

Herodotus, *The Histories*, Bk. VIII, 5th C. BC, trans. Henry Cary, 1904.

[This passage relates the siege of Athens by the Persian forces under Xerxes, 480 BC]

From the passage over the Hellespont, thence the barbarians [Persians] began to march, having spent one month there, including the time they were crossing over into Europe ; in three months more they were in Attica, when Calliades was archon of the Athenians. They took the city, deserted of inhabitants, but found some few of the Athenians in the temple, with the treasurers of the temple, and some poor people ; who, having fortified the Acropolis with planks and stakes, tried to keep off the invaders : they had not withdrawn to Salamis, partly through want of means, and moreover they thought they had found out the meaning of the oracle which the Pythian delivered to them, that the wooden wall " should be impregnable " ; imagining that this was the refuge according to the oracle, and not the ships.

The Persians, posting themselves on the hill opposite the Acropolis, which the Athenians call the Areopagus, besieged them in the following manner: when they had wrapped tow round their arrows, and set fire to it, they shot them at the fence. Thereupon those Athenians who were besieged still defended themselves, though driven to the last extremity, and the fence had failed them ; nor, when the Pisistratidae proposed them, would they listen to terms of capitulation ; but still defending themselves, they both contrived other means of defence, and when the barbarians approached the gates, they hurled down large round stones ; so that Xerxes was for a long time kept in perplexity, not being able to capture them. At length, in the midst of these difficulties, an entrance was discovered by the barbarians ; for it was necessary, according to the oracle, that all Attica, on the continent, should be subdued by the Persians. In front of the Acropolis, then, but behind the gates and the road up, where neither any one kept guard, nor would ever have expected that any man would ascend that way, there some of them ascended near the temple of Cecrops's daughter Aglauros, although the place was precipitous. When the Athenians saw that they had ascended to the Acropolis, some threw themselves down from the wall and perished, and others took refuge in the recess of the temple. But the Persians who had ascended first turned to the gates, and having opened them, put the suppliants to death : and when all were thrown prostrate, having pillaged the temple, they set fire to the whole Acropolis.

Xerxes having entire possession of Athens, despatched a messenger on horseback to Susa, to announce to Artabanus his present success. And on the second day after the despatch of the herald, having summoned the exiled Athenians who attended him, he ordered them to offer sacrifices after their own manner, having ascended to the Acropolis; whether he gave this order from having seen a vision in a dream, or a religious scruple came upon him for having set fire to the temple. The exiles of the Athenians performed what was commanded. Why I have recorded these things I will now mention. There is in this Acropolis a shrine of Erectheus, who is said to be earth-born : in this is an olive tree and a salt-pool ; which, as the story goes among the Athenians, Neptune and Minerva, when contending for the country, placed there as testimonies. Now it happened that this olive tree was burned by the barbarians with the rest of the temple ; but on the second day after the burning, the

Athenians who were ordered by the king to sacrifice, when they went up to the temple, saw a shoot from the stump, sprung up to the height of a cubit. This they affirmed.