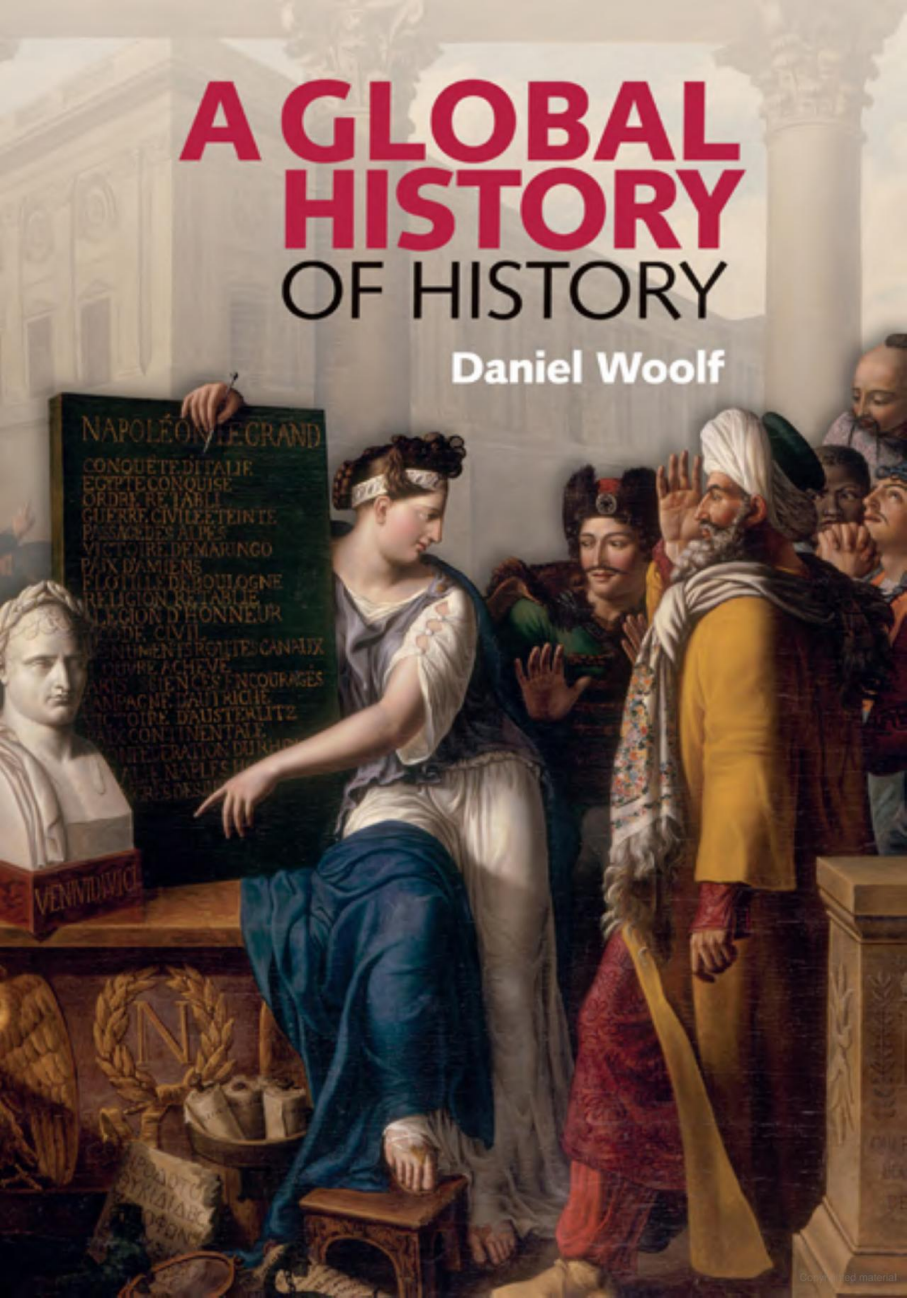
A GLOBAL HISTORY OF HISTORY

Daniel Woolf



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PREFACE AND CONVENTIONS

The purpose of this book, in brief, is to provide a history of history, suitable for undergraduates, faculty members seeking a relatively concise introduction to the subject and the interested general reader. Many years of teaching courses on historiography, and the prescription of several different textbooks for the students in those courses, convinced me that a further work was needed, but most of all I have been struck for many years by the relative dearth of studies of 'historiography' (a term for discussion of which see below, in the introduction) which covered the entire span of human efforts to recover, understand and represent the past, from earliest known times to the present, and that did so in a geographically inclusive manner. There are several books covering very long time spans, and one or two with a global reach, but none in English, of which I am aware, that do both. A conviction that students ought to be exposed to the 'historical cultures' of other civilizations than their own has thus informed my choice of subject; a strong sense that there is a story to be told about the development of historical thought, historical writing and the modern historical discipline, and that it relates directly to some of the larger movements of world history (in particular the global engagement of different peoples and cultures over several millennia), provides the 'plot', if a work on historiography can be said to have a plot.

