

[32] The first thing he did after arriving in Sardis was send heralds to Greece to demand earth and water and to tell them to be ready to provide meals for the king when he came. These heralds were sent everywhere in Greece except Athens and Lacedaemon. This was not the first time the Greeks had received a demand for earth and water: Darius had sent heralds round before. But Xerxes sent the message all over again because he was sure that the places which had refused Darius' demand before would now comply out of fear; so he sent his heralds because he wanted to find out whether or not this was true.

[33] He next got ready to march to Abydus. Meanwhile, his men had been bridging the Hellespont from Asia to Europe. On the Hellespontine Chersonese, between the towns of Sestus and Madytus, a rugged headland projects into the sea opposite Abydus. (This is the place where, not long after the events we are talking about, the Athenians under the command of Xanthippus the son of Ariphron captured a Persian called Artayctes, the governor of Sestus, and nailed him alive to a plank of wood, because he used to have women brought to him in the sanctuary of Protesilaus in Elaeus and commit sacrilege with them.)

[34] The Phoenicians and the Egyptians who had been assigned the task set about building their bridges (the Phoenicians using

white flax and the Egyptians papyrus), taking Abydos as their starting-point and directing their efforts towards the headland on the opposite coast—a distance of seven stades. They had just finished bridging the straits when a violent storm erupted which completely smashed and destroyed everything.

[35] This news made Xerxes furious. He ordered his men to give the Hellespont three hundred lashes and to sink a pair of shackles into the sea. I once heard that he also dispatched men to brand the Hellespont as well. Be that as it may, he did tell the men he had thrashing the sea to revile it in terms you would never hear from a Greek. 'Bitter water,' they said, 'this is your punishment for wronging your master when he did no wrong to you. King Xerxes will cross you, with or without your consent. People are right not to sacrifice to a muddy, brackish stream like you!' So the sea was punished at his orders, and he had the supervisors of the bridging of the Hellespont beheaded.

[36] The men assigned this grotesque task carried out their orders, and another team of engineers managed to bridge the Hellespont. They made a solid wall of penteconters and triremes, 360 of them to support the bridge on the side nearest the Euxine Sea and 314 on the other side, with the ships at an angle for the bridge nearest the Euxine, but aligned with the current for the bridge nearest the Hellespont, to take the strain off the cables. Once they had the boats all massed together, they let down anchors on extra-long hawsers on both sides—from the pontoon on the Euxine side to counteract the winds blowing from within the Euxine, and from the westward, Aegean pontoon to counteract the winds from the west and south. They left a gap in the penteconters and triremes at two points,† to let small boats sail past at will on their way to or from the Euxine. Then they attached cables to the land and wound them taut on wooden windlasses; this time they did not use just one kind of cable for each bridge, but assigned each pontoon two cables of white flax and four of papyrus. In thickness and in fineness of quality there was nothing to tell between the two kinds of cable, but with a weight of a talent per cubit of length the flaxen ones were proportionately heavier. With these bridges in place across the straits, they sawed sleepers equal in length to the width of the pontoon, laid them neatly on top of the taut cables in a row, and then tied them down.† Next they put brushwood on top of the sleepers, evened it out, put soil on top of it, and stamped the soil

down. Then they ran a fence along either side, high enough to stop the yoke-animals and the horses† looking over it and being frightened by the sight of the sea.

† At least all the work on the bridge was finished by the time