

Herodotus: The Histories (Valentine's Day 2024)

Paul Cartledge – Betty Behrens Seminar, Clare Hall

What to read in advance of the seminar

50 pages would be about one-twelfth of the whole (the longest extant ancient Greek prose text), using the Holland/Cartledge edition below as a guide.

The division into 9 'books', each named after a Muse, beginning (of course) with Klio the Muse of History, is well post-Herodotean. If attendees would wish to read a single, whole book, the most interesting methodologically is Book 2 (from which Passage 7 below is taken).

I. *Translations*

Tom Holland (639 pp), with **Cartledge** (notes, 64 pp): Penguin 2013 (pb available)

There are many other English translations – the one I rate most highly for fidelity and readability is **G.C. Macaulay** (1890), handily repr., rev. with intro and notes by D. Lateiner (Barnes & Noble Classics 2004).

The (other!) Penguin – trans. **A. de Sélincourt**, rev. J. Marincola (2003) – is too readable.

There are (at least) 3 US versions:

complete –

A.L. Purvis, ed. R.B. Strassler, *The Landmark Herodotus* (Pantheon 2007): the 'Landmark' series specialises in multiple maps and multiple Appendixes (here 21; Cartledge did B, on Sparta)

P. Mensch, ed. with intro & notes J. Romm (Hackett 2014)

abridged –

W. Blanco, ed. Blanco & J. Roberts (Norton 1992). [with repr. early modern and modern criticism]

II. *Studies*

J. Roberts *Herodotus* (OUP's Very **Short** Intro series, 2011)

C. Baron ed. *The Herodotus Encyclopedia*, 3 vols (Wiley, 2021)

III. Suggested PASSAGES (Greek originals, in **Holland's** translation)

1. Preface

Ἡροδότου Θουρίου ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις ἦδε, ὡς μήτε τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται, μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι, τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλέα γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δι' ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι. (Preface)

Herodotus, from Halicarnassus, here displays his enquiries, that human achievement may be spared the ravages of time, and that everything great and astounding, and all the glory of those exploits which served to display Greeks and barbarians alike to such effect, be kept alive — and additionally, and most importantly, to give the reason they went to war. (Preface)

2. Distinction between 'human' and 'mythical' time

Αἰτίαι μὲν δὴ αὗται διφάσαι λέγονται τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Πολυκράτεος γενέσθαι, πάρεστι δὲ πείθεσθαι ὀκοτέρῃ τις βούλεται αὐτέων. Ὁ δὲ ὢν Ὀροίτης ἰζόμενος ἐν Μαγνησίῃ τῇ ὑπὲρ Μαιάνδρου ποταμοῦ οἰκημένη ἔπεμπε Μύρσον τὸν Γύγεω ἄνδρα Λυδὸν ἐς Σάμον ἀγγελίην φέροντα, μαθὼν τοῦ Πολυκράτεος τὸν νόον. Πολυκράτης γάρ ἐστι πρῶτος τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν Ἑλλήνων ὃς θαλασσοκρατέειν ἐπενοήθη, πάρεξ Μίνω τε τοῦ Κνωσίου καὶ εἰ δὴ τις ἄλλος πρότερος τούτου ἦρξε τῆς θαλάσσης· τῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπίνης λεγομένης γενεῆς Πολυκράτης πρῶτος, ἐλπίδας πολλὰς ἔχων Ἰωνίης τε καὶ νήσων ἄρξιν. 3.122

Such are the two different reasons given for the death of Polycrates: as to which is more convincing, people are at liberty to decide as they will. What is certain, however, is that Oroetes, who had his headquarters in Magnesia, on the heights above the River Maeander, sent a man of Lydia — Myrsus son of Gyges by name — to Samos with a message. He did this because he had learned of Polycrates' designs to found a maritime empire, a plan which, so far as I am aware, Polycrates was the first Greek ever to have had in mind. I make an exception of Minos of Cnossus, and anyone else prior to Minos who may have ruled the seas. Polycrates, however, was undoubtedly the first of what we would term **the fully mortal race of men** to aim at it; and certainly, he had every expectation that Ionia as well as the offshore islands would come under his rule. 3.122

3. It was the Athenians wot won it – the Graeco-Persian Wars of 480-479 BCE

Ἐνθαῦτα ἀναγκαίῃ ἐξέργομαι γνώμην ἀποδέξασθαι ἐπίφθονον μὲν πρὸς τῶν πλεόνων ἀνθρώπων, ὅμως δέ, τῇ γέ μοι φαίνεται εἶναι ἀληθές, οὐκ ἐπισχίσω. Εἰ Ἀθηναῖοι καταρρωδήσαντες τὸν ἐπιόντα κίνδυνον ἐξέλιπον τὴν σφετέρην, ἣ καὶ μὴ ἐκλιπόντες ἀλλὰ μείναντες ἔδοσαν σφέας αὐτοὺς Ξέρξῃ, κατὰ τὴν θάλασσαν οὐδαμοὶ ἂν ἐπειρῶντο ἀντιούμενοι βασιλείῃ...Νῦν δὲ Ἀθηναίους ἂν τις λέγων σωτῆρας γενέσθαι τῆς Ἑλλάδος οὐκ ἂν ἀμαρτάνοι τάληθός· οὗτοι γὰρ ἐπὶ ὀκότερα τῶν πρηγμάτων ἐτράποντο, ταῦτα ῥέψιν ἔμελλε· ἐλόμενοι δὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα περιεῖναι ἐλευθέρην, τοῦτο <ἐλόμενοι> τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν πᾶν τὸ λοιπὸν, ὅσον μὴ ἐμήδισε, αὐτοὶ οὗτοι ἦσαν οἱ ἐπεγείραντες καὶ βασιλέα μετὰ γε θεοῦς

άνωσάμενοι. Οὐδέ σφεας χρηστήρια φοβερὰ ἐλθόντα ἐκ Δελφῶν καὶ ἐς δεῖμα βαλόντα ἔπεισε ἐκλιπεῖν τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀλλὰ καταμείναντες ἀνέσχοντο τὸν ἐπιόντα ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν δέξασθαι. 7.139

