

Inventing a New Genre: Herodotus, Thucydides, and the Challenge of Writing Large-scale Prose History

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Outline

Issues and questions — fiction — usefulness of history — *ktēma es aiei* — patterns — the human condition — typical behavior — the impact of hindsight — stark contrasts — why is patterning needed? — *exempla* and patterns — why does history need a didactic function? — giving relevance to history — creating a panhellenic public for history — preserving the memory of great deeds and demonstrating the usefulness of history — shaping and manipulating history — Herodotus's and Thucydides' shared concerns — de-ideologizing history (liberty and self-sufficiency) — narrative choices — art and deeper truth in history.

Notes

- [1] Thuc. 1.1.3; Hdt. 1.5.3. Plato, *Rep.* 2.382c-d: The lie (or falsehood) is also useful in the case of those tales about the past (*mythologiai*) we just mentioned, because we do not know where the truth lies in tales about ancient matters (*ta palaia*), we make them useful (*chrēsimon*) as much as possible by likening falsehood to truth (*aphomoiountes tōi alēthei to pseudos*). For a useful discussion of Plato's statement, see Gill 1993: esp. 52-56. I thank Kathryn Morgan for alerting me to this passage.
- [2] History as a "multi-subjective, contingency-oriented account": Meier 1987: 44.
- [3] Historians and Homer: Strasburger 1972; Hartog 2000; Boedeker 2002; Marincola 2006; Pelling 2006. On the origins of Greek historiography: Meier 1973, 1987; Boedeker 1998; Darbo-Peschanski 2007; of historiography more generally: Assmann and Müller 2005. Historiography as a new genre: e.g., Dewald 1985: 47; Lateiner 1989: ch.1, both with references. On Herodotus as "the pedestrian (i.e., prose) Homer of historiography" (thus a 2nd-century BCE inscription in Halicarnassus), see Boedeker 2002: 97. On the aspect of writing in prose, see Grethlein 2011.
- [4] Fornara 1971a, 1981. For a summary of the discussion on dating Herodotus's work, see Raaflaub 2002: 36-37. On Herodotus and Athens, see Fornara 1971b: 37-58; Ostwald 1991; Moles 1996, 2002; Fowler 2003; Evans 2006. On Thucydides' dates, see Hornblower 1987: 1-4. His own statements: 1.1; 5.26. Hindsight: e.g., 2.65.11-13.
- [5] On Thucydides' knowledge of Herodotus's work, see n. 44.
- [6] See esp. Gill and Wiseman 1993; on fiction in historiography: Moles 1993 (with bibliog.); in Plutarch: Pelling 1990.
- [7] Fiction: Hdt. 9.122 with Flower and Marincola 2002: *ad loc.*; Dewald 1997. On the pattern of poor vs. rich country, see, e.g., Lateiner 1989: ch. 7; Thomas 2000: ch. 4. On invention: Fornara 1971b: 35-36; also Moles 1993. Another, also much-discussed example is the "constitutional debate" (3.80-82): see Asheri et al. 2007: *ad loc.* In an unpublished lecture, Giulia Sissa explains how its themes resonate throughout the work and perhaps intend to foreshadow the cause of Xerxes' ultimate failure.
- [8] Thuc. 6.1.1; Plut. *Nicias* 20; see Smith 2004. Diplomatic relations: Hornblower 1991-2008: III. 5-6; first Sicilian expedition: Lewis 1992: 408-9, 413, 422; Raaflaub 2002: 29-33. Criticism of democratic knowledge: Ober 1993. Xerxes and Demaratus: Hdt. 7.104.
- [9] On early Chinese historical thinking (esp. by Confucius, e.g., *Analects* 2.11; 7.1, 20) that makes "the past central to understanding the present and empowers those who preserve and can properly read that past," see Durrant forthcoming; Leung 1982; Schwartz 1985: 85-99.
- [10] On epic uses of the past: Kullmann 1999; Grethlein 2006a; political thought in epic poetry, linking the past with the present: Raaflaub 2000; Hammer 2002; on "historical awareness" in the period when the epics "crystallized," Patzek 1992.
- [11] Past and present in tragedy: e.g., Meier 1993; Saïd 1998; Boedeker and Raaflaub 2005.
- [12] *Ktēma es aiei* (possession for ever): Thuc. 1.22.4. See, recently, Grethlein 2010: 268-79; on Thucydides' method: Rood 2006.
- [13] Recognizing recurring phenomena: explicit in Thuc. 2.48.