The years of teaching various aspects of the subject have also convinced me that students, especially those in compulsory courses on historiography, dislike most textbooks because they consist of a parade of names of great historians, most of whom the student has never heard of, and will in all likelihood never read, unless they go on to advanced study in the field. I have therefore tried to avoid creating such a parade, though the necessity of inclusiveness and breadth means that I may not always have succeeded. I have found that students unnecessarily fear historiography as 'difficult' or 'dull' (though it is not always clear what they mean by either word). Since the first time I heard the term 'historiography' as an undergraduate and began to write papers of various sorts (and ultimately a doctoral thesis) on historiographic topics, I have had a fascination with how we have, as a species, come to terms with the past. I find the great works of historiography as intellectually exciting and riveting as many great works of literature, though it is true that very few historians have written works that command a wide readership today. Many other past historical works, of lesser literary merit, can nonetheless

transliteration: thus Mao Zedong not Mao Tse-tung. Certain exceptions to this rule apply for historians with established Western names, such as Confucius, whose Chinese name was either Kong Qiu or Kong Zi (Master Kong). The names of Chinese historians publishing in Western languages, and the titles of books originally issued in those languages, follow the actual spelling of the author or title, whether Wade-Giles or pinyin.

Korean words and names are more problematic, as no system has yet achieved dominance, including the long-standing McCune-Reischauer system, and romanization practices thus vary. I have therefore often provided alternative spellings of a word or name.

Chinese, Korean and Japanese names appear with the family name first followed *without a comma* by the given name. This is well-known and common practice for Chinese and Korean, but in the case of Japanese, Western journalistic practice has tended to invert the name order according to North American usage, a practice that we have not followed: thus a reference to Ienaga Saburō denotes a historian whose surname is Ienaga. Occasional exceptions, mainly historians whose names appear Western-style on their English-language publications, are indexed *with* commas to avoid confusion; a few Japanese historians (Motoori Norinaga and Hayashi Razan for instance) are by convention referred to by their given names, e.g. Norinaga. As with Arabic, where a word has become commonplace in English usage (for instance 'shogun'), the diacriticals are omitted.

Adjectives or adverbs constructed out of foreign terms, usually for the purpose of grouping a category of person or text, dispense with diacriticals. Thus we write on India about *purāṇa* (the noun), but about puranic texts.

Where the system of transliteration in a quoted or extracted text differs from my own usage (as for instance in the case of Chinese, where most translations until recently followed the Wade-Giles method, while I have used the now-standard pinyin system), I have maintained the spelling as it is in the source of the extract or quotation, and of course in actual titles of modern books and articles. Thus the historian referred to by me as 'Sima Qian' is the same individual referred to by earlier authors as 'Ssu-ma Ch'ien', which is simply the same name in Wade-Giles transliteration; Ban Gu is Pan Ku, and so on; the Qing dynasty is the same as the Ch'ing; and Mao Zedong is Mao Tse-tung. Occasionally where I have felt more explicit signposting is justified I have inserted the pinyin spelling in square brackets.

Citations and quotations

In an effort to maximize readability, footnotes have been kept to a minimum and are used to document very specific points and quotations or, on occasion, to add a detail of interest but not essential to the main narrative. Where a fact or point

is uncontroversial, well known or contained in many other books, no footnote is provided. Bibliographic references for primary quotations and the longer extracts that accompany the main text are given in full. Not every item cited in a footnote is included in the 'Further reading' section.

Titles of historical works cited within the main text are routinely given in their original language (transliterated if in a non-Roman script) with an English translation of that title following in quotation marks, within parentheses; such translated titles are generally not italicized except where used subsequently in the main text or, naturally, if a particular edition of the work is cited, as in the footnotes and bibliography. The purpose of this somewhat cumbersome practice is to provide an understandable translation (typically one used in the secondary works on which I have relied) to English-speaking readers while also easing reference back to the work in its original language for those willing and able to read it. Where the meaning of a title seems reasonably obvious, or is cited fully in a note, no parenthetical translation is provided, and in some instances I have, for the sake of brevity, simply referred to a work by its most familiar English title. The foreign names of journals and periodicals are not normally translated, e.g. *Historische Zeitschrift*.

Dates

A multitude of calendars have been used by various peoples in the course of the past five thousand years. Full compliance with the non-Eurocentric principles of this book would suggest that dates be recorded as the authors being described recorded them, for instance using the Hijri year of the Muslim calendar. However, this would be far more confusing than helpful. While a compromise might have been to use dates in the format of Common Era (CE)/Before the Common Era (BCE), I have opted for familiarity and simplicity and used the more conventional 'BC' and 'AD'.

Vital dates (where known) for most historians (and many who were not historians but nonetheless figure in the narrative) are provided in the main text. Certain abbreviations for dates have been used:

b. = born, in the case of historians still living as of mid-2010.
c. = *circa*, approximate year where no firm year is known or agreed upon.
comp. = composed during or complete by.
d. = died. Used where a firm death year is known (or approximate, in which case noted as 'd. *c.*').
est. = established, for instance, a journal or historical society.
fl. = 'floruit', that is 'flourished': generally used in relation to authors for whom birth and death dates are entirely unknown or highly obscure; indicates active period.

r. = 'reigned'. When a monarch is noted, his or her regnal years, not years of birth and death, are noted in parentheses. The same applies to non-monarchical but significant officials, for instance popes.

In some cases alternative dates are used either because of lack of agreement in scholarship as to a single date, or in some instances because the date itself is tied to a particular chronological scheme which itself is ambiguous.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The many historians mentioned in the next several hundred pages often acknowledged patrons, employers, monarchs and those who provided them with information or correction. It is both appropriate and a pleasure for me to do so in the case of this book.

