

Herodotus was certainly forthright in his advice for drawing maps. He declares, "In a few words I will make clear the size [of Asia and Europe] and in what manner each should be depicted." He starts with Persia, delimited by the Persian Gulf and Arabia to the south. From the Black Sea are two peninsulas separated by the *Phasis River*: one arcs north to the Hellespont; the other extends south along the Red Sea to the Arabian Gulf and west to include Egypt and Libya. The Caspian Sea and the Araxes River delimit the extreme northeast, but east of India there is an uninhabitable desert whose topography is unknown. Libya is circumnavigable except where it borders Asia. But there is no certain knowledge of bodies of water delimiting northern Europe. Herodotus finds fault with cartographers for dividing Europe, Libya, and Asia into three roughly equal landmasses, "because the differences between them are great." He gives the length of *Libya* as 100,000 *stadia* and asserts that Europe is "as broad as Asia and Libya together." Altogether, with his preference for empirically derived data, he rejects the philosophical paradigm of cartography and aspires to some degree of topographical accuracy.

Like Homer, Herodotus includes cardinal directions and topographical landmarks: bounding Egypt beyond *Heliopolis*, for example, are the *Mountains of Arabia*, oriented north to south and the site of quarries for the building of pyramids. Unlike Homer, Herodotus indicates approximate distances between places: the port of the *Borysthenites* lies at the midpoint of the *Scythian* coast; across from the *Tanais River* dwell the *Sauromatae*, whose lands stretch northward from *Lake Maeotis* [the Sea of Azov] and can be crossed in fifteen days; at its widest, Egypt is traversable in two months, whether by camel or on foot we are not told. Some distances in Egypt are given with deceptive precision: the seacoast reaches 60 "ropes" (*schoinoi*), or 3,600 *stadia*; the distance between the sea and the city of *Heliopolis* is reported as 1,500 *stadia*, only 15 *stadia* longer (he says) than the route between Athens and Olympia; and *Heliopolis* lies 4,860 *stadia* (81 *schoinoi*) up the Nile from Thebes, which is 6,120 *stadia* inland from the Red Sea. Nonetheless, despite his interest in geography and his unequivocal opinions regarding cartography, Herodotus utilized geography primarily to reinforce his presentation of history.

Herodotus wrote his *Histories* in the mid-400's B.C. His book was intended first and foremost as the story of the Greeks' long struggle with the Persian Empire, but Herodotus also included everything he has been able to find out about the geography, history, and peoples of the world. His work, with the map that can be reconstructed from his descriptions, provides our most detailed picture of the world known to the Greeks of the fifth century B.C.

Herodotus was not only a great writer, but he was also an adventurous traveler. His researches for his book took him from his home in Halicarnassus in Asia Minor - the peninsula of western Asia between the Black Sea (Herodotus' *Pontus Euxinus*) and the Mediterranean - through most of the known world. His geographical descriptions are based on the observations that he made on this journey, combined with what he learned from the people he met. Herodotus saw his surroundings far more realistically than did most of his contemporaries; sometimes he even goes to the extent of doubting the truth of a story he reports second-hand. We shall have to believe that he was familiar with theories about the sphericity of the earth, but even though he was often critical of other geographers, he nevertheless seems to have accepted the old belief of the world as a flat disc. From this information, he built up a picture of the world that is very near the truth. The area he knew was small, but his knowledge of it was amazingly complete. Again, it should be noted that the Greeks were particularly not interested in the uninhabited regions.

Scattered throughout his text is so much information about countries and rivers and seas and their relative size and position that many have tried to draw maps of Herodotus' world from it. Herodotus writes:

And I laugh when I see that, though many before this have drawn maps of the Earth, yet no one has set the matter forth in an intelligent way; seeing that they draw Oceanus flowing around the Earth, which is circular exactly as if drawn with compasses, and they make Asia equal in size to Europe . . . I wonder then at those who have parted off and divided the world into Libya, Asia and Europe, since the difference between these is not small; for in length Europe extends along by both, while in breadth it is clear to me that it is beyond comparison larger; for Libya furnishes proofs about itself that it is surrounded by sea, except so much of it as borders upon Asia [Then follows the narrative of the Phoenician voyage around Libya, and further on the story of the voyage made by Scylax] . . . Thus Asia also, excepting the parts of it which are towards the rising sun, has been found to be similar to Libya [i.e. surrounded by sea]. As to Europe, however, it is clearly not known by any, either as regards the parts which are towards the rising sun or those towards the north, whether it be surrounded by sea . . .

As mentioned above, Herodotus scoffed at the popular belief that Europe, Asia, and Africa (which he called *Libya*) were all the same size, and made up a circular world. He cannot guess why three different names, *Europa*, *Libya*, *Asia*, have been given to the earth, which is one physical landmass unit. Why they are, according to him, named after women [*Europa*] was famous in mythology; *Asia* is said to have been one of the *Oceanides*; *Libya*, however, does not seem to occur as the name of a woman; Martin Waldseemüller, or his associate Martin Ringmann, was evidently recalling this passage of Herodotus when he suggested *America* as the name of the New World in his seminal map of 1507, (see *monograph* #312); nor who fixed the boundary of Asia and *Libya* at the Nile and the boundary of Asia and Europe at the *Colchian Phasis* [or at the Don and the Straits of Kertsch]. Herodotus' view of the earth was closer to our own, although, because his knowledge was limited, he described Europe as being as long as both Asia and Africa put together. Of the areas to the north and east he knew little, mentioning neither Britain nor Scandinavia, and confessing ignorance of eastern Asia. He does not know whether Europe is surrounded by water to the west and north, nor the location of the *Cassiterides Islands* [Great Britain?], from which tin is obtained. In the geography of India, Herodotus made a surprising mistake. Although he knew that a Greek mariner called Scylax (dates unknown) had sailed down the Indus River and around Arabia into the Red Sea, Herodotus maintained that the Indus River flowed southeast.

