

## *Herodotus and Thucydides: “The Fathers” of the Science of the Past*

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### *Abstract*

*Human history began to be enacted with the appearance of the first humans on earth. However, the systematic study of history did not start with our first ancestors. Many ages elapsed before humans learned to pay serious attention to the recovery and reconstruction of the past. The first attempts started in the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and the Chinese worlds, long before the fifth century B.C.E. Nevertheless, Herodotus and Thucydides of ancient Greece, who undertook their studies of the past in the fifth century B.C.E. have been regarded as the founders of the systematic study of the past: Herodotus as “the Father of History”, and Thucydides as “the Father of Scientific History”. The credit for the start of the systematic study of history has been given to these two ancient Greek historiographers due to the fact that until Herodotus’ time, history had been confused or mixed with fables, whereas Thucydides’ achievement lay in his application of the principles of medical science to the reconstruction of the past. Depending exclusively on secondary documents, this study examines the context in which Herodotus and Thucydides reconstructed the past and earned their enviable titles. To be able to do this successfully, the study first briefly reappraises pioneering attempts at the study of history. It then analyses the historical careers of the two historiographers. Finally, the study attempts a justification of the positions of the two giants in history based on the findings of the study.*

**Keywords and Phrases:** Father(s), Greek, Herodotus, History, Historiography, Peloponnesian War(s), Persian Wars, Science, Thucydides.

### **Introduction**

It is acknowledged worldwide that history as a scientific subject of study, distinct from the genealogical or geographical compositions of the earlier chroniclers, such as the Ionians, began with the writings of Herodotus, whom the Roman statesman Cicero called “the Father of History,” and Thucydides, the first “scientific historian”<sup>1</sup> respectively (Caldwell, 1965:252).

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<sup>1</sup> The origin of Thucydides’ title, “The Father of Scientific History”, is not certain, both in terms of who conferred it on him and when the title was bestowed. There is no doubt, however, that it was the scientific approach which he adopted in his reconstruction of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* which made him become the father of scientific history. One of the translators of his work Benjamin Jowett, for example, assert that for displaying philosophical objectivity and impartiality in his study, Thucydides “established himself as the world’s first scientific historian”. See the first page (without page number) of his translation of Thucydides’ work cited in the bibliography.

Herodotus became the first writer to gather his documents systematically, seek to ascertain their veracity, and offer a thoughtful and lively narrative. It was Herodotus who employed the word *historia*, the Greek word for *inquiry* or *research*, to explain how he was providing a record of human development. Herodotus became most noted for the work he produced on the emergence of the Persian Empire, the Persian assault on Greece, and the subsequent Greek triumph. Another great Greek historiographer,<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, who transformed history into a science, is best known for his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, an epic battle waged between Athens and Sparta that occurred during the latter stages of the fifth century B.C.E.<sup>3</sup> Thucydides took extraordinary care to verify the authenticity of the stories he relayed, turning to many key surviving participants on both sides. He also offered remarkable presentations of orations, such as one delivered by Pericles. Certainly, the two historiographers made great contributions to the evolution of history as a subject of serious study. In view of this, it is imperative for us to examine how Herodotus did his work, evaluate the authenticity of his facts, and estimate the kind of achievement he eventually attained. It is equally necessary to evaluate how Thucydides performed his historiographical task, measure the extent to which his work differed from that of Herodotus, and assess the contributions he offered to the historical discipline, making it scientific. This chapter, therefore, examines how Herodotus and Thucydides performed their tasks as historiographers and earned their enviable titles.<sup>4</sup>

### **Methodology and Data Sources**

The nature of a study determines the research design to be used and the documents to be consulted. Hence, the subject of this study dictated the documents to be used. Hence since no living being was a contemporary to the two historiographers, interviews with eyewitnesses could not form part of the research design. Neither could archival documents be used. In effect, the study was largely library-based and depended exclusively on secondary documents. Again, Herodotus' *Histories* could not be accessed for direct observation and review. As a result, all facts on Herodotus were gathered from studies and commentaries done on him. The major works

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<sup>2</sup> See below for the definition or explanation of historiography and historiographer.

<sup>3</sup> This study qualifies dates as B.C.E. ('Before the Common Era') or C.E. ('Common Era'). In practice, B.C.E. refers to the same epoch as B.C. ('Before Christ'), and C.E. refers to the same epoch as A.D. (*Anno Domini*, a Latin term meaning 'in the year of the Lord').

<sup>4</sup> The objective of this study is not to compare how the two *founders*, or *fathers*, of *historical science* handled their topics as historiographers. If it had been so, it would have been appropriate to organise the important elements of their works under themes such as topic or problem of study, objective of the study, methodology and data sources, interpretation of data, style of writing, significance of the study, organisation of the work, and such other significant elements which form important part of the scientific process of research. We have not adopted this approach because the aim of the study, as clearly stated here, is to examine the topics they chose for study, how they handled their problems, and appreciate the contributions they made to the development of history as a subject of study in schools, colleges and universities. Hence, we have considered it expedient to treat the two intellectuals and their works separately for a good understanding and appreciation. Moreover, although they were contemporaries, they did not compose their works at the same time. The differences in time frame implies a possible change in the factors which affect the writing and rewriting of history: new ideas, interpretations, and perceptions; new knowledge; area of interest; perspective of the author; materials or means available; etc. As a result, the aims and means of the two historiographers are too different to allow a common ground for comparison and grading. It is also obvious that Thucydides benefitted from the work of Herodotus.

consulted for data included Elizabeth Vandiver's *Herodotus: The Father of History* (2002); Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, edited by Rex Warner (1966); Mortimer J. Adler and William Gorman's *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. I (1952); Wallace Everett Caldwell's *The Ancient World* (1965); V. Gordon Childe's *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (1934); and Ernst Breisach's *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval & Modern*, (1994). The information gathered from these major studies was supplemented with evidence collected from other works. These works were used because of their relevance to the topic. They provided evidence on the context in which Herodotus and Thucydides approached their studies. The views and conclusions of these studies helped put the study in its proper perspective.

The researcher was aware of the limitations of historical documents, as it is with all documents in all fields of study. He envisaged the likelihood of distortion of facts, exaggeration, understatement and other limitations normally associated with historical documents. The researcher, thus, deemed it necessary to carefully scrutinise and internally and externally critique all the data collected from the available documents in order to present only the accurate and reliable facts. In relating the story, the researcher adopted both the chronological and thematic models. In sum, the study incorporated the hallowed traditions of historical scholarship: rigorous empirical research, systematic analysis of data, and objectivity.

