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The Anti-Thucydides: Herodotus and the development of modern historiography¹

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Introduction

Herodotus ought least of all to be classed amongst historians.

(Thomas De Quincey)²

The difference between the scientific outlook of Herodotus and Thucydides is hardly less remarkable than the difference between their literary styles. The style of Herodotus is easy, spontaneous, convincing. That of Thucydides is harsh, artificial, repellent. In reading Thucydides I ask myself, What is the matter with the man, that he writes like that? I answer: he has a bad conscience. He is trying to justify himself for writing history at all by turning it into something that is not history.

(R.G. Collingwood)³

¹ I am especially grateful to Tim Rood, for allowing me to see an early version of a paper he is writing on the ways that Herodotus and Thucydides have been contrasted in terms of their approach to ethnography. This chapter draws on research from my current AHRC-funded research project at Bristol on *Thucydides: reception, reinterpretation and influence* (AH/H001204/1), and my recent book on *Thucydides and the Idea of History* (London, 2014). Translations from French and German are mine unless otherwise noted.

² De Quincey (1862) 162.

³ Collingwood (1946) 29.

Over the last few centuries, Herodotus and Thucydides have often been explicitly compared with one another in debates about the nature and development of modern historiography; the aim of this chapter is to explore the underlying dynamics of this tradition of comparison and contrast. Each writer has a clear claim to be seen as the ‘Father of History’, composing his work at the point of origin of what comes to be seen as a distinctive (western) intellectual tradition in the study of the past; each has therefore been interpreted by later readers as revealing something important about the essential nature of historiography as a means of understanding the world.⁴ At the same time, each appears to offer -- through their historiographical practices, insofar as these can be discerned in their texts, and especially in the case of Thucydides also through his explicit precepts -- a different understanding of the aims, methods and purpose of history writing. Rather than seeing both as important contributors to the development of a more or less unified tradition of (or within) historiography, most modern commentators have set Herodotus against Thucydides or Thucydides against Herodotus, presenting the one as the epitome of true historical methodology and spirit and the other as an example of how historians can misconceive their task or mistake the object of their studies; indeed, at times (as in the quotations at the head of this chapter) the claim is made that one or the other of them is not really a historian at all. As Ulrich Muhlack has noted, in the 19th century "any judgement about the one contained or implied a judgement about the other".⁵ Their credibility in the eyes of modern historians often appears as a zero-sum game, so that Herodotus can be praised only at the expense of

⁴ The *locus classicus* on Herodotean reception is Momigliano (1966a); (1990a). On Thucydides, see Meineke (2003) and Murari Pires (2006), as well as relevant chapters in Harloe and Morley (2012).

⁵ Muhlack (2011) 181.

Thucydides, or vice versa (except, of course, when they are bracketed together as equally useless and irrelevant to modern ‘scientific’ historians).⁶

This contrast is so common and familiar that it tends to be taken for granted, even by scholars whose aim is to redress the balance by emphasizing the resemblances between the conceptions and methods of Herodotus and Thucydides, as in the recent collection of studies edited by Edith Foster and Donald Lateiner. It began of course with Thucydides himself, seeking to shape his own reception and to establish the superiority of his approach to writing about events by presenting his predecessors, including Herodotus (unmistakably, even though he is not named), in unflattering terms as ill-informed and lacking the proper dedication to truth rather than entertainment.⁷ In his 1798 work *Herodot und Thucydides*, the philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer offered detailed arguments to establish that Thucydides had indeed had Herodotus in mind in his disparaging remarks about the prevalent attitude towards the past of his countrymen, but this had seemed obvious enough to earlier readers without any need for such scholarship, such as the first English translator of Thucydides, Thomas Nicols, who decided to assist his readers by making the reference explicit in his rendition of 1.22:

Nor shall give full faith unto poets, who make the matters more great, than they are, by fainings, nor allow unto historians, who mingle poesies throughout their histories, and study more to speak pleasant things, than veritable, *like as Herodotus did*. Whereby it is chanced that a great part of that, that they said without using any arguments or tokens of truth, by succession of time, is holden and reputed for a fable. And yet is true.⁸

⁶ Foster and Lateiner (2012: 2) comment on "the repetitive zero-sum style of critiquing the first two historians".

⁷ Compare Stadter (2012b) on Thucydides’ ‘reading’ of Herodotus, and the papers by Wecowski and Zali in this volume.

⁸ *The hystory writtone by Thucidides the Athenyan of the warre, which was betwene the Peloponesians and the Athenyans, translated oute of Frenche into the English language by Thomas Nicolls Citezeine and Goldesmyth*

Thucydides' gibes at his predecessor represent an early, and quite deliberate, example of Borges' remark about modern critics' idea of 'influence': 'Every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.'⁹ In other words, we tend to read Herodotus differently as a result of Thucydides' polemical presentation of his work. At least since the end of the 18th century and the development of a methodologically self-conscious historiography, it has felt natural to see this as a uniform and unbroken tradition of reception in which the two writers, however unfair this may be to one or other of them, are eternally set against one another as the symbols of fundamentally different approaches to historiography.¹⁰

However, this interpretation is potentially misleading in two respects. These two historians did not always occupy a prominent place in discussions of the nature of historiography, and moreover they were not necessarily contrasted with one another. Until the 18th century, both Herodotus and Thucydides appear to be more or less on a level as regards their popularity and influence, to judge from the numbers of editions and translations

of London (London, 1550) (spelling modernized, my italics). The fact that Nicolls was translating from a French translation of a Latin translation means that his version of the *History* is at times quite distant from the literal meaning of the original Greek, and there are places where even his understanding of French seems shaky. His source text, Claude de Seyssel's translation, had drawn a clear distinction between the earlier historians who preferred to narrate pleasant rather than true things (helpfully amplifying Thucydides' comments by noting that "Herodotus did the same thing") and whose subject matter was lost in fable, and the account of Thucydides which, because of *les indices* (the evidence), can be taken for true; Nicolls conflated these two sentences, or perhaps simply passed over some of Seyssel's words, and so ascribed truth to the fables themselves.

⁹ Borges (1962) 201.