The Persians inhabit Asia extending to the Southern Sea, which is called the *Erythræan* [i.e. the 'red' sea. - the Indian Ocean was called the "red" sea during the entire classical era; it was only during the Middle Ages that the denomination was referred to the Red Sea proper] . . . This then [Asia Minor] is one of the peninsulas, and the other beginning from the land of the Persians stretches along to the Erythræan Sea, including Persia and next after it Assyria, and Arabic after Assyria; and this ends, or rather is commonly supposed to end, at the Arabian Gulf [the Red Sea], into which Darius conducted a canal from the Nile . . . With respect to the voyage along it [i.e. Herodotus' Arabian Gulf], one who set out from the inner most point to sail out through it into the open sea, would spend forty days upon the

voyage, using oars; and with respect to breadth, where the gulf is broadest it is half a day's sail across . . .

And Asia is inhabited as far as the Indian land; but from this onwards towards the east it becomes desert, nor can anyone say what manner of land it is . . . Then again Arabia is the furthest of inhabited lands in the direction of the midday [i.e., south]... As one passes beyond the place of the midday, the Ethiopian land is that which extends furthest of all inhabited lands towards the sunset [i.e. south-west] . . .

For the Nile flows from Libya and cuts Libya through the midst, and as I conjecture, judging of what is not known by that which is evident to the view, it starts at a distance from its mouth equal to that of the Ister [here Herodotus means that the source of the Nile is as far west as that of the Ister-Danube]; for the River Ister begins from the Celti and the city of Pyrene [the Pyrenees?] and so runs that it divides Europe in the midst (now the Celti are outside the Pillars of Hercules and border upon the Cynetes, who dwell furthest towards the sunset of all those who have their dwelling in Europe and the Ister ends, having its course through the whole of Europe, by flowing into the Euxine Sea at the place where the Milesians have their settlement at Istria. Now the Ister, since it flows through land which is inhabited, is known by the reports of many; but of the sources of the Nile no one can give an account, for the part of Libya through which it flows is uninhabited and desert . . .

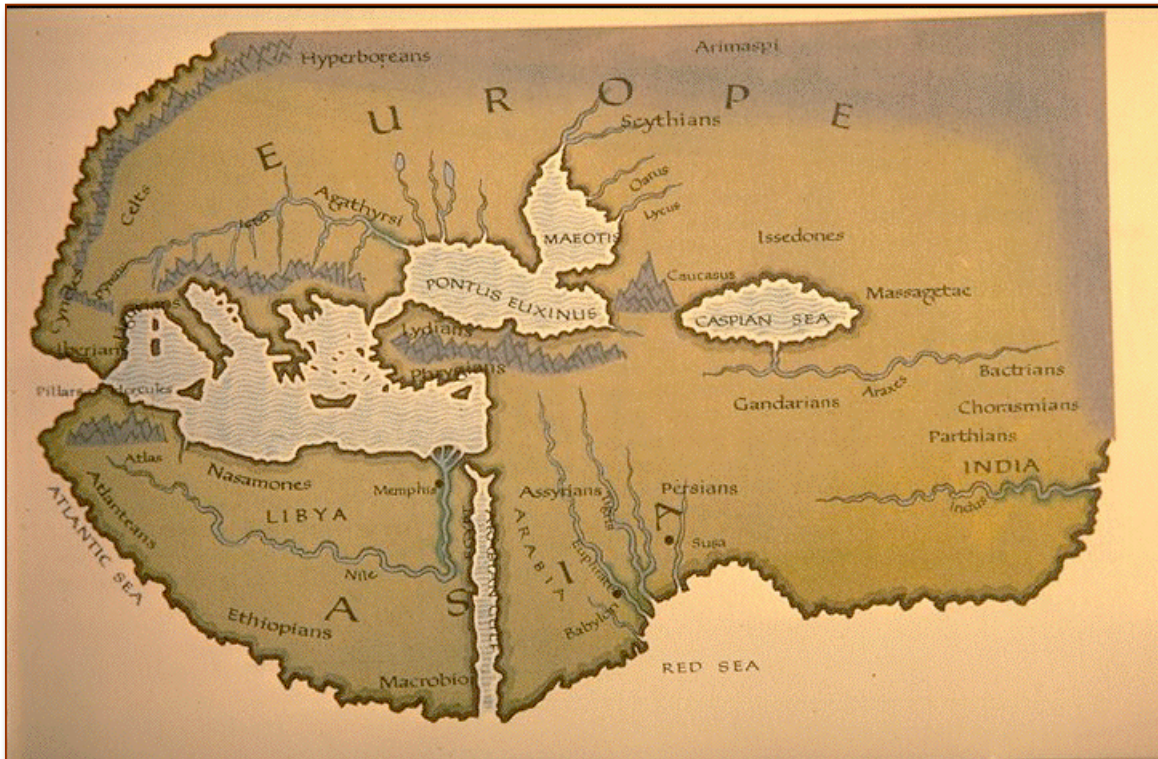
Herodotus tells of five youths from the country of the Nasamones on the Gulf of Sidra, who pushed down through the desert to the southwest until they came to a great river that flowed east. They had seen crocodiles there, and so Herodotus was convinced that they had reached the Nile, which he believed to rise in West Africa. It has been suggested that the Nasamones came upon the Niger near Timbuktu, but it is more probable that they got no further than to the Fezzan, where dried-up river beds bear witness of large prehistoric rivers, and where carvings of crocodiles have been found on rock faces. The dromedary camel was not yet in use in Africa in Herodotus' days, and it is difficult to believe that the youths could have crossed the sands of the desert as far as the Niger on horseback.

