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The Battle of Marathon

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acquainted with the *smaragdus*, a term which included down to the time of Theophrastus (315 B.C.) all the three kinds of the same beautiful crystal, the beryl, the emerald, and *aqua marine*—is put beyond doubt by the fact that the renowned signet of Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos (560–522 B.C.), which he cast into the sea to avert Nemesis, was a *smaragdus* engraved for him by the famous sculptor and engraver, Theodorus of Samos (Herod. iii. 41). The beryl was found in Cyprus, as we learn from Theophrastus (*op. cit.* 26), who alludes to the beautiful cylindrical hexagons in which it is found as rods (*πάβδοι*). The Greeks used these elegant natural crystals as earrings. Such have been found in Cypriot graves. Long cylindrical beads of emeralds and beryls have been found in the archaic tombs of Rhodes.

As Theophrastus certainly knew the difference between crystalline and amorphous substances, there can be no reasonable ground for doubting that the engravers of archaic gems must have learned very early this difference. In fact it is absolutely certain that the observation of such a difference must have been first made by those whose profession it was to seek after crystals.

I have purposely left to the last the eikosihedron of the *Timaeus*. No such crystalline form is known in nature. It is strange that Plato should have taken a number which gives no relation to the octahedron. The Pythagoreans held the number 24 of great value. It was the product of $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4$, just as the sum of these first four digits was 10. If Plato had taken a 24-sided figure, it would have been in relation to 4 and 8 (the pyramid and double pyramid), and it would have had a prototype in nature. But for our purpose it is unnecessary to discuss what Plato meant. With him the mathematical side was completely detached from the natural phenomenon, the observation of which had probably led Pythagoras to conceive that the world existed by the imitation of natural crystals.

Imitation was an excellent term to employ. Every one conversant with crystallography knows how frequently crystals are mis-shapen, the facets irregular. Pythagoras as a practical engraver could not help observing this and feeling that they frequently were not perfect mathematical solids, but attempted imitations of such, more or less imperfect.

WILLIAM RIDGEWAY.

THE BATTLE OF MARATHON.

THE second volume of the excellent English translation of Holm's *History of Greece*¹ contains some of the best work of the historian. When we come into the clear field of historical fact, Holm's narrative and exposition are masterly. It is in the dimmer regions where we find anecdote, legend, and history mixed that he is less satisfactory; and his first volume is the weakest of the four. The weakness consists in a certain credulous caution, if I may use the expression, in dealing with such a source, for example, as Herodotus. His excessive distrust of scepticism leads him into distrust of criticism. This defect is illustrated in vol. ii. in the account of the Persian war. The narrative of the campaign of Marathon given by Herodotus is simply reproduced by Holm, without any adequate recognition of the difficulties besetting that narrative,

in which the Persians are represented as acting like children. Any one who reads critically the Herodotean account must see that Herodotus had not the smallest idea why the battle was fought, and had a very inadequate notion of how it was fought. He has collected a number of details, some true, others absurd; which, as he relates them, are without any inner connexion.

In his extremely interesting and important historical studies on Herodotus (vol. ii. of his recent edition of Books iv., v., vi.) Mr. Reginald Macan has devoted a hundred pages to an elaborate examination of the problems connected with Marathon. He has not only done good service by his minute criticism of all the extant evidence, but he has made a distinct contribution to the reconstruction of the battle.

The first important step was taken by Leake who saw that the Athenian camp was near Vrana, at the mouth of the valley of Avlona; and this discovery was reinforced

¹ *History of Greece*, by Adolf Holm. Translated from the German. Vol. ii. The Fifth Century B.C. London and New York: Macmillan. 1896. Price 6s.

by Lolling who determined the site of the Herakleion in that valley. Mr. Macan has now explained, convincingly as I think, the occasion of the battle, and shown how the Athenians were lured out of a position of great strategic strength. The Persians 'decided to make a movement upon Athens, with fleet and with infantry at once, and to make it by the pass to the south, the main road to Athens. By this route navy and army would remain in touch, at least while in presence of the enemy.... Whether the Persians were convinced that the Greeks would in terror allow them to go by unmolested or whether they were *in utrumque parati*, prepared to do battle if the occasion arose, may be a question. The greater probability seems to incline to the view that the Persians were fully prepared' (p. 241). 'Nothing in the traditions concerning the actual *mêlée* would justify us in assuming that the Persians were taken in flank or off guard' (p. 242). But this hypothesis is not quite complete, so far as the battle is concerned, and requires to be supplemented, as has been pointed out by Mr. Macan's reviewer in the *Athenaeum* (Dec. 21, 1895). The elements of the art of war demanded that, when the Persian army marched southward with the right flank exposed to the Greeks at Vrana, the Greek position should be masked by a strong detachment drawn up facing the Vrana valley. This assumption, which is simply a logical consequence of Mr. Macan's discovery, explains the details of the battle.

