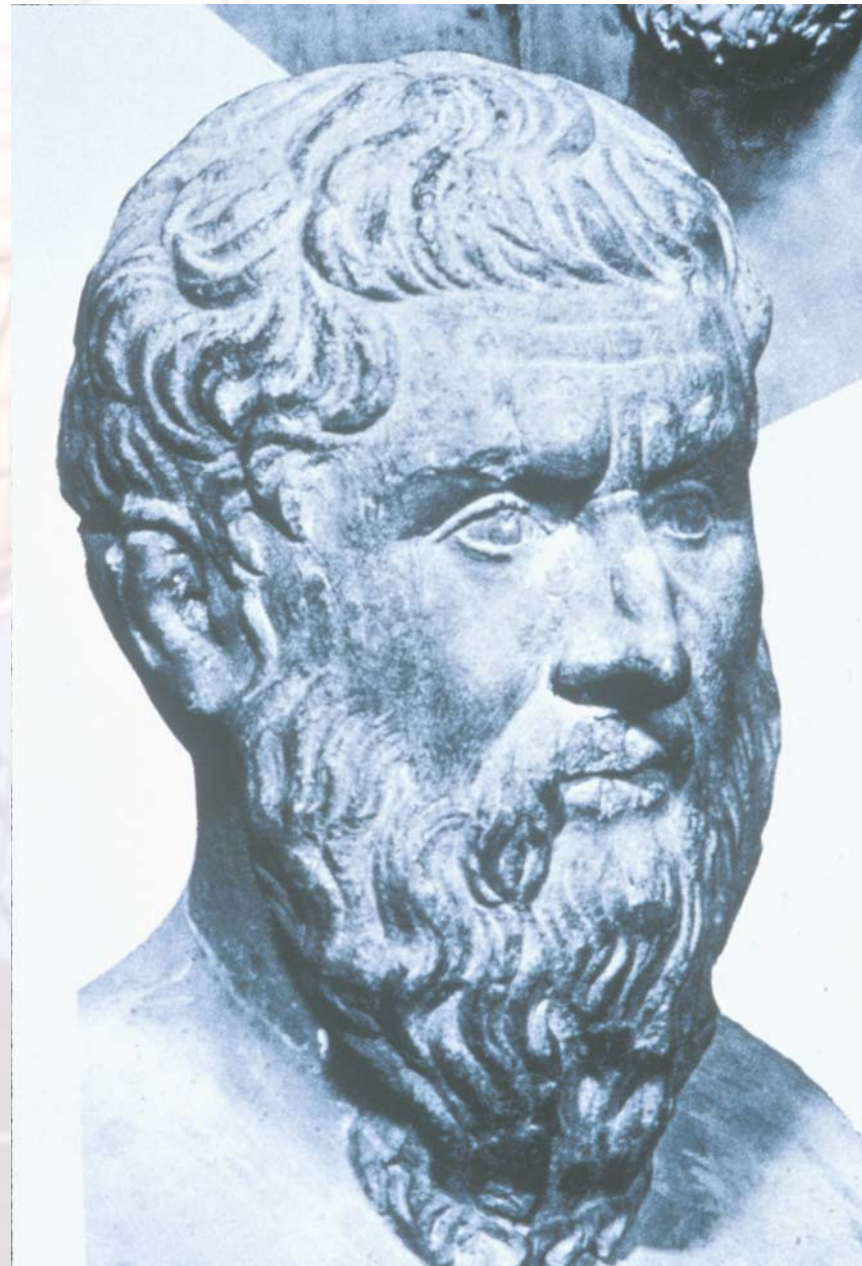


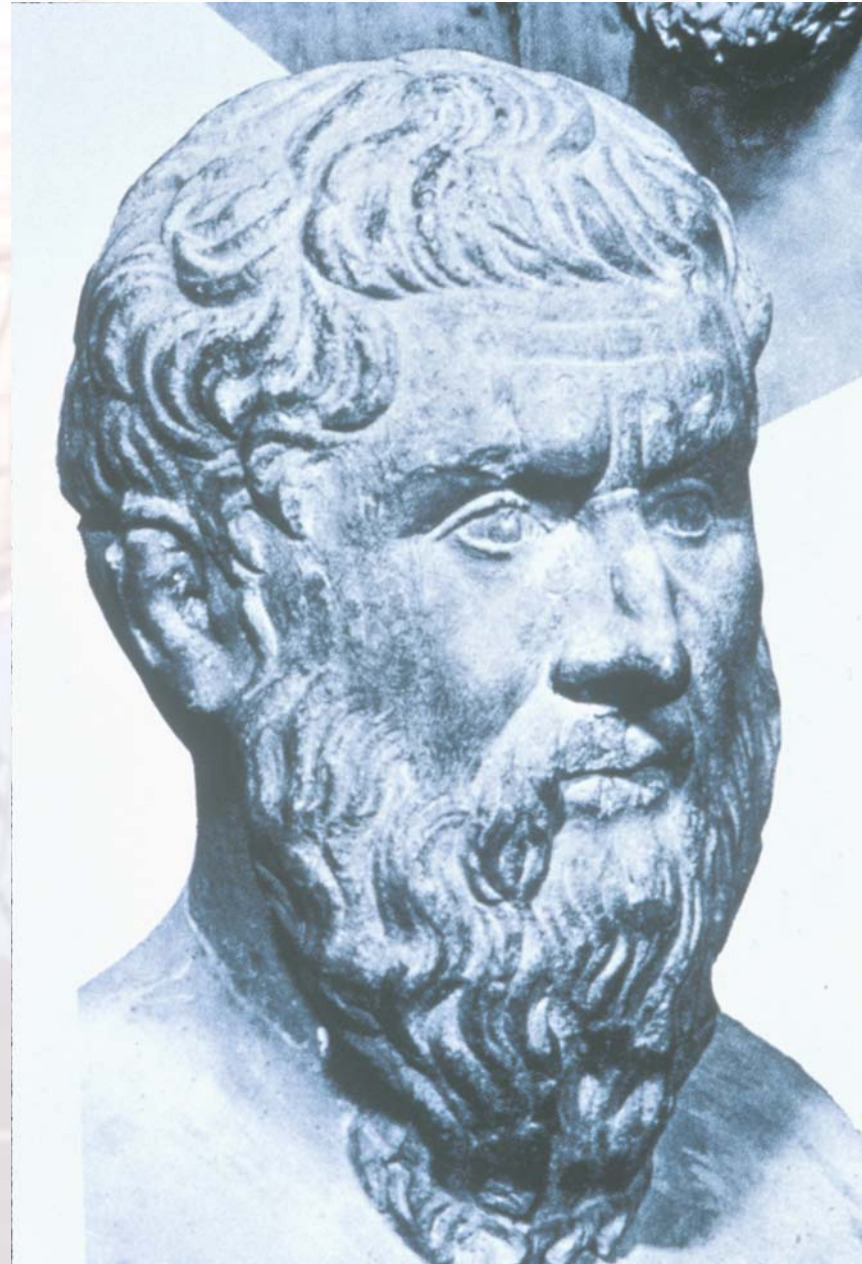
# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **Herodotus** is the first true historian known in Western Civilization
- he lived during the **Classical Age** of Greece (the fifth century BCE)



