

Greek Philosophy

Dr. B. Johan Robert

Lecturer in History, Coles Memorial Junior College, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

The Greeks were the princes in the art of writing history and they stressed very clearly the purpose of history, its functions and duties, its laws and lessons and its charm and appeal. They identified history with Clio, the Muse (God) of Grace poetry and history. Clio, the goddess of history, it the first among the nine Muses, which indicated the importance the Greeks gave the history. In Greece, historiography did not began until the fifth or sixth century BC. Prior to this they were not in the habit of preserving any records of their past. They had no interest in their origin as they concentrated more on their contemporary history than on their past. The father of history is Herodotus, who have it the narrative form, put it in simple prose, liberating, romance. Prior to Herodotus, there were logographers who were under the influence of poetry. It was only after Herodotus, that the writers took to simple prose in order to sketch legends and traditions relating to the origin of towns, peoples, princes, and temples. It is significant that in that remote past Greek mind was eager to know about people, their lives and conditions. From the sixth century BC under the double inspiration of poetry and eloquence history took its birth. The sixth century BE is certainly the most epoch making era in world history as it witnessed great reflective thought both in India and in Greece. It was a period of intellectual transition from poetic thought to a more refined philosophy approach is Greece and in India it was a resurgent religion reformation, when Budda radiated a new light for Asia.

In Greece the growth (of history) witnessed of change from myth and ballad, and ballad to history. In India it remained myth and ballad alone without pushing the ballad to the next logical stage of history. The rational approach of the Greek mind made society the centre of man's intellectual pursuit. In India the emphasis was on the individual soul which led to metaphysical thought. Along with imagination the Greeks were various and cultural of mind, which were further helpful in making history objective and scientific. The Greeks has a passion for fidelity based on national and logical methods. The two dominating influence that deepened the scope of history were the Greek love of poetry and philosophy. Literature mad it festinating tale, but philosophy made it propound. It was a Greek, Dionysins of Helicaenassics, who defined history as philosophy teaching by examples. The Greek logographers were interested in local history, which was ideally suited for that period, because they recorded what was apparent to them.

I. HERODOTUS

Herodotus stands between the logographers and the historians and so he is rightly called as the father of history. He hailed from Ionica, the birth place of Homu

and many great thinkers and writers of the classical period. Herodotus wrote the Persian wars as the subject of his history. It was made so exhaustive and interesting that it is almost the history of the age and not merely of war. He is very found of narrating stories, and his entire work is full of sidelights which form the main attraction of his work. Since Crocsus was the first prince of Asia who attacked the Greeks. Herodotus gives his genealogy, recounts his greatness and fall, then describes the rise and fall of Median empire and the history of cyrus. His narrative become more interesting because one central idea leads on to another, one aspect to another, until the whole conflict he narrates between the Greeks and the Persians becomes a comprehension history both of Greece and Persia. A noteworthy feature of his writing is his travel from place to place, like the Arab historian, to obtain first hand information. Since seeing is believing, he was able to observe the events personally and since he made contemporary events his subject of study, we get a fairly accurate account of the events although his weakness for style and stories reduces the element of accuracy to some extent. The 1) Unity of his writing is the first striking feature noticeable in his history. There is consistency and continuity in his entire work. Which is something remarkable. 2) The second feature is the vigorous spirit he displays and the powerful style he adopts which make his narrative most interesting.

II. WRITING STYLE

In his introduction to Hecataeus's work, Genealogies: Fragment from the Histories VIII on Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 2099, early 2nd century AD Hecataeus the Milesian speaks thus: I write these things as they seem true to me; for the stories told by the Greeks are various and in my opinion absurd. This points forward to the "folksy" yet "international" outlook typical of Herodotus. However, one modern scholar has described the work of Hecataeus as "a curious false start to history", since despite his critical spirit, he failed to liberate history from myth. Herodotus mentions Hecataeus in his Histories, on one occasion mocking him for his naive genealogy and, on another occasion, quoting Athenian complaints against his handling of their national history. It is possible that Herodotus borrowed much material from Hecataeus, as stated by Porphyry in a quote recorded by Eusebius. In particular, it is possible that he copied descriptions of the crocodile, hippopotamus, and phoenix from Hecataeus's Circumnavigation of the Known World (Periegesis / Periodos ges), even misrepresenting the source as "Heliopolitans" (Histories 2.73). But Hecataeus did not record events that had occurred in living memory, unlike Herodotus, nor did he include the