Mr. Macan's hypothesis, thus supplemented, while it elucidates the immediate circumstances of the fight, does not, and does not claim to, carry with it a fully satisfactory view of the whole campaign. But it is a step, of which the importance must be fully recognized, towards the solution of the larger problem.

The question, why the Persians landed on the Marathonian plain, was considered by Herodotus and answered thus (vi. 102): *καὶ ἦν γὰρ ὁ Μαραθὼν ἐπιτηδέστατον χωρίον τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἐντιπνεύσαι καὶ ἀγχοτάτω τῆς Ἐρετρίας*. Both the statements are false. Marathon is not the part of Attica nearest to Eretria, and the Cephisian plain was much better for cavalry 'than the confined and marshy ground at Marathon, crossed by streambeds and commanded by hills and highland' (Macan, note *ad loc.*). We might indeed, by combining the two clauses, construct a true statement; namely, that the Marathonian plain was the nearest place to Eretria that was suitable for cavalry; but

this is not what Herodotus says. Holm characteristically repeats the insufficient solution of Herodotus. 'Here, the country being level, they were able to use their cavalry to the best advantage.' If the main object of landing at Marathon was to use their cavalry, no one, on the old view of the battle, gave any reasons, that will bear examination, for the circumstance that they made no use of it at all. Curtius suggested that the cavalry must have been re-embarked, and found in this hypothesis an explanation of the Athenian attack.¹ But the hypothesis was incomplete until an adequate motive for the re-embarkation had been assigned. Mr. Macan's theory supplies the needed motive. The Persians disembark their cavalry; after the arrival of the Athenians, 'for several days the armies remained in their respective positions,' the Persians during that time desiring and attempting 'to draw the Athenians down into the plain towards the shore' (p. 240). The Athenians would not be drawn, and 'the Persians at last decided to make a movement upon Athens.' For this purpose the cavalry was re-embarked (p. 242); on the march to Athens it would have been a useless encumbrance.

But, while the problem of the cavalry is vital in determining our theory of the battle, it does not matter so much to the consideration of the question why the Persians landed at the Marathonian plain. If there had been no cavalry, this plain would have seemed to possess equal advantages for deploying large numbers of infantry against a far less numerous foe. The important point which emerges—on any theory—is that the Persians wanted to fight, or to accomplish something which might involve a fight, whether with or without cavalry, at Marathon. This leads us to the

¹ 'What became of the cavalry afterwards? Why do we hear nothing of their re-embarkation? What room is there in the story for that lengthy and elaborate operation after the battle? How were they got off? Curtius's suggestion lets in some light on this dark place. The cavalry was brought, as might be supposed, to Marathon, and there put on shore. The cavalry was re-embarked; and its re-embarkation was the reason for the Athenian attack. This suggestion does not leave the cavalry to be accounted for after the battle, as do all the other suggestions previously noticed [Leake's, Blakesley's]; it explains, as well as the suggestions of Leake, of Blakesley, and of Rawlinson, the absence of all notice of the cavalry in the description of the battle; and it explains better than any other hypothesis the determination of the moment of attack.' But it 'cannot in itself explain the assumption of the offensive by the Athenians or the probable circumstances of the actual fight.' (Macan, ii. pp. 163-4.)

ultimate problem, what was the plan of strategy in which the battle of Marathon was a designed incident, and which was defeated by the unexpected result.

The first thing to grasp is the obvious truth that the 'objective' of the Persians was Athens. This fact must govern our interpretation of the campaign. Herodotus did not grasp it, though, in his characteristic way, he implies it incidentally. 'The Persians,' he says, 'expected to do to the Athenians what they had done to the Eretrians'; and after the defeat they sail, in his pages, round Attica to make an attempt on the city, as a sort of afterthought.

