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Origins and Early Forms of Greek Historiography

Prologue

Two famous passages from Thucydides' *History*, written between the late 430s and the early 390s BC, set out several themes common to the ancient Greek historians.

> In the light of the evidence I have cited, however, no one would go wrong in supposing that the early events I have related happened much in that way, if one would not believe that the past was more like what the poets have sung, embellishing with their exaggerations, or the prose chroniclers have composed, in versions more seductive to the ear than true, being unexamined and many because of the lapse of time incredibly winning the status of patriotic legend, but if one would regard my discoveries from the clearest possible evidence as adequate for what concerns antiquity. (Th. 1.21.1, Lattimore, adapted)

> For [Athens] alone of existing cities surpasses her reputation when put to the test … Through great proofs, and by exhibiting power in no way unwitnessed, we will be admired by this and future generations, thus requiring no Homer to sing our praises nor any other whose verses will charm for the moment and whose claims the factual truth will destroy, since we have compelled every sea and land to become open to our daring and populated every region with lasting monuments of our acts of harm and good. (Th. 2.41.3–4, Lattimore)

The first quotation, a conclusion to Thucydides' introductory summary of earlier history, evidences direct competition with earlier poetic and

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prose versions of the Greek past and asserts the superiority of his narrative to those of poets and prose "story writers" (*logographoi*) (Marincola 1997: Chapter 5, on the topos). It contrasts both poetic exaggeration or adornment and the persuasive power of popular prose stories with Thucydides' principles of clear evidence (*sēmeia*). The second passage, from Pericles' funeral oration, illustrates the monumental product of history through the example of Athens itself. From it we see that fame attested by proofs (*sēmeia*) and preserved through memory is of paramount importance to Greek culture, that truth witnessed or supported by evidence is superior to poetic fiction, and that demonstrations of power ensure memory in posterity. Power is a central theme: its acquisition and loss and the human attraction to it and admiration for it. How will future generations receive the message of dynamic achievements in the absence of poetic commemoration? Implicitly Pericles' own speech and the historian's account, together, ensure that the monuments – literally, "memorials" (*mnēmeia*) – will not be forgotten. ("We are irresistibly reminded of 1.22.1 with its dismissal of what the poets have sung about; also surely of 1.22.4 with its contrast between Thucydides' own permanent but superficially unpleasing work … and prize competitions designed for the immediate moment": Hornblower 1997 ad l.; see also Gomme 1956 ad l. and Lattimore 1998.)

The Western tradition has for centuries shared the foundational elements exemplified in these passages: preservation of the past, inspiration for the present, and a claim to truth. Thucydides' challenge to earlier tradition is also characteristic of an agonistic impulse among historians who forged the genre before him, most notably Herodotus (480s–420s BC) and, even earlier, Hecataeus (late sixth–early fifth century BC). The challenge was inevitable in the highly dynamic period of the beginnings of historical writing in the fifth century and earlier. Oral and written media in literature, local traditions, and budding empirical studies all coexisted and vied for attention. Genres were far less well defined in fifth-century Greece than in the following centuries. For example, drama, victory odes, new forms of lyric poetry, and philosophy or protoscience in verse and prose were all first evidenced from the mid-sixth to the mid-fifth centuries, prior to Herodotus' and Thucydides' compositions. Prose was especially fluid in content and form and was influenced by contemporary verse traditions in this progressive period. The earliest "historical" texts (by today's definition of empirical studies of people and places over time) depended heavily, but not exclusively, on purely oral sources of myth, folklore, or popular local traditions transmitted in verse or prose. These points will be explored below. Historical writing was a highly

innovative enterprise in this first century of its existence, and we now turn to an examination of how it got to the point where Herodotus received it.

Choosing and Using History

Before turning to the complex shapes of pre-Herodotean tradition, we ask an obviously prior question about the meaning(s) of "history" common to the ancients and ourselves. Modern cynical wit sees history as nothing but a fiction, a hypocrisy, a litmus test for repeated human folly, or a tool for political control:

> History is a set of lies, agreed upon. (Napoleon)
> History is the nightmare from which we are trying to awaken. (James Joyce)
> History would be a wonderful thing, if it were only true. (Tolstoy)
> We learn from history that we do not learn from history. (Hegel)
> Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past. (G. Orwell)

The genre's promise of truth inevitably provokes aphorisms alleging bias. Yet the skeptical impulse is a productive one, with an ancient pedigree reaching at least to Hecataeus in 500 BC. One scholar began his study of the philosophy of history with a bleak observation: "The future is dark, the present burdensome; only the past, dead and finished, bears contemplation" – (Elton 2002: 1) to which he added:, "Like Oedipus we are dissatisfied with stories and seek our true parentage." The past can best explain our identity in relation to that of others in the present and can help us anticipate or even shape the future. (For a good sourcebook of quotations from modern intellectuals and scholars on select themes, see Morley 1999.)

The meaning of history depends upon its perceived function. Is history written to uncover a universally objective truth? Or is all history a verbal fiction, a "literary artifact," to use Hayden White's phrase, inevitably bound to the subjective aims of the author and culture in which it was formulated? (White 1978: 81–100; see Morley 1999: 97–131; on postmodern theory and Roman historians, Batstone 2009). One need not subscribe to any particular postmodern critical theory to make the simple observation that everything is political in the realm of human discourse. Universally shared absolutes of meaning and absolute objectivity are evanescent ideals that are reasonably embraced by groups and individuals,

but they are rarely globally agreed upon. So social and cultural meaning arises from the discourse or dialogue among a multiplicity of views. One description of the current orientation to history as framed in literary studies is that of "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose 1998: 781). Otherwise stated, all texts, be they ancient and modern, primary and secondary, are embedded in social and cultural contexts. Our access to a historical past as a lived experience must be mediated by documents, monuments, and other forms of evidence as they happen to be preserved. In short, literature, including historical writing, is both socially produced and socially productive (Montrose 1998). In our review of ancient Greek historical writing, it will be useful to keep in mind this quality of texts being socially embedded and to ask how literary content, together with social context (both ancient and modern), determines the meaning of each text. Connor, for example, shows how Thucydides warned his contemporaries of the breakdown of traditional values and social order in the violent context of war, and how modern scholarship responded to these same themes with a torrent of scholarship in the Cold War and then in the post-Vietnam and post-modernist eras. Now Herodotus has enjoyed a renaissance among classical scholars in recent decades not least because of his constant reinforcement of respect for cultural diversity.