It is at this stage that I feel obliged to express an opinion which most people will find hard to stomach — but when something seems to me true, I will not shrink from saying it. Had the Athenians been intimidated into abandoning their homeland by the menace that was bearing down upon them, or had they stayed put but surrendered to Xerxes, then no one would have sought to combat the King at sea...As it is, anyone who proclaims the Athenians the saviours of Greece would hardly be far from the truth. They were bound to tilt the scales in favour of whichever of the two sides they joined. By deciding to help in the preservation of Greek liberty, and backed as they were by the gods, they served to rouse to action everyone else in Greece who had not already gone over to the Medes, and to rout the King. Not even the blood-curdling oracles that had come from Delphi and thrown them into a terrible state of alarm could persuade them to abandon Greece. Instead, they stood their ground, held their nerve and met with the invader of their country. 7.139

4. What it meant to be 'Greek' supposedly in 480/79 BCE

‘Τὸ μὲν δεῖσαι Λακεδαιμονίους μὴ ὁμολογήσωμεν τῷ βαρβάρῳ κάρτα ἀνθρωπήιον ἦν ἀτὰρ αἰσχυρῶς γε εἰοίκατε, ἐξεπιστάμενοι τὸ Ἀθηναίων φρόνημα, ἀρρωδηῖσαι, ὅτε οὔτε χρυσός ἐστι γῆς οὐδαμόθι τοσοῦτος οὔτε χώρα <οὔτω> κάλλει καὶ ἀρετῇ μέγα ὑπερφέρουσα, τὰ ἡμεῖς δεξάμενοι ἐθέλοιμεν ἂν μηδίσαντες καταδουλώσῃαι τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Πολλὰ τε γὰρ καὶ μεγάλα ἐστὶ τὰ διακωλύοντα ταῦτα μὴ ποιέειν μηδ’ ἦν ἐθέλωμεν...αὕτις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὼν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα, τῶν προδότας γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἂν εὖ ἔχοι’.

‘Maybe it was only human for the Lacedaemonians [Spartans] to fear that we [Athenians] would come to an arrangement with the Barbarian [the Persian empire]. Nevertheless, your anxiety does you no credit, bearing in mind what you know of the Athenian spirit. There is nowhere so rich in gold, not in all the world — no, nor any land so beautiful and fertile, putting all others in the shade — that we would be willing to accept it in exchange for collaborating with the Medes [=Persians], and enslaving Greece. Even were we so inclined, there is a whole host of pressing reasons why we could never adopt such a course of action...we are all of us Greeks [Hellenes], of one blood and one tongue, united by the temples that we have raised to the gods, and by the way in which we offer them sacrifice, and by the customs that we have in common. For the Athenians to prove traitors to all this would be a terrible thing’.

8.144

5. War is Hell, Civil War the most Hellish

γνόντες, εἰ στασιάσουσι περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας, ὡς ἀπολέεται ἡ Ἑλλάς, ὀρθὰ νοεῦντες· στάσις γὰρ ἔμφυλος πολέμου ὁμοφρονέοντος τοσοῦτω κάκιόν ἐστι ὅσω πόλεμος εἰρήνης· 8.3

‘αἴτιος δὲ τούτων ἐγένετο ὁ Ἑλλήνων θεὸς ἐπάρας ἐμὲ στρατεύεσθαι. Οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτω ἀνόητός ἐστι ὅστις πόλεμον πρὸ εἰρήνης αἰρέεται· ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ οἱ παῖδες τοὺς πατέρας θάπτουσι, ἐν δὲ τῷ οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας. Ἄλλὰ ταῦτα δαίμοσιν οὐκ ἔστι φίλον ἢ οὕτω γενέσθαι’. 1.87

[T]hey recognized — correctly — that if they embroiled everyone in a squabble about the command, Greece was doomed. After all, civil strife among people of the same heritage and race compares as disastrously to a united war effort as does war itself to peace. 8.3

‘When I [Croesus, King of Lydia] launched the invasion [of Persian territory], however, it was with the full encouragement of the god of the Greeks [Apollo]— so the ultimate blame, I suppose, should lie with him. For would I otherwise ever have been so foolish as to choose war over peace? In peacetime it is sons who bury their fathers — but in times of war, it is fathers who bury their sons. Somewhere in the heavens there is someone smiling at what has happened’. 1.87

6. Custom (convention, tradition) Rules OK, everywhere and at all times

οἱ δὲ ἀμβώσαντες μέγα εὐφημέειν μιν ἐκέλευον. Οὕτω μὲν νυν ταῦτα νενόμισται, καὶ ὀρθῶς μοι δοκεῖ Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι, ‘νόμον πάντων βασιλέα’ φήσας εἶναι. 3.38

[T]he Callantians [an Indian people] cried out in horror and told him that his words [advocating cremation, whereas the Callantians allegedly practised anthropophagy of kindred corpses] were a desecration of silence. Such, then, is how custom operates; and how right Pindar is, it seems to me, when he declares in his poetry that ‘Custom is the King of all’. 3.38

7. The Reversed World of the Egyptians

Ἔρχομαι δὲ περὶ Αἰγύπτου μηκυνέων τὸν λόγον, ὅτι πλεῖστα θωμάσια ἔχει [ἢ ἡ ἄλλη πᾶσα χώρα] καὶ ἔργα λόγου μέζω παρέχεται πρὸς πᾶσαν <ἄλλην> χώραν· τούτων εἵνεκα πλέω περὶ αὐτῆς εἰρήσεται. Αἰγύπτιοι ἅμα τῷ οὐρανῷ τῷ κατὰ σφέας ἐόντι ἑτεροίω καὶ τῷ ποταμῷ φύσιν ἀλλοίην παρεχομένω ἢ οἱ ἄλλοι ποταμοί, τὰ πολλὰ πάντα ἔμπαλιν τοῖσι ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποισι ἐστήσαντο ἢ θεὰ τε καὶ νόμους. 2.35