My various undergraduate instructors (at Queen's University, to which I have recently returned) and graduate mentors at Oxford encouraged my early interest in historiography. They are too numerous to name individually, as are the dozens of colleagues in both early modern British/European history and, latterly, the broader history of historiography, whom I have met and profited from over several decades. Colleagues at the several other institutions in which I have worked generously provided references and suggestions. I have similarly learned a great deal from the many contributors to the *Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing*, which I edited in the 1990s, and to its more recent successor, still in the process of appearing, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*. I would, however, like to thank by name (though some of them have not always agreed with me on particular points or even approach), Michael Aung-Thwin, Michael Bentley, Stefan Berger, Peter Burke, William Connell, Antoon De Baets, Ewa Domańska, Georg Iggers, Donald R. Kelley, Ann Kumar, the late Joseph Levine, Fritz Levy, Chris Lorenz, Juan Maiguashca, Allan Megill, J. G. A. Pocock, Attila Pók, José Rabasa, Jörn Rüsen, Dominic Sachsenmaier, Masayuki Sato, Axel Schneider, Romila Thapar, Edoardo Tortarolo, Markus Völkel, Q. Edward Wang and Hayden White. Several institutions have invited me to lecture on historiography in the past few years and I have profited from questions and criticisms received on those occasions; in particular, a workshop on global historiography at the University of Vienna in April 2010, organized by Professor Deborah Klimburg-Salter, allowed me a dry run of the book's introduction. I must also acknowledge my debt to the work of two historiographers a generation senior to me (and whom I have corresponded with but regrettably never met in person), Ernst Breisach and the late John Burrow, both authors of surveys of Western historiography. If my book differs substantively from their own, especially in its geographic scope, it is the better for having obliged me to think carefully about the basis of that difference.

Maryanne Cline Horowitz, general editor of the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, invited me in 2002 to write an essay on historiography for that publication.

The present book is an expansion of that essay, and I thank Michael Watson at Cambridge University Press both for encouraging me to write it and for his patience through many revisions. I thank Rosina di Marzo at the Press for having shepherded the book through production and Rose Bell for exemplary copy-editing. I am grateful to the Board of Governors at my former institution, the University of Alberta, for providing me with a year's leave during which a (much longer) first draft of the book was written, and to the University of Alberta's Vice-President (Research) and Provost and Vice-President (Academic) for funding that allowed, among other things, the acquisition of the many illustrations and the hiring of graduate research assistance. Among my own graduate students at Alberta and (after 2009) Queen's, principally in the area of early modern England, who have put up with my digressions into global historiography, and often provided perceptive feedback, I thank Matthew Neufeld, Sarah Waurechen and Jane Wong Yeang-Chui. Other graduate students have assisted in other ways (including summarizing for me books in languages which I do not read), in particular Tanya Henderson, Carolyn Salomons, Tony Maan and Nina Paulovicova. The experience of teaching historiography to many students at all levels at Queen's (during an earlier, postdoctoral, stage of my career), Bishop's, Dalhousie, McMaster and the University of Alberta added immeasurably to my sense of what I liked in other textbooks and what I did not, which was of course not always the same as what the students liked.

Ian Hesketh, my research associate at Queen's, took time out from his other duties to provide a ruthlessly sharp critique and meticulous editing of the first version of the manuscript, shrinking it down from its previously unmanageable size. His ability to turn five words into two without loss of clarity is enviable. But for his assistance, the book would have been much later to appear, and unnecessarily long. He also provided invaluable assistance in the home stretch by compiling the timelines of key texts and events included in each chapter.

Several historians (including some already named above) provided extra assistance in the form of bibliographic references, clarification of particular points and readings of parts or whole of the manuscript. Apart from three anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press, all of whom provided commentary and suggestions for improvement, I thank for reading significant chunks of the book Donald Baker, John Bentley, Adam Budd (an exacting stylistic critique of the last four chapters), Fernando Cervantes, Tarif Khalidi and Baki Tezcan; and (again) Q. Edward Wang, José Rabasa, Juan Maiguashca, Romila Thapar, Dominic Sachsenmaier and Michael Aung-Thwin. Georg Iggers, who has been an ally for nearly twenty years in my conviction that historiography needed to be globalized, carefully read the entire manuscript. He alerted me very late in the process that my interpretation of

Introduction

> [T]he animal lives unhistorically ... Man, on the other hand, braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of what is past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways, it encumbers his steps as a dark, invisible burden which he would like to disown, so as to excite their envy.[1]

'History' exists today because humans have the biological and neurological capacity to remember things and to frame relationships of a causal or symbolic nature around those things that have been remembered. It exists also because we are social creatures whose survival has been more or less dependent upon connections with other members of our species. We will never know the identity of the first human who, curious about his – or her – past, decided to inquire into the origins of his or her tribe, village or family, or what motivated that person to do so. This does not matter very much. The human inclination to unearth knowledge of one's past may well be natural rather than acquired (though no 'history gene' has yet been mapped). One modern scholar has even suggested that 'History is a human universal. Knowledge of the past is expressed by all human beings according to their different cultural and social systems. History is a generic form of consciousness in which the past experience of oneself or of others in an environment outside oneself is transformed into symbols that are exchanged.'[2]