For all that sea which the Hellenes navigate, and the sea beyond the Pillars, which is called Atlantis, and the Erythraean Sea are in fact all one, but the Caspian is separate and lies apart by itself. In length it is a voyage of fifteen days if one uses oars, and in breadth, where it is broadest, a voyage of eight days. On the side towards the west of this sea the Caucasus runs along by it, which is of all mountain ranges both the greatest in extent and the loftiest . . . while towards the east and the rising sun a limitless plain succeeds . . .

And taking his seat at the temple he [Darius] gazed upon the Pontus [the Euxine], which is a sight well worth seeing. Of all seas it is indeed the most marvelous in its nature. The length of it is seven thousand one hundred furlongs and the breadth, where it is broadest three thousand three hundred . . . This Pontus also has a lake which has its outlet into it which lake is not much less in size than the Pontus itself, and it is called Mæotis [the Sea of Azov] and 'Mother of the Pontus'.

In two respects, Herodotus' knowledge was considerably in advance of his time. He realized that the Caspian was an inland sea and not, as many geographers thought, a gulf connected to the ocean that was supposed to encircle the earth. Also, he stated that

Africa was surrounded by sea, and cited the Phoenician voyage commissioned by Necho in 600 B.C. as definite proof of this. Some 500 years after Herodotus wrote, the geographer Claudius Ptolemy, whose knowledge was more detailed than Herodotus', mistakenly pinned southern Africa to Asia, making the Indian Ocean into an inland sea. Herodotus' knowledge of the course of the Nile was, however, as hazy as that of the Indus. According to him, it rose south of the Atlas Mountains, and flowed across Africa before turning north to flow through Egypt toward the Mediterranean Sea.



Reconstruction of Herodotus' World View

Herodotus is known as the "Father of History", not because he was the first historian, but that his text and methodology far surpassed all others. He was writing at a time of turbulence in the Greek World with constant battles against the Persian Armies, and even internecine strife. He began writing his text after self-imposed exile on the Island of Samos, in the Aegean Sea. It is west of Ephesus. Many geographical facts are given within Herodotus' *The Histories*, some deliberately others by virtue of naming a town and its province as part of a storyline. The deliberately given facts are analyzed by Michael Ferrar and thus the knowledge of the Greek World 460-430 B.C. is explored and tested against other original texts which are available today. This whole text of *The Histories* indicates that maps played a vital role in the ancient Greek world. That there are many named geographers or cartographers of this age for whom we have good details also indicates that their works were thought of highly. Robert Payne, in his book, *Triumph of the Greeks*, sums up as follows; "We do not know when he set out on his travels, and we can be sure of only a few countries he travelled in. He evidently knew Samos well, and had a great affection for the island. He certainly visited Egypt, but we have no means of telling how long he spent there or whether he went up the Nile to

Assuan. He seems to have known the coast of the Black Sea and to have been in Arabia, and he knew the various kingdoms and principalities of Asia Minor well. He talks at considerable length about Cyrene without ever quite convincing us that he knew the city at first hand.

Of India, Persia and Scythia he speaks as a stranger possessing a rare collection of travelers' tales, and even when he describes the battles fought against the Persians on the Greek mainland he never quite convinces us that he had visited the battlefields. There is nothing in his *Histories* to prove that he was a great traveler. He may have amassed most of his knowledge by talking with Samian sailors, and by consulting the books in the Athenian Libraries. We rarely know where he derived his knowledge. All we know is that he imposed his own vision on the stories he collected and sifted, and that he wrote about far places of the world with unfailing grace and deceptive ease."

Herodotus (4.191) places a range of animal and human monsters in the distant western edge of Africa:

It is here that huge snakes are found – and lions, elephants, bears, asps and horned asses, not to mention dog-headed men, headless men with eyes in their breasts (I don't vouch for this, but merely repeat what the Lybians say), wild men and wild women, and a great many other creatures of by no means a fabulous kind.