One useful definition of history common to both ancient and modern cultures is "writing about the past, selectively and with a purpose" (proposed by John Crook at a seminar I attended on "Society and the Ancient Historian" at the University of Cambridge, in winter 1977). Selection is of course dictated not only by the body of available evidence selectively preserved or eliminated over time, but by the active choice of the author from among that material. Whether a Greek historian has relied upon written documents, other narrative accounts, oral tradition, or personal observation and interview, that author inevitably must choose to include certain aspects and exclude others. He includes, excludes, and thereby imposes his own principles of valuation of the material with every sentence. In this sense, the historian can be as much a literary artist as a novelist or playwright who chooses a historical topic. Yes, certain fundamental events and participants must be acknowledged, but within those constraints a huge amount of creative description and emphasis is possible.

Our understanding of a historian's purpose is a crucial element in deriving meaning from the text. A close reading of what the author tells us in the prologue is a good place to start, followed by attention to prominent themes and motifs of the narrative. But a good modern reader must be a detective, always probing into the broader social, cultural, and

political context to ask why the historian chose specific events, was silent on others, focused on certain persons, inserted speeches and digressions where he did, and so on. "It is a commonplace," wrote Moses I. Finley, "that every historian's notion (conscious or subconscious) of his function is based on both the social and political situation in his own world and the literary and moral tradition he has inherited" (Finley 1987: 75). So attentive readers will also ask how the author's selections relate to his own political, moral, and literary environment in the period during which the work was composed. Famously, Herodotus' *History* has alternatively been read, since antiquity, as critical of Athens or as prejudicially defending that state in the later fifth century. Herodotus' account of Persian hegemony has been read accordingly as a cautionary commentary on the Athenian empire. This is not to argue that many historical texts are simply literary or political allegories for the reader to decode. More accurately, most ancient historians were keenly aware of and engaged in contemporary issues, and they had fundamental views motivating their projects. So the historians' engagement is often reflected in many nuances of their work, from the choice of topic to the framing of the major issues and the implicit or explicit judgments of historical agents. Note for example Thucydides' biased presentation of individuals (Westlake 1968; Woodhead 1960).

Oral Culture and Archaic Poetry

Other major early civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean and northeast Africa, the Hittite, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, and Egyptian cultures, had historical records prior to Homer, including royal decrees, laws, and aristocratic genealogies. These were not history per se, but the substance for it. These cultures adhered to the "canon of a sacralized tradition" while the later Greek historians followed their personal judgement of truth, being conditioned by a cultural or political environment (Bertelli 2001: 70). Also, significantly, Greece never had a theocratic monarchy of the Near Eastern or Egyptian type. Greeks did not, therefore, have to adhere in their myth and secular culture to a rigid religious ideology that controlled political areas. Rather they maintained a consistently looser social structure, organized around autonomous local regions with independent leaders. "The sacred" (*ta hiera*) was one important aspect of culture, but without influential local religious institutions or priesthoods. Indeed "religion" was not a Greek term or concept, though "the sacred" was a well respected aspect of thought, ritual practice, and public space (Burkert 1985: 269–71; Bruit Zaidman and Schmitt Pantel 1994: 8–9).

Across the Greek world, for centuries before Homer, oral myth was the dominant form of interest in the past. Without writing, local oral traditions of aristocratic genealogies and myths of gods and heroes were continually repeated but remained fluid and dynamic in their detail, responding to each city's need to use the tales for its own purposes. The uses included "pan-Hellenic or regional consciousness and pride, aristocratic rule and especially their [the rulers'] right to rule, their pre-eminent qualifications and virtues, and an understanding of the gods, the meaning of cult practices – these and other comparable ends" (Finley 1987: 24–5). When myths were written down in the eighth century BC and for centuries thereafter, the stories continued to be used and altered for regional political interests, with completely new versions in original lyric and dramatic verses, but with less liberal change in the written texts already received. At that point a new "orality" emerged, namely that of the oral performance of both poetry and prose, which included public readings of Herodotus' stories.

Out of Homer or Not?

Virtually all Greek literary traditions and genres, certainly including history, have some roots in Homer. The great Homeric and Hesiodic poems, generally considered products of a period that started around 750–700 BC, have in turn long been recognized as both the culmination of a rich and complex Mediterranean oral culture stretching centuries before and the starting point of an influential reception that reaches to the present. Nor did the Homeric epics gain instant, widespread renown in the eighth century. Their readership likely spread over the Greek-speaking world during the next two centuries, probably achieving very broad pan-Hellenic appeal by the time they were regularly recited at festivals in Athens and elsewhere in the sixth century (Nagy 1990: 21–2).

Homer's origins are often tied to those of the "invention of writing" for the Greeks and to the broader use of written texts, publicly and privately, in the two centuries thereafter. Writing, it has been observed, was at the service of orality: it maintained the formality and content of oral tradition without critical self-examination, and yet the invention of historical writing enabled close criticism and examination of traditions in genealogy and divine explanations (Bertelli 2001: 60). Myths and local legends that circulated by word of mouth were now subject to fixed forms and were put to the test of inquiry (*historiē*). The individual writer often recasts the oral forms through an unbiased process that Oswyn Murray has called "deformation," that is, a process of "both conscious and

unconscious self-interested distortion and literary or aesthetic distortion, as they operate over time within a tradition" (Murray 2001: 23–5). Yet the element of self-interest seems virtually always present in an artfully constructed ancient historical narrative. The author selects material for his purpose in undertaking the project, and his selection may contain a degree of social bias or an "agenda" to support certain values that serve a political or social hierarchy.

