

**A DISSERTATION ON THE
GEOGRAPHY OF HERODOTUS;
RESEARCHES INTO THE HISTORY
OF THE SCYTHIANS, GETAE, AND
SARMATIANS**

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A DISSERTATION
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GEOGRAPHY OF HERODOTUS.

THE revival of the critical examination of ancient history renders it everyday more evident that the most diligent study of the original authorities secures neither clearness nor certainty, unless the reader can determine the point from which and the medium through which the author looked, whose narrative he is perusing. Investigations of this nature are not less attractive than necessary; yet future ages will have little reason to complain, that even in this department of philological science the materials are exhausted.

Amongst other essential labours belonging to this style of criticism, is that of elucidating the notions of Grecian writers respecting the figure of the earth, as also the situation, outline, extent, and condition of countries known at their time: a labour, without which it is impossible to appreciate their geographical, frequently even their historical, accounts. The

researches of Voss upon ancient geography, and their highly successful results, rank among the greatest additions which have in modern times been made to the science of archaiology ; they do not, however, embrace the historian who treated of geography, so far as it was connected with his subject, the history of the wars between Asia and Europe, and interwove it with his history. Yet the abundance and importance of his accounts fully reward us for the effort which it requires to comprehend them as he intended : and it is only by restoring the whole picture, that we can be sure of the corrections by which his particular statements become applicable to the ancient geography : or, in other words, we must sketch out the map of the geography of Herodotus. Such an attempt appears the less difficult, as this historian frequently supplies measures and distances : should there be, however, in this first essay, some principal positions only doubtfully laid down, or even falsely delineated, the present dissertation will, at least, exhibit the causes of such defects : and if other writers should undertake to solve the difficulties which shall be distinctly pointed out, the labour which it has cost me will not be lost for the cause of science. There might, perhaps, be some scruple in laying before this assembly*, inquiries which tend to place in a disadvan-

* This dissertation was read before the Berlin Academy, and was first published in the transactions of that society for 1812-13.

tageous light a favourite and venerated writer of antiquity, in the presence of the cultivators of the sciences, in whose eyes the ancient historian must certainly appear ignorant when compared with a well-informed youth of modern times. Yet as we are little disposed to censure those who give the preference to modern times for the improvements in those sciences, which were either uncultivated in the brightest days of antiquity, or which were found rather in the germ of profound meditations than developed in full, yet must we claim the regard of the mathematician and the physical geographer, whose sciences, without the labours of the Greeks of a later period, would now have had no existence.

At the time when Herodotus collected and recorded his observations, many of the Greeks must have been advanced beyond a mere elementary knowledge of mathematics and astronomy: and to several of his contemporaries his notions respecting the figure of the earth, and the causes of the differences of climate, must have appeared simple and illiterate. Such information, however, was not, as in the days of modern improvement, a common property, which it is in the power of every one to acquire, and a want of which is considered as a culpable defect. As we do not require that every one should be a physician, a painter, or a musician, in order to deserve the name of educated; so it was an education of another kind, and that

of no slight extent, which the Greeks required of every freeborn citizen. The Greeks considered in the same light a knowledge of sciences and a knowledge of the arts. Now a proficiency in a single art confers distinction; and a person usually confines his attention to that particular branch, and remains unacquainted with other arts. In Greece the same view was taken of the sciences, and thus Herodotus could be an historian, without being an astronomer or natural philosopher; he could be *λόγιος* and *ιστορικὸς* without its being requisite that he should also be *αστρολόγος* or *φυσικός*; he considered geography only in his own point of view, careless of the censures of others who might view it in a different direction.

This mode of proceeding was certainly, like the whole train of thought which his work exhibits, in the highest degree empirical. On the one hand, where his own immediate experience has not shown him the contrary, he rejects not the strangest things as impossible: (and this not from credulity, but because his experience had convinced him of the reality of things the most marvellous, which in his own country he would have regarded as impossible) —and on the other, does not think^b the most

^b The words of the original, are "*wie er auch die ausserordentlichsten Veränderungen für unmöglich im langen Laufe der Zeit hält.*" It seems that the negative has, by an error of the press, been omitted in this clause; and that the author alludes to the story of the Egyptian priests, related by Herodotus, that the sun had four times changed its course, etc.

extraordinary changes impossible in long process of time; thus, both in space and time, he proceeds onwards and backwards, without acknowledging any limits. Though he does not attempt to conceive or comprehend the eternity of the earth and of the human race, nor deems the contentions of nations on their superior antiquity to be absurd, which to our prejudices appear so strange, still he gives it as his opinion, that the Egyptians might have existed from eternity, and that the Scythians might have had their origin a thousand years before his time. In like manner the earth is, according to him, a boundless plain. Minds of an entirely opposite character to that of Herodotus, engaged in comprehending the universe, had endeavoured long before, with a far more limited knowledge of countries, to determine the circumference and figure of the earth, and had reduced them, in thought at least, to a determinate shape. These limits gave way as knowledge advanced, and thus the wish to assign a definite circumference, where by extending their views on all sides they never arrived at an end, to Herodotus appeared mere folly. He was indifferent as to the relation that the earth bears to the rest of the universe, which he, with the wisest of his contemporaries, considered only as associated with the earth; he looked upon all inquiries about the nature of the universe as useless, when only so small a portion of it was known. An attempt to

draw the figure of the earth he considered an act of ridiculous presumption; when, therefore, he says, that "the ether bounds the earth¹," it is only a popular notion, purposely expressed in vague language.

It is evident, without farther inquiry or proof, that Herodotus considered the earth to be a plane. His notions, however, respecting the causes of the varieties of climate are by no means equally clear: so much so, that to a person who does not perceive their singular simplicity, the passages where they occur are wholly unintelligible. Severity or mildness of climate are, in his opinion, peculiar properties of countries, in the same way as fertility or barrenness of soil: he derives the nature of the climate from the winds, which he considers as an inherent quality of the air; an opinion by no means peculiar to Herodotus, but generally prevalent in his time. This is evident from his account of the Hyperboreans, which we are able to compare with that of Hecataeus (Diodorus II, 47²). This writer, who must have been acquainted with the rigour of the Scythian winter, describes the perpetual spring, and the double harvest of the happy islands in the extreme north beyond the icy Boreas.—Hero-

¹ VII, 8, 11. "If all countries were subject to the Persian empire, it would be bounded by the ether of Jupiter." *γῆν τὴν Περσίδα ἀποδέξομαι τῷ Διὶ αἰθέρι δμουρέουσιν, οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ χώρην γε οὐδεμίαν κατόψεται ὁ ἥλιος ἕμουρον ἐούσαν τῇ ἡμετέρῃ*, are the words of Darius.

² See note (A) at the end.