oral traditions of Greek history within the larger framework of oriental history. There is no proof that Herodotus derived the ambitious scope of his own work, with its grand theme of civilizations in conflict, from any predecessor, despite much scholarly speculation about this in modern times. Herodotus claims to be better informed than his predecessors by relying on empirical observation to correct their excessive schematism. For example, he argues for continental asymmetry as opposed to the older theory of a perfectly circular earth with Europe and Asia/Africa equal in size (Histories 4.36 and 4.42). However, he retains idealizing tendencies, as in his symmetrical notions of the Danube and Nile.

His debt to previous authors of prose "histories" might be questionable, but there is no doubt that Herodotus owed much to the example and inspiration of poets and storytellers. For example, Athenian tragic poets provided him with a world-view of a balance between conflicting forces, upset by the hubris of kings, and they provided his narrative with a model of episodic structure. His familiarity with Athenian tragedy is demonstrated in a number of passages echoing Aeschylus's *Persae*, including the epigrammatic observation that the defeat of the Persian navy at Salamis caused the defeat of the land army (Histories 8.68 ~ *Persae* 728). The debt may have been repaid by Sophocles because there appear to be echoes of *The Histories* in his plays, especially a passage in *Antigone* that resembles Herodotus's account of the death of Intaphernes (Histories 3.119 ~ *Antigone* 904-920). However, this point is one of the most contentious issues in modern scholarship.

Homer was another inspirational source. Just as Homer drew extensively on a tradition of oral poetry, sung by wandering minstrels, so Herodotus appears to have drawn on an Ionian tradition of story-telling, collecting and interpreting the oral histories he chanced upon in his travels. These oral histories often contained folk-tale motifs and demonstrated a moral, yet they also contained substantial facts relating to geography, anthropology, and history, all compiled by Herodotus in an entertaining style and format.

III. AUTHOR AND ORATOR

Herodotus would have made his researches known to the larger world through oral recitations to a public crowd. John Marincola writes in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Histories* that there are certain identifiable pieces in the early books of Herodotus's work which could be labeled as "performance pieces". These portions of the research seem independent and "almost detachable", so that they might have been set aside by the author for the purposes of an oral performance. The intellectual matrix of the 5th century, Marincola suggests, comprised many oral performances in which philosophers would dramatically recite such detachable pieces of their work. The idea was to criticize previous arguments on a topic and emphatically and enthusiastically insert their own in order to win over the audience.

It was conventional in Herodotus's day for authors to "publish" their works by reciting them at popular festivals. According to Lucian, Herodotus took his finished work straight from Anatolia to the Olympic Games and read the entire *Histories* to the assembled spectators in one sitting, receiving rapturous applause at the end of it. According to a very different account by an ancient grammarian, Herodotus refused to begin reading his work at the festival of Olympia until some clouds offered him a bit of shade – by which time the assembly had dispersed. (Hence the proverbial expression "Herodotus and his shade" to describe someone who misses an opportunity through delay.) Herodotus's recitation at Olympia was a favourite theme among ancient writers, and there is another interesting variation on the story to be found in the *Suda*: that of Photius and Tzetzes, in which a young Thucydides happened to be in the assembly with his father, and burst into tears during the recital. Herodotus observed prophetically to the boy's father, "Your son's soul yearns for knowledge."

Eventually, Thucydides and Herodotus became close enough for both to be interred in Thucydides' tomb in Athens. Such at least was the opinion of Marcellinus in his *Life of Thucydides*. According to the *Suda*, he was buried in Macedonian Pella and in the agora in Thurium.

IV. CRITICISM

Nevertheless a few weaknesses appeal to be unavoidable in him. 1) His ignorance of the local language – Persian or Egyptian. 2) He had an inherent weakness to believe what he heard. This is certainly a serious flaw. 2) His creze for style stood in the way of checking the accuracy men and events objectively. Despite these weaknesses he possessed of such great virtues as intelligent curiosity, sincere pursuit of an object and clear understanding of the problem. Which rank him as not only the first but also a great historian of the world.

