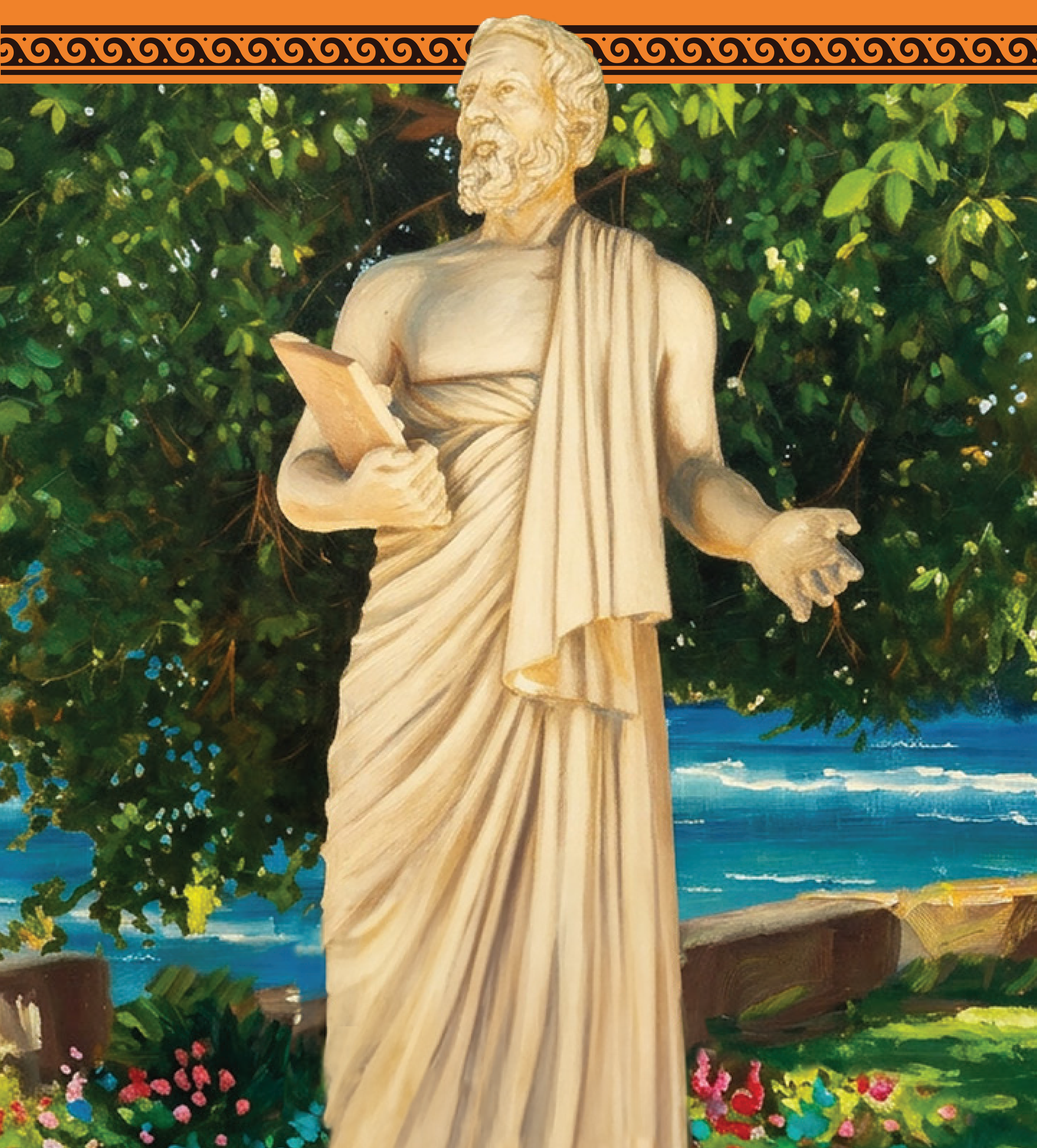
HISTORIES

A YOUNG READER'S HERODOTUS



HISTORIES
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Selections from the Histories of Herodotus

Edited by Erlend D. MacGillivray

Introduction by Michael G. Eatmon

Text adapted from *The Boys' and Girls' Herodotus* by John S. White (1884)

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Introduction

HERODOTUS: THE FIRST HISTORIAN AND THE STORIES THAT STILL MATTER

More than two thousand years ago, a Greek named Herodotus set out to understand why nations rise and fall. He walked dusty roads from Greece to Egypt, crossed deserts, and sailed among islands where the wind carried a dozen languages. He listened to priests in marble temples, merchants in crowded markets, and soldiers around campfires. Everywhere he went, he asked the same simple questions: What happened ... and why?

From his wanderings came *The Histories*, one of the most remarkable books ever written. It was part travel diary, part detective story, and part moral reflection. Above all, it was an effort to keep peoples' collective memories alive. "I write these things," he said, "so that great deeds should not be forgotten."

Travel in the fifth century BC meant danger. A journey of a few hundred miles could take months and might end in shipwreck or disease. Herodotus went anyway, guided by a restless mind. He wanted to see the shape of the world with his own eyes. He claimed to trace the course of rivers, measure temples, and compare what different peoples said about the same event. In an age before easy access to maps or libraries, satisfying his curiosity required a sort of heroic intrepidness. Today we can summon information in seconds, but Herodotus had to earn it—mile by mile, story by story. He became one of the world's first investigators of human nature and action, chasing truth through the ancient world on foot.

Even today, millennia later, his project matters. We live surrounded by facts but are often starved for meaning. Herodotus shows how facts can become an inspiring wisdom when woven into a well told story. His mission—to ensure that people remember both the what and the why of what's gone before—remains the historian's highest calling.

The birth of history as a genre

Before Herodotus, Greeks had poets and storytellers, not historians. His *Histories* transformed memory into analysis. He gathered reports, compared sources, and asked why events occurred. This curiosity created a new kind of literature—one grounded in evidence, not myth. Later writers like Thucydides (ca. 455–ca. 400 BC) built on his model while seeking to improve his approach. Still, Herodotus remains the first to study human action rationally.