It has been commonly observed that Herodotus and his successors adopted many elements from Homer, including the topics of war and battle (from the *Iliad*), travel narrative and ethnographic curiosity (from the *Odyssey*), a search for the causes of conflict, and the idea of preserving deeds to ensure fame. One obvious protohistorical description is that of the shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18.478–607), where we have very interesting scenes of the life of a *polis*, its social components, and the first description of practices concerning Greek law. Herodotus has been called "the prose Homer" in a recently discovered inscription in praise of Halicarnassus (Lloyd-Jones 1999; Hornblower 2006: 306). Yet I downplay here causation as a uniquely epic contribution, since all traditional stories present it. History also shares with epic pragmatic techniques such as a sustained narrative with careful characterization of the protagonists, abundant use of speeches and dialogue to move the action forward, and vivid descriptions, especially of battles (Luce 1997: 4–5; Lang 1984; Marincola 2001: 77–85; Stadter 1973). We can add that the epics also include the prominent historiographical themes of traditional hierarchy, power, authority, and the human motives of honor, fear, and profit. But, significantly, unlike history (at least before biography), the epics gain unity from the focus on a central character, a man (*anēr*), and his conflicts or challenges with implications for all society around him: Achilles and Odysseus are crucial characters even when absent. History, when it evolved, rather studied social collectives (*poleis*) in conflict, as they were affected by the actions of leaders and individuals. Usually the events over time in a major, multicity conflict, such as a war – and not the deeds of one individual – give unity to the historical narrative. Certainly there appears in the historical narrative a series of individuals who stand out as major agents in events. In most histories these prominent persons are given extensive characterizations through their own speeches and action and through authorial comment. But the greater action of the war itself determines the introduction, appearances, and departure of the major characters of the history. The course of the major events also dictates the brief appearances of lesser characters who play some noteworthy role, beyond which we know nothing of them.

History also generally eschews the Homeric extended concern with emotional issues of wrath and nostalgia; the seeking of causation from a divine machinery; and the domestic and personal scenes that form the bulk of *Odyssey* 13–24 (though Herodotus seems an exception). All these elements are selected out of history for different reasons. While the "machismo" of military exploits is kept, the focus on one man's importance contradicts the later ethos, which promotes broad civic participation in a more *polis*-centered culture. Herodotus' Croesus, for example, is an archetype of the impossibility of human self-sufficiency. Finally, domestic and tender scenes did not fit with a focus on the *aretē* of great men and were not suitable to political narrative. Such scenes were normally treated in lyric and dramatic poetry.

Hesiod (fl. c. 700) "deformed" myths as Homer had, but with him we see the emergence of a genealogical ordering of gods and heroes, accompanied by a concern for continuity and the harmonization of variant versions handed down by tradition. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod, like Homer, attributes to a divine source, the Muses, his access to the truth, but he also acknowledges that the Muses know "how to speak falsehoods that seem true, and, when [they] want, how to utter truths" (Hes. *Th.*, lines 27–8). The disclaimer allows the poet an escape clause against critics of his content, but it is also consistent with the Greek view that poets and prophets cannot reveal the will of the gods without enigmatic obfuscation. We are far from the truth claims of historians, based on their own observation and the testimony of human informants. To explain human suffering in the world, Hesiod offers two tales in his *Works and Days*, one the purely conventional myth of Pandora's jar. The other story describes the five races of men, four being metallic and possibly of non-Greek origin, while a fifth race, of heroes, is interposed as a quasi-rationalized Greek reminiscence of the "heroic age" of earlier centuries. The tale of races describes the quality of periods, not a precise quantity of time, but it does show real concern for causality and is "pointing to an entirely new line of intellectual endeavour and pointing away from epic and myth," namely an embryonic form of chronological periodization along with notions of moral decline and regeneration in successive social structures (Finley 1987: 16–17; Kirk 1973: 226–38). Another work of Hesiod, *The Catalogue of Women* (now fragmentary; possibly begun in the eighth century and reaching a final version in the first decades of the sixth, in Attica) was the best model for the breadth of the early genealogical works. Genealogy was later given fuller form by Acusilaus of Argos (pre-490 BC), who seems to have corrected Hesiod's creation story (Bertelli 2001: 73–4; *FGrHist* 2 Acus. F 5–6).

Writing used for records seems to have first become widespread in Greece from 750 to 650 BC. Written texts appear to be more common with the advent of public inscriptions throughout the sixth century, and are finally ubiquitous in the fifth century and later. The archaic period (c. 700–500 BC) evidences the first written laws and some religious and private inscriptions. In general, however, each city's use of political documents varied greatly until the mid-fourth century BC, when bureaucratization and standardized norms took hold. Yet oral traditions and oral discourse in politics lived strongly alongside the written throughout the archaic and classical periods. Comparison with the extensive use of writing in the Near East and Egypt even suggests that written records can often foster the control required by authoritarian central rulership (Thomas 1992 passim, and especially 93–100, 128–50). With the advent of writing from 700 to 500 BC, Greeks first applied the medium mainly to epic, then to lyric and other forms of occasional poetry that dealt "with personal problems and generalities and not with politics and society in their concrete institutional expressions" (Finley 1987: 20–1). The Greeks of this era were not interested in the written organization and chronological tracing of events. The impulse in this direction ultimately came from the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Ionian Connection

Homer, most believe, like Hecataeus and then Herodotus, was a native Ionian. Ionia was the central region of the western coast of Asia Minor that was inhabited by independent Greek cities since at least the eighth century, then ruled by the Persians in the mid-sixth to early fifth centuries. Some critics have distinguished the East Greek or Ionian emphasis on folktales from a mainland Greek preoccupation with political rationalism, perhaps arising from the hoplite class focused on action in war and politics. Scholars have further distinguished folktales and political themes from a "Delphic tradition" that emphasized the moral aspects of hybris and reversal of fortune. In short, diverse local cultures have created divergent interests in discourse, first orally, then in written texts, including history. The theory goes that Thucydides' work more strongly reflects the "mainland" or hoplite culture, while Herodotus' evidences the reception of Ionian folktales, and both incorporate the Delphic lessons of hybris avenged (Murray 2001: 32–3).

