern gateway he built for the temple of Hephaestus and the lake with the pyramids in it, which were constructed by his orders. The extent of the lake and the size of the pyramids I will mention later on.⁵⁶ As none of the other kings on the priests' roll left any memorial at all, I will pass on to say something of Sesostris, who succeeded them.⁵⁷ Sesostris, the priests said, sailed first with a fleet of warships from the Arabian gulf along the coast of the Indian Ocean, subduing the coastal tribes as he went, until he found that shoal water made further progress impossible; then on his return to Egypt (still according to the priests' account) he raised a powerful army and marched across the continent, reducing to subjection every nation in his path. Whenever he encountered a