

## HERODOTUS' HISTORIES:

### The *Other* Helen (II: 112-120)

112 Pheros was succeeded (they said) by a man of Memphis, whose name in the Greek language was Proteus. This Proteus has a fair and well-adorned temple precinct at Memphis, lying to the south of the temple of Hephaestus. Round the precinct dwell Phoenicians of [Tyre](#), and the whole place is called the Camp of the Tyrians. There is in the precinct of Proteus a temple entitled the temple of the Stranger Aphrodite; this I guess to be a temple of Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, partly because I have heard the story of Helen's abiding with Proteus, and partly because it bears the name of the Stranger Aphrodite; for no other of Aphrodite's temples is called by that name.

113 When I enquired of the priests, they told me that this was the story of Helen: — After carrying off Helen from Sparta, Alexandrus [i.e., Paris of Troy] sailed away for his own country; violent winds caught him in the Aegean, and drove him into the Egyptian sea; whence (the wind not abating) he came to Egypt, to the mouth of the Nile called the Canopic mouth, and to the Salting-places. Now there was on the coast (and still is) a temple of [Heracles](#); where if a servant of any man take refuge and be branded with certain sacred marks in token that he delivers himself to the god, such an one may not be touched. This law continues to-day the same as it has ever been from the first. Hearing of the temple law, certain of Alexandrus' servants separated themselves from him, threw themselves on the mercy of the god, and brought an accusation against Alexandrus with intent to harm him, telling all the story of Helen and the wrong done to Menelaus. They laid this accusation before the priests and the warden of the Nile mouth, whose name was Thonis.

114 When Thonis heard it, he sent this message with all speed to Proteus at Memphis: "There has come hither a Teucrian stranger who has done great wrong in Hellas. He has deceived his host and robbed him of his wife, and brought her hither driven to your country by the wind, with very great store of wealth besides. Shall we suffer him to sail away unharmed, or take away from him that which he has brought?" Proteus sent back this message: "Whoever be this man who has done a wrong to his own host, seize him and bring him to me, that I may know what he will say."

115 Hearing this, Thonis seized Alexandrus and held his ships there, and presently brought him with Helen and all the wealth, and the suppliants therewith, to Memphis. All having come thither, Proteus asked Alexandrus who he was and whence he sailed; Alexandrus told him of his lineage and the name of his country, and of his voyage, whence he sailed. Then Proteus asked him whence he had taken Helen; Alexandrus made no straightforward or truthful answer; but the men who had taken refuge with the temple disproved his tale, and related the whole story of the wrongful act. When all was said, Proteus thus gave sentence: — "Were I not careful to slay no stranger who has ever been caught by the wind and driven to my coasts, I would have avenged that Greek upon you; seeing that, O basest of men! you have done foul wrong to him who hospitably entrusted you, and have entered in to the wife of your own host. Nay, and this did not suffice you; you made her to fly with you and stole her away. Nor was even this enough, but you have come hither with the plunder of your host's house. Now, therefore, since I am careful to

slay no stranger, I will not suffer you to take away this woman and these possessions; I will keep them for the Greek stranger, till such time as he shall himself come to take them away; but as for you and the companions of your voyage, I warn you to depart from my country elsewhither within three days, else I will deal with you as with enemies."

116 This, by what the priests told me, was the manner of Helen's coming to Proteus. And, to my thinking, Homer too knew this story; but seeing that it suited not so well with epic poetry as the tale of which he made use, he rejected it of set purpose, showing withal that he knew it. This is plain, from the passage in the Iliad (and nowhere else does he return to the story) where he relates the wanderings of Alexandrus, and show how he with Helen was carried out his course, among other places, to [Sidon](#) in Phoenice. This is in the story of the Feats of Diomedes, where the verses run as follows:

There were the robes in his house, inwrought with manifold colours,  
Work of the women of Sidon, whom godlike Paris aforetime  
Brought from their eastern town, o'er wide seas voyaging thither,  
E'en when he won from her home fair Helen, the daughter of princes.