Herodotus's birthplace
Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, a busy port in Asia Minor. The city was Greek in language and culture, but it belonged to the Persian Empire. This meeting of worlds shaped his outlook. Surrounded by diverse merchants, sailors, and storytellers, he learned important lessons early on. He discovered that truth often speaks with different accents. He also learned that every people group sees life through its own customs.

THE LIFE OF A WONDERING MIND

Herodotus was born around 484 BC in Halicarnassus, a Greek city on the western coast of Asia Minor (in modern Turkey). The region was under Persian rule, so he grew up hearing Persian and Greek alike, absorbing two great civilizations from birth. The mix shaped his mind: Greek in his love of freedom, Persian in his fascination with empire. From that blend came a rare ability to see history from more than one side.

By his account, he began to travel as a young man—to Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, and the Greek mainland. He recorded not only what people did but what they believed. He asked why the Nile flooded each year, why Egyptians worshiped cats, and why Persians taught their sons "to ride, to shoot, and to speak the truth." He collected gossip and legend but also measured distances and compared reports. His main goal was not to entertain but to understand.

Ancient readers admired his scope. While some thought he believed too many tall tales, the Roman politician and orator Cicero (106–43 BC) later called him "the Father of History." Herodotus himself knew the risk of repeating others' stories. He often paused to signal his skepticism, separating what he was told from what he believed. That honesty lets us watch the historian at work. He checks sources, balances doubt against belief, and draws conclusions that are never final. To read him is to think alongside him.

WHAT THE HISTORIES CONTAIN

The Histories fill nine books, later named for the Muses, the goddesses of art and memory. Together, the nine books form a vast panorama of the ancient world. The main thread is the long struggle between Greece and Persia, culminating in the Persian Wars. Around that thread hang stories of kings, heroes, and whole civilizations. Each is described with the care of an explorer who has walked their streets.

One famous tale tells of Croesus, the golden king of Lydia, who thought himself the happiest of men. When he asked the Athenian lawgiver Solon to confirm it, Solon replied that true happiness could only be known at life's end. Years later, when Croesus lost his empire to Cyrus of Persia, he remembered Solon's warning. "Call no man happy until he is dead." In that line lies one of Herodotus's favorite themes: the instability of fortune. Greatness, once gained, can vanish overnight.

Elsewhere we meet the Spartans, who choose to die at Thermopylae rather than surrender their freedom. We encounter Egyptian engineers who built the pyramids and Scythian nomads with strange burial rites. We also meet the cunning Greek admirals who outwit the Persian fleet at Salamis. Through these stories runs a steady current of wonder. You'll read how the infant Cyrus, condemned to death by his own grandfather, was hidden by a herdsman and his wife who raised him as their own son. That shepherd's boy became the founder of the Persian Empire—proof that fortune and character matter more than birth. Herodotus describes foreign customs without scorn and strange religions without mockery. He delights in discovering and describing how peoples differ.

In gathering his material, he did more than write a history. He helped create a method. He compared sources as a scientist compares evidence, always seeking the cause beneath an event. He also preserved the voices of ordinary people—fishermen, craftsmen, and travelers—at a time when most writers

cared only for kings. In doing so, he laid the groundwork for three later disciplines: history, anthropology, and moral philosophy. His book is nothing less than a study of humanity itself.

History and philosophy
Herodotus wasn't a philosopher. (A philosopher asks for answers to some of life's most important questions.) He asked philosophical questions, though. What makes a good life? Why do nations fall? His method joined moral reflection with empirical curiosity. Later thinkers like Aristotle praised his search for causes. Herodotus turned wisdom into a matter of observation, where ideas and evidence meet in one long conversation.

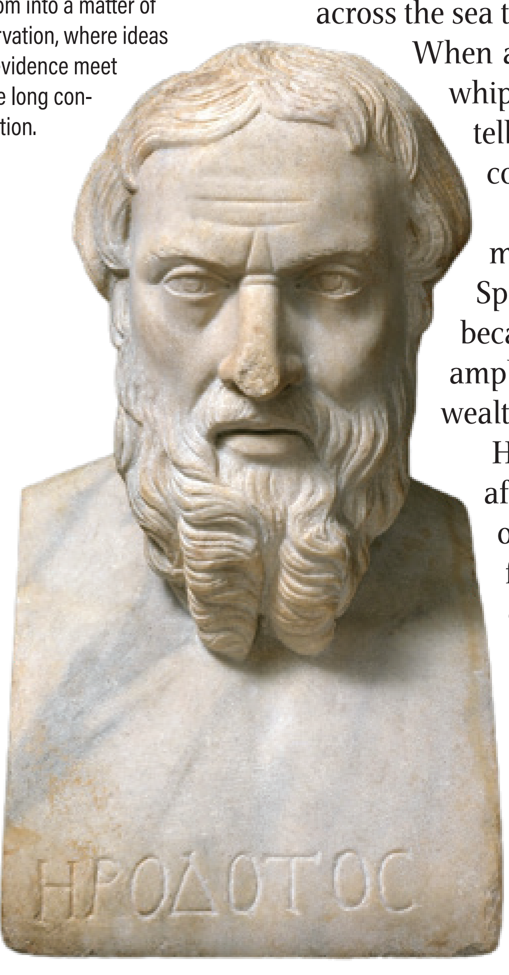
HISTORY AS MORAL CAUSE-AND-EFFECT

Before Herodotus, the Greeks had poets like Homer (ca. 8th century BC), who sang of gods and heroes. No one had tried to explain real events in moral and logical terms, though. Herodotus wanted to know *why* things happened. Why do empires rise and collapse, why does courage sometimes fail, and why does success so often turn to ruin? His answer was not mechanical; it was moral. He believed the universe itself rewarded moderation and punished arrogance.