About Egypt, however, I will have a good deal more to say, for it is a land which boasts an inordinate number of wonders, and possesses more monuments surpassing description than any other in the world. Reason enough, then, to describe it at some length. Certainly, it is not only the climate which renders Egypt unique, nor the fact that the river [Nile] behaves naturally in a way quite unlike any other river; there is also the fact that the Egyptians themselves, in almost all their customs and practices, do **the exact opposite of the rest of mankind**. 2.35

Ἐν τοῖσι αἰ μὲν γυναῖκες ἀγοράζουσι καὶ καπηλεύουσι, οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες κατ’ οἴκους ἐόντες ὑφαίνουσι. Ὑφαίνουσι δὲ οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι ἄνω τὴν κρόκην ὠθέοντες, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ κάτω. Τὰ ἄχθεια οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν φορέουσι, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων. Οὐρέουσι

αἱ μὲν γυναῖκες ὀρθαί, οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες κατήμενοι. Εὐμαρεῖη χρέωνται ἐν τοῖσι οἴκοισι, ἐσθίουσι δὲ ἔξω ἐν τῆσι ὁδοῖσι, ἐπιλέγοντες ὡς τὰ μὲν αἰσχρὰ ἀναγκαῖα δὲ ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ ἐστὶ ποιέειν χρεόν, τὰ δὲ μὴ αἰσχρὰ ἀναφανδόν. 2.35

In Egypt, for instance, it is the women who go to the market and do business, while it is the men who stay at home and weave; and while people everywhere else do their weaving by pushing the weft upwards, the Egyptians push it downwards. Men carry loads on their heads; women on their shoulders. Women urinate standing up; men squatting down [Sitzpinkler]. Their homes they use for defecating in, while the streets outside are where they eat — this on the principle that anything which is embarrassing but unavoidable should be done behind closed doors, while anything that is not a cause of shame should be done fully in public. 2.35

Ἰρᾶται γυνὴ μὲν οὐδεμία οὔτε ἔρσηνος θεοῦ οὔτε θηλέης, ἄνδρες δὲ πάντων τε καὶ πασέων. Τρέφειν τοὺς τοκέας τοῖσι μὲν παισὶ οὐδεμία ἀνάγκη μὴ βουλομένοισι, τῆσι δὲ θυγατράσι πᾶσα ἀνάγκη καὶ μὴ βουλομένησι. 2.35

Whether a god is male or female makes no odds, since women are banned from serving as priests, and only a man may officiate in a temple, be it that of a goddess or a god. Sons are under no obligation to care for their parents if they do not wish to; daughters, however, are under strict obligation to do so, whether they are willing or not. 2.35

Οἱ ἱρέες τῶν θεῶν τῆ μὲν ἄλλῃ κομῶσι, ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ δὲ ξυροῦνται. Τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισι νόμος ἅμα κήδεϊ κεκάρθαι τὰς κεφαλὰς τοὺς μάλιστα ἰκνέεται, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ ὑπὸ τοὺς θανάτους ἀνιεῖσι τὰς τρίχας αὔξεσθαι τὰς τε ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ τῷ γενεῖῳ, τέως ἐξυρωμένοι. Τοῖσι μὲν ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισι χωρὶς θηρίων <ή> δίαιτα ἀποκέκριται, Αἰγυπτίοισι δὲ ὁμοῦ θηρίοισι ἡ δίαιτά ἐστι. Ἀπὸ πυρῶν καὶ κριθέων ὄλλοι ζώουσι, Αἰγυπτίων δὲ τῷ ποιευμένῳ ἀπὸ τούτων τὴν ζῆν ὄνειδος μέγιστόν ἐστι, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ ὄλυρέων ποιεῦνται σιτία, τὰς ζειὰς μετεξέτεροι καλέουσι. Φυρῶσι τὸ μὲν σαῖς τοῖσι ποσί, τὸν δὲ πηλὸν τῆσι χερσί, καὶ τὴν κόπρον ἀναιρέονται. 2.36

Everywhere else, priests in the service of a god will wear their hair long; but in Egypt they shave themselves bald. Among other nations, it is the custom for those closest to someone who has just died to mark their bereavement by cropping their hair; but the Egyptians, who are clean-shaven as a matter of course, will mark a death by letting both their hair and their beards grow out. It is otherwise a universal practice not to mix with animals at home, but the Egyptians habitually live alongside their livestock Whereas other people subsist on barley and the standard strain of wheat, any Egyptian who thought to do so would be regarded with utter scorn: bread in Egypt is made instead from a specially soft kind of wheat or *zeia*, as it is sometimes known. Dough is kneaded with the feet, clay with the hands — and dung as well is picked up by hand. 2.36

Τὰ αἰδοῖα ὄλλοι μὲν ἐῷσι ὡς ἐγένοντο, πλὴν ὅσοι ἀπὸ τούτων ἔμαθον, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ περιτάμνονται. Εἴματα τῶν μὲν ἀνδρῶν ἕκαστος ἔχει δύο, τῶν δὲ γυναικῶν ἐν ἐκάστη. Τῶν

ἰστίων τοὺς κρίκους καὶ τοὺς κάλους οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι ἕξωθεν προσδέουσι, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ ἕσωθεν. Γράμματα γράφουσι καὶ λογίζονται ψήφοισι Ἕλληνες μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀριστερῶν ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιὰ φέροντες τὴν χεῖρα, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν δεξιῶν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀριστερά· καὶ ποιεῦντες ταῦτα αὐτοὶ μὲν φασὶ ἐπιδέξια ποιέειν, Ἕλληνας δὲ ἐπαρίστερα. Διφασίοισι δὲ γράμμασι χρέωνται, καὶ τὰ μὲν αὐτῶν ἰρά, τὰ δὲ δημοτικὰ καλέεται. 2.36

Other peoples, unless they have come under Egyptian influence, prefer to leave their private parts as they were at birth; in Egypt, they all [males] circumcise themselves. A man will own two garments, a woman only one. Whereas conventionally rings and ropes are fastened to the outside of a sail, in Egypt they are fastened to the inside. Unlike the Greeks, who move their hands from left to right as they write or do calculations on an abacus, the Egyptians move their hands from right to left; not only that, but they claim to be doing the precise opposite, and insist they that they are the ones who are moving their hands to the right, and the Greeks who are moving theirs to the left. They have two different kinds of writing: one is called 'hieroglyphic', and the other 'demotic' 2.36

Other recommended passages (but where to stop...) are:

3.80-82: the so-called 'Persian Debate', though the political thought and indeed theory are purely Greek

6.51-60: the 'privileges' accorded by the Spartans to their two hereditary joint kings/dyarchs, some of which make Sparta look really quite un-Hellenic.

