An Account of Egypt by Herodotus

HERODOTUS (c.484 BC - 425 BC) translated by George Campbell MACAULAY (1852 - 1915)

HERODOTUS was born at Halicarnassus, on the southwest coast of Asia Minor, in the early part of the fifth century, B. C. Of his life we know almost nothing, except that he spent much of it traveling, to collect the material for his writings, and that he finally settled down at Thurii, in southern Italy, where his great work was composed. He died in 424 B. C.

The subject of the history of Herodotus is the struggle between the Greeks and the barbarians, which he brings down to the battle of Mycale in 479 B. C. The work, as we have it, is divided into nine books, named after the nine Muses, but this division is probably due to the Alexandrine grammarians. His information he gathered mainly from oral sources, as he traveled through Asia Minor, down into Egypt, round the Black Sea, and into various parts of Greece and the neighboring countries. The chronological narrative halts from time to time to give opportunity for descriptions of the country, the people, and their customs and previous history; and the political account is constantly varied by rare tales and wonders.

Among these descriptions of countries the most fascinating to the modern, as it was to the ancient, reader is his account of the marvels of the land of Egypt. From the priests at Memphis, Heliopolis, and the Egyptian Thebes he learned what he reports of the size of the country, the wonders of the Nile, the ceremonies of their religion, the sacredness of their animals. He tells also of the strange ways of the crocodile and of that marvelous bird, the Phoenix; of dress and funerals and embalming; of the eating of lotos and papyrus; of the pyramids and the great labyrinth; of their kings and queens and courtesans.

Summary by the author

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