The Greeks called this moral law *hubris* and *nemesis*—overreach followed by downfall. When Xerxes, king of Persia, built a bridge of boats across the sea to invade Greece, he acted not as a general but as a god. When a storm tore his bridge apart, he ordered the sea to be whipped for disobedience (or so the Greeks said). Herodotus tells the story almost quietly, trusting the reader to see the consequences of a pride gone mad.

In contrast stands Solon, who tells Croesus that no man can be called happy until he dies well. We read of Spartans, too, who accept certain death at Thermopylae because law and honor demand it. These powerful examples show Herodotus's belief that virtue is stronger than wealth or power.

He thought of history as a "lesson for those who come after." Our choices, both moral and immoral, shape the outcomes of our actions, and later generations can learn from them. Pride blinds rulers; greed weakens nations; courage restores hope. History, for him, is a science of the soul. To study it is to study human nature. Modern readers still wrestle with the same question: Should history teach moral lessons or merely report facts? Herodotus would answer that it must do both. Facts without reflection are lifeless; reflection without facts is fantasy. His genius lies in joining them.



WHY READ HERODOTUS TODAY

Some may ask why we should read an ancient Greek when so much newer information exists. After all, modern historians have tools Herodotus never dreamed of. They have access to archaeology, satellite imagery, digital archives, etc.

Modern historians' tools are powerful and useful, of course. Herodotus's *Histories* endures, though, because better facts *alone* can't make sense of the human story. A thoughtful interpretation must accompany them. What matters most is how we see the past and what we choose to learn from it.

Herodotus reminds us that the human heart has not changed. Greed, fear, ambition, curiosity—these still move nations today as surely as they did in his time. He approaches every culture, even enemy ones, with carefulness and patience. He wants to understand before he judges. When he studies Persian education or Egyptian religion, he's practicing what we might call historical empathy. He tries to imagine life from within another's world and worldview. That habit, rare then and rare now, is one reason his work feels so alive.

Reading him also teaches patience. In an age of instant news, he shows the value of slow observation. He spent years gathering reports before drawing a single conclusion. The same method can train ours: listen first, then test, then decide.

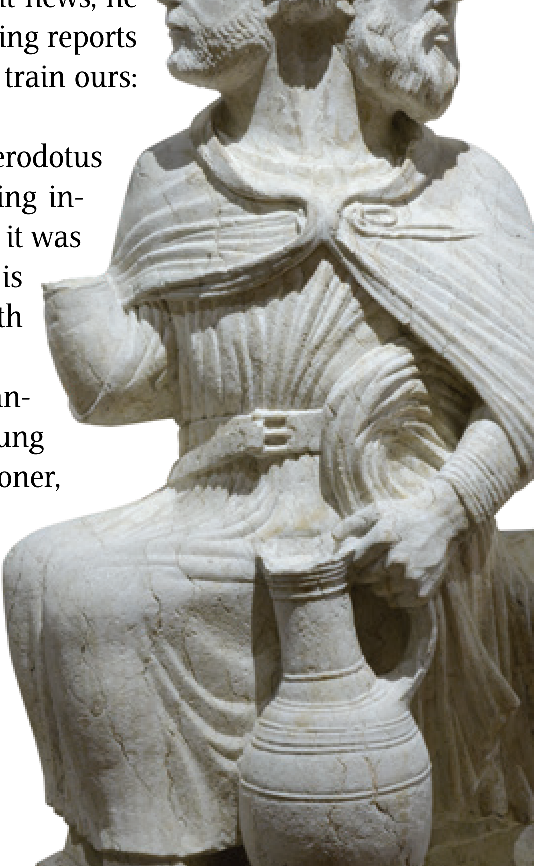
Modern historians can share that spirit of inquiry, but Herodotus shows us its original spark. His writing shows history being invented as a way of thinking. Each story feels fresh because it was written when the idea of *history* itself was new. To read him is to watch the birth of critical thought, the moment when myth gives way to evidence and wonder learns to ask questions.

For students, especially, *The Histories* offers more than ancient adventure. It fuels the moral imagination. It helps young readers see that every choice, whether by a king or a commoner, carries consequences. It shows that truth is rarely simple but always worth seeking. It also teaches a habit essential to any free mind: Weigh stories carefully. Neither swallow them whole nor dismiss them outright.

When we read Herodotus, we practice the art of wise remembering. We learn to connect events across time and

Rhetoric of inquiry

Herodotus often presents competing accounts. He weighs their merits in plain, reasoned language. This rhetorical balance invites readers to think critically. (Rhetoric is the art of effective communication.) He does not command belief; he earns it through fairness. His calm, questioning spirit gives us a model to follow. He shows us that rhetoric serves truth when it aims not to win arguments but to illuminate them.



Herodotus and Homer
Homer sang of heroes and gods; Herodotus wrote of real people and nations. Both, though, sought to preserve glory from being forgotten. Homer explained virtue through myth, Herodotus through history. His work bridges poetry and inquiry, showing that storytelling can reveal moral truth just as powerfully as verse or song.

to see our own age reflected in his—an age of courage and cruelty, of curiosity and fear. His book reminds us that the past is not dead material. It's a living conversation in which we, too, must take part.

THE LEGACY OF THE FIRST HISTORIAN

Every historian since Herodotus has owed him something. The careful method of the modern scholar builds on the foundation he laid, as does the sympathetic storytelling of the biographer. The investigative journalist's habit of interviewing witnesses imitates his innovations, too. Most historians inherited his belief that human events have causes that can be known.

What's more, his influence extends beyond history into literature. When novelists explore how character shapes destiny, they echo his insight that moral flaws can destroy empires. When travelers describe foreign lands with empathy, they follow his path. In that sense, Herodotus is not only the father of history but the grandfather of nearly every kind of thoughtful writing.

He also left us a model of intellectual humility. Although he sometimes guessed wrong, he never claimed to know all. "I must tell what is said," he wrote, "though I am not bound to believe it entirely." That sentence could stand as the motto of honest inquiry. Knowledge begins with honest listening.

A CLOSING REFLECTION

Picture Herodotus, seated by a fire among strangers, telling of kings and soldiers, of wise men and fools. Around him, listeners lean forward, not just to be entertained but to understand what these lives reveal. That's what reading him still feels like: gathering close to the world's first historian while he teaches us how to see.

