

**ARNOLD HISTORICAL ESSAY,  
1870. THE SCYTHIC NATIONS,  
DOWN TO THE FALL OF THE  
WESTERN EMPIRE**

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Arnold historical essay, 1870. The Scythic nations, down to the fall of the Western empire by  
John Gent

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## THE SCYTHIC NATIONS,

DOWN TO

THE FALL OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE.

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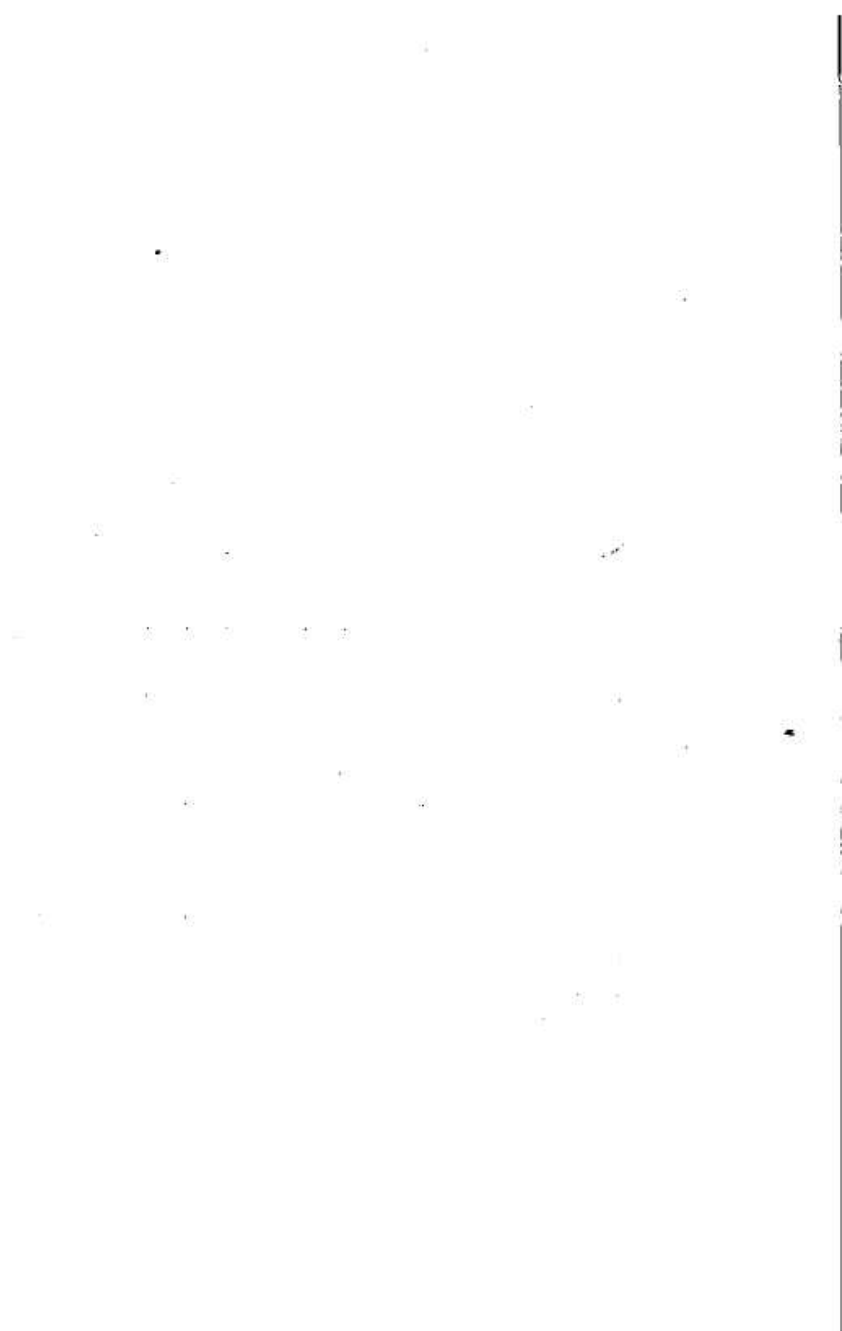
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## CONTENTS.