¹⁰ On the critical reception of Herodotus and Thucydides in antiquity, see Pelling (2012) and Samotta (2012); on the whole, it does not appear that the two were regularly bracketed together by ancient critics. On Herodotus' influence in antiquity, see Hornblower (2006).

published of their work and the range of references to each in writings on history and historiography.¹¹ Indeed, contrary to the perception that Herodotus always lagged behind Thucydides in popularity and influence, not only were more editions of his work published but he alone of the pair featured in Erasmus' influential instructions on the grammar school curriculum, *De ratione studii (On the Right Method of Instruction)*, as one of the recommended Greek prose authors along with Lucian and Demosthenes.¹² A basic search for the names of the two historians in books published in English reveals that there have only been a few years in the last four centuries when 'Thucydides' has appeared more frequently in print than 'Herodotus'.¹³ Of course, such numerical counts are crude at best, offering no indication of *how* authors are being cited or interpreted; a more qualitative survey reveals that they were accorded no special status, but were just two among many classical authors who might be referred to for different purposes, far behind both Plutarch and the major Roman historians in terms of their prominence and importance. Their contribution to the development of historiography was certainly recognized, though largely filtered through the comments and criticisms of later writers (Cicero, Plutarch and Dionysius of Halicarnassus), but the origins of history in 5th-century Greece were in the early modern period not yet seen

¹¹ See the classic Burke (1966); on Thucydides, Pade (2006) and Harloe and Morley (2012) 4-7.

¹² Erasmus (1978). It is possible that the smaller number of Thucydidean editions might be attributed to the success of two translations, Valla's into Latin and Seyssel's into French -- but equally there was clearly insufficient incentive to try to compete with them.

¹³ Checked using Google Books' Ngram viewer:

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=thucydides%2Cherodotus%2Ctacitus%2Clivy&case_insensitive=on&year_start=1600&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2CThucydides%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2CHerodotus%3B%2Cc0%3B. Herodotus in fact features more frequently than Livy or Polybius, and from around 1800 regularly outranks Tacitus as well; the same pattern is seen in both German and French publications.

were not yet seen as decisive for its present practices and identity, and so there was simply less interest in either of these two pioneering historians. Discussions of the nature of historiography were not, for the most part, organized around any sort of historical account of its development that might lead to a stress on its origins.¹⁴ Thucydides was, until the 18th century, just as likely to be evaluated through comparisons and contrasts with Livy or Tacitus, rather than inevitably contrasted to Herodotus.¹⁵

As Ben Earley discusses in his chapter in this volume, we can see the origins of a more concerted engagement with the two Greek historians in late 16th-century France. Henri Estienne (Henricius Stephanus) stated that he made no apology for comparing the works of Herodotus and Thucydides, partly because useful lessons could be drawn from each of them but also because "there is much evidence that almost all later historians have drawn from these two and especially from Thucydides, different rules of historical writing, and that their works are recollected as ideals".¹⁶ Estienne's stated aim was to defend the reputation of Herodotus against criticism by ancient commentators; he did this by emphasizing the resemblances between his work and that of Thucydides, in both their virtues and flaws, which does imply that Thucydides was already being treated conventionally as the superior historian. This provoked the Huguenot historian Launcelot Voisin de La Popelinière to offer an explicit critique of Herodotus in order to promote Thucydides as 'the Prince of History', placing great weight on the latter's truthfulness and reliability -- an early indication of the importance of each historian's treatment of stories from earlier periods in the evaluation of their contribution to the understanding of the past.¹⁷ Similar themes were developed in 17th-

¹⁴ For a general account of early modern theories of historiography, see Grafton (2007).

¹⁵ See O'Gorman (2015) for an account of the relationship between Thucydides and his "contemporaries".

¹⁶ Estienne (1980) [1566] 12.

¹⁷ La Popelinière (1599) 168, 175. See generally Murari Pires (2010).

century England, above all with the comments of Thomas Hobbes. In the prefaces to his famous translation of Thucydides, Hobbes drew on ancient critical opinion when it suited him but also devoted considerable efforts to refuting the criticisms of Thucydides by Dionysius of Halicarnassus -- including emphasizing the contrast with Herodotus in terms of the reliability of the two accounts:

Now let any man consider whether it be not more reasonable to say: That the principal and most necessary office of him that will write a history, is to take such an argument as is both within his power well to handle, and profitable to posterity that shall read it, which Thucydides, in the opinion of all men, hath done better than Herodotus: for Herodotus undertook to write of those things, of which it was impossible for him to know the truth; and which delight more the ear with fabulous narrations, than satisfy the mind with truth: but Thucydides writeth one war; which, how it was carried from the beginning to the end, he was able certainly to inform himself.¹⁸

Later in the century, Viscount Bolingbroke, English politician and philosopher, offered a similar judgement -- Herodotus sought merely to entertain, Thucydides to teach -- with an additional emphasis on the claims to expertise of the latter:

Open Herodotus, you are entertained by an agreeable story-teller, who meant to entertain, and nothing more. Read Thucydides or Xenophon, you are taught indeed as well as entertained: and the statesman or the general, the philosopher or the orator, speaks to you in every page. They wrote on subjects on which they were well informed, and they treated them fully: they maintained the dignity of history, and thought it

¹⁸ Hobbes (1629) 24.

beneath them to vamp up old traditions, like the writers of their age and country, and to be the trumpeters of a lying antiquity.¹⁹

The themes of truthfulness, reliability and purpose -- entertainment or enlightenment - - recur time and again in the modern reception of the two historians, generally though not invariably to the advantage of Thucydides. However, as these various quotations and summaries should show, it was by no means always the case that, as Muhlack suggests, any judgement about the one historian contained or implied a judgement about the other. That practice is a product rather of a particular phase in the history of their reception, more or less corresponding to the 19th century, when a new discipline of history was being created. This new discipline, self-consciously professional and critical (and often proclaimed to be in some sense ‘scientific’) was developed through a complex engagement with Thucydides, who was often then interpreted as an ideal historian and a model for the present. Herodotus paled in comparison; increasingly he became a foil, to emphasize the originality and modernity of Thucydides’ approach through contrast with his supposed deficiencies. This coupling of the two historians did then create the possibility of an equally polemical presentation of Herodotus as the true founder of historiography, a move which offered a means of promoting alternative interpretations of the historian’s task or at any rate of questioning the use of Thucydides to legitimize current practices or promote one conception of historiography over another -- this became the leitmotif of 20th-century receptions.²⁰ In brief, the contrast between Herodotus and Thucydides -- or at any rate its conception as a zero-sum game that

¹⁹ Bolingbroke (1752) 415-16.