He reminds us that memory itself is a form of gratitude. To remember is to honor both triumph and tragedy, to admit that we are shaped by what came before. Forgetting, by contrast, is a kind of ingratitude, a refusal to learn. Herodotus wrote to prevent that forgetting. He believed that when a story is preserved, a truth has been saved from the ruin of time.

Imagine his *Histories* as a great library filled with voices rescued from being forgotten. Some whisper warnings; others sing of courage or

folly. Together they form a human record, fragile but enduring. To open *The Histories* of Herodotus is to step into that library. It's to walk among the earliest witnesses of our shared story. It's to join in one of the oldest conversations on earth: how memory keeps wisdom alive.

Now, turn the page and meet Herodotus for yourself.

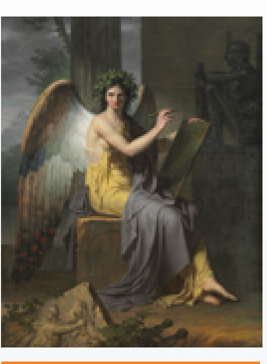
NOTE TO THE READER

The book in your hands builds on John White's 1884 *Boys' and Girls' Herodotus*. It's no mere reprint, though. Instead, we updated the language to make it more accessible for a modern audience. We were careful, however, not to dumb down the original content. What's more, we enhanced the book with a new introduction and cross-curricular sidebars. We added new illustrations and book-level timelines, too. The result is a work that's not only easier to understand, but also more informative and more delightful to read. We hope you'll agree.

Book I. Clio

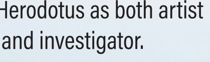
Clio /Klee oh/ is the Muse who watches over history. Her name means "to make famous," which fits her role well. She helps us remember the great stories of the past and the people who shaped them. When we read Herodotus, we are stepping into Clio's world.

c. 3100 BC	Pharaoh Menes
2200–1450 BC	Minoan civilization
2091 BC	Abraham
1860 BC	Twelve tribes of Israel
1792–1750 BC	Code of Hammurabi
1570–1090 BC	New Kingdom in Egypt
1450–1200 BC	Mycenaean civilization
1200–1000 BC	Phoenician civilization and alphabet
1200 BC	Trojan War
900 BC	Homer and Greek mythology
776 BC	Olympics
753 BC	founding of Rome
750–508 BC	Greece colonized, democracy begins
740–433 BC	Prophets of God
722 BC	fall of Israel
612 BC	fall of Assyria
586 BC	fall of Judah
560–527 BC	Tyrant Pisistratus rules Athens
547/546 BC	Cyrus defeats Croesus
538–516 BC	Jews return from exile, temple rebuilt
c. 530 BC	Cyrus's final campaign
509–27 BC	Roman Republic
500–480 BC	Persian Wars



The Muses and the nine books

Herodotus's *Histories* were later divided into nine books, each named for one of the Muses, the goddesses of art and memory. The division wasn't his idea, but it fits the work. History, like poetry, draws strength from both memory and imagination. By linking the Muses to his writing, later readers honored Herodotus as both artist and investigator.



CHAPTER 1

ORIGIN OF THE WAR BETWEEN THE GREEKS AND BARBARIANS

This book shares the work of Herodotus of Halicarnassus. He wanted to make sure that the actions of people are remembered over time and that the great things done by both Greeks and non-Greeks are celebrated. He also wanted to explain why they fought wars against each other.

Wise people of Persia believe that the Phoenicians started the fight long ago. They say that the Phoenicians moved from what we now call the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. After settling in their new land, they began to sail far and wide. They brought goods from Egypt and Assyria, stopping at various places, including Argos. At that time, Argos surpassed all the other places we now call Greece.

When the Phoenicians arrived in Argos, they set up their goods for sale. On the fifth or sixth day after they got there, many women came to the beach, including Io, the daughter of King Inachus. While the women were standing by the rear of a ship and trying to buy things they liked, the Phoenicians attacked them. Most of the women got away, but Io and a few others were captured. The traders got back quickly on their ship and sailed to Egypt. The Persians believe that this is how Io ended up in Egypt and how the troubles began.

Later, some Greeks, whose names are unknown, stopped at Tyre in Phoenicia and took away the king's daughter Europa. These Greeks were probably from Crete. The Persians think that the Greeks were just returning the favor for Io being taken. But then the Greeks did something worse. They sailed to a city called Aeae in Colchis, by the river Phasis. After achieving their goal, they took the king's daughter, Medea. The king of Colchis sent a messenger to Greece, asking for compensation and the return of his daughter. The Greeks replied that since the Asians (people from Asia Minor) had not sought to recompense them for taking Io, they would not give recompense for taking Medea.

Generations later, Alexander (also known as Paris), the son of Priam of Troy, heard about these events and wanted to take a wife from Greece. He thought he would not have to pay for her, since the Greeks had not paid for Io. So, he took Helen. The Greeks quickly sent messengers to demand her return and ask for compensation. But they were told, "You who have not given compensation now want it from others."

After this, the Greeks were wrong for waging war against Asia before the Asians attacked Europe. The Persians believe that taking women by force is wrong. However, they think that trying to get revenge for such actions is foolish, and that ignoring these actions is wise. The Persians say that the people of Asia did not care about women being taken, but the Greeks, fighting over a woman from Lacedemon, gathered a huge fleet, sailed to Asia, and destroyed Priam's empire. Because of this event, the Persians have always seen the Greeks as their enemies. They believe that Asia and the people living there belong to them, while Europe and the Greeks are completely separate.

The Persians have their own story about the start of their rivalry with the Greeks, which they say began with the capture of Troy. However, the Phoenicians disagree with this. They believe that Io, a woman from Greek

mythology, willingly left with some traders. I won't dig deeper into these stories, but I have already singled out the first person I know who acted unfairly toward the Greeks. After that, I will continue with my history, talking about both the rich and the poor. Many people who were once strong have become weak, and some who were weak have become strong during my lifetime. Because of this, I want to remember both kinds of people.