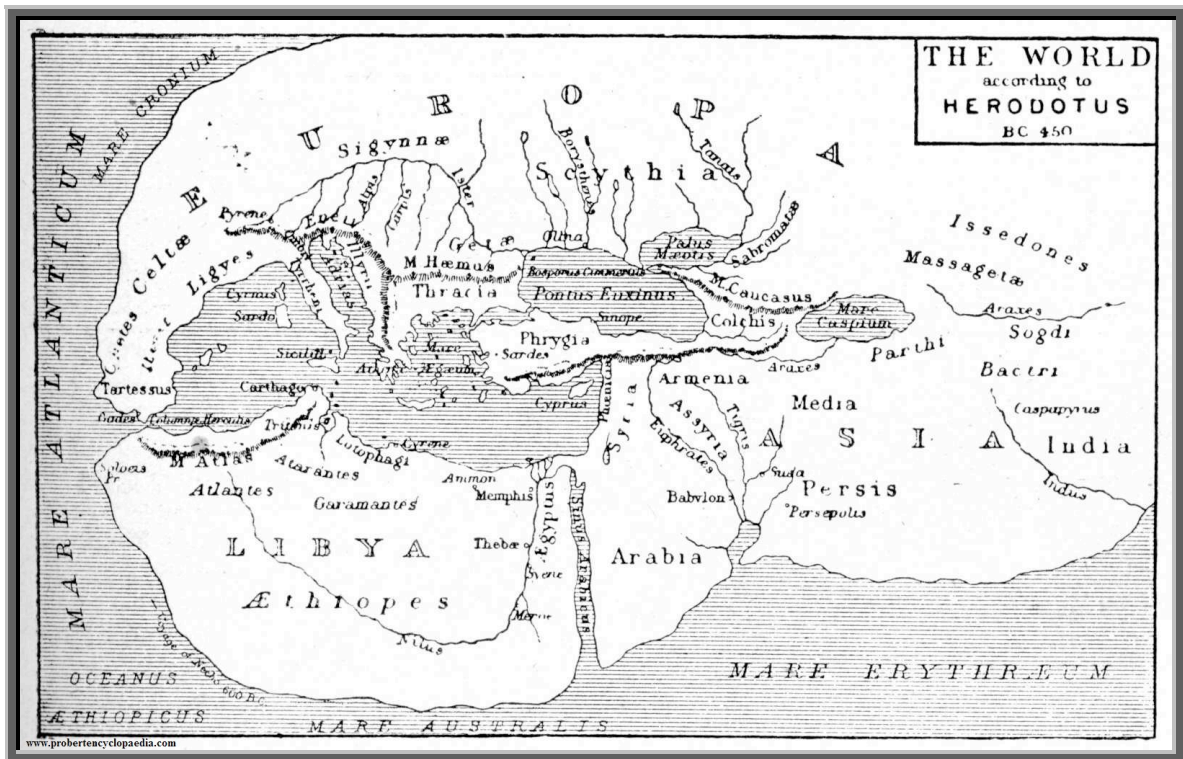
As mentioned, Herodotus upheld the common wisdom that the world was divided into three sections - *Europa*, *Asia* and *Libya* (Africa) - but argued against a widespread belief that they were the same size and made up the whole of the earth. Neither Britain nor Scandinavia featured in his accounts, and the Nile ran throughout Africa to Morocco's Atlas Mountains. Only a small section of Asia was examined, and it was dominated