However, the capacity to remember is not sufficient on its own to create the conditions for history to be made. Humans are the only species capable of ***both*** forming long-term memory (beyond the simple recollection of how to perform tasks or how to find a particular familiar location) ***and*** of communications. It is

this latter function that permits the transmission of those memories, and other knowledge, to other members of the species. Written communication has been a significant technological enhancement to the preservation and communication of information over long distances or across long spans of time, but it is a relatively recent development, dating back at most five millennia to the earliest cuneiform tablets in Mesopotamia, to hieroglyphics in Egypt, and to bone inscriptions in China. Before then, humans relied on spoken language to communicate, and we know that very ancient cultures eventually learned to use speech, specifically in the form of poetry and song, to commemorate the deeds of the gods and heroes in their past. The oral beginnings of what we now call historical thinking and historical knowledge are long acknowledged; it will be repeated at points throughout this book that writing per se is not, as used to be thought, essential to their development, even in the modern era.

Distinguishing History from 'History'

What is now called 'history' in English goes by many different names in European languages alone: *histoire* in French, *Geschichte* in German, *storia* in Italian, *dzieje* in Polish, *история* in Russian. It has often been thought of in ways that we would now deem strange, even 'unhistorical'. Because this book is being written in English, I will use terms such as 'history', 'historical thought' and 'historical knowledge' frequently.

My choice of word usage requires a bit more elaboration. For the sake of clarity I have adopted the following practice. The word 'history', when used in English and not otherwise explained or clarified, should be taken as including the following meanings, depending upon the context of the discussion:

(a) a variety of forms (not all of which are written) in which the past is recovered, thought of, spoken of and written down, but *not* the evidence from the past used by the historian, speaker or thinker in constructing their text, speech, story, painting or monument;
(b) a particular *type* of historical writing, composed in continuous prose, as distinct from annals or chronicles arranged into discontinuous annual chunks (though we will see that this distinction is not always helpful, especially in pre-modern times, or in non-European contexts such as China);
(c) the 'discipline' of history as it has developed in the two centuries just passed.

All of these refer back in some way to accounts of the past or their manufacture rather than to the past itself. But 'history' has in the last quarter millennium acquired a fourth, and very different meaning, namely the 'accumulated events of

the past' or even, when given qualities of personhood, intent, agency and moral preference, 'the manifest direction of the accumulated events of the past'. This is the sense in which the word has been used by certain philosophers of history and world historians from the time of G. W. F. Hegel in the early nineteenth century to that of Francis Fukuyama at the end of the twentieth and, with greater harm, by politicians, generals and ideologues of various persuasions who were convinced that 'History' was on their side – a crushing and merciless tsunami atop which they surfed as it obliterated those who stood in its way. This sense is a modern one, dating from the late eighteenth century, though there are certainly historians or historical thinkers, some of them discussed in this book, who well before Hegel treated the past as a collective and decodable pattern, worth speculating about. Because our subjects sometimes refer to 'History' in this sense, we must on occasion also do so when discussing their work. To make clear that I am referring to that usage (which E. H. Carr rejected along with providence, world spirit and manifest destiny)[3] and not any of those listed above as (a), (b) and (c), I have routinely capitalized the word 'History' when it is deployed in this way. Lower-case 'history', then, will denote variously the set of literary (and non-literary) forms that ***contain*** thought or statements about the past, ***a mode of thinking about the past*** as a set of events that occurred in real time and, in modern times, a professional ***discipline***.

These small-h meanings, however, are also not entirely the same, nor do they relate to each other in identical ways across all cultures: it is possible to separate out the content, historical thinking, from the container and, conversely, to find various 'modes' of thinking, historical, poetic and mythical, within a single genre or a variety of genres, all of which are specific to time and place. '[H]istory can be, and is, composed in many genres', comment the three authors of a recent book on South Asian historical thought. 'The choice belongs with the historian, who aims at a particular audience and conforms to the preferences and exigencies of a given moment. A single story can also pass from one genre to another as it moves from one social milieu to another...' We would do well to remember the following: history is an act of communication (generally now verbal and graphic but, as we will see, sometimes through other means) between an author/speaker and a reader/audience; and the truth value of any statement about the past is determined not only by *what* is contained in a text or recitation but in *how* the historian believes an audience will react to it, and how, in fact, that audience actually does so. South Asian audiences knew perfectly well, because of their sense of 'texture', when a work was being factual and when it was sliding into fiction, without it necessarily being signposted by the author.[4] This is not so very different from the kind of double-belief that Paul Veyne has ascribed to the ancient Greeks,[5] or which applied among the retellers of popular tales about the past in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. 'Truthful' and 'factual' are not identical and interchangeable

terms, something which writers on poetics from Aristotle through Sidney, even working without a modern conception of the 'fact', recognized in asserting the truth value of poetry.

What Is Historiography?