He has the imagination, sensitivity and spontaneity of a poet coupled with the inquisitive incisive and interpretative power of a historian. His style is easy, familiar and graceful. It was he who made history a definite discipline with a style of its own and with a purpose of its own. The primary purpose he fixed for history was to impart information. He gave history a distinguishing feature namely an insatiable curiosity, an intensive search for ideas and an easy and attractive style, which elevated history to the dignity of epic literature. Besides, it is close to philosophy.

V. THUCYDIDES

Thucydides is another great name in history and was younger to Herodotus. As a historian, he excelled Herodotus. The merit of Herodotus was his powerful style which often sacrificed truth. Thucydides is suspiciously accurate, reminding us that he was a precursor of Rank. Thucydides was meticulous in checking his sources and refreshingly analytical in his approach. He had a deep

reflective power and he wished to know not merely what happened but now and why it happened. He was as much interested in knowing the processes as he was in narrating the events. It was he who thought the first fundamental truth in history, namely, that history is the study of events as facts which are attached one to another in a national systematic and permanent order. This was the central concept in history. It brings to our mind the truth that all things in history are relative, and the relationship between one fact and another is organic and that it should be possible to infer one variety of facts from another.

The second important contribution of Thucydides is in the technique of writing history. When positive sources failed him, he applied universal reasoning, and argued backwards from the known to the unknown to know the possible cause or causes of an event. This was a task German historians like Niebour (History of Rome) 19th Century performed.

Thucydides inaugurated the scientific approach to historical problems. He eliminated statements based on hearsay. If Herodotus believed whatever he heard. Thucydides had the ability to think what was reported was gossip, absurd or deliberate lies. He ruthlessly rates out myths and legends and even tradition carries little weight with him. He is completely rational in his approach. He says that his narrative rested partly on the witness of others which he had verified with the severest and minute case. He says that he shall be satisfied if the history he writes proves useful to investigators who wished to know exactly how things happened in the past. In a world he anticipated rank by once two thousand years.

His range of study is wide and his history covers all aspects of human life. He touched even on pragmatic history that centers attention on the motives, purpose and ends which appeal in events. He is the first historian to bestow attention on economic history. His statement on the wealth and resources of Athens are precise and he throws interesting light on the economic stability of Greece. He sketched the social life of the people and has given a graphic account of their daily life, thus thrilling the hearts of Comte and Toynabee who conceived societies as atoms with which history is computed. He wrote on military history of Greece.

Finally what appears to be supreme in Thucydides is his ability to synthesize historical facts in order to contracts general principles. As a moralist he would remain unrivalled utilitarianism of the Romans does not appeal to him. The Philosophy of Thucydides is based on pure reason.

Eg. 1. "Not every brave man wants War". What at psychoanalyst is Thucydides.

2. Justice is between than Expediency.
3. Nemesis follows upon good fortune.

(Warning to those intoxicated with power)

Napoleon, Hitler, Alexander.

4. Love of fame often hires to destruction.

CRITICISM:

There are one or two weak points in Thucydides as well. His weakest point is his Chronology, as his "Summer and Winter" is very confusing. He does not have a definite scheme of dating events.

II. His style at times is tense, although occasions it uses to highest pitch..

He detested the drone and trumpet or "Scissors and paste" type of history.

VI. EVIDENCE FROM THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

Thucydides identifies himself as an Athenian, telling us that his father's name was Olorus and that he was from the Athenian deme of Halimous.^[6] He survived the Plague of Athens, which killed Pericles and many other Athenians. He also records that he owned gold mines at Scape Hyle (literally "Dug Woodland"), a coastal area in Thrace, opposite the island of Thasos.

The ruins of Amphipolis as envisaged by E. Cousinéry in 1831: the bridge over the Strymon, the city fortifications, and the acropolis

Because of his influence in the Thracian region, Thucydides wrote, he was sent as a strategos (general) to Thasos in 424 BC. During the winter of 424–423 BC, the Spartan general Brasidas attacked Amphipolis, a half-day's sail west from Thasos on the Thracian coast, instigating the Battle of Amphipolis. Eucles, the Athenian commander at Amphipolis, sent to Thucydides for help. Brasidas, aware the presence of Thucydides on Thasos and his influence with the people of Amphipolis, and afraid of help arriving by sea, acted quickly to offer moderate terms to the Amphipolitans for their surrender, which they accepted. Thus, when Thucydides arrived, Amphipolis was already under Spartan control.

