

BIBLIOTHECA CLASSICA.

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HERODOTUS,

WITH A

COMMENTARY BY THE REV. J. W. BLAKESLEY, B.D.

LONDON:

WHITTAKER AND CO. AVE MARIA LANE;
GEORGE BELL, FLEET STREET.

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HERODOTUS,

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A COMMENTARY

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INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE commencing the study of any ancient book, a modern reader is naturally desirous of being made acquainted with whatever is known of the personal history of the author. In the case of Herodotus there is little information remaining to gratify this desire, and that little is of a doubtful character. The brief notice in *SUIDAS*, which attributes to him a prolonged residence in the island Samos, after expulsion, in the sequel of a political convulsion, from his native city Halicarnassus, might from its probability be received without any suspicion, if it were not combined with the assertion, that in Samos he cultivated the Ionian dialect, and there wrote his history. But the Ionian dialect was in fact the dialect of literature at the time, and, although Samos was one of the Ionian states of Asia, its language was quite a peculiar one, as Herodotus himself remarks¹; and, indeed, the few characteristics of it which are recorded do not appear in any of the MSS of his work. Nevertheless, although we cannot accept any view which would connect his residence in Samos with the peculiarities of his language, there are indications in the course of his work that he was familiar with the island, and that some of his accounts of distant regions are derived from information furnished by the enterprising navigators whose home it was. Suidas goes on to say that after a prolonged stay there he returned to Halicarnassus, and assisted in the expulsion of the tyrant

¹ i. 142. The Samians said *Δεύννος* and *Θεόδωρος* instead of *Διόνυσος* and *Θεόδωρος*. *ETYMOLOGICUM MAGNUM*, p. 259. A reason for the anomalous character of the language may be found in the fortunes of the population. (See iii. 147. 149.)

Lygdamis (the author of his own banishment, and the murderer of his kinsman Panyasis, a soothsayer and epic poet). Perceiving himself, however, to be unpopular with his fellow-citizens, he joined as a volunteer the colony sent by the Athenians to Thurii in Italy, died there, and was buried in the agora. These insulated facts are at least conformable to the nature of the times in which Herodotus lived, and are confirmed in some degree by various passages in his writings. Some may perhaps trace the influence of his relative in the superstitious regard for omens and portents which shows itself continually, and may connect his residence in Samos with the frequent allusion to the mysteries and sacred legends². It seems indisputable that some portions of the work which has come down to us must have been composed in the south of Italy; and there is at least a strong probability that a large part originally existed in an independent form. Of the celebrated story related by LUCIAN relative to the circumstances under which the whole was first produced, something will be said in the sequel.

But a far more important matter for the profitable study of this writer is to ascertain the peculiar circumstances of the time in which he lived, in their bearing upon literary productions of a similar nature to his own. No writer escapes the influences of his age, even under circumstances which give the freest scope to individual character. But this scope, under Hellenic modes of life, was narrowed to an almost infinitesimal limit. From his earliest childhood to the day of his death, the Greek lived entirely with others and for others. The traditions, social, political, and religious, in which he was brought up, became a part of himself. Originality, such as we see every day, and are accustomed to admire, would have been in his eyes an object almost of horror,—would indeed have been viewed very much in the same light as free-thinking at the present time. To suppose, therefore, that because an author displays evident marks of intelligence and sagacity, those qualities would exhibit themselves in the same *kind* of discrimination which we should look for in a writer on

² Samos was the mythical site of the marriage of Zeus and Here, the mysterious character of which passed into a proverb: πάντα γυναῖκες ἴσαντι, καὶ ὡς Ζεὺς ἀγάγεθ' Ἡραν. THEOCRITUS, xv. 64. See the VENETIAN SCHOLIAST on *Iliad* xiv. 295:

οἶον ὅτε πρῶτιστον ἐμισγέσθην φιλόστητι
εἰς εὐνήν φοιτῶντε, φίλους λήθοντε τοκῆας.