²⁰ We might compare Ned Lebow’s (2012) discussion of the different ways Thucydides is cited within the International Relations tradition in the 20th century, as a means of legitimizing certain approaches and ideas and/or delegitimizing others.

reveals essential truths about the true nature of historiography -- is not an eternal situation but the product of internal disciplinary disputes at specific historical moments.

Thucydides as the Anti-Herodotus

By the middle of the 19th century, Thucydides had been elevated, in the eyes of many historians, to the status of the inventor of modern scientific historiography, the greatest historian who had yet lived. Leopold von Ranke, the leading European figure in the establishment of a newly professionalised historiography at the heart of the university, remarked that no one could have the pretension to be a greater historian than Thucydides; Ranke's pupils and admirers could think of no greater compliment to offer him than to make such a comparison.²¹ Edward Freeman, in the lectures he gave as newly-appointed Regius Professor of Modern History in Oxford in 1884, insisted on the importance of Thucydides for historians of each and every period, including the French Revolution, and remarked on the way that reading Thucydides had influenced his own work on the Norman Conquest: "I suppose," he remarked, "that, of all the books ever written, Thucydides, in his own text, is the best suited for this particular purpose, the purpose of teaching what history really is".²² If Herodotus featured in such discussions at all, it was at best as a primitive forebear of Thucydidean historiography, and more often as a foil to Thucydides' genius, the key example of the more limited conceptions of the nature of historiography out of which Thucydides

²¹ von Ranke (1948) 35; Roscher (1842) 57, naming Ranke and Thucydides as "true historical artists".

²² Freeman (1886) 172.

somehow extracted its true, modern nature. It was not just that, judged from the perspective of modern scientific historiography, Thucydides seemed more and Herodotus seemed less familiar and developed; rather, the interpretation of Thucydides as a truly modern and critical historian was elaborated and made more plausible through a contrast with an interpretation of Herodotus that stressed his limitations and credulity.

This perspective was the product of three different but interconnected intellectual developments with their roots in the 18th century, each of which promoted consideration of the differences between Herodotus and Thucydides. The first was a new interest, especially in Britain, in the history of ancient Greece, with the appearance of a series of multi-volume narratives and handbooks of study.²³ The writers of such works naturally paid close attention to the ancient historians who provided them with the bulk of their evidence. Both Herodotus and Thucydides were taken largely at face value for their accounts of the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War respectively, almost invariably ranked above rival accounts like those of Plutarch or Diodorus. In part this was because of their closer proximity to the events described and access to eye-witnesses, but there was also extensive praise for their basic veracity: the Scottish man of letters John Gillies, for example, in his 1786 history of ancient Greece, referred to "such an old and honest historian as Herodotus" while describing Thucydides as "most faithfull, accurate, and impartial of all historians".²⁴ The English historian William Mitford, whose history of Greece appeared in successive volumes from 1784 onwards, described his own historical method as "taking Thucydides for my polar star,

²³ The classic account of Momigliano (1955a) over-emphasizes the role of Grote's mid-19th century history in this regard; more recent work has emphasized how far Grote was the culmination of a long tradition, by no means as flawed in scholarly terms as either Grote or Momigliano implied; see Moore, Macgregor Morris and Bayliss (2008) and Ceserani (2011).

²⁴ Gillies (1786) 364n, 422n.

and trusting later writers only as they elucidate what he has left obscure".²⁵ However, he was perfectly happy to accept Herodotus' narrative of the Persian Wars, offering regular praise for "the evidently honest, and apparently well-founded and judicious account of Herodotus".²⁶

The whole tenor indeed of Herodotus's narration shows him a man of great curiosity, but great modesty, and perfect honesty. Doubtful of his own opinion, and scrupulously cautious of misleading others, he thinks it his duty to relate all reports, but with express and repeated warning to his readers to use their own judgment for determining their belief. Hence indeed his authority is sometimes hazardous. But generally the simplicity of his manner detects itself, and, with the assistance of circumstances collateral to the story, sufficiently indicates where he deserves credit, and where neglect.²⁷

Issues were more likely to arise when the two ancient historians offered their views on the same material. At best, this seemed to 18th-century historians to emphasize the superiority of Thucydides' account, even if Herodotus could be given some limited credit; as Mitford remarked,

It is remarkably to the credit of Herodotus, and extraordinary that it should have been so little noticed, or rather so totally unnoticed, by writers who have criticized him, that whatever he has said upon that delicate and difficult subject, the domestic politics of Athens, and indeed of all Greece, is perfectly consonant to the unquestioned authority of Thucydides. The two writers mutually reflect light upon one another: Herodotus opens the scene ; and whoever will take the pains to connect his desultory yet amusing

²⁵ Mitford (1784) Vol. III, 199.

²⁶ Mitford (1784) Vol. I, 187.

²⁷ Mitford (1784) Vol. I, 400.

narration, will find him no unworthy forerunner of Thucydides and Xenophon, who with not less honesty but more art and judgment, lead us to the catastrophe.²⁸

While Mitford judges Herodotus positively here, it is clear that this is in a context of the widespread disparagement of his work by many different authors, and that Herodotus' account is always to be measured against the clearly unquestioned authority of Thucydides. More often, however, the comparison of the two historians led to serious criticism of, in the phrase of the early 19th-century clergyman and historian Connop Thirlwall, "the credulous Herodotus", above all when it came to their accounts and interpretations of the legendary and Homeric period.²⁹ Even Mitford, the best disposed towards Herodotus as a historian, could not avoid criticizing his limitations and lack of critical sense in comparison to "the more exact Thucydides"³⁰ in their accounts of periods where they had no eye-witnesses to draw upon:

Former histories, we are told, were but dry registers of facts, like that curious and valuable monument of our own ancient history, the Anglo-Saxon Annals. Herodotus first taught to give grace to detail in prose narration; and at once with such success that he has had from the ablest writers in the most polished ages the titles of father and prince of history. But we gain little light from him concerning the chronology of ancient times, farther than by some genealogies, and even those not undisputed. The preface of the judicious Thucydides, a few years only later than Herodotus, affords the clearest and most authentic information remaining, for the connexion of Grecian history

²⁸ Mitford (1784) Vol. I, 412n.