SECTION	PAGE
i. Extension of the word Scythian (provisional) . . . . .	1
ii. Original Application of the Name twofold, Geographical and Ethnical . . . . .	3
iii. Bearing upon its Ethnical Meaning, what is known of the (a) Physical Type, (b) Manners, (c) Language, of the Original Scythians . . . . .	5
iv. Of the Facts of their Early History . . . . .	11
v. Review of the Evidence in §§ 3, 4, and of the Traditions . . . . .	13
vi. Result . . . . .	26
vii. History of the <i>Σκόλοροι Σκώθαι</i> :—	
Preserving their Identity in Name . . . . .	27
Absorbed in the Greek Colonies . . . . .	31
viii. Nations that immediately succeeded the <i>Σκόλοροι</i> :—	
Sarmatians . . . . .	32
Getae . . . . .	35
ix. Intruders from the North and West ; Gauls, Bastarnæ, Roxolani, Goths . . . . .	36
x. Scyths in Asia . . . . .	39
xi. Alani . . . . .	40
xii. Huns . . . . .	46
xiii. Connexion of the Huns and Hungarians . . . . .	45
xiv. Character of the Scythian Nations . . . . .	47



## THE SCYTHIC RACES

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### FALL OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE.

§ 1. THE term "Scythic" has been at different times applied to nations in Europe and Asia on various grounds; of common nomadic habits; of geographical position; of supposed ethnological affinity. In this Essay it must be understood to include three classes of communities; first, the Scythians so-called by Herodotus; secondly, tribes nearly akin in race to the above; thirdly, mixed peoples, of which Scythians constituted a considerable element.

As the above description does not fix the extension of the name so definitely as could be desired, it is necessary to state why it is adopted here. This name was first introduced by the Greek colonists in the Euxine. Our authority for their notion of it is Herodotus. Therefore that use of the word is historically correct which is based upon the notion of Herodotus.

Again, this use of the word is the only one which does not totally conflict with some one or other of its later meanings. These either harmonize with Herodotus, or contain extensions or inferences from the view which he represents; but they are inconsistent with one another. This will appear from a brief review of the meaning of the word in subsequent geographers,



and other writers who spoke the opinion of their own times, and not in artificial or historical language. According to Strabo, the world was divided by Ephorus among four nations, Scyths, Celts, Æthiops, and Indians; that is to say, already in the early part of the fourth century B.C. the name of the furthest nation to the North-east with which the Greeks were in contact was applied to the whole of the tribes beyond it on the North and on the East. Four centuries later, Strabo himself states that Scythians were found south of the Danube; but that Scythia proper extended, the Lesser from the Danube and Dniester to the Borysthènes, and the Greater from the Borysthènes onward.

Soon after Strabo lived Pomponius Mela and Pliny, who exhibit the more vague opinion held by Romans, and formed at a period when Sarmatians were already predominant in Western Scythia. Mela divides Asia into three belts, Scythæ in the North, Seres in the centre, and Indi in the South. In Europe, Sarmatia extends from the Danube to the Asiatic Scythia, meeting the latter at the north of the Caspian; but there is also a European Scythia (apparently enclosed by Sarmatia), which extends from the Tanais to "the centre of the Euxine coast." The statement of Pliny is well known, that the name of Scythians (meaning perhaps the nation) had passed into those of Sarmatian and German; and the term was then only applied to the most remote tribes of these two countries.

In the middle of the second century A.D., the name of Scythia as a geographical division of Europe had been lost in Greece. The Scythia of Ptolemy is Asiatic; but he mentions a nation in European Sarmatia, called *Ἀλαῖνοι Σκύθαι*, who lived inland above the Palus Mæotis. About the same period Lucian, in his dialogues of Toxaris and Scythes, speaks of the Scythians as a nation whose position (about the Sea of Azof) needed no historical explanation, but was well known to the people for whom he wrote.