Amphipolis was of considerable strategic importance, and news of its fall caused great consternation in Athens. It was blamed on Thucydides, although he claimed that it was not his fault and that he had simply been unable to reach it in time. Because of his failure to save Amphipolis, he was exiled:

I lived through the whole of it, being of an age to comprehend events, and giving my attention to them in order to know the exact truth about them. It was also my fate to be an exile from my country for twenty years after my command at Amphipolis; and being present with both parties, and more especially with the Peloponnesians by

reason of my exile, I had leisure to observe affairs somewhat particularly.

Using his status as an exile from Athens to travel freely among the Peloponnesian allies, he was able to view the war from the perspective of both sides. Thucydides claimed that he began writing his history as soon as the war broke out, because he thought it would be one of the greatest wars waged among the Greeks in terms of scale: Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, beginning at the moment that it broke out, and believing that it would be a great war, and more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it.

This is all that Thucydides wrote about his own life, but a few other facts are available from reliable contemporary sources. Herodotus wrote that the name Olorus, Thucydides's father's name, was connected with Thrace and Thracian royalty. Thucydides was probably connected through family to the Athenian statesman and general Miltiades and his son Cimon, leaders of the old aristocracy supplanted by the Radical Democrats. Cimon's maternal grandfather's name also was Olorus, making the connection exceedingly likely. Another Thucydides lived before the historian and was also linked with Thrace, making a family connection between them very likely as well. Finally, Herodotus confirms the connection of Thucydides's family with the mines at Scapté Hylē.

Combining all the fragmentary evidence available, it seems that his family had owned a large estate in Thrace, one that even contained gold mines, and which allowed the family considerable and lasting affluence. The security and continued prosperity of the wealthy estate must have necessitated formal ties with local kings or chieftains, which explains the adoption of the distinctly Thracian royal name Óloros into the family. Once exiled, Thucydides took permanent residence in the estate and, given his ample income from the gold mines, he was able to dedicate himself to full-time history writing and research, including many fact-finding trips. In essence, he was a well-connected gentleman of considerable resources who, after involuntarily retiring from the political and military spheres, decided to fund his own historical investigations.

VII. LATER SOURCES

The remaining evidence for Thucydides's life comes from rather less reliable, later ancient sources. According to Pausanias, someone named Oenobius was able to get a law passed allowing Thucydides to return to Athens, presumably sometime shortly after the city's surrender and the end of the war in 404 BC. Pausanias goes on to say that Thucydides was murdered on his way back to Athens. Many doubt this account, seeing evidence to suggest he lived as late as 397 BC. Plutarch claims that his remains were returned to Athens and placed in Cimon's family vault.

The abrupt end to Thucydides's narrative, which breaks off in the middle of the year 411 BC, has traditionally been interpreted that he died while writing the book, although other explanations have been put forward.

VIII. BUST OF PERICLES

Inferences about Thucydides's character can only be drawn (with due caution) from his book. His sardonic sense of humour is evident throughout, as when, during his description of the Athenian plague, he remarks that old Athenians seemed to remember a rhyme which said that with the Dorian War would come a "great death". Some claimed that the rhyme originally mentioned a [death by] "famine" or "starvation" (λιμός, limos), and was only remembered later as [death by] "pestilence" (λοιμός, loimos) due to the current plague. Thucydides then remarks that should another Dorian War come, this time attended with a great dearth, the rhyme will be remembered as "dearth", and any mention of "death" forgotten.

Thucydides admired Pericles, approving of his power over the people and showing a marked distaste for the demagogues who followed him. He did not approve of the democratic commoners nor the radical democracy that Pericles ushered in, but considered democracy acceptable when guided by a good leader. Thucydides's presentation of events is generally even-handed; for example, he does not minimize the negative effect of his own failure at Amphipolis. Occasionally, however, strong passions break through, as in his scathing appraisals of the democratic leaders Cleon and Hyperbolus. Sometimes, Cleon has been connected with Thucydides's exile.