### **A Brief Discussion of the Concept of 'Historiography'**

History,<sup>5</sup> as a body of knowledge, has three parts to it: the event, or the fact; the account of it, or the story; and the means by which the account is prepared, or the fashioning of the account. Among scholars of history, the third aspect is popularly referred to as *historiography*. In reality, this part takes place between the event and the account. For instance, if we state that *history requires the most meticulous research*, we are referring to history, in this sense, as something intermediate between events of the past and the final product or the report on the events as yet incomplete. In this way, we are talking about what the historian does with the facts at his disposal in his attempt to produce an intelligible account of the past. It is a fact that though history, like all other disciplines, has ethics that guide its professionals, no one can tell another person what kind of historian to be at the outset of a career. While professionals in the same domain, historians differ from one another as there are diverse themes and areas of interest in the career; and different historians employ different research techniques in the examination of their facts. Moreover, every generation reconstructs history, and all discard, not entirely though, their predecessors' views. These *variations* or *differences* among historians are what constitute the subject matter of historiographical studies.

Historiography, therefore, refers either to the study of the history or development and methodology of History as a discipline, or to the critical examination of a body of historical work on a specialised topic, such as slavery and the development of racism, imperialism and colonisation, pre-colonial African science and technology, the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian Wars, etc. Furay and Salevouris (1988: 223) define historiography as the study of the way history has been, and is, written, the history of historical writing. They advance that in historiography, what one studies is not the events of the past directly, but rather the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians. *The New Encyclopaedia*

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter One, "What is History", for the meaning of *history*.

*Britannica* (2003: 948–949) defines historiography as the writing of history, especially based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those particulars into a narrative that stands the test of critical methods. In another way, historiography could be explained as the nature of historical writing, in the sense of how the historian, based on his own judgement, treats historical data in order to eventually produce a historical work.

Initially, historiography tended to deal with a succession of books, authors and schools; later, however, it was extended to include the evolution of the ideas or principles and the techniques or methodology associated with the writing of history and the changing attitudes to the question of the nature of history itself (Butterfield, 1968: 464), so that the term now refers to the theory and history of historical writing. Ultimately, it comprises the study of the development of humans' sense for the past, and the various relationships between present generations and their predecessors (Butterfield, 1968: 464), and between the present and the future. In the early modern period, the term *historiography* tended to be used in a more basic sense, to mean simply "the writing of history". *Historiographer*, therefore, meant *historian*.

A.E. Afigbo (1993: 41), in an article entitled "Colonial Historiography", advances that historiography involves four different but closely related kinds of historical activity. The first, he argues, is the discovery and critical analysis of historical sources; the second, is the reconstruction and description of the past on the basis of facts quarried from the discovered sources; the third is the construction on the basis of the ascertained facts, of some general theory which gives meaning and inner logic to the known past, or to most of it; and the fourth is the reflection on the trends and patterns of historical writing. Mortimer J. Adler and William Gorman (1952: 713) agree with Afigbo's evaluation of historiography. They observe that the aims and methods of writing history are discussed by the historian himself. They posit that good historians state more specifically the objectives of their study, the standards of reliability or authenticity by which they determine what is fact, and the principles of interpretation by which they select the most important facts, ordering them according to some hypothesis concerning the meaning of the events reported or reconstructed.

All these observations about historiography and what historiographical studies entail are no doubt geared towards helping people outside the field of history and historiography to understand how the historian or historiographer goes about his work from the outset, the identification and definition of a problem, to the final stage, reporting on the event or giving an account of it. In other words, they are attempts at outlining the steps involved in historical research and writing. Fundamentally, the steps of historical research involve: statement of the problem, or the identification and definition of the problem, which constitutes the subject-matter; review of the relevant existing literature; data collection and analysis (criticism of data); interpretation and synthesis of the refined and selected facts; and writing the report. It is against this background that this study examines how Herodotus and Thucydides carried out their studies as pioneers in historiography.

### **The Study of History in the Pre-Herodotus Era**

The study of history is generally accepted to have begun with Herodotus, through his data collection for and the eventual writing of his work entitled *Historia* or *History*, in the fifth century B.C.E. This view creates the impression that before Herodotus' attempt, no efforts had been made to study and reconstruct the human past. But our knowledge of the human past did

not begin in the fifth century B.C.E. As has been stated, there is evidence of historical records that were produced long before this period.<sup>6</sup> To appreciate the novelty of the task undertaken by Herodotus and Thucydides, and also give credit to their predecessors, or the pioneers of the study of the past, it is appropriate to trace the roots of the evolution of history as a subject of study to the period preceding the era of Herodotus, from where Egyptian, Babylonian and Chinese historiography originated.

The rulers of Egypt, of Babylonia and Assyria, and of the Hittites and the Persians all made attempts to preserve their glorious deeds for posterity in monumental inscriptions. The most important ones also accumulated large archives of ordinary administrative documents and records specially commemorating their achievements. E.B. Fr and Ed (2003: 560) maintain that some 20,000 clay tablets remain from the collections written for Ashurbanipal of Assyria (668–627 B.C.E.). In both Egypt and Babylonia, lists of kings were kept in the temples, and these were sometimes supplemented by brief annals recording the principal events, though the hatred felt by certain rulers for their predecessors led to periodic destructions of older material. In Egypt, written records, primarily compiled in Greek by Manetho, composed under Ptolemy Philadelphus, appeared long before Herodotus' period (Childe, 1934: 4). Certain fragments of much older indigenous Egyptian annals, particularly the so-called Turin Papyrus, were written about 1300 B.C.E., while the Palermo Stone was inscribed some fourteen hundred years earlier (Childe, 1934: 4). In Babylonia, written records, which were inscribed in cuneiform<sup>7</sup> characters on tablets of baked clay together with the Greek compilation of indigenous tradition composed by a Berossus, also appeared long before Herodotus' time, and there are now several tablets drawn up in the latter half of the third millennium B.C.E., that purport to give a list of the cities that from time to time attained hegemony with the names and reigns of their rulers (Childe, 1934: 14). Actually, apart from changes in literary style, there was surprisingly little development over a period of more than 1,000 years in all these types of commemorative records (E.B. Fr and Ed, 2003: 560). The inscriptions and temple records were normally intended to perpetuate the glory of the gods in whose service these rulers had accomplished great deeds.

Ancient China also supplied itself with historians and historical writings from early times. The Chinese, in the eighth century B.C.E., for example, produced the *Spring and Autumn Annals* though it covered the entire year (Barzun and Graff, 1977: 38). This was a day-to-day record. This work was, however, preceded by a collection of notable sayings and moral injunctions to officials that is called *The Book of Documents* or *Book of History*. This earlier record was a more poetic and attractive work.

In Western culture, the same sequence of interests and expression in keeping records about the past is found. It is in this direction that the logographers, mainly Ionians, come to

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<sup>6</sup> These early writer have been described as *logographers*. *Logos* means, among other things, “account” (Vandiver, 2002: 7); a logographer, therefore, means a writer of accounts. Many of these *logographers* came from Ionia, a region just north of Herodotus' own native Caria.