Ionian Greeks

The Ionian Greeks lived along the western coast of Asia Minor, far from mainland Greece. Their colonies were wealthy and artistic but also restless under Persian rule. Ionians prized trade and travel. Their questioning spirit gave birth to early science and philosophy. Herodotus shared their curiosity. He showed how ideas as well as armies could cross the sea between East and West.

Croesus was a Lydian, the son of Alyattes, and the ruler of the countries on this (the west) side of the Halys River. This river flows from the south between the Syrians and Paphlagonians, and it flows north into the Black Sea. Croesus was the first known barbarian who made some Greeks pay tribute and who formed alliances with others. He conquered the Ionians and Aeolians, as well as the Dorians who had settled in Asia, and he formed an alliance with the Spartans. However, before his reign, all the Greeks were free.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF LYDIA

The government that used to belong to the Heraclids was taken over by the family of Croesus, known as Mermnads. Candaules, whom the Greeks called Myrsilus, was a ruler of Sardis and a descendant of Alcaeus, who was the son of Hercules. Agron, who was the son of Ninus and the grandson of Belus, was the first of the Heraclids to become king of Sardis, while Candaules, son of Myrsus, was the last. Before Agron, the rulers came from Lydus, the son of Atys. This is how the people, who were originally called Maeonians, got the name Lydians. The Heraclids were descendants of a female slave of Jardanus and Hercules. They were given control by these princes and held power for twenty-two generations, which is five hundred and five years. Each son took over from his father until Candaules, son of Myrsus. Candaules was killed by his bodyguard, Gyges, who then became king with the approval of the oracle at Delphi. When the Lydians were angry about Candaules' murder, Gyges' supporters and the other Lydians made a deal. They agreed that if the oracle said Gyges would be king, he would rule; if not, he would give the power back to the Heraclids. The oracle said Gyges would be king. However, it also warned that the Heraclids would take revenge on Gyges' fifth descendant. Neither the Lydians nor their kings paid attention to this prediction until it came true.

Coinage and commerce

Lydia, ruled by King Croesus, was the first land to mint coins of pure gold and silver. Coinage made trade easier and wealth measurable. Herodotus saw how money changed society. It sped exchange but also tempted greed. His stories of markets and merchants show both sides of prosperity: opportunity joined to moral risk.

The Mermnads took power away from the Heraclids. Gyges sent many gifts to the temple at Delphi. In fact, most of the silver offerings there are his. He also gave a lot of gold, including six gold bowls that are now kept in the treasury of the Corinthians. These bowls weigh thirty talents. However, it's important to note that this treasury doesn't actually belong to the people of Corinth; it belongs to Cypselus, the son of Eetion. Gyges was the first barbarian we know of who made offerings at Delphi, except for Midas, the son of Gordius, the king of Phrygia. Midas dedicated his royal throne, which he used to sit on and make judgments. This throne is a remarkable piece of art and stands in the same place as Gyges' bowls.

Periander, the son of Cypselus, was the king of Corinth. The people of

Corinth, with support from the people of Lesbos, tell a fascinating story about his life. Arion of Methymna was famous for playing the harp and was the first person to create and perform a special type of song called the dithyrambus in Corinth. One day, he was taken to Taenarus on the back of a dolphin.

After spending a long time with Periander, Arion traveled to Italy and Sicily, where he became very wealthy. He decided to return to Corinth. He left Tarentum and hired a ship with some Corinthians because he trusted them more than anyone else. However, once they were out at sea, the sailors plotted to throw him overboard and steal his money. When Arion found out about their plan, he begged them to spare his life and offered them his riches. But the sailors insisted that he either kill himself so they could bury him on land or jump into the sea right away.

Croesus of Lydia
King Croesus ruled Lydia, a wealthy kingdom famed for gold coins and luxury. Herodotus tells how pride led to his downfall when he misread the oracle's warning before attacking Persia. Croesus's story became a proverb of fortune's uncertainty. Riches fade, and power passes. However, wisdom—the ability to see and respect limits—endures longer than any empire.

Desperate, Arion asked if he could sing one last song while standing at the back of the ship, dressed in his finest clothes. He promised that after his performance, he would jump into the sea. The sailors, excited to hear the best singer in the world, moved to the middle of the ship. Arion then put on his robes, took his harp, stood on the rowing benches, and sang beautifully. After finishing his song, he jumped into the sea still dressed in his fancy clothes. Meanwhile, the sailors continued their journey to Corinth.

A dolphin came and carried Arion on its back to Taenarus. When he arrived, he went to Corinth still in his full outfit and told everyone what had happened. Periander did not believe his story and locked Arion up while waiting for the sailors to return. When they came back, he asked them about Arion. They claimed he was safe in Italy and that they had left him happily in Tarentum. Just then, Arion appeared, looking exactly as he did when he jumped into the sea. The sailors were so shocked that they could no longer deny the truth. This story is told by the people of Corinth and Lesbos, and there is a small bronze statue of Arion at Taenarus, showing a man sitting on a dolphin.

Alyattes was the king of Lydia and the father of Croesus. He fought a long war against the people of Miletus and ruled for fifty-seven years before he died. After getting better from an illness, he gave a large silver bowl and an iron saucer as a dedication at the temple in Delphi. This bowl is very special and stands out among all the gifts at Delphi. It was made by Glaucus from Chios, who was the first person to create the art of inlaying iron.

When Alyattes died, Croesus, who was thirty-five years old, became king.

He first attacked the Ephesians, a Greek people. The Ephesians, who were being surrounded by his army, dedicated their city to the goddess Diana by tying a rope from the temple to the city wall. The distance between the old town, which was under siege, and the temple was over 4,000 ft. After this, Croesus went on to attack the cities of the Ionians and Aeolians one after another, using different excuses against each of them. Once he had made the Greeks in Asia pay taxes to him, he planned to build ships to attack the islanders.

