

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GREEKS AND ROMANS.

Turning our attention to geographical knowledge of classical antiquity we are surprised to find that the names of India and of the river Indus have been known and written down so early as about 520 or 500 B. C., namely, in the works of HECATÆUS, of which some scanty fragments have been preserved to our own time. But he had certainly not the slightest knowledge of the countries north of India, nor of the vast regions east of the river Indus.

Nor does HERODOTUS seem ever to have heard of the river Ganges, and he knew only very little of the western half of the Indian peninsula. He has described about one third of Asia, extending from the shores of the Arabian gulf, the Mediterranean and Pontus Euxinus on the west, to the Hyperboreans, and India to the north and east, and he regarded India as the last inhabited country, bordered eastwards by vast deserts, uninhabited and unexplored. Of China, Mongolia, Siberia, Tibet and the eastern part of the Indian peninsula he knew nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Herodotus had heard of the great gold production of India, and tells us that it was partly dug out of the earth, partly washed down by the streams. But the greatest part came from the sandy desert beyond the Pactyan land, where a species of ant burrowed in the sandy soil, and threw up large heaps at the mouth of its burrows, and this sand contained gold in abundance. The Indians, traversing the desert upon very fleet camels, filled their sacks with the precious sand, and then retreated in all haste, pursued by the ants. Herodotus seems to have located this sandy desert to the north or north-east of the Indian tribes to which he refers. But Herodotus does not at all mention the existence of mountains in this part of Asia. MEGASTHENES, on the other hand, who locates the gold-digging ants among the Derdæ, knows that the latter are »a people among the mountains towards the east of India«, and describes their country as a high table-land. The same people are

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<sup>1</sup> The Geographical system of Herodotus, examined and explained . . . By JAMES RENNELL. London 1800, p. 164 et seq.