Another word which will appear often is 'historiography'. Although this word has been used at various times to describe the writing of history, in the present book it will denote both 'history-writing' (its literal sense) and secondarily what we might call the 'meta' level of historical thinking, that is, the study of how history itself has been written, spoken or thought about over several millennia and in a wide variety of cultures. 'Historiography', like 'history', requires a bit more definition because, like 'history', it is fraught with different meanings. While it clearly (and *unlike* 'history/History') can never mean *the past*, and while in a strict sense it is almost by definition a written record of the past (the syllable 'graph' refers to written symbols), no two 'historiography' courses on a university curriculum will necessarily intend the same thing in using the word. In some modern history departments it would be possible, for instance, for a student to take a number of different courses called 'historiography', dealing with any of the following:

(a) a study of historical methods – essentially a 'how to do history' course; a variant of this is the study of historical errors and fallacies, or how *not* to do history;
(b) the review and study of the state of knowledge and key debates in one national area, sub-discipline or historical event, for instance 'recent trends in Sino-Japanese historiography' or (more clearly) 'the historiography of the Russian Revolution', where what is being referred to is past and current scholarship *about* the Russian Revolution, and not the writings of Pokrovskii, Pankratova and other historians active before and after 1917;
(c) the history of historical writing, as in 'Japanese historiography from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries', typically a review of the great historians and their texts, but sometimes expanding outward to consider non-canonical works, and even the wider social and cultural contexts within which such works were produced.

Among these three usages of the word 'historiography' we will not be using (a) very much if at all, even though we will have occasion to discuss the history of historical methods, and of what are sometimes called 'ancillary disciplines' to history, such as epigraphy (the study of inscriptions) and palaeography (the deciphering of old or unfamiliar handwriting); some celebrated historical errors and

mis-steps will also be mentioned incidentally, in particular a number of infamous 'fakes'. Nor will usage (b) often appear. Where the word is used it will generally be as defined above by (c). In that sense, again, this entire book is an exercise in historiography, albeit of a more global range than the more traditional survey running from Herodotus through the nineteenth-century German Leopold von Ranke to today and invariably excluding anything outside the borders of Europe or North America. But two further qualifications must be added even here. First, the word 'historiography' in some past cultures has come to acquire a fourth possible meaning (d), now archaic in Western parlance, as something very close to or synonymous with 'history', that is, an account of the past. When authors of the Renaissance and seventeenth century, for instance, wished to refer to the authors of historical works (including often their own), they often indiscriminately blended the two. Thus the early sixteenth-century Florentine writer Francesco Guicciardini might be described as a 'historian' by one contemporary commentator and as a 'historiographer' by another. As late as the mid-eighteenth century, Voltaire used both terms, though in his case to draw an important distinction (see Chapter 6 below) between the ***historiographe***, an officially sponsored compiler, and the ***historien***, an independent writer of superior stylistic ability, answering only to his conscience and his public. This conflation of the two terms becomes even more complicated when dealing with the select group of authors who wrote not only about the past but about writing about the past. This is a smallish number, but it spans the world and goes back many hundred years to antiquity, including along the way notables from the Chinese critic Liu Zhiji in the eighth century to the French scholars Jean Bodin and Henri de la Popelinière in the late sixteenth century, to a modern-day writer such as the late classicist Arnaldo Momigliano. Most of these individuals thus wrote both history and historiography, the latter being understood as 'history of history' or 'consideration of the past and present practices and beliefs of historians'.

And that raises the second qualification. This book is an exercise in a particular type of historiography, the history of historical thought and writing. Its subjects are the many people, a majority but not all of them men until the twentieth century, who have recovered and/or represented the past either out of personal interest or with some wider social or political purpose in mind. And the book itself is also a ***history*** because it tells a story, in narrative form, of a particular subject over time, that subject being the genre or practice of which the book is a specimen. Yet the book is not, narrowly speaking, a history of ***historiography*** in senses (c) or (d), whether European or more global, if by that we limit ourselves to the modern conception of all history being written or printed and contained on paper or some similar material. Certainly, that will be a major topic. However, I have deliberately called this volume *A Global History of History* (and not *A Global History*

professional historians. On the other hand, they should not be studied entirely in isolation. Just as the history of the world is a story of encounters and conflicts between different peoples, so the history of history itself demonstrates that the different modes of knowing the past have often come into contact with and demonstrably influenced one another. With the advantage of hindsight, it looks now as if all the various streams of historical thinking that the world has seen have now flowed into the rather large lake of professional history built on European and especially nineteenth-century German academic practice. But this result was by no means inevitable, nor was it necessarily analogous to a conquest, since in many cases Western practices were willingly adopted, even zealously pursued by, social reformers in other countries seeking an alternative to long-standing and, to them, restrictive indigenous practices. Perhaps of even greater importance, the influences were not always in one direction. While Western history has certainly come to be the dominant model, it has in turn been profoundly influenced by its encounters with other forms of historical knowledge, even if only sharpening definitions of what history should and should not be by comparing it with an exotic but lesser 'other'. Spanish historical writing of the sixteenth century certainly had a huge impact on how the past of the newly discovered Americas was written, but the early modern missionaries who wrote those histories had to adapt their writings to the sources available in native oral and pictographic practices. I will argue further on that these contacts, and this growing awareness of alternative modes of historicity, obliged Europeans to make some decisions about what *they* deemed 'within-scope' for true history, and thereby prepared the ground for a hardening of European attitudes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This in turn set the table for the nineteenth-century achievement of Western hegemony over history – what I have termed in one chapter 'Clio's empire'. I have used the figure of Clio, the Greek muse supposed to have been daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne (memory), frequently in this book as both a symbol and an image of the West's historical culture, and eventually the planet's. The book's cover features Clio in a striking iconographic representation of the link between history and empire. Its early nineteenth-century artist, who wanted to draw attention to Napoleon's 'historic' achievements, did so by having the classically garbed figure of the muse, a Roman-style bust of the emperor to her right (viewer's left), display a slate listing (in French) Napoleonic achievements to a number of figures representing the peoples of the world. The bust itself connects Napoleon with ancient Rome rather unsubtly via both the laurel and the inscription, 'Veni, Vidi, Vici' – the phrase 'I came, I saw, I conquered' ascribed by Plutarch and Suetonius to Julius Caesar. Clio gestures towards the bust with her left hand and holds the slate in her right (it is French, the modern language, not Latin, that is at the centre of the painting). Several of Clio's assembled audience raise their right hands in acknowledgment of,