Ionia was an extraordinarily creative culture not only for legends and poetic fictions, but also for the earliest production of new forms of

critical knowledge in Greece, notably Ionian philosophy, science, and historiography (Kirk and Raven 1957: 73–215). Thales of Miletus (c. 625–c. 545 BC) led the revolution with studies of the earth and heavens, proclaiming that water was the "first principle" of all things; Anaximander of Miletus (c. 610–c. 547 BC) also focused on natural laws of ceaseless movement expressed in the mutual destruction of opposites, but also of stability expressed in an entity he called "the unbounded" (*to apeiron*), which is the basis of all things. Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570–475 BC) also wrote on the heavens and earth, but is known best for his skeptical position on the limits of human knowledge and the absurdity of anthropomorphic deities as Homer and Hesiod portrayed them. Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. c. 500 BC) highlighted a central principle of cosmic order (*logos*) that is in constant change. What these thinkers contributed was some necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for the Greek creation of history, namely a skepticism about myth, an affirmation of empirical evidence, and a nascent method of inquiry (Finley 1987: 30).

While Ionia was politically subject to Persia from c. 546/5 BC until after the Persian Wars (479 BC), the region was home to major pioneers of historical genres. Scylax of Caryanda (c. 500) wrote of his sailing around the Persian Gulf and elsewhere, at the order of Darius I; Scylax also wrote a biography of a tyrant of Mylasa, another Persian subject. Hecataeus of Miletus wrote critically of Greek traditions. And then Herodotus was born (Momigliano 1990: 8–11).

Herodotus, as we shall see, drew from both of his rich local traditions – storytelling and philosophical inquiry. What he added to them was the aim of preserving "human past events" (*ta genomena ex anthōpōn*), and especially "the great and wondrous deeds" of the Greeks and barbarians, for the sake of preservation in and of itself, as his preface proclaims (1.1.1). For centuries poets had sought to preserve myths that were considered to be essentially true, but Herodotus and a few others in the decades before him attempted to organize the traditions of genealogy, local traditions, and travel stories. The adaptation of an Ionian spirit of inquiry and natural empiricism to the aim of a serious understanding of human accomplishments was the crucial turning point in the invention, or perhaps better "evolution," of history. The change is not really the final discovery of some new mode of expression by thinkers long in search of a solution, as "invention" implies. Rather history arose as the natural next step in a chain of cultural circumstances. Herodotus had absorbed storytelling and the spirit of inquiry, but applied both to his original focus on events that were secular, political, and human; Thucydides then further filtered the

genre through an even more rigid focus on these events and a more obsessive concern for chronology (Finley 1987: 30).

What was the necessary final condition for Herodotus or any author positioned at this time to apply aspects of the writing of myth and of empirical skepticism to the human past must ultimately remain a matter of speculation. Beyond the impulse to preserve deeds from oblivion, the Persian Wars themselves obviously begged for a grand treatment along the lines of the Homeric epic. But Herodotus may also have been drawn to address at epic length a host of hot issues of the day, including civilization versus barbarism, democracy versus tyranny (versus oligarchy), law versus nature, divine versus human sources of authority, and pan-Hellenic cooperation versus strife among Greek cities.

Ionian thinkers had questioned laws of gods and nature long presumed valid, and the liberal spirit of inquiry may, some speculate, have led to a rupture of social barriers too, to a spirit of questioning of the elite hierarchies, which resulted in tyrannies and finally in the Athenian democracy (Meier 1987: 52; Roberts 2011: 12–14). The point is not that Herodotus follows or applies any of the specific Ionian monocausal explanations of natural processes, but rather that he lived in a region and a culture where diversity and innovation were also welcomed in the forms of writing and thinking.

History Prefigured or Forestalled in Archaic Poetry?

A series of poems forming what is called today the Epic Cycle were composed largely in the seventh and sixth centuries and treated a great range of legendary events, notably those around the Trojan War and the return of heroes, completing the contexts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Davies 1989; West 1996). The epics, known entirely from scant fragments and written by authors from many different cities, evidently also covered all great mythical periods of Greece, from creation to titanomachy, and the stories of Oedipus and other Theban heroes. Epics remained a vital source of interest for Greeks from all over the Mediterranean, if their continued production is any indication. The subject matter was, in the view of most ancients, not fabulous fiction but magnified fact. Even Thucydides' serious allusions to Agamemnon and Minos, tempered by an awareness of poetic licence, make clear that, for him, the tales were essentially based on true events (Th. 1.4, 9, and 21).

In the seventh and sixth centuries the body of serious and lofty epic required balancing by literary forms that conveyed everyday concerns and

elevated personal themes. Prose narratives of contemporary politics were not yet conceivable or attractive enough to be committed to papyrus: prose lacked the verve of verse and its cultural cachet, and feuding city-states were of ephemeral interest. So the archaic period found another outlet, a literary genre worth writing down, namely lyric poetry (excellent translation and selection in West 1994). The broad classification includes both choral and monodic (solo) songs, written to be performed in their entirety at public or private occasions. Monody begins usually with Archilochus and runs the gamut of Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Sappho, Alcaeus, Theognis, Solon, and many more. Thee poets' themes are largely personal and philosophically moralizing about loves, hates, friends, enemies, and the frustrations and joys of daily life. There is little extended narration and not much on politics, but noteworthy historical nuggets abound. In the seventh century, starting with Archilochus, we glimpse the reluctant warrior fighting for Thasos against Thracian tribes (West 1994: 13–14; Bowie 2001: 59–60). Tyrtaeus of Sparta and Callinus of Ephesus offer fellow citizens propagandistic exhortations to fight in battle (West 1994: 21 and 23–7). Theognis rolls off copious advice about friends, enemies, and the welfare of his state, Megara (West 1994: 64–73; Figueira and Nagy 1985). Solon (early sixth century) was the most politically accomplished among the lyric poets, being also a famous Athenian archon (594/3 BC) and lawgiver – a "sage" figure for Herodotus. Solon's political poems evidence his sincere efforts to reform class inequities and his frustrations at the effort (West 1994: 74–83). Our brief catalog illustrates how various poets engaged the interests of the citizenry, primarily with warnings and advice drawn from personal experience in politics and war. There is no attempt at a systematic narrative, but rather a highly individualistic view of life in the *polis*. The general absence of religious authority and mythical subject matter indicates that the monody functioned to convey secular, civic wisdom distilled from recent experience. Though monody is hugely different in form and overt subject matter from history, it functions like history by presenting experience as a lesson for civic behavior. Hence monody prefigured and perhaps forestalled the invention of history.