However, just as he was getting ready to build the ships, Bias from Priene (or, as some say, Pittacus from Mitylene) came to Sardis and stopped him from building by saying this when Croesus asked if he had heard any news from Greece: "O King, the islanders are gathering a large army of horsemen to fight against you and Sardis." Croesus, believing this was true, replied, "May the gods inspire the islanders to attack the sons of the Lydians with horses." Bias responded, "Your Majesty, it seems you want to see the islanders on horseback in your land, and that makes sense. But what do you think the islanders want more than to catch the Lydians at sea, since they know you plan to build a fleet to attack them? They want to get back at you for holding down the Greeks on the mainland." Croesus was pleased with this advice and, convinced by it, stopped the shipbuilding and made an alliance with the Ionians who lived on the islands. Over time, most of the nations near the river Halys, except for the Cilicians and Lycians, were conquered. Croesus added them to his own people, the Lydians.

Many wise men from Greece traveled to Sardis, which was very prosperous at the time. Among them was Solon, an Athenian lawmaker. He left Athens for ten years, supposedly to travel the world, but in reality this was so he wouldn't have to change any of the laws he made. The Athenians couldn't change them either because they had promised to follow Solon's laws for ten years.

When Solon arrived, Croesus welcomed him warmly. On the third or fourth day, the king ordered his servants to show Solon the royal treasury, filled with beautiful and expensive treasures. After looking at everything, Croesus asked Solon, "My Athenian guest, we have heard about your wisdom and travels. Who is the happiest person you have seen?" Croesus thought he himself was the happiest.

Solon answered honestly, "Tellus, the Athenian." Croesus was surprised and asked, "Why do you think Tellus is the happiest?" Solon explained, "First,

Tellus lived in a well-run city, had good sons, and saw grandchildren born to them. Second, he lived a happy life and died gloriously. He helped the Athenians in a battle against the Eleusinians, defeated the enemy, and died bravely. The Athenians buried him with honor, paying for his funeral."

When Solon caught Croesus' attention by telling him about many good things about Tellus, Croesus, hoping to be in second place, asked who he had seen next to Tellus. "Cleobis and Biton," Solon answered. They were from Argos and were very strong. They both won in public games. Here is their story: During a festival for Juno, their mother needed to be pulled to the temple in a chariot. But the oxen did not come back from the field in time. So, the young men decided to take the yoke on themselves, and they pulled the chariot with their mother inside. They traveled about forty-five stades and reached the temple.

After they achieved this in front of everyone, they had a very happy ending to their lives. The people of Argos praised the strength of the young men, and the women honored their mothers for having such great sons. The mother, filled with joy from both their deed and the praise, stood before the goddess' image and prayed that Juno would give Cleobis and Biton, her sons who had honored her so much, the greatest blessing a person could have. After this prayer, they offered sacrifices and enjoyed a feast. The young men then fell asleep in the temple and never woke up again; this was how their lives ended. The people of Argos, to remember their love for their mother, had statues made of Cleobis and Biton and dedicated them at Delphi.

Solon decided that the second-best kind of happiness belonged to these young men. Croesus got angry and said, "My Athenian friend, do you think my happiness is so unimportant that you don't see me as valuable, like regular people?" Solon replied, "Croesus, are you asking me about human life? I know that the gods are always jealous and love to create confusion. Over time, people must face many things they would

rather not see, and endure many things they would rather not experience. I believe a person's life lasts about seventy years. In those seventy years, there are about twenty-five thousand two hundred days, not counting the extra days in leap years. If we add an extra month every other year to keep the seasons right, there will be thirty-five extra months in those seventy years, giving us an additional one thousand and fifty days. So, altogether, there are twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty days in seventy years, but no two days are exactly the same."

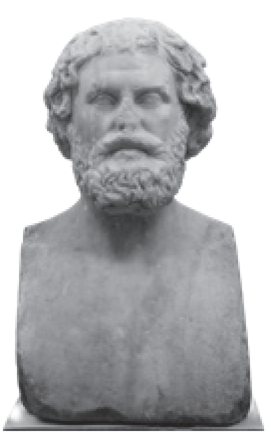
"Therefore, Croesus, a person's life is really just a game of chance. You seem to be very rich and the king of many lands, but I can't say whether you are truly happy until I know how your life ends. The richest person is not happier than someone who has just enough to get by, unless they have good luck until they die, so they can end their life happily. Many wealthy people are unhappy, while many with just enough are lucky."

The rich person who is unhappy only has two things better than the one who is just getting by, but the latter has many advantages. The wealthy person can satisfy their desires and handle tough times better. However, the person with just enough is protected from many misfortunes. They can enjoy good health, have a good family, and be of handsome appearance. If they also end their life well, then they are truly the person you are looking for and can be called happy. But until they die, we should hold off on judging and not say they are happy, but rather fortunate."

When Solon finished speaking to Croesus, Croesus did not show him any kindness. Instead, he thought very little of him and sent him away, calling him a very ignorant man. Croesus believed that Solon was foolish for not appreciating his current wealth and for telling people to think about the future instead.

After Solon left, the gods got very angry with Croesus. This was probably because he believed he was the happiest man alive. Soon after, he had a dream that warned him about the troubles that were going to happen to him through one of his sons. Croesus had two sons. One of them could not speak, but the other, named Atys, surpassed all the young men of his age. The dream told Croesus that he would lose Atys due to a wound from a sharp iron weapon.

When Croesus woke up and thought about this, he decided to take Atys away from leading the Lydian troops and never let him go out to battle again. He also ordered all the weapons, like spears and lances to be moved out of the men's rooms and locked away, so nothing could fall and hurt his son.



Solon's wisdom

The Athenian lawgiver Solon told King Croesus, "Call no man happy until he is dead." He meant that a person's life cannot be judged until its story is complete. Herodotus uses this warning to show how pride blinds rulers and how fortune changes swiftly. Happiness, Solon taught, comes from virtue and balance, not wealth or luck.

