

## The Persian Courier Post (Herodotus, *Histories* 8.98)

[1] τούτων δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων ἔστιν οὐδὲν ὅ τι θᾶττον παραγίγνεται θνητὸν ὄν. λέγουσι γὰρ ὡς ὅσων ἂν ἡμερῶν ἦ ἡ πᾶσα ὁδός, τοσοῦτοι ἵπποι τε καὶ ἄνδρες διεστᾶσι, κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστης ἡμέρας ὁδὸν ἵππος τε καὶ ἀνὴρ τεταγμένος, οὐς οὔτε νιφετός, οὐκ ὄμβρος, οὐ καῦμα, οὐ νύξ κωλύει μὴ ποιῆσαι τὸν προκειμένον ἑαυτῶ δρόμον τὴν ταχίστην. [2] ὁ μὲν δὴ πρῶτος δραμῶν παραδίδωσι τὴν ἀγγελίαν τῶ δευτέρῳ, ὁ δὲ δεύτερος τῶ τρίτῳ ἢ δ' ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη κατ' ἄλλον διεξέρχεται παραδιδόμενη, ὥσπερ ἐν Ἑλλησιν ἡ λαμπαδηφορία, ἦν τῶ Ἡφαίστῳ ἐπιτελοῦσιν.

### Vocabulary

[1] ὅ τι (neut. of relative pronoun), which, that; θάττων –ον, comparative of ταχύς ταχεῖα ταχύ, swifter, faster; παραγίγνομαι to arrive; τούτων δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων, genitive of comparison: “nothing mortal which arrives faster than these messengers.”

θνητός –ή –όν, mortal, befitting mortals

ἂν . . . ἦ: ἂν + present subjunctive of εἰμί makes a generalizing statement: “however many days the entire journey is”

δίστημα, to set apart, place separately: “are placed at intervals”

τεταγμένος, ordered, arranged, posted

νιφετός –οῦ, ὄ, snowstorm

ὄμβρος –ου, ὄ, rain

καῦμα –ατος, τό, heat (cf. caustic)

κωλύω, to prevent (from)

προκειμαι, to be set before, lie before; to be proposed

δρόμος –ου, ὄ, a course, race, running

[2] παραδίδωμι, to give, hand over

ἐντεῦθεν (adv.) from there

κατ' ἄλλον from one to another

λαμπαδηφορία –ας, ἦ, torch relay race

ἐπιτελέω, to complete (a vow), celebrate

Mark Twain echoed this passage when he described the Pony Express: “No matter whether it was winter or summer, raining, snowing, hailing, or sleeting, or whether his ‘beat’ was a level straight road or a crazy trail over mountain crags and precipices, . . . he must be always ready to leap into the saddle and be off like the wind! There was no idling-time for a pony-rider on duty. He rode fifty miles without stopping, by daylight, moonlight, starlight, or through the blackness of darkness — just as it happened” (from *Roughing It*).