<sup>7</sup> Cuneiform was the first form of writing developed around 4500 B.C.E. by the Sumerians (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: 57). The Sumerians began by using pictures to represent objects or ideas, drawing them on clay with blunt-ended reeds in such a way that the lines appeared to be wedged-shaped, hence cuneiform. Later, the pictures became formalised and came to represent sounds as well (Caldwell, 1965 24). The cuneiform was developed primarily to keep track of business accounts among the traders of Sumeria (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: 57). See page 25 of Caldwell's study for the different types of early writings developed by the most renowned civilisations.

mind. Unfortunately, most of the works of the logographers did not survive, and so their precise nature is hard to determine. What is certain, however, is that these works seem to have fallen into several distinct categories: ethnographical treatises describing the customs of non-Greek peoples; geographical works detailing the places visited on a journey; mythographical works, which attempted to systematise traditional myths; local histories listing events in one particular city, often starting with its foundation; and chronological treatises attempting to work out consistent time reckonings (Vandiver, 2002: 7). Homer's account of the Trojan War, a much richer, more highly organised piece of legendary history, is more popular with most people. Homer's two great epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, are the first works of Greek literature.<sup>8</sup> Both works relate only a part of the story of the Trojan War. *The Iliad* focuses on events that happened in the last year of the war, culminating in the death of Hector. It depicts panoramic battles, warrior values, heroic acts, and interventions by impatient deities. This epic poem examines war, bravery, and honour, focusing on the battles themselves and the personal qualities of the warriors. On the other hand, *The Odyssey* depicts the ten-year travels of Odysseus, a hero who was an ideal ruler, after the Trojan War.<sup>9</sup> These works, the culmination of a centuries-long oral tradition, were probably written down sometime in the eighth century B.C.E. (Vandiver, 2002: 13). They show unmistakable evidence of oral composition.

It is interesting to note that these stories of heroic deeds and individualism became the foundation for Greek education. Greek boys, particularly aristocrats, were schooled in these two classics and committed long passages to memory (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: 163). Each city-state claimed a heroic founder from *The Iliad*, and their nostalgic reverence for the heroic Mycenaean Age gave them a sense of unity, cultural superiority, and tradition. The influence of Homer's works on later Greek literature and society was incalculable. They served as a virtually inexhaustible source of plots and characters; and they also served as sources of quotations and as reference points. For Herodotus, the Homeric epics suggested both the subject matter and the structure of his work. Conversely, it is believed that among the logographers, Hecataeus of Miletus stood out as the most important influence on Herodotus.<sup>10</sup> Hecataeus wrote two major works, neither of which survived. These were *Periodos Gês* (*Journey around the World*) and the *Genealogies* (Vandiver, 2002: 7). The former described the places and peoples encountered on a voyage around the Mediterranean and Black Sea. According to Professor Vandiver, this work was divided into two books, Europe and Asia. It was an attempt to describe the entire known world. The *Genealogies* consisted of at least four books. This work focused on families that claimed a divine ancestor.

It must be noted that historical works produced before Herodotus' work were usually records relating to events in, or close to, the area of the writers (local histories). Herodotus' study, a work regarded as a superb literary art, however, showed a deep curiosity about other peoples and their history. Herodotus' formula ushered in a situation in which subsequent writers sought to extend history beyond local limits and domestic concerns. Meanwhile, it is evident that

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<sup>8</sup> Though the compilation of these works is generally attributed to Homer, they are actually a compilation of legends by many storytellers of the eighth century B.C.E. (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: 163).

<sup>9</sup> Odysseus' life entertained as well as inspired. His experiences, captured in *The Odyssey*, the story of his ten-year trek back to his homeland after fighting with other Mycenaeans at Troy, proved to be the most popular of Greek adventures.

<sup>10</sup> In Herodotus' work, he makes frequent references to Hecataeus, and this justifies the assertion that the latter had enormous influence on the former.

before Herodotus, some attempts were made towards reconstructing aspects of the past. In these attempts, different attitudes were adopted. These attitudes became more identifiable with the first two dominant figures in the development of history as a unique discipline of academic importance, Herodotus and Thucydides.

### **Herodotus: Birth and Life**

Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus in Caria (now Bodrum) in Asia Minor (western Turkey), then part of the Persian Empire. This area was Greek-speaking and culturally Greek (Vandiver, 2002: 4; Caldwell, 1965: 252).<sup>11</sup> Ancient tradition maintains that he was born in 484 B.C.E. and died in 425 (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: I-13; Caldwell, 1965: 252). His family, including his father Lyxes, who was probably from Caria, and his mother, whose name was either Rhaeo or Dryo, was stationed in the upper social strata. Herodotus had one brother, Theodore, and another relative, Panyasis, who was an uncle or a cousin, and an esteemed poet. Herodotus undoubtedly received the liberal education that comfortable Greek citizens did: grammar, gymnastics, and music. When he turned eighteen, he took his place among Halicarnassus's *epebi* or *eirenes*, the young men who were undergoing military training. However, he possibly felt stifled, due to the tyrannical rule that his home city endured under Lygdamis. Thus, he decided to follow the example of Panyasis in becoming a writer. Clearly, he undertook an extensive reading programme poring over the works of Homer, Hesiod, Ovid, Lysistratus, Sappho, Solon, Aesop, Aeschylus, and Pindar, among others. In his work, Herodotus referred particularly to Hecateus, up to that point considered the finest Greek prose writer.

Herodotus was early involved in political troubles. Fearing that Panyasis was engaged in treasonous activities, the despot Lygdamis had him sentenced to death around 457 B.C.E. Herodotus, who apparently shared the political ideas of Panyasis and appeared to be involved in the attempt to overthrow the ruling dynasty, was either exiled from Halicarnassus or left of his own accord as the execution of Panyasis was taking place. Herodotus sailed for the Ionian island of Samos, which was a key component of the Athenian confederacy. His family's comfortable economic status, perhaps coupled with the need to distance himself from Halicarnassus, led to extensive travels, both in Greece and in other lands. Most of those travels were apparently conducted between 464 and 447 B.C.E. Herodotus went through much of Asia Minor and European Greece, visiting islands of the Archipelago-Rhodes, Cyprus, Crete, Italy, Sicily, Sparta, and Athens, among other spots. He travelled from Sardis to Susa, the Persian capital, went to Babylon, and spent considerable time in Egypt, which was at the time largely influenced by Athens. His second home was Athens from which he drew his inspiration. The direction and extent of his travels are not precisely known, but they provided him with valuable firsthand knowledge of virtually the entire ancient Middle East.

Following the overthrow of Lygdamis, an event in which Herodotus may have participated, Halicarnassus became a willing participant in the Athenian confederacy. Herodotus evidently returned to his hometown, where his history was beginning to receive an initial, unfavourable response. That probably convinced him to leave Halicarnassus once again. Hence, in about 447 B.C.E., he moved to Athens, then the center of intellectual life in Greece and the

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<sup>11</sup> The specific dates of birth and death of Herodotus are difficult to determine. Many scholars are not certain on them. Some agree that he was born in 484 B.C.E. However, the year in which he died remains unsettled among many scholars. Some believe that he died in 425 B.C.E. Those who are not certain normally say 'sometime in the 420s B.C.E.' See, for example, Vandiver (2002: 4).

focus of culture in the Greek world. There, Herodotus was treated with great favour, even being awarded the generous sum of ten talents, thanks to a decree by the citizens of that city-state. He won the admiration of most illustrious men of Greece. He was often seen in the company of his friend Sophocles, when he was in Athens. Among the noteworthy intellectual figures to be found in that Greek city-state who were contemporaries of Herodotus were Pericles, Thucydides, Protagoras, Zeno, Olorus, Antiphon, Euripides, and Sophocles. It is reported that Herodotus was very close to Sophocles, Thucydides, and Olorus.