That the Persians did not decide to sail straight to Athens is explained by an easily intelligible desire to avoid a wearisome siege of the Acropolis, which, as Hippias might inform them, would have been no light labour. Their decision to land at Marathon implies that they proposed to accomplish something before an attack upon Athens. The purpose clearly was to lure the Athenian forces to Marathon and keep them there, so that the city might be left unprotected. If the Athenian army were either defeated on the plain or cooped up in the hills, the Persians could march upon Athens, by the route south of Pentelikon—by Pikermi and Charvati—and seize it without difficulty. The point was to detain the Athenians in the region of Marathon, either alive or dead.

The more desirable alternative for the Persians was that their opponents should be induced to fight. Delay on the other hand was obviously the game of the Athenians; their position was strong and they expected Spartan aid. Mr. Macan reasonably accounts for the delay of some days which elapsed between the arrival of the Athenians at the Herakleion and the battle by supposing that the Persians were in vain endeavouring to bring on an action. The fact of the delay cannot be fairly questioned, although Herodotus assigns an unacceptable reason for it. But the Persians could not wait too long; it would have been clearly inexpedient to wait long enough for the arrival of Spartan reinforcements. Accordingly the march on Athens—the ultimate object from the beginning—was resolved on. The Greeks might do one or other of two things, and both possibilities had to be provided for. They might attack the flank of the Persian army as it marched past into the southern pass of the plain; this was provided for, as we saw, by masking the recess of Vrana. Or they might hesitate to run such a risk, and might determine to march back

to Athens, by the Stamata and Cephisia road, by which they had come. In this way they might by a forced march either reach Athens first, or make a dangerous attack on the Persians between Pentelikon and Hy-mettus. Against this danger it was needful to guard, and it could be obviously met by sending round the south of Pentelikon a small detachment to occupy a position near Stamata, sufficient to bar for hours, if not to hinder entirely, the passage of the Greeks. There was no difficulty in effecting this. Troops for example could be landed by night in boats at some distance south of the little marsh of Vrexisa, and reach their destination under the guidance of local adherents of the Pisistratids.¹ The road was not likely to be guarded, for the Athenians could not spare troops. We may calculate that the Persian soldiers (landing south of Mount Agrieli) would have required about six hours to march, by Pikermi and Cephisia, to the place beyond Stamata where the path to Vrana parts from the path to Marathon. Posted there, on the slopes of Aphorismós, the northern spur of Pentelikon, they would await events; ready either to oppose the passage of the Greek army, or, if a battle were fought, and the Athenians were routed, to intercept the fugitives.

In Herodotus, of course, there is not a syllable as to such a device on the part of the Mede. But here, as in some other cases, we find that he has preserved, in a wrong connexion and embedded in fable, a distinct vestige of the truth. I refer to the signal of the shield.

The episode of the shield cannot be set aside, as Mr. Macan has rightly insisted. If there is anything in the whole story that Herodotus is positive about, it is this; and his certainty about the fact is rendered all the more weighty by his uncertainty as to the explanation.² Accordingly 'any attempt at a rational reconstruction of the story of Marathon must reckon with this episode' (p. 165). Not the least valuable part of Mr. Macan's appendix is his criticism of the shield incident. He acutely discerned that the words (vi. 115) *ἐοῦσι ἤδη ἐν τῇσι νηυσὶ* let out part of the secret. The Persians were already in their ships before the signal was shown; it was therefore a signal not to

¹ Holm (p. 18) gives, like others, a second reason for the landing of the Persians at Marathon, the circumstance that it was 'the district in which the Peisistratidae had long had their adherents.'

² His words are (vi. 124) *ἀνεδέχθη μὲν γὰρ ἀσπίς, καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστι ἄλλως εἰπεῖν ἐγένετο γὰρ ὅς μιν τοὶ ἦν ὁ ἀναδέξας οὐκ ἔχω προσωτέρω εἰπεῖν τούτων* (viz. suspicions about the Alcmaeonidae).

embark, but to sail (p. 167); it was shown before the battle was fought.

