

# Herodotus 1.1-5 (Strasler, ed.)

Herodotus of Halicarnassus<sup>a</sup> here presents his research<sup>b</sup> so that human events do not fade with time. May the great and wonderful deeds—some brought forth by the Hellenes, others by the barbarians—not go unsung; as well as the causes that led them to make war on each other.<sup>c</sup>

Persian<sup>a</sup> authorities of the past claim that the Phoenicians<sup>b</sup> were responsible for the dispute. This is because, after they had come to and settled the land which they still inhabit from what is now called the Erythraean Sea,<sup>c</sup> they at once undertook long sea voyages and brought back cargo from Egypt,<sup>d</sup> Assyria,<sup>e</sup> and elsewhere, but more to the point, they came to Argos.<sup>f</sup>

[2] At this time in the land we now call Hellas,<sup>a</sup> Argos surpassed other places in all things, and when the Phoenicians reached Argos they set out their cargo for sale. [3] On the fifth or sixth day after their arrival, when they had sold almost everything, many women came down to the sea, in particular, the king's daughter. Her name, according to what the Hellenes also say, was Io daughter of Inachos. [4] The women were standing by the stern of the ship intent upon their purchases when the Phoenicians, inciting each other, rushed upon them. The greater part made their escape, but some were seized and carried off. Io herself was among the captives. The Phoenicians put the women on board their vessel and set sail for Egypt.

Proem

Herodotus states his general purpose in this brief preface.

1.1

Herodotus describes the origins of the conflict between Hellenes and barbarians as a series of abductions of women. The Argive woman Io was first.

Proem.a Halicarnassus: Map 1.3, the city in Asia Minor in which Herodotus grew up; Aristotle knew a version of this work in which Herodotus identified himself as from Thurii (Map 1.24), where he lived in his later years.

Proem.b These opening words crudely translated run: "What follows is a performance [literally 'display'] of the enquiries of Herodotus from Halicarnassus." (Gould). This almost certainly implies that Herodotus performed (read aloud) his text, in whole or in part, to an audience gathered to hear him.

Proem.c See Appendix Q, Herodotus and the Poets, §1-2.

1.1.1a Persia: Map 1.3.

1.1.1b Phoenicia: Map 1.3.

1.1.1c Erythraean Sea: Map 1.3. Herodotus recognizes only one sea south of Africa, Persia, and India and calls it, including the gulfs that extend north from it—the modern Red Sea and the Persian Gulf—the Erythraean Sea. However, on three occasions, he does call it the "Southern Sea" (2.11.3, 2.158, 3.17.1), and once he calls the modern Red Sea the "Arabian Gulf." See Appendix D, Herodotean Geography, §1-3.

1.1.1d Egypt: Map 1.3.

1.1.1e Assyria: Map 1.3.

1.1.1f Argos: Map 1.3.

1.1.2a Hellas: Map 1.3.

## 1.2

## TYRE

Some Hellenes abduct the king's daughter Europa from Tyre. Others take Medea from her home in Colchis.

This is how Io came to Egypt according to the Persians (though the Hellenes disagree), and this was the very beginning of grievances.

They say that following these events, certain Hellenes whose names they cannot specify came to the port of Tyre,<sup>a</sup> in Phoenicia, and abducted the king's daughter Europa. These Hellenes would be Cretans.<sup>b</sup> And now the score was even.

[2] But after this, the Hellenes were responsible for a second crime. For they sailed in a warship to Aia in the territory of Colchis and on to the River Phasis.<sup>a</sup> And when they had finished the business that brought them there,<sup>b</sup> they abducted the king's daughter Medea. [3] So the Colchian king sent a messenger to Hellas to demand satisfaction for the abduction and the return of his daughter. The reply was that, since they had received no satisfaction for the abduction of Io of Argos, neither would they pay anything to them.

## 1.3

## TROY

Alexandros of Troy carries off Helen.

They say that in the generation following these events Alexandros son of Priam<sup>a</sup> heard the stories and wanted to abduct a wife from Hellas for himself, quite confident that he would pay no penalty since the other side had not paid either. [2] And so he abducted Helen. The Hellenes decided that the first thing to do was to send messengers demanding the return of Helen and satisfaction for the abduction. When they made these proposals they were charged with the abduction of Medea, and besides, they said, how could they expect satisfaction from others when they themselves had neither paid nor surrendered her upon request?

## 1.4

## TROY

The Persians say the Hellenes overreacted to the abduction of Helen.

Up to this point, there had been abductions only from each other, but after this the Hellenes were largely responsible for offenses. For they began to make war on Asia<sup>a</sup> before their enemies made war on Europe.<sup>b</sup> [2] Now the Persians think that the abduction of women is certainly an act only unjust men would perform, and yet once they have been abducted, it is senseless to make a fuss over seeking vengeance. It is the way of sensible people to have no concern for abducted women; it is quite obvious that the women would not have been abducted if they had not been compliant. [3] The Persians claim that while they themselves, Asiatics, thought nothing of the women being abducted, the Hellenes of Sparta, for the sake of a woman, mustered a huge expedition, went to Asia, and destroyed the power of Priam. [4] From that time on they have considered the Hellenes to be their enemies. For the Persians assume Asia and the barbarian tribes living there as their own, and anything Hellenic is separate and divergent from themselves.