Herodotus decided to leave Athens, where an elevated status was hardly afforded writers, unless they performed other tasks as well. Socrates, for example, was an infantryman; Sophocles commanded naval fleets; and Thucydides served as a general in the Greek army. Again, Herodotus must have been aware that the franchise, so valued by free Greeks, was not easily attained. In view of all this, in 444 or 443 B.C.E., he chose to sail with a group of colonists who established the colony of Thurii in southern Italy, which Pericles championed. Herodotus later referred to himself as Herodotus of Thurii, which included as one of its colonists, the great philosopher, Pythagoras. Herodotus devoted the remainder of his life to the completion of his great work, entitled *Historia*, the Greek word for *inquiry*. It was possibly the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta in 431 B.C.E. that induced Herodotus to construct his story of battles, historical developments, and travels as a full narrative. His main topic was the Persian Wars of 490 and 480–79 B.C.E. Herodotus died at Thurii in 425 B.C.E. (Caldwell, 1965: 252).

### **The Persian Wars (490 and 480–479 B.C.E.) Produce “The Father of History”**

Before attempting to discuss how Herodotus examined his topic, the Persian Wars of 490 B.C.E. and 480–79 B.C.E., it is imperative for us to briefly examine the wars themselves in order to gain insight into these conflicts and to understand the importance Herodotus attached to them. It has been argued that the Greek poleis<sup>12</sup> infrequently united in a common effort, but they did so to defend Greece from the Persians (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998:161). By the sixth century B.C.E., the huge Persian Empire became interested in the lucrative Greek trade along the western coast of modern Turkey, threatening the Ionian cities there. After taking over the smaller nearby kingdom of Lydia in 546 B.C.E., Persia soon encroached on Greeks in the region. Many of the poleis were eventually taken over or were forced to accept pro-Persian governments. The Ionian cities revolted against Persia in 499 B.C.E., calling for aid from their Greek homeland. This conflict initiated long-term hostilities between Greece and Persia. When Persia’s King Darius I invaded Thrace in 490 B.C.E., the Persian Wars (490–479 B.C.E.) began. Some Greek poleis had surrendered to the Persians, but others allied in a common effort to defeat Persian aggression. This brought into existence what is called the *Delian League*, a coalition for the common defence and liberation of any Greek who remained under Persian control. However, not all areas in Greece joined the alliance of poleis against Persia. Greeks rarely came together in political or military unity; each polis fiercely guarded its independence. During these conflicts, the powerful states of Athens and Sparta supplied commanders to lead the Greek alliance. The three major battles of the Persian Wars occurred at Marathon, Thermopylae, and Plataea (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: 161). The last and most significant naval battle, near Salamis, launched the Athenians into naval dominance. Athens soon emerged the leader of the allied effort, the Delian

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<sup>12</sup> *Polis* means city-state; it is the singular form of *poleis*; hence poleis mean city-states.



League. After their defeat in 479 B.C.E., the Persians retreated from the area, and a new era in Greek history unfolded as Athens exploited its leadership role. Hostilities with Persia came to an end in 449 B.C.E. with the signing of peace treaty between the two belligerent powers (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: 161).

It was the Roman statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero who called Herodotus the “Father of History”. Cicero conferred the title on Herodotus because the latter, as shown above, was the first person to carry out a thorough search for facts and attempt fully to describe events of the recent human past and to explain the causes of those events, as well as offer a justification for his reconstruction of the past. After inquiring into his topic, he produced a narrative compilation of his findings into a single volume. Later authors, however, have divided the work into nine parts; that is why the title of the work is often given as *Historiai*, which translates as *Histories*, meaning inquiries or researches.<sup>13</sup> It is not certain when Herodotus started writing the work, but it is believed that the work was probably published<sup>14</sup> sometime in the 420s B.C.E. (Vandiver, 2002: 4).

The *Histories* contain a vast amount of material; their organisation, however, moves clearly toward a culmination in the account of Greece’s victory over Persia in their conflicts. As noted, the *Histories* have been put into nine “books,” or papyrus rolls. The earlier books deal with the customs, legends, history, and traditions of the peoples of the ancient world, including the Lydians, Scythians, Medians, Persians, Assyrians, Egyptians, and the people of Thrace. The last three books describe the armed conflicts between Greece and Persia in the early fifth century B.C.E. Book I outlines the beginnings of the East-West conflict. Herodotus traces the conflict’s origins to the Trojan War and, in more recent history, to the subjugation of Ionia by Croesus, king of Lydia. He then describes the rise of Cyrus the Great and the Persian Empire. This book is complex, containing several subsidiary stories. Books II and III continue the description of the Persian Empire and its conquests. Book II focuses on Egypt, which was brought into the Persian Empire by Cyrus’ son Cambyses (Vandiver, 2002: 27). Book III concentrates on the accession and rule of Cambyses’ successor, Darius. Book IV examines Darius’ campaigns against Scythia and Libya and contains ethnographical material on those two nations. Book V brings the narrative closer to the eventual conflict of Greece and Persia by describing the Ionian Revolt. The Greek-speaking city-states of Ionia revolted against Persian rule in 499–494 B.C.E. Athens lent aid to the Ionian cities, and this attracted Darius’ attention and enmity to the Athenians. Book VI begins the narrative of the Persian Wars by describing Darius’ invasion of Greece in 490 B.C.E. and his troops’ defeat at the Battle of Marathon. Books VII through IX, the culmination of the *Histories*, focus on the second Persian invasion of Greece, under the leadership of Darius’ son Xerxes. Book VII details Xerxes’ preparations and journey to Greece, includes the narrative of the Battle of Thermopylae, and begins the description of the Battle of Artemisium. Book VIII continues the narrative of Artemisium and culminates in the account of

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<sup>13</sup> Herodotus’ book begins: “These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus”; and what follows is a series of reports for oral delivery. See Barzun and Graff (1977: 39).

<sup>14</sup> Using the term *published* here creates some confusion. Many scholars and studies maintain that the *Histories* were published in the fifth century B.C.E. The fourth word in the opening sentence of the work *apodexis*, which Professor Elizabeth Vandiver (2002: 8) considers as the “subject of the sentence”, has been translated as *publication*. To talk of publication as far back as the fifth century B.C.E. is, however, anachronistic. Moreover, it is accepted that Herodotus’ work was almost definitely “shown forth” through oral recitations, and so were the works of other writers at the time.

the crucial naval Battle of Salamis. Book IX concludes the *Histories* by describing the Battles of Plataea and Mycale and the Persians' eventual retreat. Thus, the *Histories* move from remote antiquity to the recent past, from a broad sweeping portrait of foreign lands and peoples to specific spots in Greece, and from broad ethnographical and cultural descriptions to fine details of battle.