and apparent acquiescence to, France's hegemony. While some stand comfortably in the front row, others crowd in behind, and still others at the rear struggle to squeeze into the modest classical temple, including a few from regions where the Napoleonic armies would never march: in the full-size painting, the oriental figure of a Mongol or Chinese here visible at the right can be observed gripping a column with his left hand to balance himself as he leans in to hear, the implication being that even the unconquered ought to wish inclusion within this New World Order. Out of view here, a wigged figure, presumably Britain, crosses his right hand over his chest, also in deference. But within the view, immediately below the oriental observer, we can see another figure of ambiguous complexion and ethnicity, clasping his hands as he raises his eyes to the heavens – an invocation of thanks? Or, one wonders, a quiet prayer for deliverance?

The artist, Alexandre Veron-Bellecourt, was not making any kind of statement about the activity of studying or writing about the past; this was part of a series of paintings on various aspects of the Napoleonic successes to date. Veron-Bellecourt was, to use our parlance, focused on History, not history. Yet the painting is unintentionally prophetic of the developments of the next two centuries, during the course of which it would be Clio's empire, not Napoleon's, that would ultimately thrive. In a book aspiring to be global, why, one asks, do we allow a minor classical deity to stand for all the world's historiography? Does this not privilege a particular kind of history, a specific way of looking at the past? It does indeed, but not because I wish to suggest that the West is a synecdoche for the globe. My point is precisely the opposite: that the structures and practices of history in the Western world which we conventionally trace back to the classical era have ***become*** global over the course of the past several centuries, and with mixed consequences. The book attempts to explain how and why this occurred, while also exploring the ways in which the European approach to the study of the past, forged into the late nineteenth–early twentieth-century discipline, was syncretically adapted or altered better to mesh with radically different cultures.

This raises a further issue. As 'world history' and latterly 'global' history have gradually won both academic and curricular acceptance over the past few decades, it has become clear that the noblest plans for inclusiveness often run aground on the shoals of Eurocentrism. If on the one hand we simply 'add Asia (or Africa, or Latin America, or Polynesia) and stir', we wind up with a homogenized agglomerate vision of a single world historiography whose waters have magically converged in that large modern lake, itself seen only from its Western beaches. All the past traditions of historical writing, thinking, singing, painting and inscribing can be triumphantly sublimated into a victorious European project that looks something like the 'Borg' of *Star Trek* fame or,

less ominously, one of the seventeenth-century philosopher Leibniz's monads, in which each small part reflects the whole. As Edward Said famously observed, the alleged universalism of various disciplinary fields, among which he includes historiography, is 'Eurocentric in the extreme, as if other literatures and societies had either an inferior or a transcended value', a loaded view which Said traced to Enlightenment thought.[9]

There are ways around this towards an inclusive historiography that borrows one principle attributed to Ranke and nineteenth-century historicism (a term defined at length in Chapter 7 below), and treats each historical culture as unique and of value. But, on the other hand, if we simply recount a number of parallel histories of history, West and East, we risk losing perspective; we will miss both the 'big picture', pointillist though it may be, *and* a sense of the relative scale, significance and magnitude of different types of history. We will also jeopardize any hope of making meaningful generalizations and of finding the red threads that may stretch, in a meandering fashion, from beginning to end. Here explicit comparison can help, together with attention to the ways in which historical cultures have been aware of one another for a very much longer time than they have interacted. R. G. Collingwood, as Eurocentric a historiographer as has ever lived, did not like comparison, and thought that it added nothing to our understanding of a particular event.[10] His mistake was lumping all comparative work with the drive towards general laws, not something any modern comparativist aspires to do. But Collingwood also wrote from the position not of an external observer but rather as an insider, dwelling at the heart of the dominant *régime d'historicité* (a useful phrase coined by the French classicist François Hartog).[11] This is a regime that has ruled over the study of the past since the nineteenth century, and has only rather recently been shaken by postmodern and postcolonial criticism.

Given the dominance of Western models, it would simply be stupid to claim that 'all forms of historicity have been equal and all can live in harmony' because that demonstrably hasn't happened. Micol Seigel suggests that the underlying contradiction in any narrative of world history is the project of narrative itself, 'an inescapable aspect of historical thinking' or, as the influential postmodern historiographer and literary theorist Hayden White has put it in one of his most important essays, that which bestows the illusion of reality on the past.[12] We can extend this further, to the meta-problem of narrating the past of the narration of the past. The challenge of the present book is thus to tell a coherent worldwide narrative of the history of history without creating either a kaleidoscope of different coloured histories, beautiful and dizzying, but ultimately momentary, transitory and meaningless, or its opposite, a Long March, a triumphalist