Choral poetry accompanied some religious worship, funerals, and weddings, as well as songs of praise for rulers (*enkomia*) and victory songs for athletes (*epinikia*) (Segal 1985). Many choral songs blended elements of myth with brief historical episodes, though ancients understood that there would be a necessary bias in poems praising the elite, the wealthy, and athletes (who often were aristocratic and monied). The choral pieces were, after all, paid for by families, clients, or the praised subjects

themselves. Choral poetry thus complemented monody by weaving together epic elements of myth with contemporary realia. The genre is first attested in the poems of Alcman of Sparta (later sixth century), best known for a lovely *parthenion* or "maidens' song" designed to accompany a cult dance, but noteworthy also for a cosmogony contrasting that of Hesiod. Stesichorus of Himera in Sicily (c. 632/629–556/553 BC) wrote mainly on mythical topics but is said to have composed fables on political topics, for instance urging the people of Akragas to reject the tyrant Phalaris so as not to become his slaves, as a wild horse does by accepting a bit (Arist. *Rh.* 2, 1393^{b}; see Kennedy 1991: 180).

Poetic versions of foundation stories (only the titles are extant) arose in the seventh and sixth centuries and are of more direct historical interest. In the eighth century there is the *Corinthiaca* by Eumelus of Corinth and, in the seventh, Mimnermus' *Smyrneis* and the *Early History of the Samians* by Semonides of Amorgos, a work of over 2,000 lines. Panyassis of Halicarnassus, fifth-century author of an *Ionica* of about 7,000 lines, was a compatriot and kinsman (uncle or cousin) of Herodotus, who may well have known the poem. A poem by Ion of Chios (480s–c. 421 BC) tells of the foundation of his city. Progress in verse seems to be from poems on a single *polis* to an "overarching narrative … concerning several *poleis*" (Bowie 2001: 49–50). It is striking that Panyassis is the first to adapt elegy to a new form, which deals with several cities, while Herodotus seems to have been the first to move from local to pan-Hellenic prose historiography. The inclusion of affairs may, among Greek *poleis*, have been inspired by the Persian Wars, but also seems to have arisen from the typically more cosmopolitan Ionian perspective.

Recent scholarship on the papyri fragments of the choral poet Simonides of Ceos (557/556–468 BC) has highlighted the way in which lyric used historical events for its subject matter. The so-called "new Simonides" verses, usually thought to be from one single poem, praise the Greek victory in the Persian Wars at the battle of Plataea (possibly also at the battles of Salamis and Artemisium), and they do so using Homeric themes and allusions (Boedeker 1998, 2001; Kowerski 2005). The occasion for the first performance may have been the funeral of those fallen at Plataea (Aloni 1994). Simonides' blending of the legendary Greek–Trojan War with the Greek–Persian conflict illustrates the ready association of mythical heroism with recent military events. It is instructive, if not surprising, to contrast Simonides' unalloyed praise with Herodotus' critical account of the Plataean conflict decades later – an account designed to illustrate division within the Greek forces. It is also significant that, like Panyassis' multicity subject matter, Simonides' poem is unique among extant Persian

War poems in including so many allied cities by name (Boedeker 2001). Lyric poetry after the Persian Wars to the time of Herodotus (480–c. 440 BC) evidences an upsurge of interest in contemporary people, places, and events.

Victory odes (*epinikia*) were commissioned choral performances that, like Simonides' elegy for the Plataean warriors, extolled the winners. The genre flourished brilliantly but briefly from around 550 to 450 BC. It conveyed the elite aristocratic ideal of the athlete in the image of a legendary hero and thus presented myth liberally mixed with contemporary family genealogy and achievements. Pindar (518–438 BC) is of course the master of the genre, but Bacchylides of Ceos is the other famous epinician poet, whose uncle Simonides of Ceos had also written *epinikia*. Leslie Kurke sees the *epinikia* generally as systems of exchange of symbolic capital between victor and family and between victor and his *polis*, both sides being engaged in noble gift exchange (Kurke 1991). Christian Mann emphasizes the differing political functions of the odes in each city, as in the case of Hieron of Syracuse's use of seven songs by Pindar and Bacchylides to describe his ideology of rule (Mann 2001: 48–9; 248–73). Though victory odes in part allude to historical events, their primary function is one remote from history's avoidance of bias, namely unqualified praise written for and paid by wealthy and powerful patrons.

Why No Historical Tragedies?

Athenian tragedy began in the 530s BC, or possibly together with democracy, around 508/7 BC, and the vast majority of tragedies dealt with heroic myths. Only three historical dramas are known: Phrynicus' *Capture of Miletus* (492 BC), his *Phoenician Women/Persians* (476 BC [?]), and Aeschylus' *Persians* (472 BC). The reasons for a virtual taboo against historical drama in Athens may include an obvious avoidance of shaming fellow Greeks in a serious, publicly performed genre; conversely, the many oblique commentaries on Greek life embedded in tragedy, famously the allusions to the Areopagus and to Ephialtes' reforms in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*; the fact that Old Comedy (mid- to late fifth century) filled the gap by parodying and ridiculing prominent men; and the coming of age of historical prose in the second half of the fifth century. In short, tragedy, comedy, and history each had different but complementary social functions, at least in Athens. The audience evidently did not seek or accept historical events being performed in the context of tragedy; it highly approved of the lampooning of current public figures in comedy

during the democratic era – and yet the much more limited public treatment of political events in historical texts was perfectly acceptable.