HERODOTUS

The Histories

Translated by TOM HOLLAND
Introduction and Notes by PAUL CARTLEDGE



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN CLASSICS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RT, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 707 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3008, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, Block D, Rosebank Office Park,
181 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parktown North, Gauteng 2193, South Africa
Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RT, England

www.penguin.com

First published in Great Britain by Penguin Classics 2013
This paperback edition published in Penguin Classics 2014

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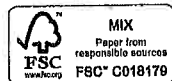
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ISBN: 978-0-14-0-45539-7

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Translator's Preface

Herodotus: A Historian for All Ages

Herodotus is the most entertaining of historians. Indeed, he is as entertaining as anyone who has ever written – historian or not. He has been my constant companion since I was twelve, and never once have I grown tired of him. His great work is many things – the first example of non-fiction, the text that underlies the entire discipline of history, the most important source of information we have for a vital episode in human affairs – but it is above all a treasure-trove of wonders. This, coming from a translator of *The Histories*, may sound like special pleading – but it is not. To spend as much time with Herodotus as I have done over these past years has been a rare privilege, a veritable labour of love. The Father of History he may be – but he is also very much more than that.

The ostensible goal of *The Histories* is to explain what would now be termed ‘the clash of civilizations’: the inability of the peoples of East and West to live together in peace. The theme was one fit to inspire a whole new genre. Herodotus was writing within living memory of events so epic that they continue to thrill and astonish to this day. In 490 BC, the King of Persia, Darius the Great, had dispatched an expedition to swat the buzzing of the Greek city of Athens. Since the empire he ruled was the largest that the world had ever seen, and since no Greek army had ever before defeated the Persians in battle, the King was confident of victory. His confidence, though, proved misplaced. The Athenians, marching out to a plain named Marathon, defeated the invaders. The respite this won for them, however, was only temporary. A decade later, the Persians were back. This time they came in overwhelming numbers, and were led in person by their new king, Xerxes. Many Greeks, convinced that they had no prospect of preserving their liberty, went over to the invaders. Only a few cities, headed by Athens and the peerless warrior-state of Sparta, refused to surrender. At Thermopylae, a pass to the north of Athens, a tiny Greek holding-force led by a Spartan king managed to keep the Persians at bay for two

Summary of Contents of The Histories

This overview is after Hamel 2012: 5–6. The Book divisions are not those of Herodotus himself, but ultimately of scholars working in post-Classical Alexandria in Egypt in the third century BC. The Library founded there under either King Ptolemy II (ruled 285–246) or his father Ptolemy I (ruled 305–285) aimed to produce and conserve master copies on papyrus rolls of all then known Greek texts, but much could have happened to H.'s text between *c.* 420 and *c.* 280. The Alexandria editors, however, will have been far better placed than any of their modern successors to decide what H. was most likely to have originally written, even if reading that or consulting it in its papyrus roll form was not at all straightforward. The chapter divisions are much more recent than the third-century BC copy text or texts. Indeed, the original texts did not even distinguish sentences nor did they use diacritical marks such as accents.

Book One

Preface

- 1–5 Origins of the enmity between Europe and Asia (the Trojan War).
6–94 King Croesus of Lydia and the conquest of his kingdom by
 Persia under King Cyrus the Great. Lydian customs.
95–216 Childhood and rise to power of Cyrus, his various conquests,
 his death in battle in central Asia. Persian customs.

Book Two

- 1–182 Geography, history, marvels and customs of ancient and con-
 temporary Egypt.

Book Three

- 1–66 Expeditions of Persian King Cambyses (son and successor of
 Cyrus) against Egypt and Ethiopia, his madness and death.

- 67–160 Rise to power of Persian King Darius I and the first years of
 his reign, including his reordered administration of the
 empire.

Book Four

- 1–144 Darius' failed expedition against the Scythians. Customs of
 the various Scythian peoples.
145–167,
198–205 Foundation and early history of Cyrene.
168–197 The Persian expansion into Libya and description of the
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Book Five

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and his party insisted on advancing at once and putting their plans into action without delay. In the midst of all this wrangling, there appeared seven pairs of hawks, in pursuit of two pairs of vultures. The hawks were sending the vultures' feathers flying, and shredding their bodies. The sight brought the Seven to give their unanimous backing to the arguments of Darius – and so, emboldened by the birds, they went on towards the palace.

[77] When they came to stand outside the gates, everything happened more or less as Darius had forecast: the guards, confronted by the foremost men in Persia, did indeed cringe before them, never suspecting the divinely appointed mission they were engaged upon, but waving them past and asking them nothing. The Seven made it into the courtyard, where they were met by the eunuchs whose job it was to take messages in to the king, who enquired of them what they wanted, and why they had come. Even as the eunuchs put these questions, however, they were simultaneously threatening to punish the gatekeepers for having admitted the Seven – whose wish to go further into the palace they attempted to obstruct. At this, the Seven yelled encouragement to one another, then drew their daggers, quickly stabbed the men who had been presuming to restrain them and proceeded at full pelt into the men's quarters.

