

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
October 21, 1930

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed October 14, 1930

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ANCIENT SANDSTORM DISASTERS

Since great sandstorms are as common today as they have ever been in the past, it is rather remarkable that we must go back to the records of antiquity for accounts of cases in which large numbers of human beings have been overwhelmed and suffocated by such storms. Two are described as follows by Herodotus; the first in Book IV and the second in Book III of his celebrated History:

"On the country of the Nasamonians borders that of the Psylli, who were swept away under the following circumstances. The south wind had blown for a long time and dried up all the tanks in which their water was stored. Now the whole region within the Syrtis is utterly devoid of springs. Accordingly the Psylli took counsel among themselves and by common consent made war against the south wind--so at least the Libyans say, I do but repeat their words--they went forth and reached the desert; but there the south wind rose and buried them under heaps of sand; whereupon, the Psylli being destroyed, their lands passed to the Nasamonians."

"Further than this, the Ammonians relate as follows: That the Persians set forth from Oasis across the sand, and had reached about half way between that place and themselves, when, as they were at their midday meal, a wind arose from the south, strong and deadly, bringing with it vast columns of whirling sand, which entirely covered up the troops and caused them wholly to disappear."

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