Generally speaking for the fifth century and earlier periods, poetry and prose were considered antithetical in content: prose, including history and oratory, was the normal medium for factual discourse, while drama and other poetry conveyed broader truths. Aristotle's famous passage in the *Poetics* (1451^{b}) asserts that "poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks more of universals, history more of particulars." For Aristotle, the materials of poetry are, according to Stephen Haliwell (1987 ad l.), "approximating to universals" by token of their adherence to probability and necessity, not because they claim gravity and deep truth, or vision, as in a Romantic view of poetry. Behavior and experiences are understood at the level of general or universal categories (more on this in Chapter 5). Yet, in our view, data-based historical discourse could also present universally significant narratives, reflecting on typical human thoughts, feelings, and actions through its selection of crucial events and elaboration of fictionalized speech and detail. Aristotle seems to downplay the deeper meanings of historical narratives for a sharper contrast with poetry.

Falsehood and Fashioning, or Veracity, Verisimilitude, and "Versionification"

History's subject matter comes encumbered with cultural biases and potential agendas that other genres avoided. Ancient history primarily treated the contemporary, and therefore topics much less malleable to treatment: recent individuals, deeds, and the fates of cities. For an audience with its own oral sources, accuracy, or at least plausibility, posed a problem of versions competing for validation and for support by different groups. There arose critical dissonance and the production of variant readings (we might term the process "versionification"), alternative and challenged explanations, and fame and the defamation of individuals, families, citizens, and ethnicities. (German *Fassung* conveys better than our "version" the notion of "framing" or "mounting" as a picture, or "setting" as a gemstone, or "wording" or "formulation" in writing.) In short, the political and social stakes are more immediate and subject to contention. So the historian, unlike the poet or philosopher, must be on guard and highly self-conscious about veracity, not primarily to adhere to some quasi-scientific ideal of objectivity, but to undertake personal responsibility for his own published version of a past involving persons

still alive, interested, and able to gain or lose much from a particular narrative representation. Thucydides saw the historian's problem of bias of reporting a war in which one is involved (1.21), and in public rhetoric Thucydides' Pericles (Th. 2.35) notes the difficulty of balancing praise that will not arouse envy in the audience. (See Flory 1990 on *to muthōdes* in Thucydides 1.22.4 meaning "patriotic storytelling"; also Marincola 1997: 158–75.) "For ancient historians, [Marincola] observes, the opposite of 'true' is 'biased'; and bias is seen as specifically occasioned by favours or injustices (past or anticipated). Even patriotic bias is linked with what one's *patria* gives one" (Walbank 1997: 236).

Rhetoric and History

For the Greeks, history was a branch of rhetoric, not of the more speculative philosophy. Both prose genres relied on clear, direct expression to convey opinions and actual events. Speaking well meant speaking effectively, achieving the pragmatic purpose of persuasion in court or the assembly, exhortation in military affairs, and ceremonial exposition as in a funeral oration. Ancient theorists divided oratory into three types, judicial, deliberative, and epideictic (for "display"), and history has aspects in common mainly with the judicial and the epideictic (in its praise and blame) (Woodman 1988: 95–8). Rhetoric, like history, demands selection for a purpose and claims to be a true and objective account. But, unlike history, rhetoric involves performance for specific occasions, does not confine itself to narratives of past events, and does not espouse preserving the fame of men for eternity. Effective public rhetoric was, of course, a way of life among the Greeks centuries before its formal theory and teaching in the fifth century, as Homer's speeches evidence. Teaching and theory began, legendarily, with Corax and Tisias in mid-fifth-century Sicily and evolved greatly in the hands of Gorgias in the later fifth century, and even more with Plato and Aristotle in the fourth. Chronologically, rhetoric actually matured as a self-conscious art contemporaneously with Herodotus and Thucydides, in the fifth century. But it is impossible to imagine Herodotus presenting the rich and polished speeches of his history without a highly sophisticated evolution of the rhetorical genre in daily practice by the era of the Persian Wars. So the mutual enrichment of rhetorical technique and historical standards of evidence came about simultaneously in the genres, despite the fact that one purported to convey the unvarnished truth and the other was known to be delivered with partisan bias, just to prove a point (Fornara 1983: 170). When we

encounter speeches in ancient historians, we must be aware of several issues that modern scholars confront, specifically three questions debated for each author: truth versus invention (the degree of fidelity to the original argument – leaving aside verbatim reports, which are rare – versus the historian's adding what seemed appropriate in the situation); formal conventions (different types of conventional rhetorical speeches – debates, exhortations, exposition of facts, etc.); and how speeches mix past with present issues (using examples from history, and adopting aspects of former speeches for their own purposes) (Marincola 2007: 118–32; Fornara 1983: 142–68).

