CHAPTER TWENTY

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE FRINGES

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*Herodotus and the rims of the world*

Herodotus had two ways of dividing the inhabited world (*oikoumenē*/*οἶκουμενή*), geographical and ethnographical. The geographical division, which is, *mutatis mutandis*, still used, is given in 4.36–45. Dismissing the earlier view of a circular earth fringed by the Ocean, the River Oceanus, and divided in two equal halves, Europe and Asia, he introduced a new system with three continents of different size: Europe, Asia, and Libya (Africa). In several passages he made clear that in his opinion the Ocean was purely mythic (2.23, 4.8, 36, cf. 3.115, 4.45). In his ethnographical thinking, however, there was a threefold pattern which was applied to all three continents: the orderly and familiar centre, the intermediate region, and the fringes (*eskhatiāi*/*ἐσχατιαί*).

The methods and the types of source criticism used by Herodotus in ethnographical matters were the same as in history—after all, ethnography was for him only a subgenre of history. He made his own observations, collected local information, checked existing literary sources and analysed all these in the light of his own rational thinking. He rarely gave exact references—the normal technique being to name the source only when one was criticizing it—but carefully distinguished the type of information he was relying on and said whether he found it reliable or not. However, in the case of the fringes he rarely had a choice of source. His own travels (see Jacoby (1913) 247 ff.), though extensive, never went beyond the familiar central parts of the *oikoumenē*. For the fringe regions, he depended

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1 On this earlier view, probably still followed by Hecataeus, see Romm (1992) 20 ff., 32 ff.
2 See further the long discussion by Hartog (1988) 260 ff.
The World according to Herodotus. Adapted from J. O. Thompson, *History of Ancient Geography* (Cambridge 1948), 99 fig. 12.