It has been argued that Thucydides was moved by the suffering inherent in war and concerned about the excesses to which human nature is prone in such circumstances, as in his analysis of the atrocities committed during the civil conflict on Corcyra, which includes the phrase "war is a violent teacher" (πόλεμος βίαιος διδάσκαλος).

IX. PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK AND INFLUENCES

Paul Shorey calls Thucydides "a cynic devoid of moral sensibility". In addition, he notes that Thucydides conceived of human nature as strictly determined by one's physical and social environments, alongside basic desires. Thucydides' work indicates an influence from the teachings of the Sophists that contributes substantially to the thinking and character of his History. Possible evidence includes his skeptical ideas concerning justice and morality. There are also elements within the History—such as his views on nature revolving around the factual, empirical, and the non-anthropomorphic—which suggest that he was at least aware of the views of philosophers such as Anaxagoras and Democritus. There is also evidence of his knowledge concerning some of the corpus of Hippocratic medical writings.

Thucydides was especially interested in the relationship between human intelligence and judgment, Fortune and Necessity, and the idea that history is too irrational and incalculable to predict.

X. CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

Bust of Thucydides residing in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

Scholars traditionally view Thucydides as recognizing and teaching the lesson that democracies need leadership, but that leadership can be dangerous to democracy. Leo Strauss (in *The City and Man*) locates the problem in the nature of Athenian democracy itself, about which, he argued, Thucydides had a deeply ambivalent view: on one hand, Thucydides's own "wisdom was made possible" by the Periclean democracy, which had the effect of liberating individual daring, enterprise, and questioning spirit; but this same liberation, by permitting the growth of limitless political ambition, led to imperialism and, eventually, civic strife.

For Canadian historian Charles Norris Cochrane (1889–1945), Thucydides's fastidious devotion to observable phenomena, focus on cause and effect, and strict exclusion of other factors anticipates twentieth-century scientific positivism. Cochrane, the son of a physician, speculated that Thucydides generally (and especially in describing the plague in Athens) was influenced by the methods and thinking of early medical writers such as Hippocrates of Kos.

After World War II, classical scholar Jacqueline de Romilly pointed out that the problem of Athenian imperialism was one of Thucydides's central preoccupations and situated his history in the context of Greek thinking about international politics. Since the appearance of her study, other scholars further examined Thucydides's treatment of realpolitik.

More recently, scholars have questioned the perception of Thucydides as simply, "the father of realpolitik". Instead they have brought to the fore the literary qualities of the *History*, which they see as belonging to the narrative tradition of Homer and Hesiod and as concerned with the concepts of justice and suffering found in Plato and Aristotle and problematized in Aeschylus and Sophocles.^[46] Richard Ned Lebow terms Thucydides "the last of the tragedians", stating that "Thucydides drew heavily on epic poetry and tragedy to construct his history, which not surprisingly is also constructed as a narrative." In this view, the blind and immoderate behaviour of the Athenians (and indeed of all the other actors)—although perhaps intrinsic to human nature—ultimately leads to their downfall. Thus his *History* could serve as a warning to future leaders to be more prudent, by putting them on notice that someone would be scrutinizing their actions with a historian's objectivity rather than a chronicler's flattery.

The historian J. B. Bury writes that the work of Thucydides "marks the longest and most decisive step that has ever been taken by a single man towards making history what it is today".

Historian H. D. Kitto feels that Thucydides wrote about the Peloponnesian War, not because it was the most significant war in antiquity, but because it caused the most suffering. Indeed, several passages of Thucydides's book are written "with an intensity of feeling hardly exceeded by Sappho herself".

In his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl Popper writes that Thucydides was the "greatest historian, perhaps, who ever lived". Thucydides's work, however, Popper goes on to say, represents "an interpretation, a point of view; and in this we need not agree with him". In the war between Athenian democracy and the "arrested oligarchic tribalism of Sparta", we must never forget Thucydides's "involuntary bias", and that "his heart was not with Athens, his native city":

Although he apparently did not belong to the extreme wing of the Athenian oligarchic clubs who conspired throughout the war with the enemy, he was certainly a member of the oligarchic party, and a friend neither of the Athenian people, the *demos*, who had exiled him, nor of its imperialist policy.

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