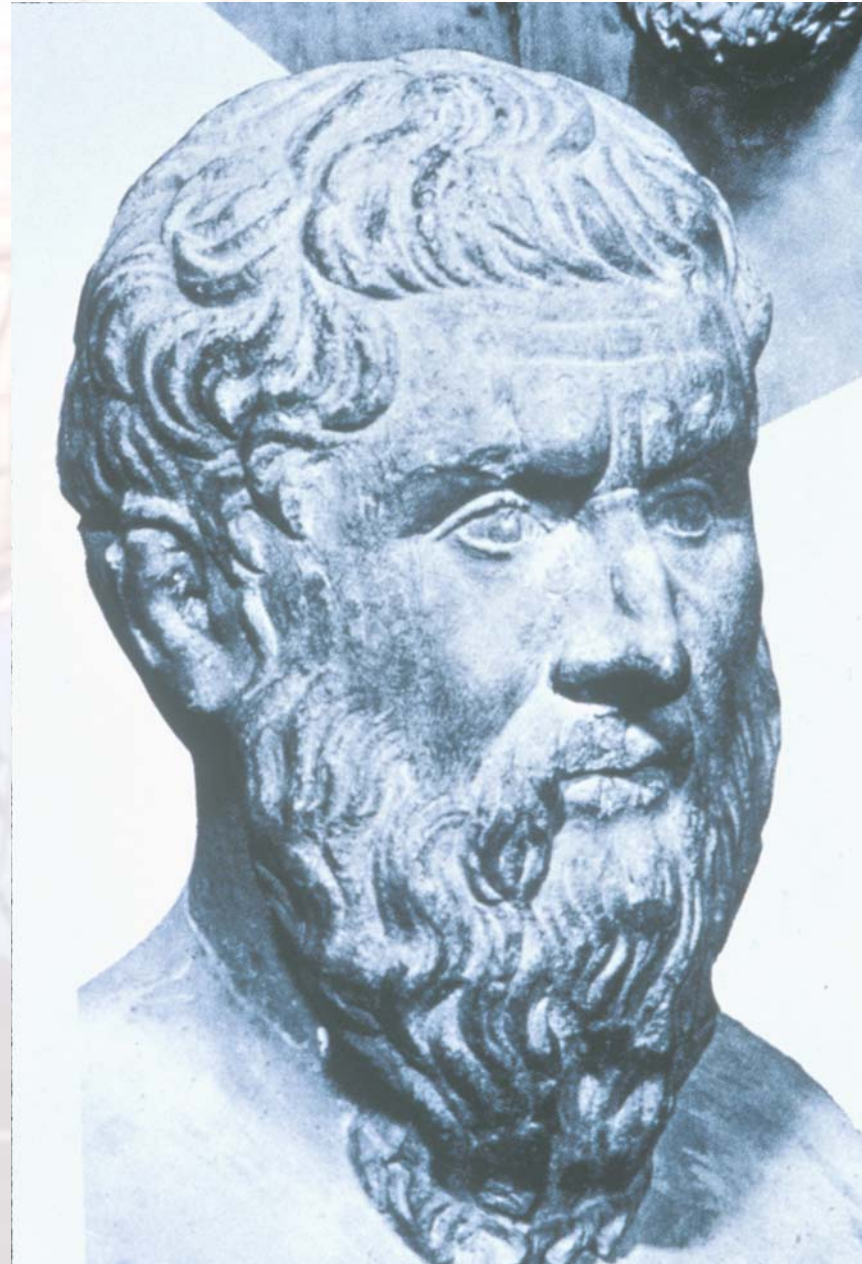
# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- he is the earliest Western author known to have written a systematic investigation of the past