[78] Now it so happened that both the Magians were inside, discussing how to handle the consequences of the Prexaspes affair. Accordingly, when they saw the eunuchs screaming in uproar, they sprang to their feet; and when they realized what was going on, their thoughts turned to resistance. One of them just had time to take down his bow; the other turned and grabbed his spear. Then battle was joined – the two sides, one against the other. So hemmed in by his enemies was the Magian who had picked up his bow and arrows, and so hard pressed by them, that he found his weapons no use at all; but the other Magian, the one who had the spear, defended himself to such good effect that he struck Aspathines in the thigh and Intaphrenes in the eye. (This wound to Intaphrenes, though not fatal, did result in his losing his eye.) Such was the damage that one of the Magians managed to inflict upon his attackers; but the other Magian, when he found his bow and his arrows useless, ran down from the men's quarters into a bedroom which opened directly onto them. His aim was to bar the room's doors; but two of the Seven, Darius and Gobryas, were hot on his heels. Gobryas started to

grapple with the Magian, but it was so dark that Darius, terrified in case he struck Gobryas by accident, stood there beside him, paralysed by indecision. Gobryas, when he saw Darius standing there ineffectually, asked him why he did not lend a hand. 'I am worried,' said Darius, 'in case I hit you.' 'Strike with your sword,' Gobryas answered, 'even if you run both of us through!' Obediently, Darius struck with his dagger – and somehow managed to strike the Magian alone.

[79] Then, having dispatched the Magians, the conspirators cut off their heads. Their own wounded they left behind in the citadel, since it needed guarding, and the wounded were anyway incapacitated; but the remaining five, yelling at the tops of their voices, and taking with them the heads of the Magians, ran outside, calling as they did so on all the other Persians to join them. As they told everyone their news, and brandished the heads, they simultaneously slew each and every Magian who crossed their path. When the Persians learned what the Seven had done, and of the hoax perpetrated by the Magians, they felt themselves perfectly justified in joining in – and so they too drew their daggers, and started to kill any Magian they could find. Indeed, had nightfall not intervened, they would not have left a single Magian alive. This day is now more widely celebrated by the mass of the Persian people than any other in their calendar: they mark it with a great festival which is called by the Persians 'The Slaughter of the Magians', and includes a ban on any Magian appearing by daylight, so that all who belong to the Magians are obliged to keep to their homes the whole day long.

→ [80] Some five days and more later, when the uproar had subsided, the conspirators against the Magians met to debate the general state of affairs.⁶³ The speeches that were delivered at this debate, although regarded by some Greeks as incredible, were indeed authentically spoken. It was the recommendation of Otanes that they place the business of government in the midst of the Persian people. 'In my opinion,' he said, 'we should abandon any notion of installing one of us as sole ruler. There is nothing either pleasant or noble about monarchy. You saw for yourselves how far Cambyses went in abusing his power, and you have had some experience as well of the Magian's brutality and arrogance. How can monarchy ever create ordered governance, when a monarch can do what he pleases and not be answerable for it? Install even the very best of men in such a position of authority and his customary personality will be quite transformed. All the good qualities that

he possesses will foster an abusive arrogance in him – and as for envy, well, that is ingrained in men from birth. These twin characteristics will suffice to render him a repository of every kind of evil, and every crime he commits will be traceable to a surfeit of insolence and jealousy. By rights, of course, a man who rules as a tyrant should be proof against envy, bearing in mind all the pleasant things that he enjoys. In reality, however, instinct imbues him with an attitude towards the citizenry which is quite the opposite. Just as he resents the continued existence of the city's elite, so he exults in those who make up its dregs – nor is there anyone quicker to listen to malevolent gossip. A sole ruler is also more prone to violent swings of mood than anyone. Express only a moderate admiration for him, for instance, and your relative lack of deference will throw him into a towering rage – but behave with a creeping subservience and he will grow irate with you for being a flatterer. And that is not all: I now come to mention his gravest offences. A monarch plays havoc with ancestral customs, he rapes women and he executes men without trial. Rule by the majority, on the other hand, bears that fairest of all titles: 'Equality before the law'.⁶⁴ Not only that, but it has this second quality: it gives rise to none of the actions which a monarch characteristically takes. Those in office have their authority courtesy of a lottery, and wield it in a way that is strictly accountable. Every policy decision must be referred to the commonality of the people. That is why I give it as my opinion that we should abolish the monarchy and foster the rule of the masses. Everything, after all, is contained within the multitude.' Such was the case made by Otanes.

[81] Megabyzus, however, urged that power be turned over to an oligarchy. 'While I concur with the criticisms levelled by Otanes against tyranny,' he said, 'I feel that he is seriously wide of the mark in recommending that power be transferred to the masses. There is nothing more lacking in intelligence, nor more insolent, than some useless mob. How intolerable that men should escape the haughty brutality of a tyrant, only to succumb to the untempered violence of riff-raff no less haughty or brutal! At least a tyrant, when he does something, understands what he is doing, but a mob lacks even that modicum of knowledge! What can anyone know who has been taught nothing of what is fine and noble, nor possesses any innate sense of it, but only rushes blindly at things, and batters at them like some river in spate? No, leave it to those who bear ill will towards the Persians to deploy the masses in govern-

ment! Let us instead pick a band of the finest men we have and entrust them with power. We ourselves will, after all, be numbered among them – and it is only reasonable to assume that men who rank as the best will devise the best policies as well.' Such was the case made by Megabyzus.⁶⁵