²⁹ Thirlwall (1835) 124n.

³⁰ Mitford (1984) Vol. I, 218.

from the Homeric age to that immediately preceding the Persian invasion; and also strongly shows the deficiency of authorities, even for the history itself, and far more for its chronology.³¹

Gillies, meanwhile, had felt obliged to downgrade Herodotus' claims as a historian as a result: "The exploits which he relates, still more than his manner of relating them, render the work of Herodotus the intermediate shade between poetry and history, between Homer and Thucydides".³² Across the English Channel, the French philosopher Voltaire had come to a similar conclusion in his article on 'L'Histoire' for the great *Encyclopédie* project edited by Diderot and d'Alambert, contrasting Herodotus' account of his own times (based, it was assumed, on his own experiences) with what he had to say about earlier periods:

Almost everything that he relates on the basis of trust in strangers is fabulous; but everything that he has seen is true...When Herodotus relates the stories which he has heard, his book is no more than a novel...One must declare that history begins for us only with the enterprises of the Persians against the Greeks. Before these great events, one finds only a few vague accounts, enveloped in puerile stories.³³

³¹ Mitford (1784) Vol. I, 216-17. The earliest description I have found of Herodotus as 'Prince of History', rather than the more familiar 'Father of History', is in Joseph Baretti's *Observations on the Greek and Roman Classics* (1753: 59), where he is compared to Homer as the Prince of Poets, in stylistic terms. Baretti's emphasis on 'the copiousness of invention, the elegance of phrase, the sweetness, ease and perspicuity' was unlikely to be persuasive to those who saw historiography in terms of veracity and impartiality, and Mitford's reference to Herodotus' ability "to give grace to detail in narration" suggests he was responding directly to Baretti's ideas.

³² Gillies (1786) 105n; cf. 3: "the work of Herodotus, which forms, as it were, the shade between Epic Poetry and History".

³³ Voltaire (1765) 223.

Unlike his predecessors, the British historian George Grote was firmly convinced of the impossibility of extracting anything remotely historical from Greek legend. Greek thinking had, he argued, made dramatic advances between the Olympic era and the 5th century -- "Positive history and chronology has not only been created, but in the case of Thucydides, the qualities necessary to the historiographer, in their application to recent events, have been developed with a degree of perfection never since surpassed"³⁴ -- but when it came to the study of the distant past, Thucydides had in fact achieved little more than Herodotus, and had suffered from the same misconceptions:

In common with the body of the Greeks, both Herodotus and Thucydides had imbibed that complete and unsuspecting belief in the general reality of mythical antiquity, which was interwoven with the religion and the patriotism, and all the public demonstrations of the Hellenic world. To acquaint themselves with the genuine details of this foretime, was an inquiry highly interesting to them : but the increased positive tendencies of their age, as well as their own habits of personal investigation, had created in them an historical sense in regard to the past as well as to the present. Having acquired a habit of appreciating the intrinsic tests of historical credibility and probability, they found the particular narratives of the poets and logographers, inadmissible as a whole even in the eyes of Hekataeus, still more at variance with their stricter canons of criticism. And we thus observe in them the constant struggle, as well as the resulting compromise, between these two opposite tendencies ; on one hand a firm belief in the reality of the

³⁴ Grote (1846) 366.

mythical world, on the other hand an inability to accept the details which their only witnesses, the poets and logographers, told them respecting it.³⁵

However, while Thucydides' account of early Greece was no more to be believed than that of Herodotus, there were in Grote's view substantive differences between them: Herodotus did, up to a point, attempt to subject particular facts to tests of historical credibility, and was "often disposed to reject as well the miraculous as the extravagant",³⁶ but he remained fundamentally credulous:

Thucydides places himself generally in the same point of view as Herodotus with regard to mythical antiquity, yet with some considerable differences. Though manifesting no belief in present miracles or prodigies, he seems to accept without reserve the preexistent reality of all the persons mentioned in the mythes, and of the long series of generations extending back through so many supposed centuries...But on the other hand, we find no trace of that distinction between a human and an heroic ante-human race, which Herodotus still admitted, nor any respect for Egyptian legends. Thucydides, regarding the personages of the mythes as men of the same breed and stature with his own contemporaries, not only tests the acts imputed to them by the same limits of credibility, but presumes in them the same political views and feelings as he was accustomed to trace in the proceedings of Peisistratus or Perikles.³⁷

³⁵ Grote (1846) 392.

³⁶ Grote (1846) 395.

³⁷ Grote (1846) 403.

Herodotus remained firmly embedded in the assumptions of earlier Greek culture, whereas Thucydides sought to break free from them. That did nothing to enhance the credibility of Thucydides' account, since the only sources he had to work with were legends and the writings of the poets and so he could only ever produce a mutilated reworking of Homer, but his efforts showed a more critical spirit, akin to that of Niebuhr in seeking to extract historical truth from ancient myths.³⁸ In the second edition of his work, in response to a review that had criticized his sceptical remarks on Thucydides, Grote developed this idea further:

No man feels more powerfully than I do the merits of Thucydides as an historian, or the value of the example which he set in multiplying critical enquiries respecting matters recent and verifiable... Instead of wondering that he shared the general faith in such delusive guides -- we ought rather to give him credit for the reserve with which he qualified that faith, and for the sound idea of historical possibility to which he held fast as the limit of his confidence.³⁹

He felt no such need to defend Herodotus or emphasize his critical spirit -- and it is clear that he had received no criticisms of his treatment of the earlier historian, whereas Thucydides was, by the mid-19th century, clearly identified by others as an unimpeachable historical authority whose credibility must be defended against such disparaging remarks.⁴⁰

³⁸ In an earlier essay, Grote in fact described Thucydides' account of the Trojan War as "a sort of palimpsest, not unlike those of the monks in the middle ages, when they rashly obliterated a manuscript of the Aeneid, in order to fill the same parchment with their own chronicles" (Grote (1873a) 105).

³⁹ Grote (1849) 408n.

⁴⁰ Compare also Richard Shilleto's pamphlet, published anonymously, rejecting Grote's claims that Thucydides had been biased against Cleon: Shilleto (1851) 1.