The Logographers: From the Silly to the Serious

Modern scholars have long sought to understand the beginnings of historical prose writing prior to Herodotus, in texts that survive today only in sparse fragmentary quotations. (The texts were systematically organized by Felix Jacoby in a multivolume collection, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* [*FGrHist*], which still remains authoritative but is currently being revised by a collective of scholars. Pearson 1939 gives a still useful account of four major figures.) From the sixth to the fifth century, a series of prose authors undertook several different modes of writing about the past: genealogies from heroic times to the present, ethnographies of foreign lands, horographies or local histories recording yearly events in a city-state since its foundation, and chronographies validating time-reckoning methods by correlating events. These authors were given the name logographers (*logographoi*; also *logopoioi* or *logioi*) – that is, "story (or speech) writers" – which was meant to distinguish them from the poets. Each subgenre had its political motives: local elite families sought validation of their lineage; cities and their peoples legitimized their origins; non-Greeks were subordinated as less civilized and strange. With Herodotus, these approaches were all united in what we might call history proper, a chronological narrative of men's deeds, usually unified around a defined period or major event.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing in the later first century BC, summarizes the names and subject matters of prominent historians writing before the Peloponnesian War. The reliability of his account in many details has been disputed, but David Toye has demonstrated that Dionysius seems mainly correct, and Jacoby mistaken in claiming that the aim of logographers is to describe heroic genealogies and early histories of an ethnos or city, and not strictly to establish a general chronology of

Hellenic history (Toye 1995). The passage is quotable, as it gives a valuable ancient summary of the subjects of history prior to Thucydides' work around 400 BC:

> All of these showed a like bent in their choice of subjects and there was little difference in their ability. Some wrote treatises dealing with Greek history and others dealt with non-Greek history. They did not blend these histories [into one work], but subdivided them by nations and cities and gave a separate account of each, keeping in view one single and unwavering subject, that of bringing to the common knowledge of all whatever records or traditions were to be found among the natives of the individual nationalities or states, whether recorded in places sacred or profane, and to deliver these just as they received them without addition or subtraction, rejecting not even the legends which had been believed for many generations nor dramatic tales which seem to men of the present time to have a large measure of silliness. (D.H. *Th.* 5, Pritchett, adapted)

Dionysius highlights aspects still generally considered characteristic of these earliest historians, their focus on cities or ethnic groups, and their largely uncritical acceptance of traditional tales. What they had achieved was an attempt at reconciling various traditions and inevitably some correction of their sources. Pearson attractively suggests that the logographers' bare quoting of official records may have been for political reasons:

> To glorify and magnify the past, perhaps at the expense of the present, as epic poetry did, was dangerous, if not actually forbidden under the Persian domination. But simply to tell the truth, to describe events as were described in the annals of their cities, could not possibly be considered dangerous or subversive of authority. (Pearson 1939: 16)

Genealogies go back to Homer and the more systematic Hesiod, particularly his *Theogony* and *Catalogue of Women*. Logographers, notably Hecataeus, were concerned with improving the continuity and synchronization of genealogical records with ample criticism of Hesiod. Several important logographers come from Ionia and reflect the intellectual revolution of that region. Hecataeus of Miletus (fl. c. 500 BC) is arguably the most significant of the logographers prior to Herodotus, and the only one cited by name by that later historian. He is the author of works embracing both geographical and genealogical interests, namely *Genealogies* or *Inquiries* (*Geneēlogiai* or *Historiai*) and *Circuit of the Earth* (*Periodos tēs gēs* or *Periodos*). The *Circuit* was, interestingly, in two books, "Europe" and "Asia" (which included Africa), a clockwise journey

around the Mediterranean, perhaps inspiring Herodotus' later ethnographic excursus. Herodotus mentions Hecataeus as a respected Milesian citizen consulted twice by the leaders of the Ionian Revolt (500–494 BC) and wisely warning against it, and once as a traveler to Egypt who describes his ancestry, sixteen generations removed from a divine forefather (Hdt. 5.36, 5.124–6, and 2.143). West 1991 questions the authenticity of these episodes on the basis of their suspiciously literary aptness, but the detail and the proximity in time to Herodotus suggest that they are probably genuine. The encounter in Egypt may reflect Hecataeus' *Genealogies*, debunking stories such as Heracles' labors: Geryon's cattle were fetched from the region of Epirus and not from Iberia or elsewhere, and Cerberus is not a dog, but a poisonous snake retrieved by Heracles (*FGrHist* 1 Hecat. F 26, F 27). The involvement in the Ionian Revolt shows that he was respected by compatriots and engaged in contemporary politics.

Hecataeus' *Genealogies* opens with a self-confident assertion relying on reason and not inspiration: "Hecataeus of Miletus speaks thus. I write what seems to be true; for the Greeks have many tales which, as it appears to me, are absurd" (*FGrHist* 1 F 1, West 1996). The author implicitly critiques a confusing mythical tradition for not applying criteria of selection of the better version; a narration had to be coherent and probable. Hecataeus mistrusted the marvelous and selected sources according to his critical judgement. To judge from Herodotus' story of Hecataeus' willingness to spend temple treasures to fund a navy, he was not a pious devotee of conventional religion either (Hdt. 5.36). In genealogical subject matter, Hecataeus was an heir to Hesiod, but he innovated from the "formalized social past" of the Hesiodic tradition, changing poetry to prose. Hecataeus evidences the stage of "agonistic intertextuality" (a term coined by Assmann 1992: 286–7) in the dynamic between author, predecessor, and topic, as well as between texts, object, and the criteria for assessing the truthfulness of a text. His pointing up of his own agency in writing ("I write," *graphō*) imparts an authority to his prose medium, fixed against other poetic versions, and appeals not to tradition but to a new role of the writer as logographer. Hecataeus' choice of prose might have come from the Milesian scientific prose in service of a new rationality, but it might also have followed the traditionally first prose author, Pherecydes of Syros (c. 544), who wrote on philosophy and mythography, close to a genealogical treatise. Hecataeus' fixing of continuous, written lists of generations allowed the chronological calculation of present generations with the mythic past, and thus linked mythic time with historic time. The antitraditionalist Ionian poet Xenophanes (c. 570–475 BC) opened up critical attitudes to myth and, it has been suggested, he may

have been the catalyst for Hecataeus' undertaking a genealogical revision (following Bertelli's perceptive analysis of Hecataeus, 2001: 67–94, for much of this section; see also Fränkel 1973: 142–7).