At the time of Ammianus the leading race are once more

Scythæ, and therefore the region resumes the name of Scythia ; so that the later Greek writers call its inhabitants, even in the preceding period, by the geographical name of Scythians. Jornandes does the same, proceeding further to connect with these geographical Scyths (the Goths) all the old tales which were found in Herodotus or elsewhere of the original possessors of the name. In a similar spirit, Pinkerton, at the close of the eighteenth century, apologizes to his better-informed readers for bringing forward any proof of the identity between Getæ, Goths, and Scythians.

There is a very simple progress in the history of the word. The most prominent nation gives its name to the surrounding districts and to the whole unknown country behind. First the name is Scythia, then Sarmatia, then Scythia again. There would be Sarmatians in the Scythia of Ephorus, but they would also be geographically Scyths ; there are Tauroscythæ and Alaani within Ptolemy's Sarmatia ; and the Scythia of the late empire professes to be no more than geographical.

If it is necessary to refer our extension of this term to that in which it was employed by the people who introduced it, the following questions suggest themselves :—

I. What actual information do we possess about the compass of Scythia in the time of the early Greek colonists ?

II. What indications of the affinities of the people are to be gathered from this information ?

III. Are these indications supported by the traditions of their previous history ; traditions either based on fact, or merely constituting concrete statements of the belief of later times ?

§ 2. Although the geography of Scythia in Herodotus presents some difficulties which cannot be discussed here, yet he had seen the country, at least as far as Olbia<sup>1</sup>, and no doubt furnishes a faithful account of what he heard from the mouths of Scythians and of Greek traders. Inland, north of the Crimea, were two nations most expressly distinguished from the Scy-

<sup>1</sup> He had also gone some distance inland (iv. 81).

thians, whom however they resembled, one in dress, the other in manners. These were *Ἀνδροφάγοι* and *Μελάγχλαινοι*. The language of Herodotus is so clear as to forbid any supposition of affinity here. The other boundaries, respecting which Herodotus is less positive, (for he only calls them boundaries of his square territory of Scythia, not expressly of the Scythian nation), are as follows. The Danube passes from Thrace into Scythia; its mouth, which is eastward, being in Scythia<sup>2</sup> (iv. 99). Accurately speaking, Thrace is the limit, and not the Danube. North of the Danube, a little higher up, were the *Sigynnæ*<sup>3</sup>, then *Agathyrsi*, and so forth. Eastward, Scythia extended to the *Tanais*, supposed by Lindner to be the *Donetz*, a western tributary of the *Don*, continued to the mouth of the *Don*; by others, to be a confusion between *Don* and *Volga*; most probably the *Don* in all strictness. Within these limits certain non-Scythic populations occur: first, the *Greeks*, who were in contact with *Hellenized Scythians*, called *Callipidæ*, above *Olbia*; secondly, the *Tauri*, expressly stated to be of a different race, inhabited the south-eastern part of the peninsula called *Chersonesus Taurica*. Beyond Scythia were certain Scythian nations; the *Scythæ* who had seceded from the *Royal* tribe, east of the upper *Tanais*; probably also the *Budini*<sup>4</sup>, for the *Geloni*, from contact with them, had adopted a language half *Greek* and half *Scythian*; lastly, the *Sauromatæ*, north-east of the *Sea of Azof*, spoke a corrupt *Scythian*, and the *Empire of Darius* includes *Sacæ*, who, says Herodotus, are *Amyrgian Scythians*. Besides all these, the *Neuri*, *Melanchlæni*, and also the *Massagetæ*<sup>5</sup> on the *Araxes*, resemble the *Scythians* in manners.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *supra* (page 2, top). In *Strabo's* time there were nomad *Scythians* south of the *Danube*, about *Tomi* and *Dionysopolis*.

<sup>3</sup> In *Hdt.* iv. 48, the *Sigynnæ* appear to be included in *ἡ Χερσική*; or they may have been situated on the lower course of some of the five *Scythian* tributaries; whilst the upper parts at least of all these were in *Scythia*.

<sup>4</sup> This may be only loose language in Herodotus; as he says also that the *Budini* were redhaired, and autochthonous. But he appears to have regarded the *Geloni* as in the beginning exclusively *Greek*; if so, he probably considered the *Budini* to be *Scythic*; incorrectly, as will appear in the sequel. <sup>5</sup> *Hdt.* i. 201. 215.