narrative which leads *inevitably* to the modern academy. All histories are *not* the same, nor should they be measured in the same way. We do no service to Vedic era *purāṇa*s or Mixtec painted histories to claim either that they are Western histories in embryo or to assert rosily that their truth claims should be taken as literally as their contemporary 'counterparts' in Europe; their creators would have been surprised at our taking them in that light. Similarly, we don't really know how the history of history will end, any more than we know with whom it began. It will only do so when that last man or woman writes or utters the last sentence about the past, and until then, any conclusion is provisional. (Let us hope that this person has time to reach a conclusion, and that anyone is there to hear it, though this seems unlikely.) The medieval chroniclers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could not have imagined the humanist historical writings of the fifteenth and sixteenth, much less the academic apparatus of the last century, or the Annales School. The progressive fragmentation of the discipline over the past half century, combined with the challenges of postmodernism, feminism and postcolonialism, examined here in Chapter 9, can suggest to the pessimist the impending doom of history; the house that we constructed over many generations, and in which we have been generally comfortable for over a century (though frequently redecorating and renovating it), may now be standing in the way of a number of intellectual bulldozers closing in from different directions. Or, perhaps that house is about to enter a new global golden age: the revolution in large databases, the internet and on-line research of the past decade alone has made it possible to conduct research in very different ways than we used to do, and doubtless will open up new channels of inquiry. So far as history is concerned, we do not know where current trends will eventually take our successors. To borrow a famous image from Hegel, the owl of Minerva continues, for now, to perch quietly on its branch.

'Rise' of the Discipline of History – a Tale too Triumphantly Told?

What is sometimes called the modern 'discipline' – an academic term beloved of professors and students rather than the public – of history has had for about 150 years a very clear set of professional codes and practices, generally understood by most, though of late challenged by alternative practices and differing senses of what is a proper subject for the historian. The 'profession' that adheres to this discipline is in some ways a very large and heterogeneous international craft guild, as fierce as any college of physicians or law society; and it has by

and large policed and enforced its own codes and rules. Misdemeanours such as careless citation of sources lead to critical book reviews; capital crimes such as plagiarism or its opposite, the invention of sources (not an uncommon practice in earlier times) are dealt with most severely by the offender's own peers, leading to derision, condemnation, professional disgrace and even loss of employment. Somewhere in between lie felonies of various sorts ranging from shoddy research, failure to judge sources correctly, or credulous acceptance of facts without verification. The road the modern historian treads is a treacherous one, with hazards at every turn, and fiercely judgmental critics, observing from the shoulder, ever ready to pounce, often in packs, at the first scent of blood. The late Hugh Trevor-Roper, Lord Dacre (1914–2003), was a brilliant essayist and effective critic of what he saw as poor quality work by others. In the 'Gentry Controversy' of the 1950s (a controversy about upward social mobility in Tudor England and the evidence supporting it) he famously attacked the great British social historian R. H. Tawney (1880–1962) and a younger contemporary of Trevor-Roper himself, Lawrence Stone (1919–99) over some of their methods. But three decades later the hunter became the hunted. The now ennobled Lord Dacre, having throughout his career 'bet on red'[13] – that is, chosen a default position of scepticism – abruptly and unfortunately placed all his accumulated reputational winnings on black. He prematurely pronounced a set of forged diaries, concocted by a clever German trickster, as being in the genuine hand of Adolf Hitler. This single late-career lapse of judgment severely tarnished though it did not (and should not have) utterly destroy his reputation. 'Discipline' it would seem is a polite word for what has often been rough justice.

How historiography, taken as 'writing about the past', ended up at its modern point has been a tale oft told, beginning (at least in recent times) with Eduard Fueter's classic *Geschichte der Neueren Historiographie* (1911) published precisely a century before this book. Though Fueter began only with the early Renaissance, his book has proved paradigmatic for much 'history of history' in the century since. In the English-speaking world alone, a series of prominent historians have one-by-one presented their narratives of the discipline's past.[14] The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, in 1921, linked an overview of the history of history to an exposition of some of his ideas about how it worked, something his English counterpart R. G. Collingwood would also do two decades later. George Peabody Gooch (1873–1968), a journalist, thwarted politician and prolific non-academic historian, wrote an informative account of a much shorter period, the nineteenth century, during which the discipline had become professionalized and entered the custody of the academics. His early exposure to Lord Acton, the Cambridge historian, made Gooch a product of exactly the historiographical system that he

of many centuries in possible pathways to the past; the establishment in a governing position of one broad set of codes and conventions to the exclusion of the different historical practices, alternative attitudes and countervailing beliefs that were in play elsewhere in the world at various points in the past; and the eradication of many of these not only from the modern enterprise of history but also from our very understanding of how that enterprise came into existence. Given this, I have (with some reluctance, and in full awareness of their relativity and limitations) employed collectivizing terms such as 'West' and 'Western', along with over-simple geographical terms such as 'East Asian' or even 'European', as convenient aggregations or modifications attached to systems of thinking about and representing the past – systems that in reality were much more variable, internally contested and impermanent. In short, terms such as these must be read throughout the book as if enclosed within permanent quotation marks.