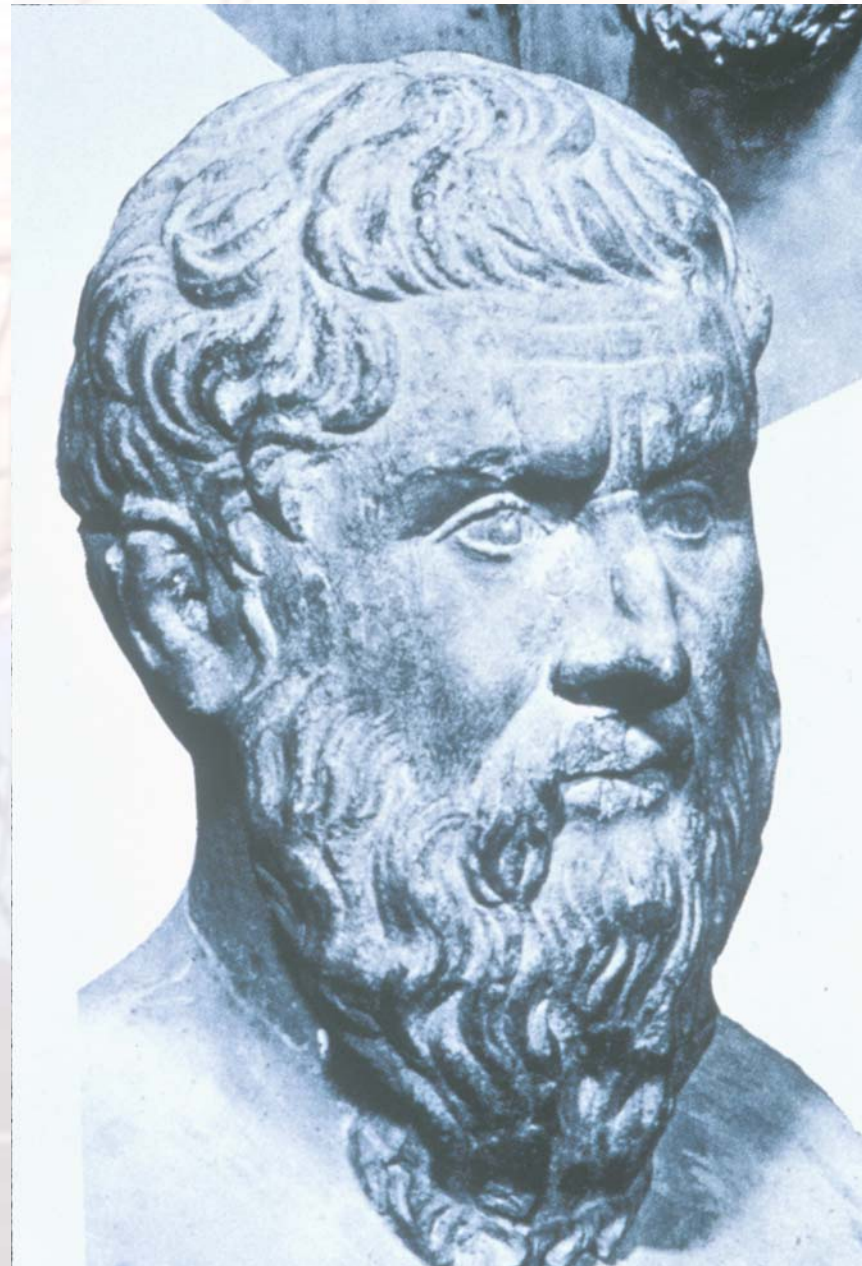
# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- he wrote ***The Histories*** which are now divided into nine “Books”
- ***historia*** in Greek means “inquiry, investigation”
  - of the **Persians Wars**