While Croesus was busy with Atys' wedding, a man who had fallen on hard times arrived in Sardis. He was a Phrygian from a royal family and was covered in dirt. This man came to Croesus' palace and asked to be cleaned according to the customs of the land. Croesus helped him, performing the usual ceremony, and then asked, "Stranger, who are you, and where in Phrygia did you come from? Why are you here seeking help, and who have you harmed?"

The stranger replied, "I am the son of Gordius and the grandson of Midas. My name is Adrastus. I accidentally killed my own brother, and after being banished by my father and losing everything, I have come here." Croesus responded, "You come from families who are our friends. You can stay with us, and you will not lack for anything. If you bear your troubles as best as you can, you will find the most benefit." So, Adrastus stayed in Croesus' palace.

At this time, a huge wild boar appeared in Mysian Olympus. It came down from the mountain and destroyed the fields of the Mysians. The Mysians tried many times to catch it, but they could not hurt the boar and suffered a lot because of it. Finally, some representatives from the Mysians came to Croesus and said, "Oh, king, a huge boar has come to our land and is ruining our fields. We have tried to catch it many times, but we cannot. We ask you to send your son and some chosen young men with dogs to help us drive it away."

But Croesus, remembering the warning he had received in a dream, replied, "Do not mention my son again. I cannot send him with you because he just got married. However, I will send some skilled Lydians and a whole hunting team to help you drive the beast away." The Mysians were satisfied with this, but Atys, who had heard their request, came in and said, "Father, you used to let me take part in the important activities of war and hunting. Now you keep me from both, even though I have not shown any cowardice or lack of spirit. How will people see me when I go to or come back from the forum? What kind of man will I appear to my fellow citizens? What will my new wife think? Please let me go on this hunt, or convince me that it is better for me not to."

"My son," said Croesus, "I am acting this way not because I believe you are cowardly or unfit. A dream warned me that you would have a short life

Hercules and the Erymanthian boar

and die by an iron weapon. That is why I rushed your marriage and now refuse to let you go on this hunt. I want to keep you safe for as long as I can because you are my only son. The other son, who cannot hear, I consider lost."

The young man replied, "You cannot blame yourself, Father, for caring for me after such a dream. But you say the dream means I will die by an iron weapon. What kind of weapon does a boar have that should make you so afraid? If it said I would die by a tusk, you could worry, but it said by a weapon. Since we are not fighting against men, please let me go."

"You have argued well," replied Croesus, "in explaining the importance of the dream. You may go on the hunt." Then, turning to the Phrygian Adrastus, he said, "Adrastus, I ask you to be my son's guardian when he goes hunting. Make sure that no sneaky villains try to harm him. Besides, you should go for your own sake, where you can show your skills. This was the glory of your ancestors, and you are still strong." Adrastus replied, "I would not join this adventure for any other reason, my lord. It is not right for someone in my unfortunate situation to join those who are doing well. But since you ask me, I will help you. You can be sure that your son, whom you want me to protect, will come back safe to you."

Ruins at the sanctuary of Delphi

Then everyone went away, bringing chosen young men and dogs with them. When they arrived at Mount Olympus, they searched for the wild boar, found it, and surrounded it. Among them, the stranger named Adrastus threw his javelin at the boar but missed and hit the son of Croesus instead. This fulfilled a warning from a dream. Someone quickly ran to tell Croesus what had happened and reached Sardis to inform him about the event and his son's fate. Croesus was extremely sad about his son's death. He mourned deeply, especially because the one who caused his son's death was someone he had helped by cleansing him of bloodshed. Grieving his misfortune, he called upon Jove the Expiator, saying how he had suffered from this stranger. He also prayed to the same god as the god of hospitality and friendship. He called him the god of hospitality because he unknowingly welcomed the murderer into his home, and the god of friendship because he had sent Adrastus to protect him, only to find out that Adrastus had become his worst enemy.

Offering at the temple of Delphi

Soon, the people from Lydia came carrying the body, and behind them walked the murderer, Adrastus. He stepped forward and gave himself up to Croesus, reaching out his hands and begging him to kill him as punishment; he felt he should not live any longer. When Croesus heard this, even though he was suffering deeply, he felt pity for Adrastus and said, "You have fully accepted your punishment by wanting to die. You are not truly to blame for this tragedy, except for being involved without meaning to. The one who warned us of this event long ago is the one to blame." Croesus buried his son with the honor he deserved. But after everything was quiet, Gordius' son, believing he was the most unfortunate person alive, took his own life on the tomb.

After some time Cyrus, who was the son of Cambyses, defeated Astyages, the son of Cyaxares, and the Persian Empire started to grow stronger. This made Croesus feel less sad. He began to wonder if there was any way he could stop the Persians from becoming too powerful. To find out, he decided to ask the oracles in Greece and one in Lydia for advice. He sent different people to various places: some went to Delphi, some to Abae in Phocis, and others to Dodona.

Croesus wanted to make the god at Delphi happy, so he offered a lot of valuable sacrifices. He gave three thousand cattle that were fit for sacrifice and built a huge pile for the offerings. On this pile, he burned beds made of gold and silver, gold vials, and purple robes and garments, hoping to gain the god's favor. After the sacrifice, he melted a large amount of gold and made bricks from it. The longest bricks were six palms long, the shortest were three palms long, and they were one palm thick. There were one hundred and seventeen bricks in total. Four of these bricks, made of pure gold, weighed two-and-a-half talents each, while the other bricks, made of lighter gold, weighed two talents each.

Croesus also created a golden figure of a lion that weighed ten talents. When the temple of Delphi burned down, the lion fell from the bricks where it was placed, and it now rests in the treasury of the Corinthians, weighing six-and-a-half talents because three-and-a-half talents were melted away. After finishing these offerings, Croesus sent them to Delphi, along with two large bowls: one made of gold and the other of silver. The gold bowl was placed on the right side as you enter the temple, and the silver bowl was on the left. Both bowls were removed when the temple burned down. The gold bowl weighed eight-and-a-half talents and twelve minae, and it is now in the treasury of Clazomenae. The silver bowl, which could hold six hundred amphorae, is in a corner of the vestibule and is used by the Delphians for mixing wine during the Theophanian festival. The Delphians believe that Theodorus the Samian made it, and I agree because it looks very special.

