CHAPTER 3

Duris of Samos and a Herodotean Model for Writing History

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It is a curious fact of ancient Greek historical writing that our best-known examples stand at the very head of the tradition.\(^1\) Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon wrote their works between roughly 440 and 355 BC and established the goal of the historian which would remain in place for over two millennia: to describe and explain political and military events of the (recent) past. Their place of honour was already awarded in antiquity.\(^2\) Five hundred years later, in an essay On the Malice of Herodotus, Plutarch could still be moved to respond angrily to Herodotus' portrayal of the Boeotians and other Greeks; six hundred years out, Arrian adopted Xenophon as an authorial persona, giving his history of Alexander the same title (Anabasis) and number of books (seven) as Xenophon's most famous work, and perhaps even adding the latter's name to his own; and almost a full millennium after Thucydides died, Procopius—a high-ranking official of the Eastern Roman Empire—wrote a history of Justinian's wars in which he borrowed scenes, speeches, and methods from his already ancient predecessor.\(^3\)

Each of the later works just mentioned survives complete, allowing us to judge the contribution of the founders of the genre. But our ability to trace the development of Greek historiography in more detailed fashion is severely hampered by the fragmentary nature of the evidence. After Xenophon, our next chance to read a Greek historian's work in full comes with the Jewish

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\(^2\) They did not, of course, arise ex nihilo. On the prose predecessors and contemporaries of Herodotus, see Fowler (2006) and (1996); Thomas (2000) and Raafflaub (2002a) for the intellectual background more broadly. Grethlein (2010) examines the wider intellectual milieu in which both Herodotus and Thucydides operated, including poetry and oratory.

author Josephus in the late 1st century AD. Some lengthy, continuous narratives from the intervening period survive—Polybius, Diodorus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus—but these represent only a small fraction of what once existed. Hermann Strasburger estimated that we possess only one-fortieth (2.5 percent) of all the Greek historical writing produced in antiquity. The Hellenistic age, from the death of Alexander in 323 to the Roman conquest of the Greek East in 31 BC, has suffered the most damage. All that remains are ‘fragments’, the commonly accepted term but one which is slightly misleading: in most cases, we have not actual pieces of lost texts (whether on papyrus or stone), but rather quotations, paraphrases, and citations of lost authors in later texts which do survive. As a result, when evaluating most Greek historians, we must constantly attempt to account for the goals, methods, and interests of the authors who preserve the evidence.5

What we can say with a good deal of certainty, however, is that Herodotus and Thucydides served as models for later Greek historians.6 While the two men shared the same basic goal, they followed different paths to reach it. In over-simplified and impressionistic terms, Herodotus is expansive, digressive, personal, and open to uncertainty; Thucydides is focused, linear, impersonal, precise.7 Even through the distorting filter imposed on our evidence, we see that most Greek historians favoured one of these approaches over the other, though the models were not mutually exclusive.8 Our focus in this volume is Herodotus, and scholars have noted his influence on Greek historical writing in various areas: topic, theme, presentation, style, even vocabulary and

4  Strasburger (1977) 175–81.
5  I have recently attempted to illuminate these methodological difficulties at length, using the Sicilian historian Timaeus of Tauromenium as a case study: Baron (2013). The classic statement of the issue remains Brunt (1980).
6  Discussions include Clarke (2003), Consolo Langher (2001), Candau Morón (2001), Strasburger (1966); see also the recent comments of Whitmarsh (2013) 20–3. Even as early a writer as Xenophon was described by Dionysius of Halicarnassus as Ἡροδότου ζηλωτής, “an emulator of Herodotus” (Pomp. 4.1).
7  The papers in Foster and Lateiner (2012) compare the two historians from numerous perspectives; see also the excellent recent discussion in Grethlein (2010) 149–280. Wecowski (2008) emphasizes, on the grand scale, their shared notion of historiography: “the paradigmatic value of great wars” which is where “human nature can best be perceived” (52). Cf. Raaflaub (2002a) 150; Riemann (1967) 15–18.