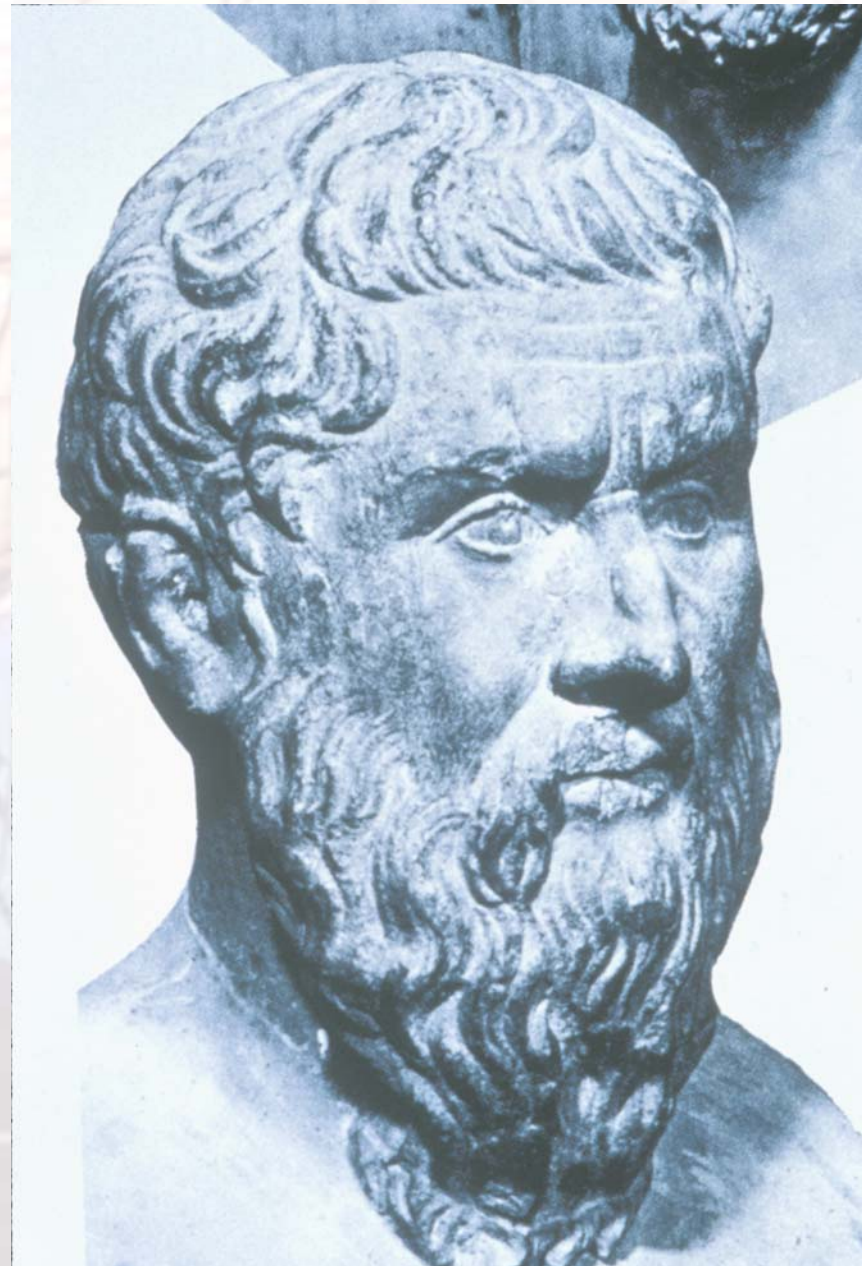
# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- Herodotus' life
  - born ca. 485 BCE at Halicarnassus (**Ionia**)
  - was a merchant and traveler
  - spent some time in Athens
  - died ca. 425 BCE at the Athenian colony of Thurii



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- the nature of his *Histories*
  - a jumble of fact and fable
  - like a parent telling bedtime stories
- modern historians (in the Victorian period) dubbed him the **“Father of History and Lies”**



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- Herodotus' methodology
  - he was an **“oral historian”**
    - he talked to people about what they remembered in the past
    - or what their elders had told them
  - then he collected the stories
    - often uncritical of conflicting accounts
    - little attempt to sift fact from fiction
  - only clear theme: the Delphic oracle is always right — in the long run!

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- the organization of Herodotus' *Histories* is discursive
  - main thrust: to tell the story of the Persians Wars (490 & 481-479 BCE)
  - but Books 1-4 about deep background: **Lydia**, Egypt, etc.
  - only in Book 5 does Herodotus finally get to the Persian Wars
    - cf. starting a history of the Vietnam War with Napoleon!