by India. Herodotus admitted to uncertainty over whether Europe was surrounded wholly by water, but he suggested Africa might be. He also saw the Caspian Sea - accurately - as a vast inlet, unlike many of his successors.

LOCATION: (*map only exists as reconstruction*)

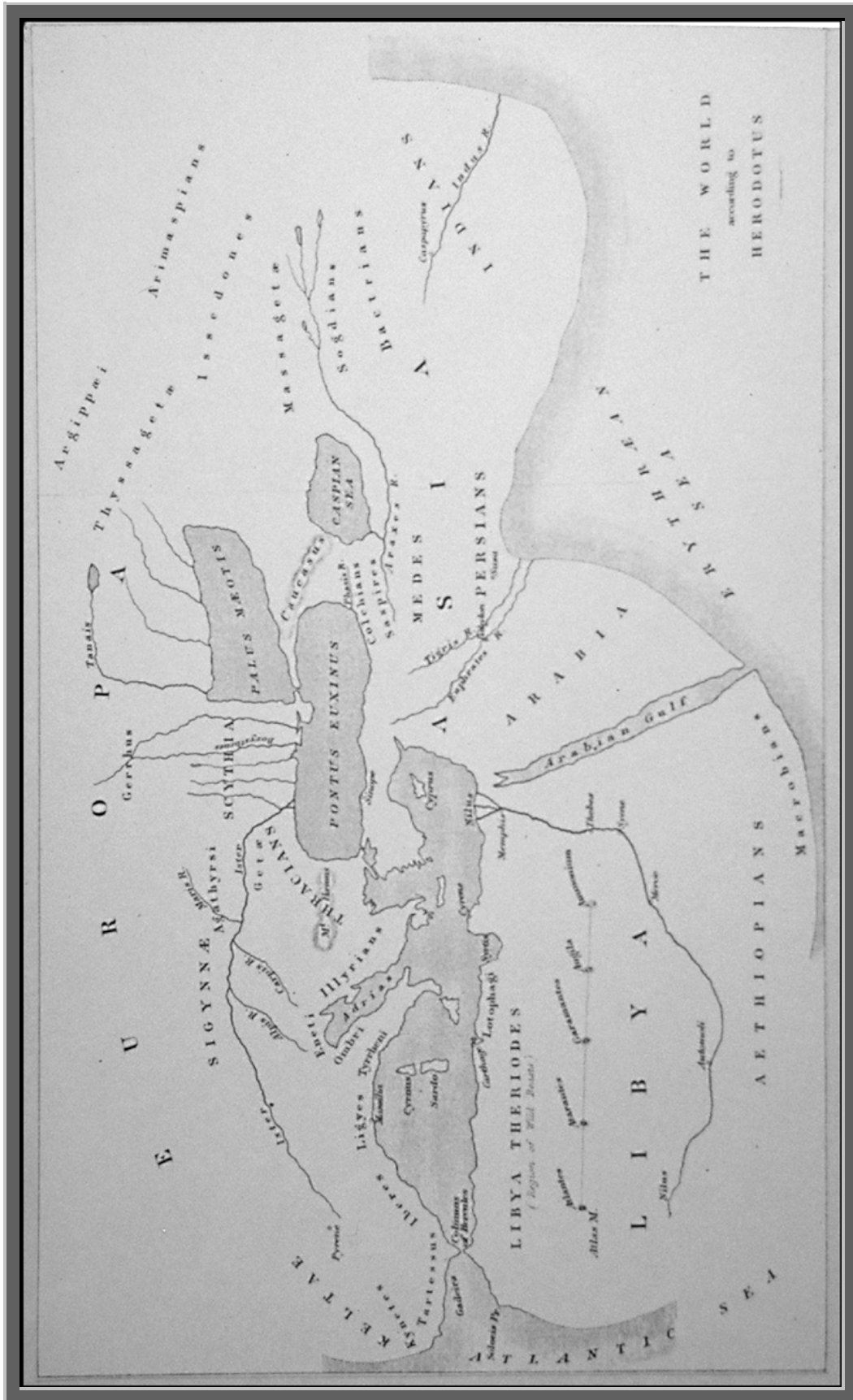
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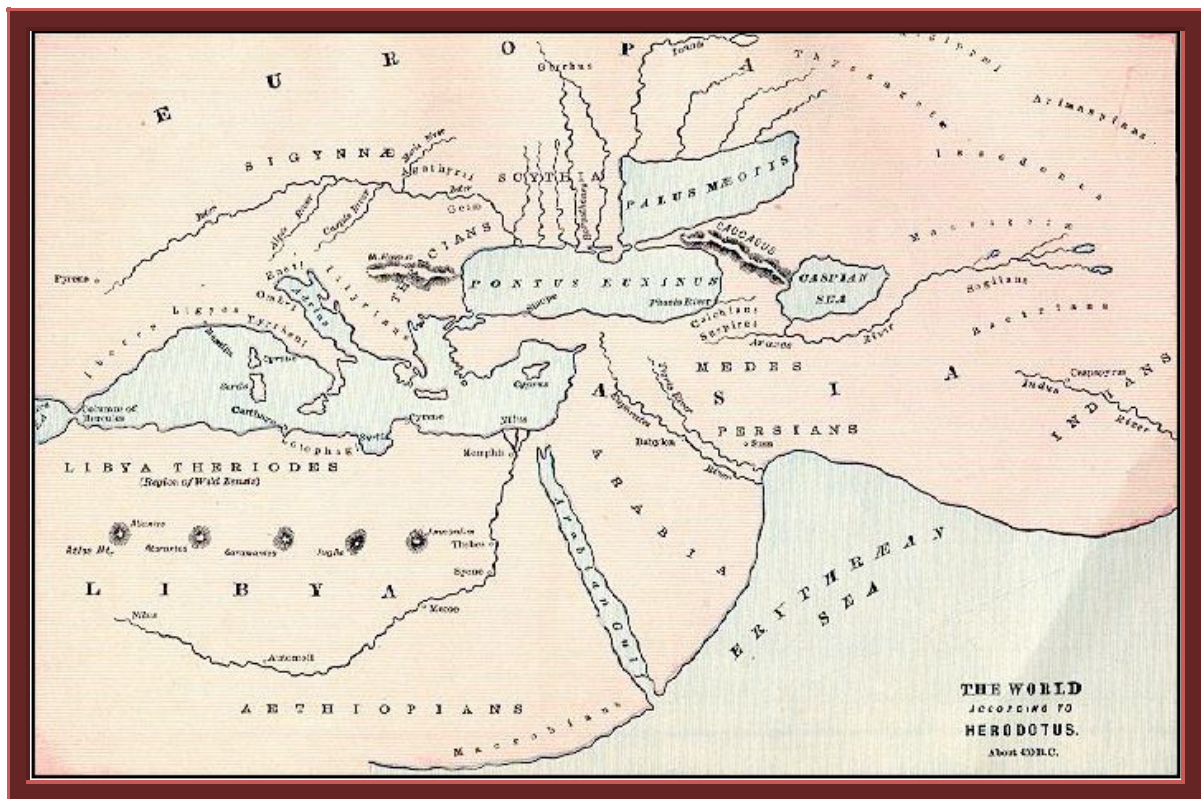
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*illustrated