In the *Histories*, Herodotus provides information about ancient Greece, North Africa, and the Middle East, based on his observations of the different peoples he encountered and on his studying of the military history of the places he visited. In these studies, the development of civilisation moves inevitably toward a great confrontation between Persia and Greece, which are presented as the centers of Eastern and Western cultures respectively. Indeed, he envisages the war as an episode in the conflict between East and West. Accordingly, he traces the background of these struggles in the sixth century B.C.E., proceeds to a description of the lands which were under the Persian Empire, and writes an account of the war itself. Included in the work are descriptions of landscapes and the people who inhabited them, as well as climatic factors. In addition, Herodotus discusses the history of the people of Greece, examining their colonies, political machinations, wars, religion, and more.

Herodotus' information was derived in part from the works of predecessors, meaning that Herodotus relied on written accounts for background knowledge. Information gathered from existing literature was widely supplemented with knowledge that he had gained from his own extensive travels, which also means that Herodotus cross-checked the observations made in written accounts with the accounts of eye-witnesses in oral form (Alagoa, 1993: 4; Vandiver, 2002: 11). He enriches his work by also collecting a vast amount of information from other historical sources. This included physical remains such as art objects, language, ethnographic information, and geographical accounts which he then joined to the story of the Persian Wars with its different focus (Breisach, 1994: 19–20). In relation to foreign traditions, Herodotus' research methodology was to record the traditions of the various nations just as he heard them related to him. In dealing with different traditions, he mentions the problem of accuracy and evidence on a number of occasions:

So far the Egyptians themselves have been my authority; but in what follows I shall relate what other people, too, are willing to accept in the history of this country, with a few points, added from my own observation (cited in Breisach, 1994: 19).

He, however, interprets all traditions in the light of direct observation and research, and the views he forms from them (Alagoa, 1993: 4). Although he is sometimes inaccurate, he is eminently fair-minded and is generally careful to separate plausible reports from questionable ones. He feels it his duty to inquire and then to report what he learns, whether he himself believes it or not. When opinions conflict, he presents them all; for he seems satisfied to let the reader decide between conflicting accounts. Only in few cases does he use his own judgement to indicate which account was more likely (Adler and Gorman, 1952: 713). In doing this, Herodotus more often shows good judgement: "At this point I find myself compelled to express an opinion which I know most people will object to; nevertheless, as I believe it to be true, I will not suppress it" (cited in Breisach, 1994: 19). In the treatment of events and personalities, he

shows, for the most part, an admirable balance, except perhaps in the case of Cleon, against whom he is prejudiced.

Admittedly, Herodotus offers explanation to certain historical phenomena by formulating and testing hypotheses to direct his search for the order among the facts he was dealing with (Cohen and Nagel, 1936: 197–204).<sup>15</sup> Interested in the problem of causation and with a mind freed from superstition by his education, he brushes aside traditional views. Earthquakes and eclipses are to him not divine portents but natural phenomena. Herodotus disregards oracles and omens of supernatural interference and found his causes in the actions of humans and in the relation of events. To him, the causes of the wars between the Persian invaders and the Greek city-states are: mischief-making exiles at the Persian court who urged the Persian ruler Xerxes to wage war against the Greeks; fraudulent oracles; a peculiar sense of duty which told Xerxes that he must add to Persian power; the hope for war booty and for control of “Greek wealth”; revenge for Athens’ support of the Ionian revolt against Persian rule; and Xerxes’ vague ambition “that the sun will not look down upon any land beyond the boundaries of what is ours” (Breisach, 1994: 15). Eventually, Xerxes’ grandiose ambition also provokes the Persian catastrophe by arousing the gods, who frowned upon excessive power. Essentially, Herodotus identified the causes of the Persian Wars in human motives.

He fails, however, to emphasise sufficiently those underlying social and economic elements in history upon which present-day historians lay such stress. His comments on the actions of people under strain of war are, nevertheless, full of wise observations. Again, although freed by the enlightenment of his generation from much of the supernaturalism of his predecessors, he still believes firmly in the justice of the gods and pays due respect to the gods of other lands (Caldwell, 1965: 252). But above all, he believes in the happiness of the individual as a citizen, an individual not so arrogant as to offend the deity and bring down vengeance upon himself, but mindful of the gods and of the limitations which they placed on all human achievements. His ideal of human happiness is best illustrated by the story he tells of Solon’s visit to Croesus. When Croesus asked Solon whom he deemed to be the happiest of men, the latter mentioned Tellus of Athens. Solon considered Tellus the happiest of all men because he lived in a well-governed commonwealth and had sons who were virtuous and good; and he saw children born to them all and all surviving. The other reason for which Solon regarded Tellus happy was that he ended his life in a glorious manner; for coming to the assistance of the Athenians in a battle with their neighbours near Eleusis, he put the enemy to flight and died nobly. The Athenians buried him at the public charge in the place where he fell and honoured him greatly (Caldwell, 1965: 252–253).

The *Histories* may be the first known creative work to be written in prose. Both ancient and modern critics have paid tribute to its grandeur of design and to its frank, lucid, and delightfully anecdotal style. In the past several decades, Herodotus has been lauded as a pioneer in history, ethnography, and anthropology.<sup>16</sup> His lyrical style, acknowledged by contemporaries

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<sup>15</sup> In their *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (1934), Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel examine in detail how Herodotus formulated hypotheses and tested them in his search for connections between facts and his rejection of untenable theories. See Chapter XI, especially pages 197–204, of their work for the details.

<sup>16</sup> This why some scholars maintain that Herodotus could also be called the “Father of Ethnography,” the “Father of Anthropology,” or even the “Father of Travelogues”. See, for example, Vandiver, 2002: 5). Barzun and Graff (1977: 192) have also described Herodotus as a sociologist, a demographer, and even a

and later generations alike, continues to be appreciated. While Cicero termed his prose “copious and polished”, Quintilian called it “sweet, pure and flowing”. An ancient critic also said in praise of Herodotus: “He takes you along and turns hearing into sight” (Barzun and Graff, 1977: 40). Herodotus demonstrates a wide knowledge of Greek literature and contemporary rational thought. The universe, he believed, is ruled by Fate and Chance, and nothing is stable in human affairs. Moral choice is still important, however, since the gods punish the arrogant. This attempt to draw moral lessons from the study of great events formed the basis of the Greek and Roman historiographical tradition, of which Herodotus is rightly regarded as the founder. Obviously, though he had political and cultural interests too, Herodotus cherished moral history more than anything because he believed that notable lives and deeds have permanent value as moral teachings (Barzun and Graff, 1977: 46). He was a unique story-teller, and the greatest charm of his book is to be found in the many digressions when he turns aside to tell a story. And the fact that he was the first to weave his researches into a continuous and shapely narrative for readers’ consumption is what justifies his ancient title of *Father of History* (Barzun and Graff, 1977: 39).