[82] The third person to make known his point of view was Darius. 'In my opinion,' he said, 'the speech that Megabyzus just gave us was very much to the point in its analysis of the masses, but highly misleading when it touched on oligarchy. We have three choices before us. Suppose that each of them functions as well as it possibly can – rule by the people, rule by an elite and rule by a single man.'⁶⁶ It is this last option, I would argue, which stands head and shoulders above the others. A single individual who cannot be improved upon is self-evidently the best – for the judgement of such a man can be deployed in the governance of his people, without his ever being criticized. Similarly, it serves as the best possible guarantee that plans directed against men opposed to us will be kept confidential. Yes, there are many in an oligarchy with a commitment to civic virtue, and they do indeed practise it in the cause of the common good – and yet how often does that same commitment engender bitter private enmities! Since every oligarch wishes to be foremost, and see his opinions prevail, an eruption of savage feuding is the inevitable consequence – feuding which in turn results in civil strife, which leads to bloodshed, which results in rule by a single man. Proof enough, then, of the degree to which monarchy excels! Then again, wherever the people are in power, corruption is the inevitable consequence. What serves to foster this state of corruption in a commonwealth is the tendency of trouble-makers, not to turn on one another, but rather to form fast friendships and to get things done by ganging up with one another and exploiting the common interest. So it goes on, until in due course someone emerges as a champion of the people and puts a stop to it. The consequence of this, however, is that the people are lost in such admiration for this person that their hero-worship sees him emerge as a monarch. Clear proof again that it is monarchy which is the best! There remains, however, one clinching point to be made. Where did this independence of ours come from? To what do we owe it? To the people, to an oligarchy – or to a monarch? It was an individual, one single individual, who won our liberty for us – and that is why I firmly believe that we should maintain our current

system of government. And that doesn't even touch on a further issue – the excellence of the way that our forefathers ordered things, and which should never be disassembled.⁶⁷ There is no alternative.

[83] Such, then, were the three points of view put forward for consideration – and it was to the last that four of the Seven gave their backing. Otanes, desperate as he had been to see the Persians established as equal before the law, responded to his defeat by making a declaration to the other six. 'My fellow-conspirators,' he said, 'whether it is done by casting lots, or by turning to the Persian people for their choice of candidate, or by some other means altogether, it is evident now that one of us is going to become king. That being so, I will not be a candidate in the contest. I have as little wish to be a ruler as to be ruled. Nevertheless, I renounce my claim to the kingdom on this one condition – that I will not be subject to any of you, neither I nor any of my descendants, in perpetuity.' The other six, once Otanes had delivered these terms, agreed to them; and so he duly stood down from the contest, and withdrew from the meeting. And still, to this day, the House of Otanes ranks as the only free one in all of Persia: though it never breaks the laws of the Persians, it is obedient to the king only to the degree that it wishes to be.

[84] The six remaining conspirators deliberated among themselves as to the fairest way of installing a king. They decided that if one of the others among the Seven became king, Otanes and his descendants should be rewarded as a special privilege with a grant, each and every year, of all the things that the Persians most prize – Median robes included. Behind their decision to give him this award was the fact that he had been the prime mover in the whole business, and had recruited them all to the conspiracy. Then, in addition to the special privileges granted to Otanes, it was resolved that all of the Seven should share a right of unannounced entry to the royal palaces, except when the king happened to be sleeping with one his wives, and that it should be forbidden the king to marry outside the families of his fellow-insurrectionists. As for the method of choosing a king, they resolved that they should all mount their horses out on the margins of the city, and that the kingdom should be given to the rider of whichever horse was the first to neigh after the sun had risen.

[85] Now, Darius had a groom called Oebares, a man who was very clever. Once the meeting had broken up, Darius said to this man, 'Oebares, we have decided how the issue of the kingdom is to be sorted.

We will all of us climb into our saddles, and whoever's horse neighs first as the sun rises will win for his rider the throne. Your brain – is it in good working order? If so, then devise some scheme that will enable us – us, and no one else – to secure this great honour!' 'Master,' Oebares replied, 'if this is really what your prospect of becoming king depends upon, keep your spirits up and rest confident there is no one who will beat you to the throne. I have the perfect plan for success!' 'Well,' said Darius, 'if you really do have a cunning scheme in mind, now is the time to put it into action. No time for delay, because our contest will be held tomorrow morning.' Sure enough, no sooner had Oebares heard this than he set to work as follows. When night fell, he led out a mare, for which Darius' horse had a special partiality, to the limits of the city and tethered her there; he then brought Darius' horse out to the same spot, and walked him round and round and round her, allowing him to draw so close that he brushed against her. Then finally Oebares released the stallion, who mounted the mare.

[86] At the first glimmer of dawn, the six all assembled on horseback, as they had agreed, and rode out to the limits of the city. Then, as they did a circuit, they came to the spot where the mare had been tethered the night before – and immediately Darius' horse galloped up to it and whinnied. Simultaneously, just as the horse was doing this, there was a flash of lightning from the clear blue sky and a clap of thunder. These additional markers, produced as if to order, clinched the contest for Darius: the others all leapt down from their horses and prostrated themselves before him.

[87] But there is another story explaining how Oebares managed to pull off the trick. (In fact, the Persians tell it both ways.) Oebares, according to this second tale, rubbed his hand all over the mare's genitals, and then kept his hand hidden in his trousers. As the sun rose, and the six were about to let their horses go, Oebares whipped out his hand and shoved it under the nostrils of Darius' horse – and no sooner had the horse smelled it than he snorted and whinnied.⁶⁸

[88] So it was that Darius, son of Hystaspes, was proclaimed king – lord, thanks to the conquests of Cyrus, and those subsequently of Cambyses, of all the various peoples of Asia, the Arabians only excepted. (The Arabians, rather than being subjected to slavery by the Persians, had instead come to rank in friendship as their allies, at the time when they had granted Cambyses safe passage into Egypt. Had the Arabians

reason the Aeginetans had made the gift was because they were planning to join forces with the Persians in an attack upon them. Delighted to have this pretext to hand, the Athenians headed off to Sparta, where they declared the Aeginetans guilty of having betrayed Greece.³⁷

[50] This accusation prompted Cleomenes,³⁸ the son of Anaxandridas, to cross over to Aegina, with the aim – in his role as king of the Spartiates – of arresting the Aeginetan ringleaders. His attempt to apprehend them, however, provoked widespread opposition from the Aeginetans; the most forthright of these was Crius, the son of Polycritus, who declared that the removal of even a single Aeginetan would have dire consequences. ‘Your course of action is clearly provoked by Athenian bribes rather than reflecting the official policy of the Spartiates as a whole. Otherwise you would have come to make your arrests accompanied by the other king.’³⁹ (This speech had been prompted by a letter from Demaratus.) Cleomenes, obliged to leave Aegina, asked Crius for his name. The answer came back: ‘Crius’, which means ‘ram’. ‘Well, Crius,’ Cleomenes told him, ‘get your horns sheathed in brass, because you are facing terrible danger.’⁴⁰

[51] Meanwhile, back in Sparta, all sorts of muck about Cleomenes was being raked by Demaratus, the son of Ariston, and himself a king of the Spartiates, albeit from the junior house.⁴¹ Both houses actually share an identical ancestry,⁴² and the fact that one is junior, and the other – the House of Eurysthenes – enjoys a margin more prestige, is simply due to Eurysthenes having been born first.