He makes mention of it in [the Odyssey](#) also:

Suchlike drugs of grace, for a healing cunningly mingled,  
Once in the land of Nile had the wife of Thon, Polydamna,  
Giv'n to the daughter of Zeus; for there of the country's abundance,  
Potent to heal or to harm, are herbs full many engendered:

p409 and again Menelaus says to Telemachus:

Eager was I to return, but the gods fast held me in Egypt,  
Wroth that I honoured them not nor offered a sacrifice duly.

In these verses the poet shows that he knew of Alexandrus' wanderings to Egypt; for Syria borders on Egypt, and the Phoenicians, to whom Sidon belongs, dwell in Syria.

117 These verses and this passage prove most clearly that [the Cyprian poems](#) are by the hand not of [Homer](#) but of another. For the Cyprian poems relate that Alexandrus reached [Ilion](#) with Helen in three days from [Sparta](#), having a fair wind and a smooth sea; but according to the Iliad he wandered from his course in bringing her.

118 Enough, then, of Homer and the Cyprian poems. But when I asked the priests whether the Greek account of the Trojan business were vain or true, they gave me the following answer, saying that they had inquired and knew what Menelaus himself had said: — After the rape of Helen, a great host of Greeks came to the Teucrian land on Menelaus' behalf. Having there disembarked and encamped, they sent to Ilion messengers, of whom Menelaus himself was one. These, on coming within the city walls, demanded restitution of Helen and the possessions which Alexandrus had stolen from Menelaus and carried off, and reparation besides for the wrong done; but the Teucrians then and ever afterwards declared, with oaths and without, that neither Helen nor the goods claimed were with them, she and they being in Egypt; nor could they (so

they said) justly make reparation for what was in the hands of the Egyptian king Proteus. But the Greeks thought that the Trojans mocked them, and therewith besieged the city, till they took it; and it was not till they took the fortress and found no Helen there, and heard the same declaration as before, that they gave credence to the Trojans' first word and so sent Menelaus himself to Proteus.

119 Menelaus then came to Egypt and went up the river to Memphis; there, telling the whole truth of what had happened, he was very hospitably entertained and received back Helen unharmed and all his possession withal. Yet, albeit so well entreated, Menelaus did the Egyptians a wrong. For when he would have sailed away he was stayed by stress of weather; and this hindrance continuing for long, he devised and did a forbidden deed, taking two children of the land and sacrificing them. When it was known that he had so done, the people hated and pursued him, and he fled away with his ships to Libya; and whither he thence betook himself the Egyptians could not say. The priests told me that they had learnt some of this tale by inquiry, but that they spoke with exact knowledge of what had happened in their own country.

120 So much was told me by the Egyptian priests. For myself, I believe their story about Helen: for I reason thus — that had Helen been in Ilion, then with or without the will of Alexandrus she should have been given back to the Greeks. For surely neither was Priam so mad, nor those nearest to him, as to consent to risk their own persons and their children and their city, that Alexandrus might have Helen to wife. Even be it granted that they were so minded in the first days, yet when not only many of the Trojans were slain in fighting against the Greeks, but Priam himself lost by death two or three or even more of his sons in every battle (if the poets are to be trusted), in this turn of affairs, had Helen been Priam's own wife, I cannot but think (for myself) that he would have restored her to the Greeks, if by so doing he could escape from the present evil plight. Nay, nor was Alexandrus next heir to the kingship, whereby he might have been the real ruler, Priam being old; it was Hector, an older and a more valiant man than Alexandrus, who was like to receive the royal power at Priam's death; and it was none of Hector's business to consent to his brother's wrongdoing, least of all when that brother was the cause of great calamity to Hector himself and the whole of Troy beside. But matters fell out as they did because the Trojans had not Helen there to give back, yet though they spoke the truth the Greeks would not believe them; for, as I am convinced and declare, the powers above ordained that the utter destruction of Troy should prove in the sight of all men that the gods do greatly punish great wrongdoing. This is my own belief and thus I declare it.