But the question as to the meaning of the signal remains, in Mr. Macan's reconstruction, still unsolved. Why did the moment for departure depend on a signal shown on the summit of a mountain? The suggestion that it was intended to notify to the Persians that the coast at Phaleron was clear is not plausible, nor any other suggestion implying vague dangers. The only explanation which can carry conviction is one which will *fit the episode of the shield into the strategy of the campaign, as a definite and necessary part of it.*

The inference, which I made above from the conditions of the problem, that the Persians must have taken measures to beset the Stamata road, involves the supposition that the army in the plain could be by some means apprized of the successful execution of this move in the game. A signal from the top of Mount Pentelikon was the obvious device for conveying the news. Nothing impressed me more when I visited the scene of the battle than the sight of the summit of Pentelikon, which seemed designed by the foresight of nature for the ἀνάδεξις of the shield. The signalman, posted there, could discern what befell in the plain, and signify to the troops of Aphorismós whether the enemy had decided to face the risks of a battle. And in the case, too improbable to contemplate, of an Athenian victory, these

soldiers, warned by him, could return to the shore by the way they had come, and be picked up by the ships of their friends.¹ We may conjecture that this is what actually happened. It is useless to speculate how far the Greeks at the time apprehended the Persian strategy. One might naturally expect that news of the movement in the rear would have been conveyed at once from Stamata to the Greek generals; and this intelligence might, in the supreme moment, have decided them to risk battle. But in those days no official accounts were drawn up of military operations; nor was there a contemporary historian like Thucydides to ask searching questions and record the truth. Some of the circumstances of the battle—if ever fully known—were soon forgotten, with the result that the rest lost their right significance. The flashing of the signal impressed itself on men's imaginations, and as the memory of the actual facts of the campaign grew dimmer, and the events shaped themselves into a story, the shield became the centre of a new mysterious incident, which lent itself to a malicious interpretation by the political enemies of the Alcmaeonidae. Mr. Macan discovered the key to the solution of the problem.

J. B. BURY.

¹ I have added this conjecture (which occurred independently to Mr. Marindin), as showing that every eventuality could be provided for easily by the Persian strategy.

ARISTOPHANICA.

Plutus.

45—52:

KAP. κᾶτα ξυναντᾶς δῆτα πρώτῳ τουτῶι
εἴτ' οὐ ξυνίεις τὴν ἐπίνοιαν τοῦ θεοῦ
φράζοντος ὃ σκαϊότατέ σοι σαφέστατα
ἀσκέιν τὸν νῖον τὸν ἐπιχώριον τρόπον;
XP. τῷ τοῦτο κρίνεις; KAP. δῆλον ὅτι καὶ
τυφλῷ.
[γνῶναι δοκεῖ τοῦθ' ὡς σφόδρ' ἐστὶ συμφέρον
τὸ μηδὲν ἀσκέιν ὑγιᾶς ἐν τῷ νῦν ἔτει.]
γρ. γένει καὶ χρόνῳ
XP. οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως ὁ χρησμὸς εἰς τοῦτο ῥέπει,
ἀλλ' εἰς ἕτερόν τι μείζον κ.τ.λ..

I have adopted Cobet's conjectures in 45 and 47, but they do not remove all the difficulties of the passage.

The marginal note upon 51 appears in the Venetus; the Ravennas reads βίῳ, not ἔτει.

The two lines here bracketed are made up of several adscripts, which we may approximately restore as follows:—

(1) κρίνεις; γνῶναι δοκεῖς. Compare an adscript still to be found among the scholia, κρίνεις; κρίναι θέλεις.

(2) δῆλον: Δ (i.e. λείπει) ἐστὶ.

(3) καὶ τυφλῷ: σφόδρα.

(4) δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τυφλῷ: ὡς συμφέροντος μηδὲν ἀσκέιν ὑγιᾶς. Such a genitive absolute introduced by ὡς is a form of adscript often found. The matter comes from 37, 38.

(5) τὸν ἐπιχώριον τρόπον: τὸν ἐν τῷ νῦν γένει καὶ χρόνῳ. The βίῳ of the Ravennas comes from 38.

61—66:

XP. ἀλλ' εἴ τι χαίρεις ἀνδρὸς εὐόρκου τρόπο
ἐμοὶ φράσον. ΠΛ. κλάειν ἔγωγέ σοι λέγω.