→ [52] Even though no poet has ever corroborated the story, the Lacedaemonians claim that it was not the sons of Aristodemus who led them to the land which they occupy today, but Aristodemus himself, the son of Aristomachus, the grandson of Cleodaeus and the great-grandson of Hyllus. Not long after this, the wife of Aristodemus – Argeia, as she was called – successfully came to term. (She is said to have been the daughter of Autesion, who in turn was the son of Tisamenus, the son of Thersander, the son of Polynices.) According to the Spartans, she had brought twins into the world – even as a mortally sick Aristodemus, after one look at the children, departed it. The Lacedaemonians of the time then consulted together, and decreed that the eldest, as was traditional, should be installed as king – but because the twins were identical in every way, they had no idea which one to choose. When they found

themselves stuck for an answer (and perhaps even at an earlier stage), they tried to solve the puzzle by turning to the woman who had given birth to the twins; but she too declared that she found it quite impossible to tell them apart. (In fact, despite this assurance, she knew full well which one was which – but it was her ambition that they should both of them, by some means, end up on the throne.) So the Lacedaemonians were at a loss; and indeed, such was their perplexity that they sent messengers to Delphi to ask how best to resolve the matter. ‘Treat both boys as kings,’ the Pythia instructed them, ‘but honour the elder one the more.’ Concerning the identity of this ‘elder one’, however, the Pythia’s answer gave no hint, and so the Lacedaemonians were left as puzzled as they ever had been. Then it was that a man from Messenia, called Panites, had an idea. The Lacedaemonians, he suggested, should keep a close watch on the mother, and see which of the boys she bathed and fed the first. If she turned out always to follow the same routine, then the mystery would be solved, and they would know all that they needed; but if she varied her routine, and kept changing it, then it would be clear that she was indeed just as much in the dark as they were, and they would have to try some other method. So the Spartiates did as the Messenian had suggested: they kept a close watch on the mother of Aristodemus’ children, who never had any suspicion that they were spying on her, and found that she did indeed show one of the boys the honour due a first-born, both when feeding them, and at their bath-time. The Lacedaemonians took this boy, the one his mother had been favouring as her first-born, and brought him up at public expense. Eurysthenes, they called him, while his brother they called Procles. These two, so the Lacedaemonians report, went on to spend their entire adult lives at loggerheads, despite their being brothers; and so it has been with their descendants ever since.⁴³

[53] The Lacedaemonians are alone among the Greeks in giving this version of events, so let me now spell out the conventional Greek account, which holds that the list of Dorian kings as traditionally enumerated by the Greeks is correct, and can be traced as far back as Perseus, the son of Danaë – although it skirts the issue of whether his paternity was divine. Not only that, but it demonstrates that the Dorian kings, who even in the time of Perseus were counted as Greeks, must indeed therefore have been Greek. I said ‘as far back as Perseus’, rather

than fixing on an earlier date, because no mortal is named as having been his father – as Amphitryon, for instance, is named as the father of Heracles. Clearly, then, in using the phrase, I have both accuracy and logic on my side. But were the paternal lineage of Danaë, the daughter of Acrisius, to be traced back through the generations, then the ancestry of the Dorian rulers would indisputably be shown to derive from Egypt.

[54] Besides this Greek genealogy, there is also a version related by the Persians, who claim that Perseus himself was an Assyrian, and that, although he ended up a Greek, his ancestry was not Greek at all. Acrisius and his forefathers were quite unrelated to Perseus, the Persians say, and came from Egypt – a point on which the Persians and the Greeks do concur.⁴⁴

[55] But I have said quite enough on this topic. The question of how, despite being Egyptian, their exploits allowed them to rule as kings over the Dorians has been dealt with by others, so I will leave it well alone. The themes that form my subject are ones that have never been touched upon hitherto.

[56] The Spartiates have bestowed a number of prerogatives upon their kings. They hold two priesthoods, one of Zeus of Lacedaemon, and one of the Heavenly Zeus; they can make war against any country they choose,⁴⁵ and no Spartiate is permitted to obstruct them in this, upon pain of being subject to a curse; going into battle, it is the kings who are positioned in the vanguard, and during a withdrawal, in the rear; on campaign, they have a hundred hand-picked men to protect them;⁴⁶ as they head off to war, they have the right to take as much livestock as they want, and to be given the hides and backs of every single sacrificial victim.

[57] In addition to these rights, which relate to times of war, they have also been granted prerogatives which apply in times of peace. Whenever there is a public sacrifice, for instance, it is the kings who sit down first to the meal, and receive the first portions, which are for each of them double the size of those received by everyone else at the feast. The kings also pour the first libations, and receive the hides of animals killed in sacrifice. Every new moon, and on the seventh day of every month, both kings are given, at public expense, an animal that has been specially reared for sacrifice to Apollo, together with a *medimnus* of barley-meal and a Laconian quart of wine. At athletics contests, seats are always reserved for them in the front row. They have the right to

appoint as official representatives of foreigners in Sparta whichever citizens they please. Each king also nominates two Pythians: emissaries who are sent to consult Delphi, and who dine at public expense alongside the kings. Should the kings not attend the public mess, then 2 *choenixes* of barley and a *cotyle* of wine are sent to them in their homes; when they are in attendance at the mess, they receive double portions of everything. (The same privilege is afforded them even when they are invited to dine by a private citizen.) The kings are guardians of any oracles that may be given, although the Pythians share in the knowledge of them as well. There are also certain judicial matters which are the exclusive concern of the kings: who should get to marry a virgin heiress whose father has died without first choosing her a husband, for instance; anything to do with public highways; and the adoption of children, which is always performed in the royal presence. When the twenty-eight members of the Gerousia⁴⁷ sit in session, so too do the kings – and should they not attend the meeting, their closest relatives among the various members of the Gerousia will wield the royal prerogatives, casting two votes, and then a third one on behalf of themselves.⁴⁸