Every good historical work must serve a purpose. At the outset, Herodotus explains that he undertook the study “in the hope of preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the Barbarians<sup>17</sup> from losing their due meed of glory” (Adler and Gorman, 1952: 713; Caldwell, 1965: 252). In effect, the *Histories* provide the initial history produced by the Western world. Herodotus’ description of Egypt remained a major source of the West’s image of this important civilisation until the end of the eighteenth century, when Napoleon Bonaparte’s Egyptian expedition enabled French archaeologists and historians ‘rediscover’ Egypt (Lim and Smith, 2003: 49). Shortly after its publication, the work was considered path-breaking. Writers had previously produced chronicles and epic tales, in their efforts to record the past. However, Herodotus is the first to examine the past in a philosophical fashion and to conduct research to track human behaviour. Meanwhile, it should be noted that one of the important questions in the study of Herodotus and his *Histories* is whether or not the work is a finished work. Some scholars have argued that he left the work unfinished when he died. The balance of modern scholarly opinion, however, is that the work is a finished whole and that Herodotus intended for it to end as it does, with an anecdote about the great Persian king Cyrus. Interestingly, the *Histories* proved highly controversial throughout the ancient era, and its author was condemned for his purported biases and inaccuracies.

### **Thucydides: Birth and Life**

Described as an ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ historian by Rex Warner (1966: 7), Thucydides was born around 460 B.C.E. and died in 400 B.C.E. (Caldwell, 1965: 253; Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998: I-29).<sup>18</sup> He was born into a prominent Athenian family, which owned gold mines at Scape

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psychologist. The last description is based on the fact that in Book II, Herodotus reports the experiment by which Psammetichus tried to find out which language an untaught child would speak. Considering all these, Herodotus was generally a social scientist.

<sup>17</sup> In Greek, the term *barbarian* simply meant *foreigner*. In view of this, when Herodotus said that he wanted to record great and astonishing deeds by Greeks and *barbarians*, he was not necessarily implying that those non-Greeks were in any way uncivilized or savage.

<sup>18</sup> Like Herodotus, Thucydides’ dates of birth and death remain controversial. Scholars like Caldwell and Fields, Barber and Riggs agree that Thucydides was born in 460 B.C.E.; yet others, including Warner

Hyde on the Thracian coast opposite Thasos. His father Olorus was related to Cimon, the great Athenian general and statesman whom Pericles was to oppose and to supplant as the outstanding political personage in Athens (Hadas, 1960: 9). Family wealth afforded Thucydides two dwelling places: one in Athens and the other in Thrace. Moreover, the family gold mines undoubtedly led to Thucydides's frequent stays in Thrace, where he operated a gold mine. In addition, the connections his relatives possessed enabled him to meet powerful men who were shaping history in their own fashion. During his early schooling, Thucydides was, without doubt, educated by Sophists, who taught rhetoric, philosophy, and critical thinking.

Prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian Wars in 431 B.C.E., Thucydides evidently played no major role in Athenian political affairs. However, considering his appointment in 424 B.C.E. as a *strategos* or general in the Athenian military, there is the likelihood that even as a young man, Thucydides must have had some reputation for military and political competence. That he belonged to the same highly regarded and politically conservative family as Cimon is also an indication that Thucydides must have been nurtured in the conservative tradition which opposed the growing power of the democracy and the programme of Pericles. His highly approval of Pericles, however, has been regarded as a sign of acute political awareness and independent judgement (Hadas, 1960: 10).<sup>19</sup>

When the Peloponnesian Wars broke out in 431 B.C.E., Thucydides was a young man, and it is likely that he participated in some of the early actions of the conflicts. In the second year of the wars, the plague swept through Athens, afflicted many citizens of Athens and decimated the city. Thucydides himself caught the disease some time between 430 and 427 B.C.E. and recovered from it (Warner, 1966: 8). Later, he indicates that "he had seen others suffer" and had apparently helped minister to his fellow citizens. In 424 B.C.E., when Thucydides was named a general in the Athenian army, he was charged with operations in Thrace and in particular with the defence of Athenian colony of Amphipolis (Hadas, 1960: 9; Warner, 1966: 8). With his small squadron of ships, Thucydides arrived too late to save Amphipolis from the energetic advance of and skillful diplomacy of the Spartan commander Brasidas, though he succeeded in securing the near-by port of Eion and defended it against Brasidas' attacks. For his failure to save Amphipolis, however, Thucydides suffered condemnation, probably instigated by Cleon, and exiled in 424 B.C.E. for a period of seven years, but he did not return to Athens until twenty years later when all people banished were amnestied following the defeat of Athens (Warner, 1966: 8).

The exile ended Thucydides' own part in the conflict. How Thucydides spent his years in exile, and at what times the various parts of the *History of Peloponnesian War* were composed are not certain. It is certain, however, that after his banishment, he was free to consort with both

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(1966: 8) and Hadas (1963: 10), maintain that he was born rather in 455 B.C.E. In the works of earlier writers, Herodotus is said to have been born in 470 B.C.E. based principally on the ancient assumption that a man's most important work is done when he reaches his peak, which is the age of forty (40 years) (Hadas, 1960: 10). The date of his death, too, is not clear. Caldwell (1965: 253) maintains Thucydides dies in 395 B.C.E., whereas Hadas (p. 10), Fields, Barber and Riggs (1998: I-29) and Warner (p. 8) advance that he died in 400 B.C.E. Even some of the scholars, including Hadas (p. 10), who accept that Thucydides died in 400 B.C.E. do so on the grounds that in Herodotus' *Histories* there are no allusions to events in the fourth century in passages where one might reasonably expect them.

<sup>19</sup> Some critics suggest that Thucydides wrote his work largely to praise Pericles and justify his policy. See Hadas (1966: 10).

Peloponnesians and Athenians and had leisure for his inquiries. Accordingly, for much of the remainder of the war, as he resided at his property in Thrace, Thucydides determined to write about the conflict. At the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides returned to Athens for a brief period, before Lysander's takeover. He then retired to his estate in Thrace, remaining there until his death, continuing to work on his grand history of the war that had so crippled the great Greek city-states. It has been asserted that Thucydides had intended to carry his work down to 404 B.C.E., but the work stops short at the winter of 411 B.C.E. (Warner, 1966: 8). He apparently died around 400 B.C.E., at which point his remains were sent to Athens and placed in the vault of Cimon's family. His sudden death explains why his history ends abruptly in 411 B.C.E., seven years before the war came to a close.

