

Correcting Herodotus 1.56:
The *Histories*' Non-answer to the Pelasgian Question

I. The Grammar

1) Hdt. 1.56.1-2: ...μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐφρόντιζε ἱστορέων τοὺς ἂν Ἑλλήνων δυνατωτάτους ἐόντας προσκτῆσαι φίλους, [2] ἱστορέων δὲ εὔρισκε Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Ἀθηναίους προέχοντας **τοὺς μὲν** τοῦ Δωρικοῦ γένεος **τοὺς δὲ** τοῦ Ἴωνικοῦ. ταῦτα γὰρ ἦν τὰ προκεκριμένα, ἐόντα τὸ ἀρχαῖον **τὸ μὲν** Πελασγικὸν **τὸ δὲ** Ἑλληνικὸν ἔθνος. καὶ **τὸ μὲν** οὐδαμῆ κω ἐξεχώρησε, **τὸ δὲ** πολυπλάνητον κάρτα.

“Afterward, [Croesus] took care to inquire whom of the Greeks, being the most powerful, he should acquire as his friends. He made the inquiry and found that the Spartans were best of the Doric race and the Athenians the best of the Ionic. For these races were preeminent, the first being of old a Pelasgic tribe and the other a Hellenic one. And the first has not yet left their home for anywhere, while the other is very much a wandering tribe.”

2) Raymond Weil is the only scholar to read the lines as I propose:

“Les Athéniens sont un ‘ethnos’ hellénique qui fait partie du ‘génos’ ionien, les Lacédémoniens un ‘ethnos’ pélasgique à rattacher au ‘génos’ dorien.” - Weil (1960) 385.

II. Arguments for Common Translation

- Dorian invasion = πολυπλάνητον
- Athenian autochthony = οὐδαμῆ κω ἐξεχώρησε
- Herodotus ties Athenians or Ionians to Pelasgians 3 times.
 - 1.57, 7.94-95 (both qualified), 8.44 (back when all of Greece was Pel.)
- Dorians are Hellenes *par excellence*.

III. Why Pelasgian Dorians are possible

- Dorians did travel, but no more than Ionians.

3) Hdt. 7.93-5: “The Dorians of Asia provided thirty ships. [...] [2] The Ionians provided one hundred ships [...]. As long as the Ionians were in the Peloponnesus they inhabited what is now called Achaea, and before Danaus and Xuthus came into the Peloponnesus, as the Greeks say, and were called Aigialian Pelasgians, were called Ionians in the time of Ion son of Xuthus. [3] The islanders provided seventeen ships, were armed like Greeks, and this tribe was Pelasgic; this tribe was later called Ionian for the same reason as the Twelve City Ionians, according to the Greek story. The people from the Hellespont other than those from Abydos [...] were colonists from the Ionians and Dorians.”

- Pelasgians are known for traveling.
 - Summary from Strabo 5.2.4:
 - Homer: Crete, Thessaly (“Pelasgian Argos”), Dodona, Epirus, Troad
 - Ephorus: Arcadians who traveled to fight; Pelop. called Pelasgia.
 - Hesiod said the same about Arcadians
 - Aeschylus and Euripides: Argos
 - Anticles: traveled to Italy with Tyrrhenus
 - Atthidographer: Pelargoi because they were wanderers (πλανήτας).
 - Vergil places Pelasgians at Latium.
 - Servius: they were similar to birds, Hyginus said they were Etruscans

4) V. A. 600-602: “It was rumored that the old Pelasgians, who once upon a time were the first to inhabit the Latin borders, sacrificed to Silvanus...”

- All of Greece was Pelasgia
 - Ephorus, Strabo
 - Herodotus: 2.56, 8.44

5) Hdt. 8.44.2: “The Athenians, when the Pelasgians held the land now called Greece (Ἑλλάδα), were Pelasgians, being called Cranaoi. When Cecrops was king they were called Cecropidai, and when Erechtheus took up rule they changed their name to Athenians. When Ion son of Xuthus became the commander of the Athenians’ army, they were called Ionians after him.”

- Pelasgians are associated with Thessaly in particular

6) Hdt. 1.56.3: “For when Deucalion was king it [the Dorian race] inhabited the land of **Pthia**, then in the time of Dorus son of Hellen it inhabited the territory **under Ossa and Olympus called Histiaeotis**; driven from Histiaeotis by the Cadmeans, it inhabited the place called **Macedon in the Pindus** mountain region; from there it again migrated into **Dryopia**, and from Dryopia thus it came to the Peloponnesus and was called Doric.

7) Servius on A. 600: “For some say that [the Pelasgians] trace their origin from the Athenians, others from the Spartans, and others from the Thessalians, which is more likely, for it is agreed that there are many tribes of Pelasgians in Thessaly.”

- What is in a name?
 - Dorians are not directly tied to Dorus or Hellen.
 - Neither are the Ionians tied to Ion.
 - Common thread: various peoples are “called” different names.

III. Why Athenian Pelasgians does not work, either

- Herodotus never clearly accepts Athenian autochthony
 - Pelasgians emigrate in 1.57

8) Hdt. 1.57: “What language the Pelasgians uttered, I cannot say exactly. If it is possible to make a judgement by those of the **Pelasgians** who now are above the Tyrrhenians inhabiting the city of Creston, **who once shared borders with those now called Dorians** (but at the time they inhabited the land now called **Thessaliothis**), [2] and by those of the **Pelasgians** who inhabited Placia and Scylace on the Hellespont **who became co-dwellers with the Athenians**, and by all the other towns which were Pelasgian and change the name - if it is possible to make a judgement by these, the Pelasgians uttered a barbarian language. [3] If then the entire Pelasgian tribe spoke this, **the Attic tribe, being Pelasgian, changed its language too at the same time as it changed into Greeks** (τὸ Ἀπτικὸν ἔθνος ἐὸν Πελασγικὸν ἅμα τῇ μεταβολῇ τῇ ἐς Ἑλληνας καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν μετέμαθε)..”

9) Hdt. 1.58: “But the Hellenic race, as it appears to me, always used the same language since its beginning. However, when it was separated from the Pelasgian race it was weak, and, eager for power, it grew from something small into a multitude of tribes, especially since the Pelasgians and many other barbarian tribes joined with it. Before that, it seems to me, the Pelasgian tribe did not grow very much in any place while it was barbarian.”

- Pelasgians mentioned as distinct from Athenians
 - 1.57, 2.51, 4.145, 6.137-138

10) Hdt. 2.51: “...But those making the ithyphallic statues of Hermes did not learn this from the Egyptians, but from the Pelasgians; the Athenians were first of all the Greeks to receive this from them, and then others. [2] For the Athenians were already at that time reckoned as Greeks [ἤδη τηνικαῦτα ἐς Ἑλληνας τελέουσι] when the Pelasgians became co-dwellers in their territory, whence they were also began to be considered Greeks [ὄθεν περ καὶ Ἑλληνας ἤρξαντο νομισθῆναι].

- Hellenization through language acquisition

IV. Conclusion

- Herodotus is hopelessly vague and inconsistent on ethnicity.
- Only points of clarity:
 - Greekness is acquired, and often.
 - Identity comes from language, perhaps also culture.
 - Claims of blood kinship should be viewed with skepticism.
- Either he didn't care about ethnicity like we do, or concluded it was impossible to tell.
- Bottom line:
 - No consensus before or after Herodotus.
 - No clear treatment within the *Histories*.
 - Grammar is clear.

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