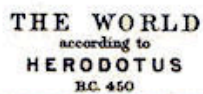


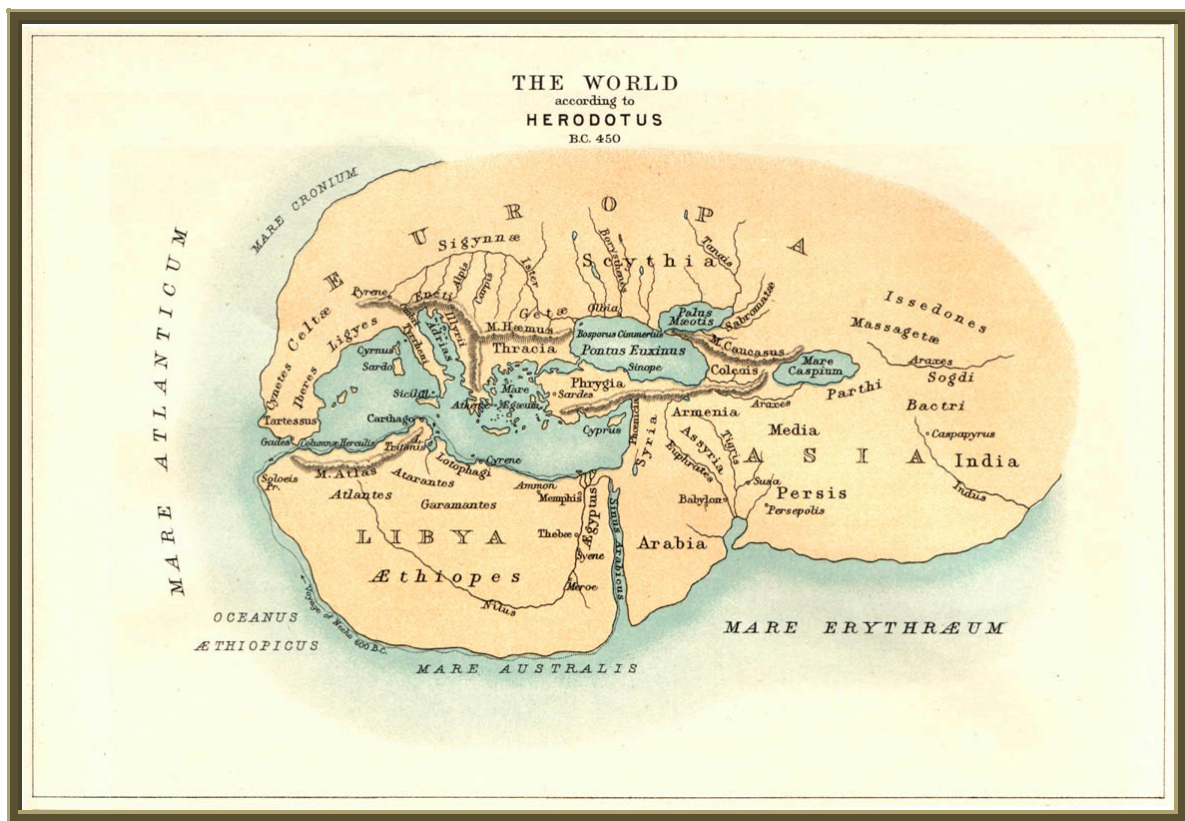
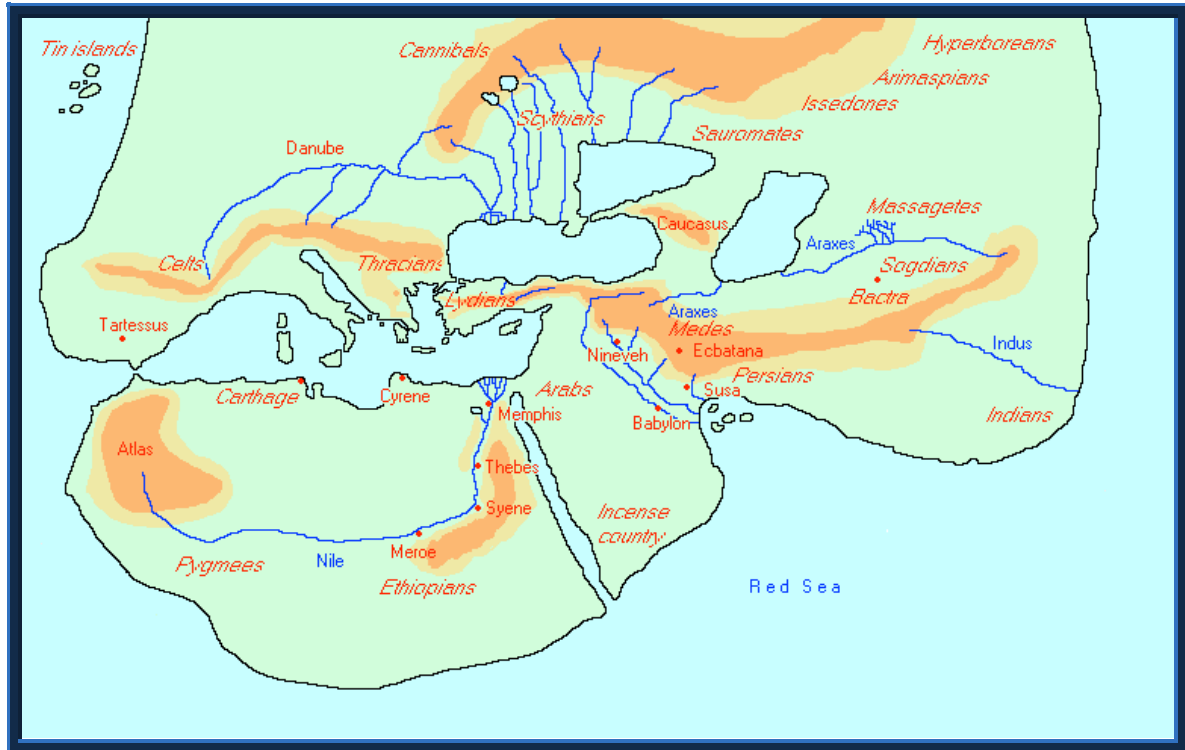