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

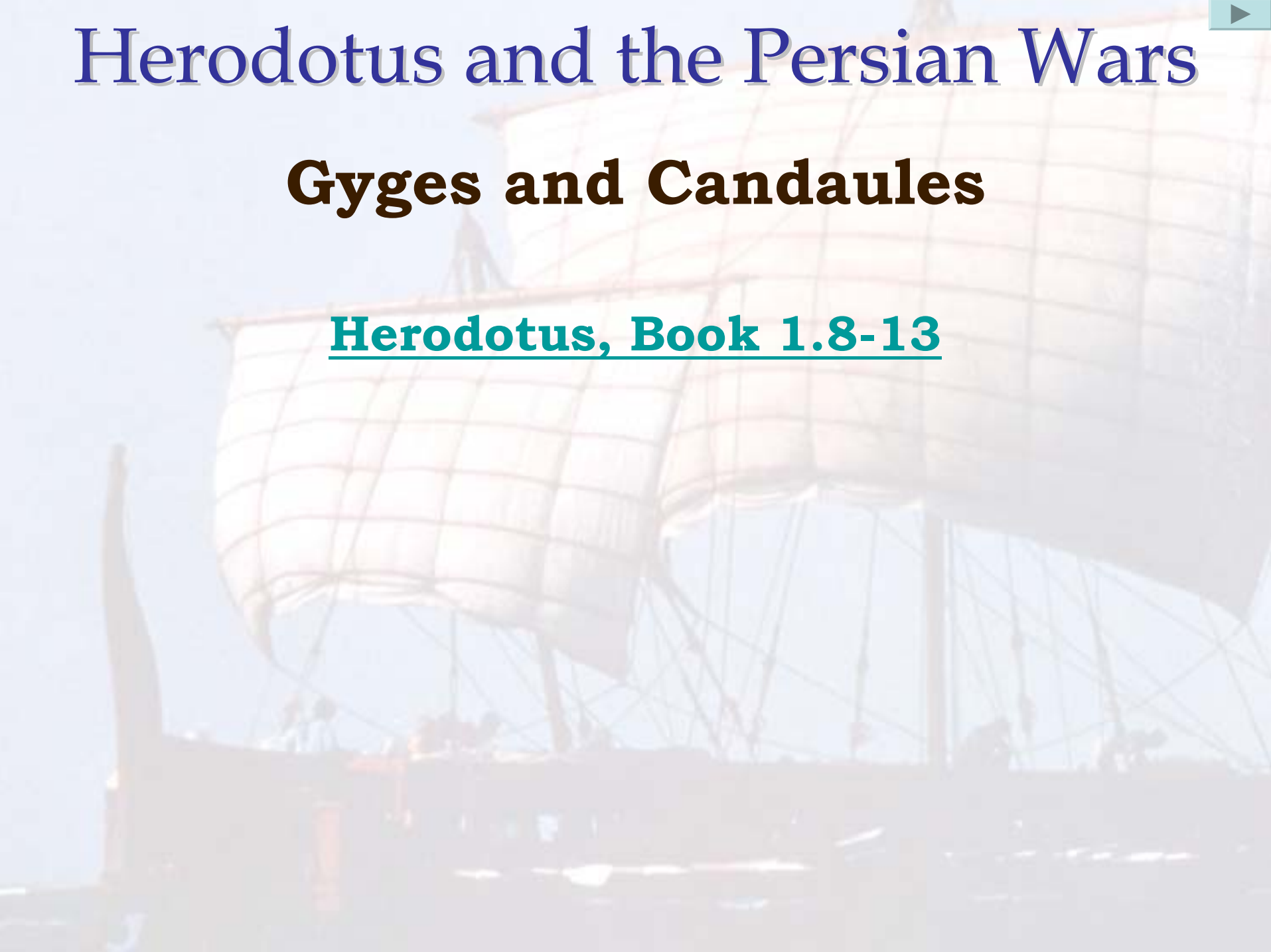
- the reason for the discursions is clear: they're entertaining!
  - how to build a pyramid
  - tour of ancient Babylon
  - the people who live “beyond the Massagetae” and smoke marijuana
  - and the first story in Herodotus' *Histories*: **Gyges and Candaules**



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

## **Gyges and Candaules**

**Herodotus, Book 1.8-13**



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Persian Empire**

- the **Persians** were originally a tribe from the highlands of Iran
- Assyrians > Babylonians > **Medes**
- **Cyrus (II) the Great** (ca. 550 BCE)
  - conquered and assimilated the Medes
    - the Greeks confused Persians/Medes
  - conquered Babylon; freed the Hebrews
  - then, conquered Lydia and Ionia

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Persian Empire**

- Cyrus was succeeded by his son **Cambyses** (II) in 530 BCE
- Cambyses conquered Egypt
  - but he was crazy and vicious
  - this negative picture may be the result Herodotus' Persian sources who disliked Cambyses
- he was assassinated in 522 BCE

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Persian Empire**

- Cambyses' brother-in-law **Darius** took the throne

- consolidated Persia

- created **satrapies**,  
run by **satraps**

- built the **Royal Road**

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

(General Post Office, New York City, 8th Avenue and 33rd Street)

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Persian Empire**

- Darius increased Persian wealth, prestige and bureaucracy

- Herodotus:  
“Cyrus was a father,  
Cambyses was a master, and  
Darius was a shopkeeper.”