The second current of thought contributing to this perception of Thucydides was a growing interest, especially in Germany, in the history of ancient historiography.⁴¹ In contrast to many earlier discussions, these studies explicitly adopted a developmental model. Rather than seeking to characterize ancient historiography as a whole, they focused on identifying the most important themes in the work of different historians, emphasizing their differences from one another and charting changes over time. This historical approach naturally created a particular interest in the origins of the development. This in turn meant a close engagement with the historical approaches of both Herodotus and Thucydides as the rival contenders for the title of 'Father of History', founder of the development under investigation -- and, by implication, of the discipline that was now studying its own origins. The simple logic of temporal sequence tended to suggest Thucydides' superiority; he could be seen to have built on Herodotus' pioneering work, or recognised its true possibilities, or one might present him as -- in the words of an anonymous 1773 German essay on how to write history -- "Thucydides, who wanted to make use of Herodotus' mistakes".⁴² As in earlier centuries, the criteria adopted, consciously or unconsciously, for evaluating the contributions of different ancient historians were the prevailing contemporary assumptions about the nature of historiography, and these tended to favour Thucydides -- especially if his statement of his own principles of history writing were taken at face value. Thucydides' approach was understood to be characterized by the rejection of 'history as art' in favour of 'history as science'; a focus on historical methodology rather than subject matter and content; an interest in the critical analysis of sources rather than simply reproducing their accounts; an insistence on presenting history in human terms, removing all traces of superstition and any notion of

⁴¹ In the context of a broader project to establish historiography on a more critical (and later 'scientific') footing): see, for example, Reill (1975), Iggers and Powell (1990), and Stuchtey and Wende (2000).

⁴² Cited in Blanke and Fleischer (1990) 142.

divine intervention in history; a focus on history as useful rather than merely entertaining. In these terms, it was generally easy enough to see Herodotus' work as representing a significant intellectual development -- but then to see Thucydides as completing, surpassing or transforming it.

The process can be clearly charted in the work of the philologist, archaeologist and ancient historian Georg Friedrich Creuzer at the turn of the century.⁴³ In his 1798 work, *Herodot und Thucydides*, Creuzer's avowed aim was to consider the way that Thucydides had, as discussed above, implicitly attacked his predecessor and thus influenced his own reception, not least by Lucian. Creuzer seeks to place both historians in their historical context, rather than interpreting them according to modern historical conceptions and thus insists on the importance of interpreting Herodotus in his own terms rather than solely in comparison to Thucydides. Nevertheless, his account constantly reverts to familiar contrasts: the differences in their spirit and style, in their attitude towards the gods and towards oracles, in the inclusion of digressions and their sense of the purpose of history.⁴⁴ Creuzer insists, through his historicizing approach, that neither historian's work can be compared with modern historiography -- "what we call Thucydides' critique is only in comparison to his time...What we now mean by the term was possessed by no ancient historian" --⁴⁵ but this still tends to represent Thucydides' work as a progression, even if this is to be explained by changes in the external context (since Herodotus and Thucydides became historians under such different conditions, it was scarcely surprising, Creuzer argues, that their approaches should have differed).⁴⁶ If Herodotus is considered in context, this works as a defence against

⁴³ Discussed also by Momigliano (1994) [1946] and Muhlack (2011) 187-93.

⁴⁴ Creuzer (1798) 59-60 on religious beliefs, 67-8 on digressions, 112-13 on different audiences and conceptions.

⁴⁵ Creuzer (1798) 88n

⁴⁶ Creuzer (1798) 101, 107.

the accusation that he is less critical than Thucydides, and emphasizes his originality -- no one at this time expected historians to be concerned with "critical exactitude and historical fidelity" --⁴⁷ but it reinforces that contrast at the same time as explaining it. We can, Creuzer concludes, clearly see why the Greeks judged Herodotus and Thucydides in the way that they did, and especially why they favoured Thucydides.⁴⁸ However much he himself sought to avoid such judgements and to emphasize the dependence of both historians on their historical context, his account provided ammunition for readers who preferred to elevate Thucydides' historiographical practices in absolute terms.

The same themes are visible in Creuzer's broader 1803 account of the historical art of the Greeks. Once again, his focus is on the history of historiography in its original context, rather than seeking to draw any wider lessons for present practices, and he insists in his conclusion that "the ideas of the ancients about historical language and representation, wherein they concentrate their judgements on historiography in general, represent the sharpest opposition against the theories and works of the moderns".⁴⁹ However, it is difficult to avoid the sense of a teleological development, as Creuzer presents the gradual emergence of a historiography that looks more like the modern conception in everything but its focus upon art and rhetoric. The detailed discussion of Homer, myths and sagas and the logographers serves to emphasize Herodotus' originality: he was interested in the broad sweep of world events rather than just local traditions, and he developed a critical attitude towards supernatural explanations and the stories he was told by different people.⁵⁰ His work was "the first fruit of a history developed according to laws" --⁵¹ but in comparison to that of

⁴⁷ Creuzer (1798) 84.

⁴⁸ Creuzer (1798) 113.

⁴⁹ Creuzer (1803) 241.

⁵⁰ Creuzer (1803) 112-13, 125.

⁵¹ Creuzer (1803) 155.

Thucydides, it retained far too many elements of the old logography and even of Homer, in its treatment of oracles or use of speeches, its attitude towards earlier stories, and its dedication to entertainment rather than understanding.⁵² Thucydides on the other hand insisted on the absolute divide between rhetoric and history (even if his work retained some literary elements), he developed new methods of historical critique, and sought to establish historiography as a critical discipline that was about more than mere entertainment. However, such an approach was "a unique remarkable occurrence, because in the strict sense of the word Thucydides had no successor" -- later historians failed to maintain his standards of criticism and rigour.⁵³ It was not Creuzer's intention, but such phrases were easily interpreted by others as suggesting not only that Thucydides had advanced far beyond Herodotus in the development of historiography, but that he had anticipated modern ideas, only for his contemporaries to fail to recognise his achievement.

We can find more or less identical conceptions a century later presented as established truths, in general accounts of Greek thought like that of the Viennese classicist and philosopher Theodor Gomperz:

There is hardly any pair of contemporaries who offer a more glaring contrast than Herodotus and Thucydides. Barely a score of years divided their works from one another, but a gulf of centuries seems to yawn between their temper and inspiration. Herodotus creates throughout an entirely old-fashioned impression; Thucydides is a modern of the moderns.⁵⁴

⁵² Creuzer (1803) 130, 161-2.