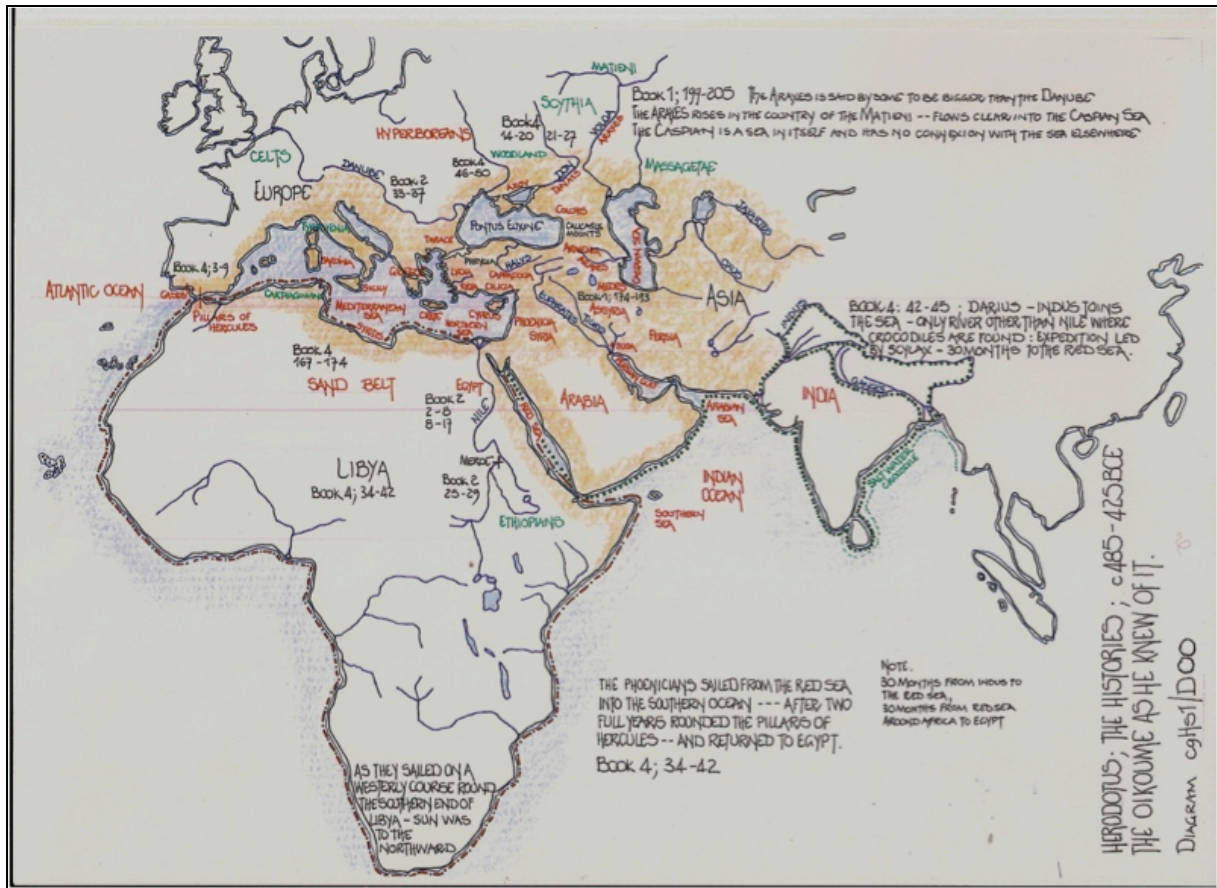


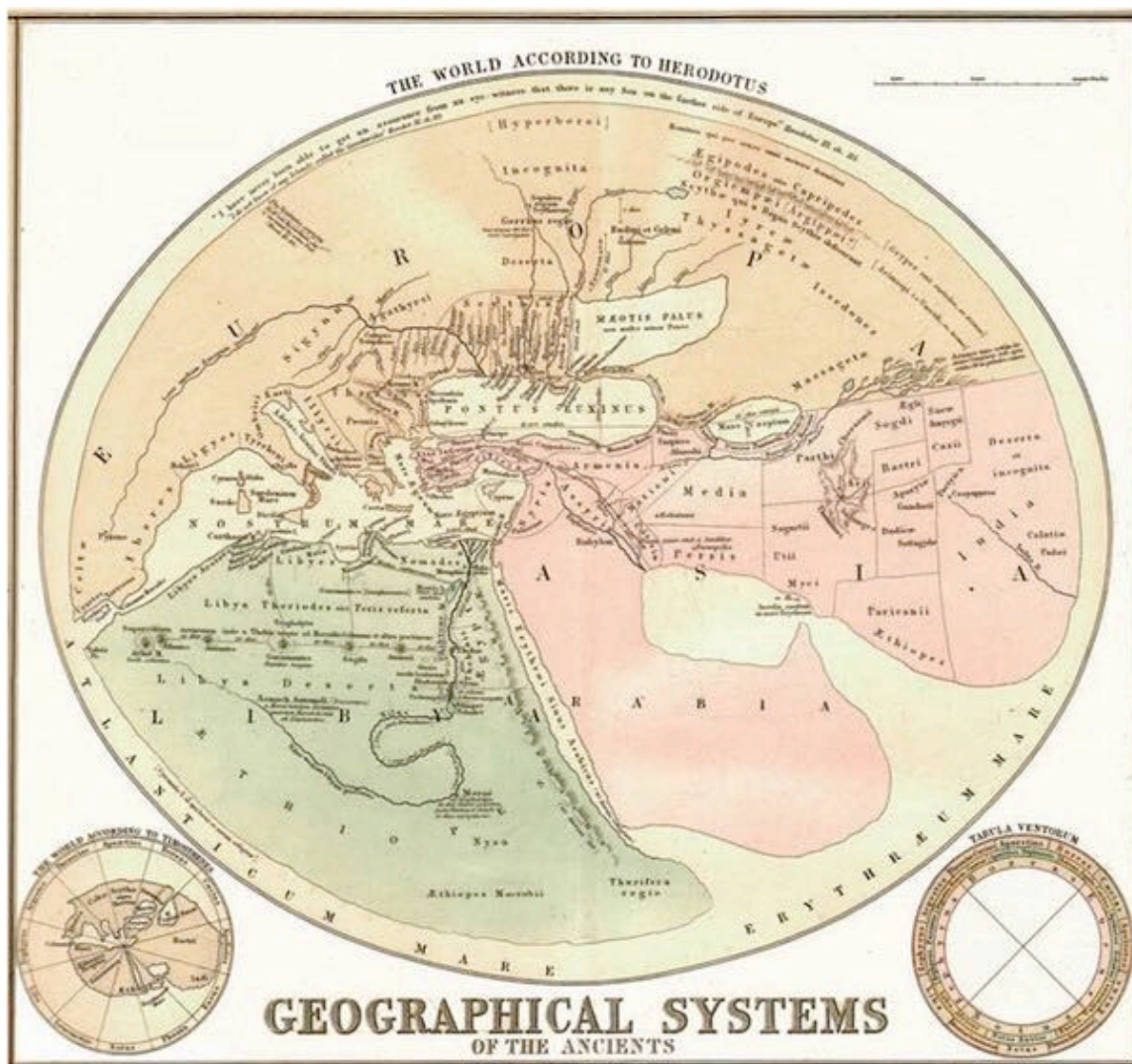




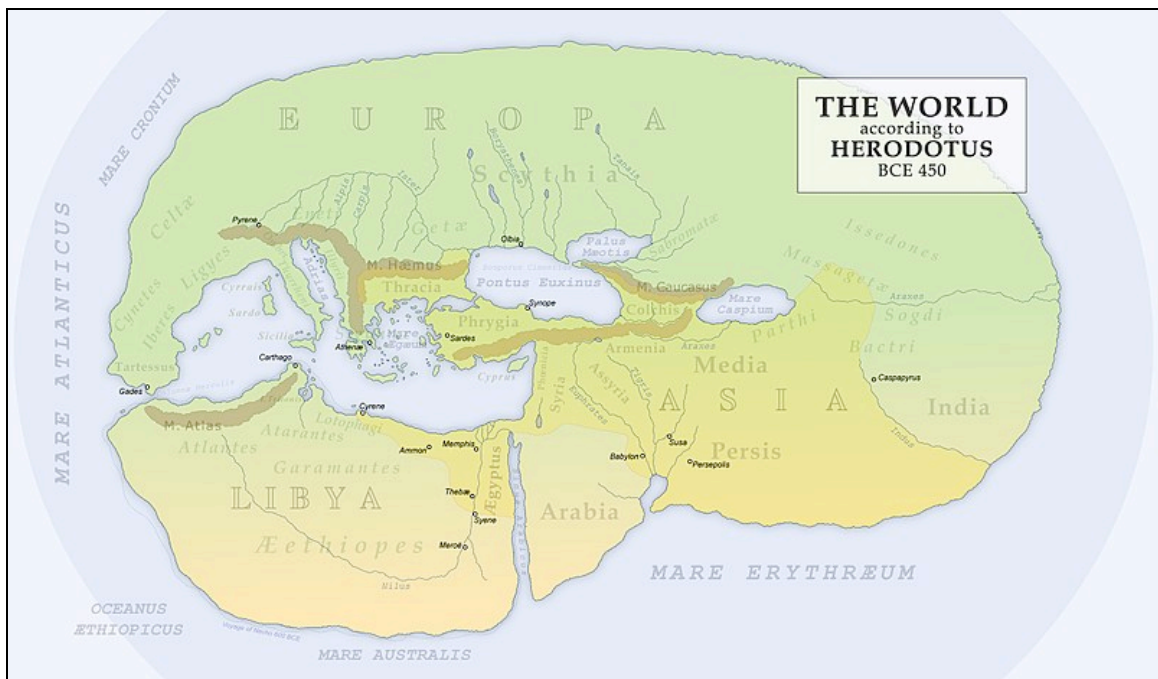


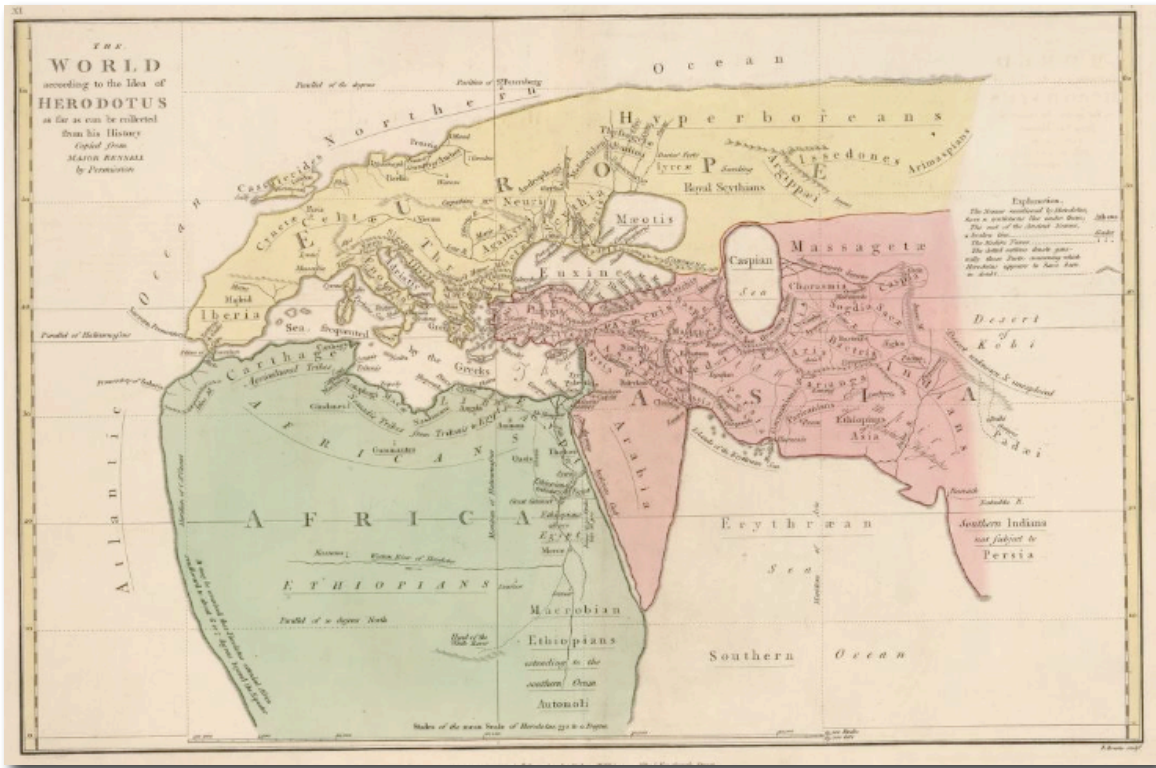






The world according to Herodotus, 5th century B.C. reconstructed by Charles Muller in 1884 in Smith's Atlas of the Ancient World. The bottom left diagram is the world according to Timosthenes





Reconstruction by Robert Wilkinson, 1819