### **The Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 B.C.E.) Produce “the Father of Scientific History”**

Thucydides' topic was the Peloponnesian Wars, and as in the case of Herodotus, a preliminary examination and understanding of the Peloponnesian Wars are prerequisite to an understanding of Thucydides' historiography of the wars. The Peloponnesian Wars were a purely Greek affair. The two major antagonists in the Peloponnesian Wars were Athens and Sparta. Athens dominated the Delian League, which developed in 478 B.C.E. (Vandiver, 2002: 22) after the Greek victory over Persia in 479 B.C.E. for the common defence of Greeks against any future Persian attack. Athens forced each polis to join the coalition on its liberation from Persia. She also controlled the treasury, which had been established for running the League. The controllers, or treasurers, of the treasury which was housed on the island of Delos were Athenians. The future of Athenian power seemed secure when the treasury was moved from Delos to Athens in 454 B.C.E. (Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998; 161; Vandiver, 2002: 22). Athens had been severely damaged in the Persian Wars, and the money used to rebuild the city came from the league's funds. At the same time, Athens enjoyed an unprecedented commercial expansion and a corresponding economic growth, due principally to Athenian access to all ports.<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, democratic Athens increasingly meddled in the political affairs of the poleis and dominated the Greek economy. In fact, Athens became the controller of hundred and fifty other poleis, which paid tribute in return for League protection (Vandiver, 2002: 22). This Athenian dominance of the political and economic lives of the poleis led to widespread rebellion among the poleis. What the other League members even found more annoying was that any threat of withdrawal from the League was met with force, and allies were treated as subjects. The allies, realising that they were actually subjects of Athenian interests, turned to rebellion. Sparta and its allies, mainly from the more rural areas, had resisted Athenian hegemony and had not joined the Delian League. Sparta took this opportunity to destroy Athenian power and led the rebellion against Athens, thereby initiating the conflicts. The wars were fought in two major periods, 431–421 B.C.E., and 415–404 B.C.E., with an uneasy truce between them. By 404 B.C.E., Athens had been defeated, its walls demolished and its citizenry demoralised. Unconditional surrender placed the city under the control of a tyrant backed by Sparta, but Athens overthrew the tyrant and regained its independence. Democracy finally returned to Athens by the winter of 403–402 B.C.E. The end of the Peloponnesian Wars, however, did not mean peace for Greece. Skirmishes between poleis continued for a generation, which even saw

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<sup>20</sup> Athens' wealth, political power, and democratic system of government were undoubtedly among the motivating factors behind the astonishing flowering of Athenian culture in the fifth century B.C.E. (Vandiver, 2002: 23).

the Persian emperor arbitrate local disputes. This implied that although Persian control of Greece had been overthrown, there was still some kind of relationship between Persia and Greece which allowed Persian ‘interference’ in the affairs of the Greek poleis. The tradition of Greek independence discouraged Greece from uniting politically and militarily, and the history of Greece from this period until the rise of Macedonia in the north is the history of each individual polis.

It is believed that Thucydides died while still at work on his book, and that some author(s) must have continued, or revised, the work.<sup>21</sup> This is because the last book breaks off in the middle of a paragraph and contains none of the speeches Thucydides would have included. Various suggestions have then been offered in response to the question of why passages in the preface and elsewhere can envisage events down to 404 B.C.E. The *History of the Peloponnesian War*, as a whole, is divided into eight books.<sup>22</sup> Book I is introductory. Books II, III, IV, and part of V cover the Archidamian War, which was concluded by the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C.E.; the rest of Book V is on the interval of peace. Book VI and VII deal with the Sicilian expedition; and the incomplete Book VIII examines the Deceleian War. It has been suggested that Thucydides may have laid a later book down unfinished to work on an earlier one; or that the whole work was revised and references to later events added by some later writer; or that the whole study was done by Thucydides in the order we have, kept his work by him constantly, and continually revised the earlier portions while he worked on the later.

Thucydides indicates in the first sentence of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* that he began to write about the war at its very beginning because he felt it was going to be great and memorable above all wars. He believes that no other event in the recorded history of Greece, not even the Trojan War or the Persian Wars, could match the importance of the Peloponnesian Wars. Athens and Sparta were vitally important Greek city-states, with highly contrasting worldviews. The intellectual and artistic influence of Athens on other Greek cities was considerable, as was Sparta’s martial emphasis. In addition, non-Hellenic peoples in Thrace, Macedonia, Epirus, Sicily, and the Persian Empire were affected by political and cultural developments in Greece. History to Thucydides was primarily a useful subject. His object is not only to reconstruct the history of the war itself, but also to provide lessons for future generations. He believes a faithful history would serve those who desire an exact knowledge of the past as a key to the future, which would in all probability, he believed, repeat or resemble the past. In consequence, his work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of the immediate public, but is done to last forever (Warner, 1966: 24–25).

To achieve his ends, Thucydides painstakingly gathered evidence and interviewed participants. Like, Herodotus before him, he travelled extensively, and readily visited allies of the warring parties. He visited and studied the scenes of events, talked with eyewitnesses, copied

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<sup>21</sup> Xenophon, author of the *Hellenica*, has been identified as the likeliest reviser of Thucydides’ work. Xenophon’s work starts with the completion of Thucydides’ unfinished last paragraph, and Xenophon’s first two books, which continue the story from 411 B.C.E down to 404 B.C.E., have been considered as based on notes left by Thucydides. Theopompus and Cratippus are two other historians known to have written continuations to Thucydides’ work; and the papyrus *Hellenica* of Oxyrhynchus, which does not bear the name of its author, is yet another continuation of Thucydides’ work. Refer to Hadas (1960: 11) for the details.

<sup>22</sup> There are even proofs of an alternative division of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* into thirteen books. See page 11 of Hadas’ study.

documents, and used all available evidence to reach conclusions and to be able to state what actually happened. In pursuit of the scientific approach, he made a greater effort to determine the facts (Adler and Gorman, 1952: 713). Thucydides hoped to surpass the contributions of previous students of Greek history, including Homer and Herodotus. Epic poets like Homer had waxed eloquent about their subjects, but had deliberately welded together fable and fact. The Ionian prose writers or chroniclers, seeking a popular audience, had uncritically sought to record tales of legend. Thucydides, however, was influenced by the science of the time and tried to apply the principles and methods of Hippocratic medicine to politics, so that everything could be covered by rational explanation (Butterfield, 1968: 468). He refused to blame the gods or fate for historical events.

In contrast to Herodotus, whom Thucydides apparently lumped with the Ionian chroniclers, he makes every effort to ascertain the veracity of the materials he obtained. Of course, he deserves the title “father of scientific history”, because regarding his factual reporting of the events of the war, he makes it a principle not to record the first story that he accesses. He dislikes the situation whereby people are unwilling to take enough pains “in the investigation of truth, accepting readily the first story that comes to hand” (cited in Adler and Gorman, 1952: 714). Neither does he allow himself to be guided by his own general impressions. Events that he reports were those at which he was personally present or those which he heard from eye-witnesses, whose reports he cross-checked with as much thoroughness as possible. And instead of merely reporting speeches, Thucydides writes them out in full in his own words. He acknowledges this practice frankly:

I have made use of set of speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation (Warner, 1966: 24).