Croesus also sent four silver casks that are in the treasury of the Corinthians. He dedicated two ceremonial vases, one gold and the other silver. The gold vase has an inscription claiming it is from the Lacedaemonians, but this is not true; it was actually given by Croesus. A certain Delphian wrote the inscription to make the Lacedaemonians happy. I know his name but won't say it. The boy, who uses the water from the vase, is their gift, but neither of the vases belongs to them. Croesus sent many other offerings without names on them, including some round silver covers and a statue of a woman made of gold that is three cubits tall. The Delphians say this statue represents Croesus' baking woman. He also added his wife's necklaces and belts to the offerings.

The Persian Empire

In Herodotus's day, Persia stretched from Egypt to India. It was an empire of immense power and careful organization. Roads, postal riders, and royal inspectors kept distant provinces connected. Herodotus saw that such unity came at a cost. Persian kings demanded obedience above all, and their pride often tempted them to challenge both nature and the gods.

He sent these gifts to Delphi. He also dedicated a golden shield and a solid gold spear to Amphiaraus, knowing about his goodness and struggles. Both the shaft and the points of the spear were made of gold. Today, these items are in Thebes, at the temple of Ismenian Apollo.

Croesus, the king of the Lydians, asked his messengers to deliver gifts to the temples and to find out from the oracles if he should go to war with the Persians and if he should ask any other nation to help him. When the Lydians got to their destinations and made their offerings, they asked the oracles: "Croesus, king of the Lydians and other nations, believes these are the only oracles among humans. He sends these gifts to thank you for your wisdom and now wants to know if he should lead an army against the Persians and if he should join forces with any other nation."

The oracle at Delphi
When Greeks faced hard choices, they often sought advice from Apollo's oracle at Delphi. There, a priestess called the Pythia sat above a fissure in the earth. She spoke in riddles that priests interpreted. Herodotus reports kings and generals consulting her before war. To ancient minds, wisdom meant asking heaven before acting on earth.

Both oracles agreed and said, "If Croesus goes to war with the Persians, he will destroy a great empire." They also advised him to ally with the strongest Greeks. When Croesus heard their answers, he was very happy and thought he would defeat Cyrus' kingdom. He sent gifts to the oracle at Delphi again and, after finding out how many people lived there, he gave each person two gold coins. In return, the people of Delphi allowed Croesus and the Lydians to consult the oracle before anyone else, did not make them pay taxes, gave them the best seats in the temple, and allowed them to become citizens of Delphi whenever they wanted in the future.

After giving these gifts to the Delphians, Croesus sent a third message to ask the oracle another question. He frequently consulted the oracle after learning it was reliable. This time, he wanted to know if he would have a long reign. The oracle replied, "When a mule becomes king of the Medes, then, soft-footed Lydian, run away across the stony Hermus and do not hesitate to escape or be thought a coward." When Croesus heard this, he was even happier, believing that a mule would never become king instead of a human. Therefore, he thought he and his family would always keep the kingdom.

Next, Croesus carefully searched for the strongest Greeks he could ask for help. He found that the Lacedaemonians and Athenians were the most powerful, with the Lacedaemonians being of Dorian descent and the Athenians of Ionic descent. Historically, the Athenians were known as a Pelasgian nation and the Lacedaemonians as a Hellenic nation.

CHAPTER 3

ORIGIN OF ATHENS AND SPARTA

I cannot say for sure what language the Pelasgians spoke. However, if I look at the Pelasgians who live in the town of Crestona above the Tyrrhenians and those Pelasgians settled at Placia and Scylace on the Hellespont, it seems they spoke a foreign (not Greek) language. If that was true for all Pelasgians, then the Attic people, who are Pelasgic, must have changed their language when they became Hellenes. On the other hand, the Hellenic people seem to have spoken the same language since they became a group. They started out small, but over time they grew into many nations, mainly by joining with many other foreign groups. However, the Pelasgic people, being foreign, never grew very large.

Croesus learned that the people of Attica were being troubled and disturbed by Pisistratus, who was in charge of Athens at that time. A conflict arose between the people living by the sea and the Athenians. The coastal people were led by Megacles, while the Athenians were led by Lycurgus. Pisistratus wanted to gain power, so he created a third group. He gathered his supporters, pretending to protect the mountain people. To trick everyone, he hurt himself and his mules, then drove his chariot into the public square. He acted as if he had escaped from enemies who wanted to kill him on his way back to the countryside. He asked the people for armed guards, having already gained fame for his military success against Megara, where he had captured the port called Nisaea and done other great things.

The people of Athens were fooled by his act and gave him some citizens whom he chose. These men were not armed with javelins but carried wooden clubs to protect him. Together with Pisistratus, they took control of the Acropolis, and Pisistratus became the leader of Athens. He did not disturb the current officials or change the laws; instead, he ran the government according to the existing rules, doing so fairly and well. However, not long after, Megacles and Lycurgus reconciled and forced him out.

This was how Pisistratus first took control of Athens, but since he did not have strong support, he lost it.

Afterward, those who had kicked out Pisistratus began to argue again. Megacles, troubled by the fighting, sent a messenger to Pisistratus to ask if he would marry his daughter in exchange for regaining power. Pisistratus agreed to the deal, and they came up with a very silly plan. This plan seemed especially foolish since the Greeks were known for being clever and wise, and it was surprising that they tricked the Athenians, who were considered the smartest of the Greeks.

In a tribe called the Paeanean, there was a woman named Phya who was about six feet tall but was missing three fingers and was otherwise attractive. They dressed her in full armor, placed her on a chariot, and taught her how to act properly. They then drove her to the city with messengers in front, who announced upon their arrival: "O Athenians, welcome Pisistratus, whom Minerva herself is bringing back to her own citadel." News spread quickly among the people that Minerva was bringing Pisistratus back, and the

Athens from Mount Hymettus (above) and Athens today (below)

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