



The Ancient History of the Near East

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SOME thirty years after the defeat of Xerxes, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who had travelled much in the lands of the barbarians as well as in Greece, set himself to write down for the men of his own time and for posterity the events of the great struggle and also to describe, as completely as he could, the long series of events, cause upon cause, effect after effect, which had led up to the final catastrophe. And he began from the beginning of ancient story, from the Trojan War and before that from the rape of Io. For he rightly saw that the Great Event had indeed had its ultimate origin in the furthest recesses of time, when the ancient civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean first evolved themselves out of chaos, and the peoples of the Nileland, of Western Asia, and of the Aegean first came into contact with each other. So he told first all he knew of the peoples of Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, and also Scythia, and of their history, and intended, we know, to tell the story of Assyria also. Everywhere he tried to trace back the first contact of his own people with these barbarians, and to identify this or that element of culture which his Greeks, whom he knew to be far younger as a nation than the Orientals, owed to the East which they had defeated. And then he gathered all the threads of his various tales together, as Xerxes gathered the peoples themselves together, for the final story of the collision of East and West, and his history marches straight without digression now, to Salamis, Plataeae, and Mykale.



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