Hecataeus may have also led the way by including implicit political commentary in his narrative. Herodotus relates Hecataeus' account of the Athenians "unjustly" expelling the Pelasgians from Attica (Hdt. 6.137; *FGrHist* 1 Hecat. F 127). Hecataeus here seems to sympathize with the "barbarians" against the Athenians. Bertelli suggests that this reconstruction of Athenian–Pelasgian relations is done "in light of the recent [514–506 BC] expulsion of the Pelasgians from Lesbos by Miltiades" and that the historian may be critiquing the Athenian Miltiades' "tyrannical *hybris* against an innocent people." Hecataeus again counters tradition by making Greece a barbarian colony prior to Greek settlement there, "going against the exaltation of Hellenic identity in the Homeric tradition" (*FGrHist* 1 Hecat. F 119; Bertelli 2001: 89). If Bertelli is right, Hecataeus' implicit criticism is extended to matters political, and he is all the more a precursor of Herodotus and Thucydides.

Contemporary with Hecataeus in the late sixth and first half of the fifth century is the logographer Acusilaus of Argos, whose *Genealogies* (also known as *Historiai*, *Inquiries*) covered in three books divine, heroic, and human generations (Fränkel 1973: 347–8). It proceeded from the first man, "Phoroneus," to after the Trojan War and borrowed from conventional epic, without any evidence in the extant fragments of any rationalization or questioning of the received myths. Perhaps not coincidentally, Acusilaus lived far from the Ionian intellectual scene. From Hecataeus' high point around 500 BC we come to a cluster of historians, all from the general Ionian region and all prominent around the time of Herodotus (c. 485–424 BC), men who witnessed the turbulent fifth century. Of the many works attached to Charon of Lampsacus, only two are securely by him: *Chronicles of Lampsacus* (four books) and *Persica* (two books). The fragments of the *Persica* show a less detailed treatment of events than Herodotus' work, but a similar interest in anecdote, legends, and local traditions; they illustrate, for example, the Persian rise to power with Astyages' prophetic dream (*FGrHist* 687b F 4; cf. Hdt. 1.107–8; Meister 1996a; von Fritz 1967: 518–21; Pearson 1939: 139–51). In *Chronicles of Lampsacus* he narrates an amusing tale of how the Cardians were defeated by the commander Naris, who cleverly used flute players to disrupt the enemy cavalry (*FGrHist* 262 F 1 = Ath. 12.520D–F; Fränkel 1973: 348). The *Lydiaca* by Xanthus of Lydia in four books is a history of the Lydian people, possibly to the capture of Sardis by Cyrus. It blended legend sometimes with empirical observation, such as in his provident hypothesis

about marine fossils as evidence of sea-level change (*FGrHist* 765 F 14; von Fritz 1967: 88–9; Pearson 1939: 123). Xanthus' main contribution to advancing historiography beyond Hecataeus and in the direction of Herodotus is, to judge from the fragments, a desire to support mythical narrative with genealogical, linguistic, rationalistic, and scientific arguments (Meister 1996b; Pearson 1939: 109–38; von Fritz 1967: 88–91).

The last historian here from Ionia, Hellanicus of Lesbos (c. 480–395 BC) is said to have written numerous works, groupable as mythographic, ethnographic, and chronographic (or horographic) (Pearson 1939: 152–235; Fornara 1983: 21). Among the third group are two chronological sketches based on archival lists; the *Priestesses of Hera at Argos*, which Thucydides used (Th. 2.2.1; 4.133.2), and the *Carneian Victors* (*Karneionikai*). His most famous chronographic work is *Atthis*, an outline of Attica's history from early times to 404 BC in two books – a work criticized by Thucydides as being done "sketchily and with chronological imprecision" (Th. 1.97.2) on account of its treatment of the *pentēkontaetia* (fifty-year period) between the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War. Recent scholarship has even asserted that the *Atthis* was not a chronicle but a collection of random local tales and genealogy and that the Athenian Androtion (c. 410–340 BC) authored the first *Atthis* genuinely identifiable as a chronicle (Joyce 1999; Harding 1994). One fragment naming Erichthonius as the founder of the Panathenaia and another asserting the Athenian native occupation of Attica both validate civic prestige (*FGrHist* F 39 and F 161). Many of Hellanicus' attested ethnographic titles may actually be reduced to two, one on *Foundations of Peoples and Cities* (*Ktiseis ethnōn kai poleōn*) and one on *Foreign Customs* (*Barbarika nomima*) that included treatment of the Greeks in Asia Minor and of the tribes around them (Pearson 1939: 194–9). He seems also to have written separate works on the Egyptians, the natives of Lesbos, and the Persians, the last covering mythic times to the battle of Salamis. His political stance on Persia cannot be discerned from the fragments, and his methodological sophistication in general in his chronological works is to be doubted. He seems to have written much, but not very well.

Conclusions

The journey from Homer to Hellanicus is not a straight line but an evolution of genres competing and complementing one another, all at the service of audience and authorial interest. In over a century from Hecataeus to Hellanicus, the historical writing of the logographers shows

a swift turn away from the enchanted poetic performance of myth to the rationalizing and organizing principles of a new genre. Challenged by Ionian scientific and philosophical ideas and applying the skepticism and new rationalism of Xenophanes and others to traditional legends, the logographers reworked myths, genealogies, and travelers' tales. But in their obsession with the ever popular topics of myth, logographers gave short shrift to the most fruitful area for prose narrative, namely the events of recent generations, where testimonial evidence and archive promised a richer and more reliable account. The logographers also seemed shy of speeches, as if they were foreign to prose accounts. Herodotus was the first to take on the recent past in full detail. He also first incorporated rhetoric amply into his narrative, clearly drawing upon the traditions of Homeric epic, Athenian drama, and live oratory itself. Logographers seemed still to live under the primacy of a mythical canon and could not quite emerge from it. Hellanicus sought chronological anchors in timelines of priestesses and victors. Like his near contemporary Herodotus, Charon was an artful storyteller of dreams, battles, and the like and employs narrative to describe political movements. Many of these earliest prose historians were prolific in producing smaller, monograph-like studies and they aspired to rationalizing and organizing bodies of legend; but none approached the scale and scope of Herodotus' revolutionary project.

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