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Persian Empire**

- Darius endorses **Zoroastrianism**

- religion featuring a battle between light and dark, i.e. good vs. evil
- popularizes this sort of “dualism”
  - influences other religions, cf. Satan



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Ionian Revolution**

- in the mid-sixth century BCE, a new sort of thinking arises in **Ionia**
  - the **Ionian philosophers**
- search for origins and basic **elements**: water, air, earth, fire
  - **Pythagoreans**: numbers
- earliest attested non-religious explanation of the natural world

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Ionian Revolution**

- philosophical revolution leads to political revolution

- **Aristagoras of Miletus**: enlightened tyrant who forces the expulsion of other Ionian tyrants in 499 BCE

- forms **Ionian League** of free states

- having just expelled their tyrant, **Athens (Athenians)** join this league and send five ships from **Attica**



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Ionian Revolution**

- the forces of the Ionian League march against **Sardis** (capital of Lydia) and “liberate” it
- but in the ensuing celebration, the Ionians burn the city down
- the Lydians call in Darius and the Persians to oust the Ionian League
- to even the score, the Persians burn down Miletus in Ionia (493 BCE)

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

## • **The Ionian Revolution**

– the results of the Ionian Revolution

- it did *not* produce any new **democracy**

  - **democratia**: “mob-rule”

- the new thinkers (philosophers) fled Ionia for the west (Greece and Italy)

- it gave Darius an excuse to attack Athens for sending ships

  - Darius needed to have a military victory to add to his institutional and economic achievements as king

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The First Persian War (490 BCE)**

- Darius' naval expedition across the **Aegean Sea**

- **The Battle of Marathon**

- Greece and the Greeks defeat the Persians

- but at the cost of many lives

- **Phidippides**: “We won!”

- hence, the race called the Marathon

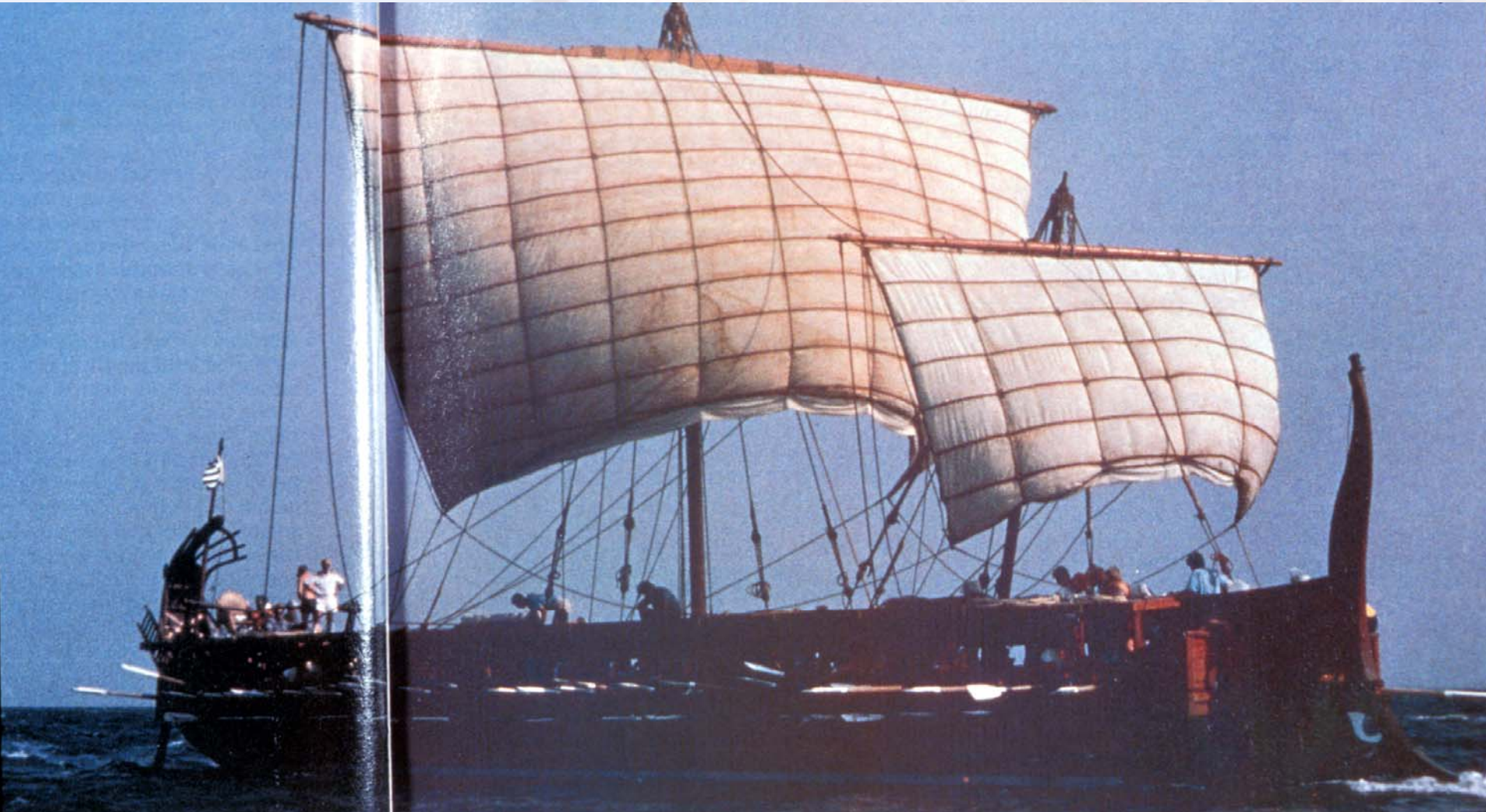
# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- The 480's: Between the Wars
  - in Greece, the rise of **Themistocles**
    - (ab)uses **ostracism**
    - **ostraca** (“wastepaper”)
  - in Persia, Darius > **Xerxes** (r. 486-465 BCE)
    - revolt in Egypt suppressed (483 BCE)
    - plans to attack Greece and avenge his father Darius
    - the Persian expeditionary force numbers over five million people