The best known of these is the Funeral Oration delivered by Pericles in honour of those who had perished on the Athenian side. Thucydides used these speeches to communicate what we should regard as the historian’s explanations of facts or situations, or of the motives and ideas behind human actions (Butterfield, 1968: 468). Admittedly, it is Thucydides’ concern for accuracy and his detachment which set him apart from his predecessors who wrote to implant particular political attitudes and beliefs.

Thucydides clearly draws his own interpretations about the origins of the conflict and how it unfolded, and expresses his viewpoint. For example, he expresses the view that the war was a disastrous affair, resulting from “love of power operating through greed and through personal ambition.” Another instance where Thucydides expresses his own point of view is found in his discussion of the conquest of Melos. His “Melian dialogue” conveys Thucydides’ perception that “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.” In presenting his history, Thucydides attempts to make it readable. He generally succeeds, as when he offers graphic descriptions of the plague’s impact on Athens or his account



of the fateful Sicilian campaign. In view of the conscientious attitude he adopts towards the treatment of his topic, he is convinced that his conclusions “may safely be relied on”, undisturbed “either by the lays of a poet displaying the exaggeration of his craft, or by the compositions of the chroniclers which are attractive at truth’s expense” (cited in Adler and Gorman, 1952: 714).

Thucydides combines the concern for the particular and concern for the general, the approaches of the chronicler and the philosopher respectively. His combination of the two approaches, to their mutual enrichment, is said to be the greatest hallmark of his study (Hadas, 1960: 12). The *History of the Peloponnesian War* seems to many readers more than an account of a war between two ancient Greek city-states. Generally, as Rex Warner (1966: 8) has argued, the study is an account of war itself, or of all wars where any kind of principles are involved. Consequently, the work is not only fascinating in itself but must also be judged useful by all who believe that it is possible to learn something from the experiences of the past. It provides and insightful, even modern, interpretation of how distinctive cultures come into being, showing how human societies throughout history have formed their own identities on the basis of environmental factors and contact with other peoples. Thucydides reveals to us the drama and the tragedy of a struggle which was fought out not only on the material plane but also on the moral plane. He gives his readers, in full detail and with conscientious accuracy, both what happened in the course of one particular significant war and an understanding of the permanent patterns of human reaction to types of military and political challenges. Thucydides’ work is also instructive on the fact that humans repeat themselves; their motivations for action and their responses to the actions of others are sufficiently constant for their political conduct to be subsumed under general laws (Hadas, 1960: 13). The facts he conveys on the causes and symptoms of the plague that hit Athens are equally valuable assets to contemporary society. They provide adequate knowledge of both the symptoms physical and psychical, and the effects on human outlooks and on their responses to political and military behaviour. As Hadas (1960: 13) maintains, the account of the particular plague constitutes an increment in our knowledge of history, but the knowledge is made universal and, therefore, philosophical, and, as a result, constitutes an increment to our wisdom.

Thucydides has been compared with Hippocrates and his followers, the Hippocratics, and described as both scientists and philosophers. Elsewhere, he is described as both a master of scientific history and of a literary style that showed a keen sense of dramatic values. His descriptions of the plague in Athens and of the retreat from Syracuse are marvels of exposition. Some critics think that the work was composed as a prose tragedy under the spell of the great dramatists. Ernst Breisach (1994: 17) maintains that it was Thucydides who developed the most expressive and precise prose style. His work is, in fact, an artistic distillation in selection and distribution of emphasis to construct a grand organic rhythm and in the gradations of his own austere style. His relentless search for the essence of history, rather than for the merely interesting detail, found its stylistic counterpart in a sparse, rhythmic prose which had an impact on his audience like that of poetry.

By largely eliminating divine causality in his account of the war between Athens and Sparta, Thucydides established a rationalistic element which set a precedent for subsequent Western historical writings. He was also the first to distinguish between cause and immediate origins of an event. His work was enthusiastically read by Demosthenes, while Cicero and Quintilian were reportedly influenced by it as well. In the Roman period, Thucydides was

recognised as an authentic classic. Literary critics considered him the peer of Demosthenes and commented on his style at length. Both Greek and Latin historians imitated Thucydides; and compilers, such as Plutarch in his biographies and Diodorus Siculus in his universal history, relied so much on Thucydides account of the Peloponnesian Wars for historical data (Hadas, 1960: 11–12). The *History of the Peloponnesian War* is, indeed, an exemplary historical work that is still widely admired and read today.

## **Conclusion**

The study has shown the attempts made by earlier writers to recover and reconstruct the human past before the fifth century B.C.E. It has also examined how Herodotus and Thucydides composed their studies and earned their prestigious positions in historiography. The earlier Egyptian, Babylonian, Chinese and other chroniclers deserve our commendation for being the pioneers in the field of history. However, considering that Herodotus and Thucydides attached more seriousness to their studies and made strenuous efforts to gather all the necessary and sufficient evidence before composing their works, making all attempts to ensure objectivity, and recording their works in a more intelligible manner, one would be convinced that the two ancient historiographers actually laid the foundations for historical studies. Thus, in different ways, the two founded the study of history: Herodotus is “The Father of History” because he made the first major attempt at studying and recording the past in great detail, and Thucydides is “The Father of Scientific History” because he was the first to introduce the scientific principles of his times into the study and writing of history. Hence, whenever and wherever students and teachers of history meet to celebrate their noble discipline, they must always ‘pay homage’ to Herodotus and Thucydides for their great efforts towards the founding History.

It must be appreciated, however, that other peoples and institutions, in the course of time, also made enormous impact on the development of History as a subject. Individuals like St. Augustine and Orosius recorded great events like historians, but they interpreted catastrophes as punishment by God. The Middle Ages (C.E. 500–1450) added to the development of History. At this time, emphasis was placed more on monarchical or political history. In the next generation, Voltaire enlarged the scope of hitherto monarchical history by showing in his *Essay on the Manners and Customs of Nations* (1756) that aspects of civilised life other than battles and kings had importance and could interest the general public. More and more individuals continued to add their efforts to the growth of History, particularly in the nineteenth century. It is important to state, however, that the study of history as an academic discipline, a formal field of study in universities, colleges, schools and other centres of learning, began in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with Leopold von Ranke, a nineteenth century German historian. Ranke is often regarded as “the father of modern history”, that is, History as an academic discipline (Spielvogel, 1999: BH-2). He created techniques for the critical analysis of documents and began to use formal courses in universities to train new historians.

In Africa, the systematic study of history was introduced into the school curriculum during the colonial period. At this time, however, the kind of history students were taught was not that of African history, but, rather, the names of European kings and queens, rivers and mountains in Europe, and so forth. Essentially, students were not taught anything about the African past due mainly to the wrong assumption that Africa had no history. It was in an attempt to correct the situation that African and Africanist historians emerged to put the records straight. Meanwhile, historians of all schools of thought, and of all countries today usually make

references to Herodotus and Thucydides in their studies because of the fact that no historian can examine the problem of the development of History as a subject without appreciating the good works of these two giants in the science of the past.

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