## 1.5

## TROY

Other versions of Helen's story.

The Persians claim that this is how it happened, and they find in the sack of Troy<sup>a</sup> the origin of their hostility toward the Hellenes. [2] But the Phoenicians disagree with the Persians about Io. They say that it was not by

1.2.1a Tyre: Map 1.3.

1.2.1b Crete (Creta): Map 1.3.

1.2.2a Aia in Colchis: site unknown. Colchis: Map 1.3. Phasis River: Map 1.3.

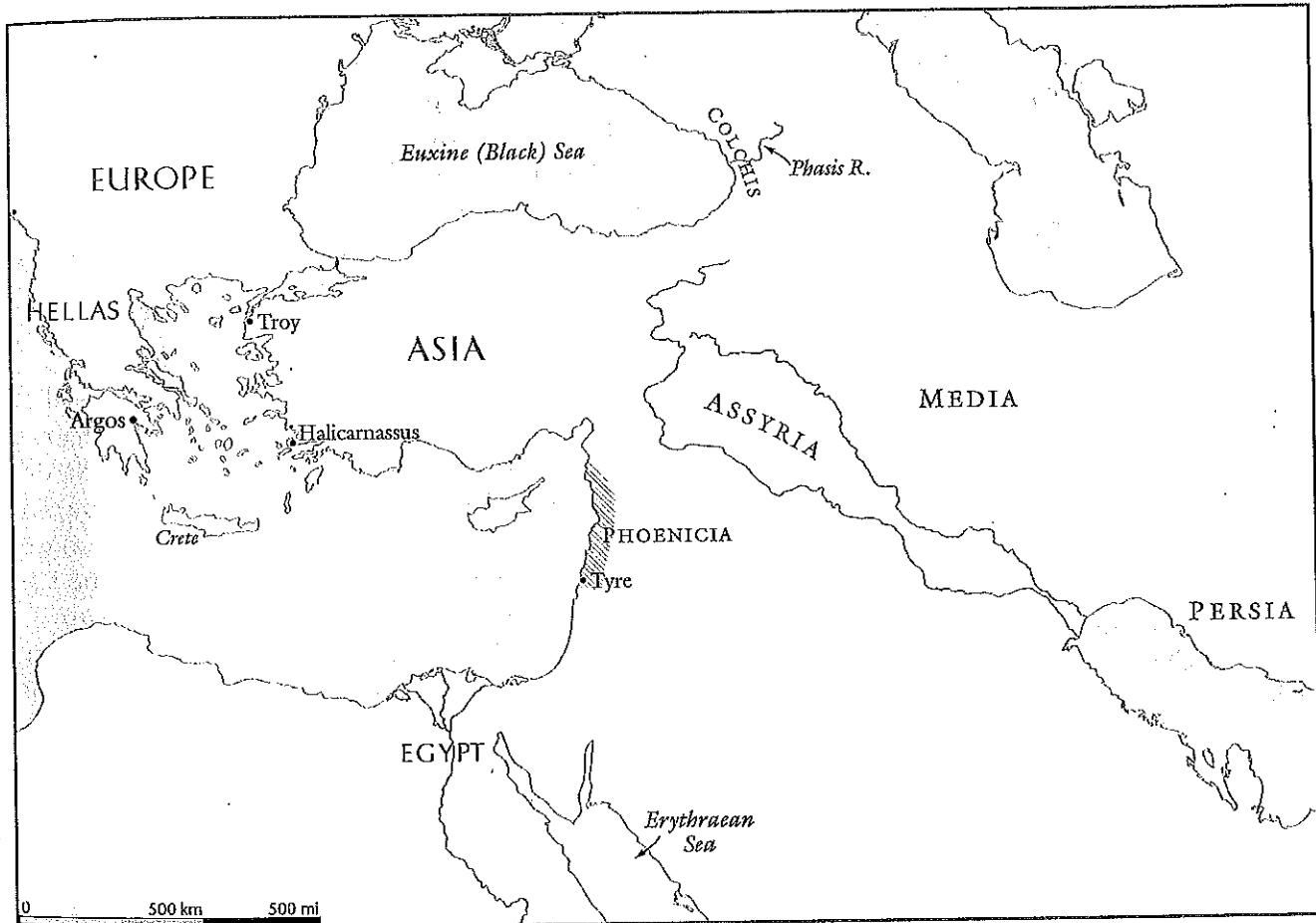
1.2.2b The legendary capture of the Golden Fleece.

1.3.1a Alexandros son of Priam; also known as Paris.

1.4.1a Asia: Map 1.3.

1.4.1b Europe: Map 1.3.

1.5.1a Troy (Ilion/Ilium): Map 1.3.



Map 1.3

abduction that they brought her to Egypt, but rather that she had intercourse with the captain of the ship in Argos, and when she realized she was pregnant, she was ashamed to face her parents and she voluntarily sailed away with the Phoenicians so that she would not be found out.

[3] These are the stories told by the Persians and Phoenicians. I myself have no intention of affirming that these events occurred thus or otherwise. But I do know who was the first man to begin unjust acts against the Hellenes. I shall describe him and then proceed with the rest of my story recounting cities both lesser and greater, [4] since many of those that were great long ago have become inferior, and some that are great in my own time were inferior before. And so, resting on my knowledge that human prosperity never remains constant, I shall make mention of both without discrimination.