- [14] On scholarship, theoretical reflection, and various approaches to this topic, see Dewald 2005: 1-22, 193-203.
- [15] Interaction with other disciplines: Thomas 2000, 2006a, 2006b; see also Finley 1942, ch. 2; Ober 2006.
- [16] Waves and circles: Hdt. 1.5; 1.32; 1.207. Logical time: Vidal-Naquet 1986: 46; Hornblower 1991-2008: I. 61.
- [17] *To anthrōpinon*: e.g., 1.22.4; 1.84.4; 3.82.2; de Ste. Croix 1972: 29 for further passages and discussion; Hornblower 1991-2008: I. 61; Reinhold 1985. “People are people”: Derow 2009: 5.
- [18] Didactic purpose of history: Pol. 1.1.1-2; cf., e.g., 3.12; 3.31-32; 12.25a. Purely intellectual purposes: Gomme 1945: 149-50; Hornblower 1991-2008: I. 61; practical: de Ste. Croix 1972: 29-33 (with further bibliog.).
- [19] Analytical and rhetorical set pieces: 2.35-46 (Funeral Oration); 2.47-54 (plague); 3.82-84 (*stasis*); 3.36-50; 6.8-26 (Mytilenian and Sicilian debates); 5.84-116 (Melian Dialogue). First and second half: Rawlings 1981: 38-57; Moles 1993: 108. On continuing analysis: below n. 30.
- [20] Set pieces in Herodotus: e.g., 1.96-100 (the “tyrannical template”: Dewald 2003); 3.80-82 (“constitutional debate”); 7.5-18 (debate at Xerxes’ court: Raaflaub 2002). Repeated patterns: e.g., eastern autocracy (Lateiner 1989: ch. 8); Persian imperialism (Raaflaub 1987, 2002 with sources and bibliog.). See generally Strasburger 1955; Fornara 1971b; Hunter 1982: 176-225, and, on patterning in Herodotus, Lateiner 1989: 165-67.
- [21] Spartan and Athenian collective characters: Thuc. 1.70-71. Both reacting similarly: 1.76; 5.105.
- [22] Sparta’s self-interested policies: 5.17ff. (Peace of Nicias; see recently Lendon 2010: 323-67); Xen. *Hell.* 1-2.3 (Ionian War; on the formation of Sparta’s empire: Cartledge 1987).
- [23] Allied criticism: esp. 1.69.1-2, 1.120.1; Athenian ambassadors: 1.75-76; cf. 1.144.2; 5.105.
- [24] “Battle cry of freedom”: Thuc. 2.8. On Sparta’s use and abuse of liberty in its propaganda, see Raaflaub 2004: 193-202.
- [25] For a more detailed discussion of this particular pattern, see Raaflaub 2011.
- [26] Agamemnon, power, and fear: Thuc. 1.9; Kallet 2001: 112-14; also Vidal-Naquet 1986: 46.
- [27] Incongruencies in Athens’ early depiction as a leading power: Hdt. 1.56.2, 59ff.; 5.78; 8.3. Parallels in Herodotus between Sparta’s and Athens’ rise to power: Raaflaub 1988: 213 n. 73.
- [28] E.g., 7.162.1 with a quote from Pericles’ much later Funeral Oration (perhaps in the war against Samos in 440/39): Munson 2001: 218-19; van Wees 2002: 341-42; Grethlein 2006b: 498-501. Allusions to events transcending the *Histories*’ chronological end: Fornara 1971a, 1981.
- [29] Even if Thucydides then makes an effort to describe this history as open-ended: Grethlein 2009: 164-171.
- [30] Deteriorating sequence of decision making: Thuc. 2.65; Mytilene: 3.36.49; Pylos: 4.27-28 (with 4.15-22, 27, 41); Sicily: 6.15, 19, 24. See Raaflaub 2006: 198-209.
- [31] *Polypragmosynē* (1.70). Nominal democracy: 2.65.8-10. Pericles: 2.65.8-9; Plut. *Per.* 7. Fickleness of demos: 2.65.2-4.
- [32] For a brief discussion of war and peace, see Raaflaub 2007 and, more generally, 2009; imperialism and liberty: de Romilly 1963; Tamiolaki 2010.
- [33] Arbitrariness of chance: Grethlein 2006b: 502.
- [34] “Exemplary history: Livy, pref. 9-10; Chaplin 2000; for general discussion, see Grethlein 2006a: 32-40, esp. 34.
- [35] Pervasiveness of historical references: Grethlein 2010: 2-3, with reference to van Groningen 1953 and other useful sources. Greek sanctuaries, of course, were crowded with votive offerings, and the attached inscriptions usually informed visitors of the donor and the occasion of the gift. Herodotus (see, e.g., Flower 1991) and Pausanias, among others, inform us of what could be learned from these about historical events. For the votive inscriptions on the Athenian Acropolis, see Raubitschek 1949. On the “Lindian Chronicle,” inscribed in 99 BCE, that preserves a record of the votives to Athena Lindia on Rhodes, see Higbie 2003. See also, esp. on Olympia, Kreutz 2004. The difference is that such

collections of “exhibits” in sanctuaries were the result not of a conscious intention to commemorate the past or convey a coherent political or historical message; rather, they were the accidental result of the generosity of the deity’s worshippers. Interest in their historical significance followed upon the development of interest in history.