⁵³ Creuzer (1803) 204-5, 161.

⁵⁴ Gomperz (1901) 503.

In his 1909 lectures on *The Ancient Greek Historians*, the historian and classicist J. B. Bury offered a narrative with a still greater degree of intellectual revolution between the two works. Herodotus is again credited with developing a kind of universal history, breaking out of the parochial concerns of the logographers, and with showing a limited kind of scepticism -- he had a "wavering standard of the credible and probable, which generally excluded what seemed physically impossible".⁵⁵ His "epic" (a word which deliberately evokes the old comparison with Homer) acquired a special quality through the way that "credulity alternates with a cautious reserve"; he avoided committing himself to choosing one version of a story about an event, which is congenial to the modern critic -- but it reveals him as a collector of historical material and an artist, "rather than as what we mean by a historian, who considers it his business to sift the evidence, and decide, if possible, between conflicting accounts".⁵⁶

We must give full credit to Herodotus for having recognised the principles of criticism which I have indicated, though his application of them is unsatisfactory and sporadic. They are maxims of permanent validity; properly qualified they lie at the basis of the modern developments of what is called historical methodology. But notwithstanding the profession of these axioms of common sense, he was in certain ways so lacking in common sense that parts of his work might seem to have been written by a precocious child. He undertook to write the history of a great war ; but he did not possess the most elementary knowledge of the conditions of warfare.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Bury (1909) 45-6 (quote from p. 58).

⁵⁶ Bury (1909) 60-1.

⁵⁷ Bury (1909) 71.

Thucydides, in contrast, is presented as "the first truly critical historian of the world" who introduced "a new conception of historical writing", expressly rejecting the ideas of Herodotus and the Ionians.⁵⁸ Thucydides stood apart in his historical method, his exclusion of everything mythical, and his conception of the purpose of historiography: "If the first fundamental principle of his ideal of history was accuracy, the second was relevance; and both signify his rebound from Herodotus".⁵⁹ "Out of the twilight in which Herodotus still moved wondering, he burst into the sunlight where facts are hard, not to wonder but to understand".⁶⁰

It is abundantly clear that Bury's account is an example of precisely what Creuzer had sought to warn against: Herodotus is judged solely through the lens of the criticisms and self-aggrandizing claims of Thucydides, and Thucydides is interpreted entirely in terms of modern conceptions of historiography. This reflects the third strand of Thucydides' elevation in the 19th century, his identification by at least some writers as a truly 'modern' historian who offers a timeless and universal model of historiography. From the mid-18th century, certain historians expressed increasing dissatisfaction with the classical and humanist tradition of 'history as art', and began to look for alternative models and precedents for a critical and scientific approach to the past. These might be found in other disciplines, such as the history of law and critical theology or the natural sciences, but there was also a desire for specifically historical models.⁶¹ Briefly, when a focus on 'universal history' came into fashion, this presented an opportunity for both pioneering ancient Greek historians, as Thucydides offered a model of critical acumen (albeit with a narrow focus) and Herodotus a

⁵⁸ Bury (1909) 74, 81.

⁵⁹ Bury (1909) 81-7 (quote from p. 87).

⁶⁰ Bury (1909) 147.

⁶¹ General introductions in Iggers and Powell (1990), and Stuchtey and Wende (2000).

breadth of subject (albeit with some lapses in scepticism); as the Göttingen historian Johann Christoph Gatterer put it,

Seek out the best models, seek them among the ancients, seek them among the moderns, but free from prejudice and from slavish dependence on any single one. Herodotus can be a model for the plan, but not for truth, and Thucydides for truth but not for the plan.⁶²

Increasingly, however, all ancient historians were rejected as models, since they were too tainted by the idea of ‘history as art’ -- all except Thucydides, whose explicit rejection of writing to please an audience and insistence on rigorous historical criticism suited perfectly the needs of early 19th-century historians. His methodological precepts and the little known of his biography were both discussed in detail to explain the perfection and exemplary status of his historical account. His treatment of evidence, his search for truth, his impartiality and objectivity, his eschewal of rhetorical effect and his sense of history’s higher purpose as a source of understanding rather than mere entertainment, were put forward as models for historians of all periods. The fact that his actual performance in certain of these respects might be questioned, and that his history contained a number of elements that did not so easily fit with the image of him as the perfect modern historian -- most obviously, the inclusion of speeches -- did not greatly affect the image of him as the historian’s historian.⁶³

In many of these discussions, Herodotus was scarcely mentioned at all. Modern historians had rejected any idea that classical historiography as a whole possessed exemplary status or had anything to teach them, and simply retained the one ancient historian who

⁶² Gatterer (1990) 570.

⁶³ See Murari Pires (2006) and Morley (2014).

appeared to transcend his time. This image of Thucydides clearly drew upon the earlier discussions of the development of Greek historiography, and the comparisons of the two early historians as sources for Greek history, but it rarely felt the need to discuss the underpinning for its view. It is only in the more extended discussions that we can see the way that Herodotus appeared ever more as the witless foil or limited predecessor, whose failures as a historian accentuated Thucydides' achievements and emphasized the extent to which the latter did not truly belong to the time in which he lived. The historian Wilhelm Roscher, for example, author of the sole 19th-century book-length treatment of Thucydides as a model for modern historiography, regularly mentioned Herodotus (normally to emphasize the differences between his approach and that of Thucydides), and devoted seven pages to exploring the nature of the relationship between them (including the extent to which Thucydides' methodological precepts were deliberately targeted against his predecessor).⁶⁴ His conclusion was relatively kind, while still emphasizing the superiority of his subject: anyone who has thought about the matter must recognize that there had to be a Herodotus before Thucydides, but that a Thucydides had to follow Herodotus.⁶⁵

It is perhaps significant, however, that Roscher abandoned his original plans to write further books about other ancient historians. Such studies would have only historical interest, rather than offering a model for historiography in general in the way that the detailed discussion of Thucydides' achievement did.⁶⁶ It is the same attitude that permeates the account that the ancient historian Eduard Meyer offered of 'Thucydides and the development of scientific historiography':

⁶⁴ Roscher (1842) 284-90. On Roscher's account of Thucydides, see Morley (2012).