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- The 480's: Between the Wars
  - back in Greece, the Athenians discover a huge vein of silver in the Laurian mines (SE of Athens)
  - Themistocles convinces the Athenian assembly to build a fleet of **triremes** (“three [decks of] oars”)

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Second Persian War (481-479 BCE)**

- Xerxes attacks by land and sea
- crosses the **Hellespont** by building a boat-bridge
  - the first one is destroyed by strong winds and currents
  - Xerxes has the Hellespont cursed and whipped
- northern Greeks let him pass

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Second Persian War (481-479 BCE)**
  - Xerxes drives his forces south
  - **The Battle of Thermopylae** (480 BCE): **Leonidas** and 300 Spartans hold off the whole Persian army
  - Thebes “**medizes**”
  - Xerxes captures and burns Athens
    - in particular, the wooden temple of Athena on the Acropolis



# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Second Persian War (481-479 BCE)**
  - **The Battle of Salamis** (480 BCE)
    - in the narrows between the island of Salamis and the mainland
    - Persian battle-cruisers cannot maneuver but smaller triremes can
    - Xerxes panics and flees back to **Persepolis**
    - leaves his general Mardonius to finish off the Greeks

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- **The Second Persian War (481-479 BCE)**
  - Mardonius and a large Persian army winters in Thebes
  - **The Battle of Plataea** (Spring, 479 BCE)
    - after a long and hard-fought battle, the Greeks win and Mardonius is killed
  - with that, the Persian threat is over

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- Conclusion on Herodotus
  - a thrilling *story*, but how much of it is *history*?
  - nevertheless, he is surely reporting what his sources told him
  - and surely at least some of those sources believed in the accuracy of their accounts
  - even when they claimed that a god appeared in the midst of a battle!!

# Herodotus and the Persian Wars

- Conclusion on Herodotus
  - and what if Thermopylae didn't happened the way he says?
  - Herodotus' story of the Spartans' bravery tells a truth greater than any literal reality!
    - their patriotism and love of liberty
  - even if Herodotus cannot be verified, these are important psychological elements in what-really-happened