

## OSTRICH-SKIN SHIELDS

In his fourth book, chapters 168-199, Herodotus gives an account of the Libyan peoples amongst whom are the Macae. Of these, 175. i., he says: ἐξ δὲ τὸν πόλεμον στρουθῶν καταγαίων δοράς φορέουσι προβλήματα. A shield made of ostrich skin<sup>1)</sup> may be a difficult thing to imagine, but it is not an impossibility. At the present day handbags and shoes of this material are occasionally to be seen. This use of ostrich skin began in the 1930's; up until 1914 the ostrich was widely reared in South Africa for its feathers alone.

Mr A. D. H. Bivar of the Nigerian Museum in Lagos informs me that the Nigerian Department of Antiquities has on display in the Premier's office at Kaduna a shield which Professor J. E. Webb of the chair of Zoology at University College, Ibadan, has proved to be made of ostrich skin. It was purchased from England, Mr Bivar continues, with a collection of Benin antiquities, but it must have come from the extreme North of the

---

3) B. A. van Groningen's Kapitel über das Scutum (La composition littéraire archaïque grecque, Amsterdam, 1958, 109 ff.) bringt sehr wichtige neue Gesichtspunkte zur Textkritik des Scutum. Er betont mit vollem Recht, daß die elegantere Lesart nicht immer die ursprüngliche zu sein braucht. Man wird dies Prinzip auch hier nicht vergessen, aber nach erneuter Überlegung sich doch für τῶς als ursprüngliche Lesart entscheiden, weil der Vergleich, wie gesagt, im Hinblick auf die gesamte Situation konzipiert ist. Die Annahme, daß erst ein späterer Rhapsode die reicheren Möglichkeiten, die im Gleichnis latent waren, erkannt haben sollte, hat viel weniger Wahrscheinlichkeit.

1) How and Wells in their note oddly take δοράς as "wings". Silius Italicus, 3. 275 ff., introduces the Macae:

squalentia barba  
ora viris, humerosque tegunt velamine capri  
saetigero.

Here he may have read Herodotus' καταγαίων as αλγῶν; — see P. H. Damsté *Mnemosyne*, xxxvii (1909), p. 331.

country. It is described as a rectangular Saharan shield of the type usually regarded as characteristic of the Tuareg, though sometimes used by other adjoining nations. A discussion of such shields is to be found in F. R. Rodd's "People of the Veil" (London, 1926), p. 235 (with plate 26).

Early travellers from Europe found the Tuareg to be a nomadic people inhabiting a large area of the central Sahara from Southern Algeria and Tripolitania to the middle Niger and the Northern borders of Nigeria. The Macae with their hair worn in a crest (*οἱ λόφους κείρονται* — Herodotus loc. cit.) are, in this respect at least, reminiscent of the Tuareg<sup>2</sup>).

After wide enquiry the only ostrich-skin shield of which I have learned is the one mentioned, but its existence bears Herodotus out. Concerning crane-skin shields, which he says (7.70.2.) the Asiatic Ethiopians used, I have been unable to find any evidence<sup>3</sup>).