⁶⁵ Roscher (1842) 289-90.

⁶⁶ As suggested by Muhlack (2011) 197.

Until Thucydides, the historical work was a collection of interesting stories; Thucydides recognised that his task was to grasp the nature of historical processes in their relation to one another, to represent the development of an event out of its assumptions, the effective forces and motives, and thereby at the same time to recognise its historical significance and effects, out of the endless abundance of individual processes to chisel out the historically effective factors.⁶⁷

As for Herodotus, 'his work is not a historical work in our sense'.⁶⁸

Herodotus as the Anti-Thucydides

It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that the roles were reversed again, and Thucydides was brought down from his pedestal. This was in many ways a reaction against the success of the Rankean project, and the role of Thucydides as its inspiration. Proponents of economic, social and cultural history objected to the dominance of political and military history, and the narrow focus of the Rankeans; in this light, Thucydides' approach to the past appeared far too narrow. There was increasing concern about the excessively rhetorical aspects of Thucydides' account, which seemed incompatible with the values of a critical historiography (although, as the British historian A. J. Toynbee pointed out, modern historians' preference for indirect speech was no less rhetorical than Thucydides' direct speech, but "is merely more likely, by its specious appearance of objectivity, to delude the reader as well as the writer himself").⁶⁹ For the most part, historians of periods other than

⁶⁷ Meyer (1913) 83.

⁶⁸ Meyer (1913) 88.

⁶⁹ Toynbee (1934) 445.

Classical Antiquity largely stopped referring to Thucydides as any sort of modern, without offering any reasons for doing so.⁷⁰ Ancient historians continued to debate about the nature of Thucydides' historiography, but in order to determine the reliability of his account of 5th-century Greece for their own purposes, rather than because they wanted to elevate him as a model for their own practice.

One possible reason is the development of a backlash from philologists against the abstraction of Thucydides from his historical context. Francis Cornford's *Thucydides Mythistoricus* sought to bring Thucydides back down to the same level as his contemporaries, most obviously Herodotus, by emphasizing the persistence of mythical conceptions in his work despite the appearance of scientific reasoning. This did involve defending Herodotus against some of the more excessive criticisms put forward by proponents of Thucydides in the previous century:

Herodotus is, to our minds, unscientific only in three respects. First, he does not understand that primitive myths are not garbled history, any more than he was aware that garbled history is a sort of myth. Second, he imports into the heroic age the international courtesies and decently conducted negotiations by herald and envoy, which prevailed in his own time. Third, he does not care which story -- the Persian or the Phoenician -- is true... It is against this light and careless Ionian temper that Thucydides protests.⁷¹

⁷⁰ This surprising eclipse has hitherto not been discussed at any length; existing accounts of Thucydides' influence in historiography, such as Murari Pires (2006), simply conclude after the great period of Niebuhr, Ranke and Roscher. There is a tentative account in Morley (2014), but more work is needed in this area.

⁷¹ Cornford (1907) 240-1

However, this revisionism is largely devoted to undermining the special status of Thucydides, and to pointing out the extent to which his idealisation in the 19th century had rested on anachronistic assumptions -- above all, ignoring the extent to which, in Cornford's view, Thucydides' history was founded upon a thoroughly old-fashioned mythical conception of the world.

In the course of this study the conviction has been growing upon us that the comparisons commonly made between Thucydides and Herodotus are based on false assumptions and misleading. It is usual to speak of Herodotus as primitive, and religious to the point of superstition; of Thucydides, as advanced and sceptical to the point of irreligiousness. Herodotus is treated as a naive and artless child ; Thucydides as a disillusioned satirist and sometimes as a cynic. These representations seem to us to be founded simply on the external fact that Herodotus was by a generation the older of the two, and on the false assumption that, because their books are both called histories, Thucydides must have started where Herodotus left off, and developed the tradition he originated. Our own view is almost exactly the reverse. If either of the two men is to be called religious, it is Thucydides; if either is sceptical, it is Herodotus. Naivety and artlessness are not terms we should choose to apply to either; something closely akin to cynicism and flippancy is common enough in Herodotus; there is not a trace of either in Thucydides.⁷²

This line of thought reduced all classical historians to irrelevance; their works became texts of purely historical interest, confined to specialists and philologists, rather than being ascribed any significance in broader discussions of the nature of historiography. This serves

⁷² Cornford (1907) 287.

to undermine Thucydides as a universal model for historiography, rather than elevate Herodotus in his place; Herodotus is indeed shown to be superior to his successor in some respects, but neither of them is counted as a fully modern historian.

The most explicit critique of Thucydides and his approach to historiography by means of Herodotus is found in the philosopher of history R. G. Collingwood, exemplified by the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Collingwood emphasizes the contrast between the latter's easy and readable style and the painful experience of reading the former's tortured prose (elevating his personal experience and aesthetic judgement to objective facts). Collingwood's account of the development of historiography restores Herodotus to his status as the founder of real history; Thucydides follows on and builds on his example, and, initially, the two are treated together as marking a new stage in human self-knowledge.

The work of the Greek historians as we possess it in detail in the fifth-century historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, takes us into a new world. The Greeks quite clearly and consciously recognised both that history is, or can be, a science, and that it has to do with human actions. Greek history is not legend, it is research; it is an attempt to get answers to definite questions about matters of which one recognises oneself as ignorant. It is not theocratic, it is humanistic.⁷³

Herodotus is the originator and inventor: "The conversion of legend-writing into the science of history was not native to the Greek mind, it was a fifth-century invention, and Herodotus was the man who invented it".⁷⁴ Thucydides took this further, not least in his inclusion of methodological precepts: "In one way he improves upon Herodotus, for

⁷³ Collingwood (1946) 17-18.

⁷⁴ Collingwood (1946) 19.