[58] Such are the rights received from the mass of Spartiates by their kings while alive; but there are privileges bestowed on them in death as well. Whenever a king dies, horsemen tour Laconia,⁴⁹ broadcasting the news across the entire territory, while in the city women go up and down, beating on copper cauldrons. This is the compulsory signal for two free persons from every household, a man and a woman, to put on sackcloth and ashes, and anyone who ignores this obligation is subjected to heavy fines. These rituals practised by the Lacedaemonians upon the occasion of the death of their kings correspond precisely to those of the barbarians of Asia – and indeed, by and large, to those of barbarians everywhere, whose customs whenever their own kings die are much the same.⁵⁰ This is evident from the fact that it is not only the Spartiates who are required to attend the funeral of a dead king of the Lacedaemonians, but also a number of the subject people who ring the city, and who are drawn from across the entire span of Lacedaemon. Once they, the helots and the Spartiates themselves (thousands upon thousands of men and women all mingling promiscuously together) have congregated in one place, they beat their foreheads in a violence of passion, and give themselves over to endless wails of grief, declaring that the last king to have died in the royal succession was the best there ever

was – no matter who the king. Should he have died in battle, then the Lacedaemonians fashion an image of him, place it on a lavishly appointed bier and carry it out in procession. Following his burial, the city market is closed for ten days, and there are no elections held in all that time, only displays of mourning.

[59] This is not the only way in which the Lacedaemonians resemble the Persians. Whenever a king, on the death of his predecessor, succeeds to the throne, he marks his accession by clearing the debts of any Spartan indebted either to himself or to the state. Likewise, in Persia, a newly crowned king remits any arrears of tribute which may be owed him by a city, without exception.

→ [60] There are also the following ways in which the Lacedaemonians resemble the Egyptians.⁵¹ Heralds, flute-players and sacrificial cooks all inherit their respective crafts from their fathers, with flute-player being born to flute-player, sacrificial cook to sacrificial cook and herald to herald. Because heralds, for instance, become what they are by right of birth, not even those with clear and ringing voices can hope to usurp their roles and displace them. That is how things are done.

[61] So while Cleomenes was away on Aegina working for the common good of Greece,⁵² there was Demaratus busy stabbing him in the back – not out of any great concern for the Aeginetans, however, but because he was consumed by envy and malice.⁵³ Cleomenes, once he was back from Aegina, duly turned to pondering how Demaratus might be removed from the throne – and sure enough, by fixing on one particular issue, he found a promising line of attack. Back when Ariston had been king of Sparta, he had married twice, but never had any children. Refusing to acknowledge that he himself might be to blame, however, he instead took a third wife, and under very particular circumstances. He had a friend among the Spartiates, one who was dearer to him than any other citizen. It so happened that the wife of this man was by far the most beautiful woman in all Sparta – despite the fact that she had become the most beautiful having been the ugliest. Indeed, so ill favoured had she been that her nurse, who was alert to the fact that the child was not merely ugly, but the daughter of a very wealthy family, and who could see that the parents regarded her appearance an utter calamity, came up with a well-considered plan. Every day, she would carry the child to the sanctuary of Helen, which stands in a place called Therapne, above the shrine of Phoebus; and every time the nurse carried

her there, she would prop her up against the statue of Helen and beseech the goddess to deliver the child from her ugliness. Once, it is said, as the nurse was leaving the sanctuary, a woman appeared to her and asked what she was carrying in her arms. ‘I am carrying a child,’ the nurse answered. ‘Show her to me,’ the woman answered. The nurse refused. ‘I have strict instructions from the parents that she is on no account to be shown to anyone.’ Still the woman insisted, over and over again, on seeing the child – until the nurse, recognizing how much it meant to the woman to have a look, eventually showed her the child. The woman stroked the girl’s head, and then declared: ‘You will be the fairest woman in Sparta.’ Sure enough, from that day on, the child’s looks began to blossom. When she became nubile, she was married to Agetus, the son of Alcides – and the friend of Ariston.

[62] Now, because lust for this woman was an itch that tortured Ariston, he came up with a scheme to scratch it. He promised his comrade, whose wife she was, one of his own possessions as a gift. He should have his pick, anything he liked; and then he urged his comrade to make an identical commitment. The friend, who had no anxieties concerning his wife, because he could see that Ariston too was married, agreed. Once the arrangement had been sealed with solemn oaths, Agetus chose some item or other from Ariston’s treasure store, which Ariston duly handed over; and then, when it was the turn of Ariston to make his own corresponding claim, he sought to drag off his friend’s wife.⁵⁴ Agetus, however, protested that she, alone of all he had, was not covered by the deal. Nevertheless, as he had been tricked and suborned into swearing his oath, he had no choice but to let Ariston lead her away.

[63] Thus it was that Ariston divorced his second wife and came by his third. Not long afterwards, before even ten months had fully passed,⁵⁵ his new wife gave birth to a child: this was none other than Demaratus. News of the child’s delivery was brought by a household slave to Ariston as he sat in session with the ephors. Knowing the date of his marriage to the mother, and counting off the months on his fingers, Ariston exclaimed with an oath, ‘It can’t be mine!’ The ephors, however, despite hearing him say this, made nothing of the matter at the time. The boy grew up, and Ariston came to regret what he had said; for he no longer had any doubt that Demaratus was indeed his child. Indeed, the very reason that he had named the boy ‘Demaratus’ – meaning ‘Prayed-for-by-the-People’ – was that the entire body of the