- [36] For discussion of “cultural memory,” see, e.g., Assmann 1997; Assmann and Hölscher 1988; more generally, e.g., Vansina 1985; von Ungern-Sternberg and Reinau 1988; Thomas 1989.
- [37] Fractured memory: Yates 2009; see also Jung 2006; Bridges et al. 2007.
- [38] Choice from contrasting traditions: Lateiner 1989: 84-90; contradicting popular views: 7.139. On the panhellenic outlook of epic and early Greek poetry: Nagy 1979, 1990.
- [39] Independent position: Thuc. 5.26.5; see 1.1.1; Boedeker 1998. Knowing precisely: 1.22.4.
- [40] Glory and greatness: Hdt. pref.; 7.20. Thuc. 1.1-19 (demonstration of greatest war); 2.64.5 (ever-remembered glory: *doxa aieimnēstos*). See also Hdt. 6.109.3 with Thuc. 2.41.4, 64.3.
- [41] On “rescuing the remarkable from oblivion,” see Dewald 2007: 91-94. Replacing fame by usefulness: Crane 1996: 215; Grethlein 2010: 214.
- [42] Impact on our understanding of ancient historiography and history: Raaflaub 2010b: 203.
- [43] Thucydides’ shaping of history: Greenwood 2006; also Hunter 1973 (Th. as an artful reporter); Badian 1993 (deceitful reporter).
- [44] Shared intellectual environment: above n. 15. Thucydides’ reaction to Herodotus: e.g., Moles 1993; Hornblower 1991-2008: II. 19-38, 122-45; Rood 1999; Rogkotiis 2006; Rengakos 2006.
- [45] Liberty as propaganda on both sides: Raaflaub 2004: ch. 5.
- [46] Hdt. on the Athenian fight for Greek liberty: 7.139; 8.140-44.
- [47] Thuc. 2.36 (*polis autarkestatē*). On self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) as a political concept: Raaflaub 2004: 184-87 (with sources). Individual self-sufficiency: Thuc. 2.41 (Pericles): “I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself a self-sufficient person (*sōma autarkes*), and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and versatility.” Refutation: no self-reliant person (*sōma autarkes*) was to be seen anywhere. Herodotus’s refutation: 1.32.
- [48] For discussion, see Raaflaub 2002: 29-32.
- [49] Hdt. 6.102-17. For a much fuller discussion of my argument here, see Raaflaub 2010a.
- [50] Athens and Persia in the “Darius-books”: esp. 5.73, 96-97, 99-102, 105; 6.43-44, 48-49, 94; see also 8.142.2. Importance of Marathon for Athens’ rise to power: 6.109. The panhellenic significance of Xerxes’ expedition: esp. 7.139; cf. 8.140-44.
- [51] For a detailed exploration of this interrelationship, see Raaflaub 2002.
- [52] On the Croesus *logos*, see Raaflaub 2002b: 167-74; on Thucydides’ Archaeology, Hornblower 1991-2008: I. 8 with reference to Hunter 1982: ch.1.
- [53] On the Funeral Oration’s programmatic function, see Grethlein 2005.
- [54] Cic. *De or.* 2.62. Historians’ claim to establish the truth: Marincola 2007a. For discussion, see, e.g., Fornara 1983: 99-120, 137-41; Wheeldon 1989; Grant 1995: esp. ch. 5; Marincola 1997: 158-74, esp. 160-61, and relevant chs. in Gill and Wiseman 1993.
- [55] In the effort of uncovering a deeper truth, Tacitus is Thucydides’ closest successor: Raaflaub 2010b: 190-94; on Tacitus in more detail: Raaflaub 2008.
- [56] Artful and deceitful: see n. 43.

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Herodotus wrote only one book, known today as the Histories. The Greek word that forms its title, *historiai*, from which our word "history" derives, means "inquiries" and so a more accurate title might be the Inquiries of Herodotus of Halicarnassus. For Herodotus' unremitting focus on the mythological or wondrous, Thucydides roundly criticizes him. In Thucydides' prefatory pages, commonly known as the Archaeology, Thucydides even identifies several Herodotean "errors," although he never mentions Herodotus by name. Although Herodotus' stories may be false in certain particulars, however, they may also reveal the horizon of the peoples that he was studying, and so accurately record the internal view of their beliefs. The Histories of Herodotus is considered the founding work of history in Western literature. Written in 430 BC in the Ionic dialect of classical Greek, The Histories serves as a record of the ancient traditions, politics, geography, and clashes of various cultures that were known in Greece, Western Asia and Northern Africa at that time. Although not a fully impartial record, it remains one of the West's most important sources regarding these affairs. Moreover, it established the genre and study of Herodotus reads his story and is crowned with a laurel wreath. He was the first historian known to collect his materials systematically. DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images. But a new generation of historians are rescuing Herodotus's reputation as the true "father of history," a man who traveled to the edges of the known world and interviewed everyone from Egyptian priests to Babylonian farmers, collected stories of powerful queens and Median shepherd girls, in order to make sense of the complex course of human events, both great and small. The challenge for an investigator of the past working in the fifth century B.C.E. was that almost nothing was written down. Herodotus couldn't walk into the Athens library and check out a scroll or two on Egyptian history.