Herodotus makes no mention of evidence... and one is left to gather from the body of his work what his idea of evidence was; but Thucydides does say explicitly that historical enquiry rests on evidence".⁷⁵ However, this promising development came to an abrupt halt:

Herodotus had no successors. Even if I conceded to an objector that Thucydides worthily carried on the Herodotean tradition, the question would still remain: Who carried it on when Thucydides had finished with it? And the only answer is: Nobody carried it on. These fifth-century giants had no fourth-century successors anything like equal in stature to themselves.⁷⁶

This was not, as we have seen, a wholly new idea. The absence of heirs to Thucydides' conception of history had in the previous century been a means of emphasizing his unique status, his genius and modernity unrecognized or misunderstood by his contemporaries but now clearly perceived by his modern successors. Collingwood, however, is more concerned with the absence of a Herodotean tradition. He begins by raising doubts as to whether Thucydides could really be considered the heir of such a tradition at all, given the differences between his and Herodotus' historical approaches. He proceeds to argue that Thucydides is a symptom, if not indeed a cause, of the stifling of proper scientific history shortly after its birth.

This argument rests on the definition of history that Collingwood seeks to promote: it is a form of knowledge that can, because it focuses on asking questions and seeking to answer them, be considered (in a very broad sense) part of the sciences; it is focused upon the actions of human beings in the past; it proceeds by the interpretation of evidence; and it aims

⁷⁵ Collingwood (1946) 19-20.

⁷⁶ Collingwood (1946) 28-9.

at human self-knowledge -- "it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is".⁷⁷ Both Herodotus and Thucydides met, to some extent, all of these criteria. The crucial difference between them in Collingwood's eyes was the kind of knowledge they sought to offer their readers: Herodotus provided information about past events, whereas Thucydides wished to use such information to develop more general theories of humanity. Self-knowledge, Collingwood argued, was to know something of the nature of man rather than just your own individual peculiarities, but also to know what it is to be a certain kind of man and "what it is to be the man *you* are and nobody else is".⁷⁸ Thucydides was found wanting in comparison to Herodotus, in his wish to move beyond the properly historical. Whereas Herodotus had heroically resisted the innate Greek tendency to see supposedly universal knowledge as the only true knowledge -- "the greatness of Herodotus stands out in the sharpest relief when, as the father of history, he is set against a background of the general tendencies of Greek thought"⁷⁹ -- Thucydides had succumbed. Thucydides becomes in Collingwood's account "the father of psychological history", which "does not narrate facts for the sake of narrating facts. Its chief purpose is to affirm laws, psychological laws".⁸⁰ Thus, "Thucydides is not the successor of Herodotus in historical thought but the man in whom the historical thought of Herodotus was overlaid and smothered beneath anti-historical motives"⁸¹.

The discussion presents the birth of history in Collingwood's terms: an original betrayal, in which Herodotus' invention is turned aside from its true purpose and nature by his supposed heir. This sets the pattern for the remainder of his account of the development of historiography, a constant tendency to stray from the true historical path in search of the false

⁷⁷ Collingwood (1946) 9-10.

⁷⁸ Collingwood (1946) 10.

⁷⁹ Collingwood (1946) 28

⁸⁰ Collingwood (1946) 29.

⁸¹ Collingwood (1946) 30.

gods of generalization. Herodotus is the means for undermining the idea that Thucydides' approach to history is to be admired and emulated -- on the contrary, that is the path to the unhistorical. But this does not lead to a restoration of Herodotus as a model in any serious sense; he is too obviously limited in his treatment of evidence. Collingwood claims that the Greeks believed the only proper evidence for historiography was eyewitness accounts and the core of historical method was the eliciting and interrogation of such accounts, which thus limited the subject matter and scope of their investigations.⁸² Herodotus' method is thus far too primitive and limited to be adopted as a model in the present; his role here is simply as a foil to Thucydides, a foundation myth for Collingwood's idea of proper historiography rather than a continuing inspiration.

We can see the same tendency in another 20th-century intellectual current that might have been more favourable to Herodotus, the shift towards a more inclusive understanding of the proper scope of history, moving beyond the traditional focus on politics and war to encompass not only economic and social structures but also culture and geography.⁸³ In the light of such a project, Thucydides appeared too narrowly political, and this is one reason for his subsequent neglect by historians. Herodotus, with his far greater breadth of concerns and interests, offered an alternative model for a historical anthropology or anthropological history, and such a claim was indeed made in 1908: "so far as Herodotus presents us...with a science of anthropology...he is little, if at all, behind the best thought of our own day".⁸⁴

⁸² Collingwood (1946) 24-5; 25-7 on the consequences for Greek historiography. This point had been noted in the previous century by Droysen (1967) 136, 141-2.

⁸³ See the account of the development of the French *Annales* school and its global influence in Burke (1990), and Evans-Pritchard (1961) for an overview of the relationship between anthropology and history up to that date -- a lecture which does not, to my knowledge, mention Herodotus. A more recent account of this relationship can be found in Barnard (2000), which however also ignores the classical precedents for the debate.

⁸⁴ Myres (1908) 135. See discussion by Redfield (1985).

However, this was in a collection of pieces dedicated to claiming that the roots of anthropological thought lay in the Classics; the anthropologists themselves seem to have been unimpressed, and Herodotus was not taken up as a model or a significant founding figure.⁸⁵

In 2004, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins published *Apologies to Thucydides*, denouncing what he saw as the continuing -- though now concealed -- influence of Thucydides' conception of a universal human nature in modern historiography:

One may conclude that Thucydides is still very much with us, not only because he raised the important questions about society and history, but because he begged them in the same fashion as well: by resorting to the universal practical rationality of human beings, born of their innate self-interest.⁸⁶

Sahlins' insistence on the need for a turn to anthropology and its emphasis on the importance of culture might suggest a return to Herodotus, if a classical model was required to underpin the project -- but in fact he chose to persist with Thucydides, and offered a self-consciously Thucydidean account of a war in Polynesia as a counterpart for the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides' model of human nature may have been flawed and problematic, Sahlins implies, but his focus on truth and understanding rather than entertainment, his attachment to the reality of events rather than abstract principles, and the power of his narrative and rhetoric are all things from which we can still learn today -- precisely the ways in which he has been polemically distinguished from Herodotus since the end of the 18th century. The myth of Thucydides as clearly distinct from his predecessor and

⁸⁵ Classicists have continued to put forward such claims (see e.g., Sikes (1914) and Kluckhohn (1961)), and have of course drawn on anthropological concepts to elucidate Herodotus (see e.g., Hartog (1988)).

⁸⁶ Sahlins (2004) 3.

his culture, as a timeless model of what historiography should be in contrast to Herodotus' flawed and limited conception, dies hard.