We will return periodically to the problem of Eurocentrism in later chapters, but the weakness in most history of history (unlike, say, 'world history') hasn't really been *Eurocentrism* per se so much as something one might call *Eurosolipsism*. The placing of something at the centre of a map or a narrative at least acknowledges that there are peripheral parts, even if one can argue over what is centre and what periphery. But for the most part Western historiography, as represented in a century of surveys, has not placed its understanding of its past at the centre so much as made it the whole story. The periphery, the excluded, the marginal, the subordinate, the Other, whatever term one prefers, isn't simply a reducible supplement. It might as well not exist at all. In that respect, some of our early modern and Enlightenment predecessors, including favoured targets of postcolonialism like the eighteenth-century philologist William Jones and the nineteenth-century utilitarian James Mill, were streets ahead of us, often attuned to other approaches, and not always unremittingly hostile towards them. They at least acknowledged alternative roads to the past outside Europe, even if they were convinced that these roads led nowhere meaningful. This is a critical point: as suggested above, one of the arguments of this book will be that Western historiography has repeatedly and somewhat defensively fashioned itself, masking its internal insecurities and intellectual doubts, in response to other types of history that it encountered in the course of war, trade and other forms of contact. The great irony is that this occidental form of knowledge, having built itself into something unlike its oriental and 'ahistorical' counterparts, was by the nineteenth century sufficiently refined, confident in its methods and clear in its goals (themselves associated with Western success) that it could march with comparative ease – and sometimes by invitation – into those parts of the world that previously entertained different notions of what the past was and how and

why it should be remembered. And there is a second irony: even with the most willing local admirers, European historical practices could not be grafted wholesale on to foreign societies (any more than American democracy can be imposed today on countries with no democratic experience). In many instances they required some modification in order to achieve broad acceptance. The rough fit and the compromises have been elided from the story of history as the twentieth century wrote it, along with most of the indigenous historical practices that they supplanted.

This elision occasioned in eminent twentieth-century historiographers such as Herbert Butterfield a kind of sympathetic tokenism (Butterfield respected some aspects of Chinese historiography and the odd Muslim such as Ibn Khaldūn); in others it reinforced a notion that history cannot be written for any period prior to contact with the West. In a now infamous utterance earlier in his career, Hugh Trevor-Roper dismissed the existence of any history in non-Muslim Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans:

> Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.[19]

Not only was there no history to study from preliterate societies; the very attempt to do so should be the pursuit of sociologists, archaeologists and anthropologists. For historians, it would be a distraction from the main event, the 'purposive movement' of History (here in the capital-H sense). In words that could easily have been written by an eighteenth-century philosophe, Trevor-Roper added a warning against such digressions, through which 'we may neglect our own history and amuse ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe: tribes whose chief function in history, in my opinion, is to show to the present an image of the past from which, by history, it has escaped.'[20]

These quotations have been often repeated, and they are a great example of a provocatively and stunningly wrong generalization usefully producing the evidence for its own contradiction: its very wrongness became a rallying cry for forty years' worth of Africanists, and for others dealing with other parts of the non-European world, including American indigenous cultures (incidentally clobbered on the back-hand swing of Trevor-Roper's remarks). But Trevor-Roper is unfairly blamed for articulating clearly what in fact was a widely held position in his time

and for much of the previous several hundred years. We will see early examples of this in the European encounters in the New World beginning in the sixteenth century, and they have continued to recent times. The early twentieth-century English fascist Houston Stewart Chamberlain had an even more derisory view of China and non-Christian society than Friedrich Nietzsche, and once again one without history, 'without' meaning both 'not possessing' (which was certainly mistaken) and 'outside', the position that Hegel had taken in the nineteenth century. When the eminent American historian Daniel J. Boorstin (1914–2004) returned from a visit to Puerto Rico in 1955, he made in the pages of the *Yale Review* the bizarre statement (at least to eyes half a century further on) that the island had no history worth telling, at least not before 1898 when it became an American protectorate; despite the vigorous protests of Puerto Rican historians, it would be nearly a quarter century before another American drove a spike through Boorstin's argument.[21]

At the opposite end of this denial of history to certain parts of the world, there has been a countervailing belief in historical consciousness as a rather unitary, coherent and culturally universal phenomenon. An American historian writing in 1987 took as virtually axiomatic the existence of a 'unifying theme that has given coherence to history', which she linked to a definition of man as 'a rational, political animal'.[22] Others have modulated this by asserting that historical thinking is indeed a common human feature but one that develops in different ways that are culturally specific. 'Man is a historical animal', commented two distinguished Africanists in the early 1980s, quickly qualifying this statement by observing that historical consciousness also 'reflects the society to which it belongs'.[23] One shrinks from universalizing historical-mindedness, or even interest in the past, as an innate feature of human nature. It is possible to acknowledge that there are people who have in fact lived quite happily without history, thank you very much. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, for instance, has proposed with reference to Hawaiian culture that a 'historylessness' was there induced by a continuous redistribution of land, preventing the formation of local lineages and thus any genealogical memories beyond living personal experience. The Maori of New Zealand, it has been suggested, live in a kind of 'eternal return' in which contemporaries appropriate to their own persons the acts of remote ancestors.[24] We should not seek ways of bestowing 'history' as a kind of badge of honour on every culture, much less trying to twist alternative modes of remembering or living with the past into Western categories. The historian of American native peoples, Calvin Martin, has made a similar observation. 'We historians ... quite deliberately insert an alarm clock in our posed scenes of Indians – and likewise furnish them with the wrong time. That is, we make them into a "people

of history'': assign them our terms and conception of living in time and space, our commitment to changing reality and changing humanity over the ages'.[25] Nor should one assume that a culture without history at one time necessarily lacks it at all times, as one ethnohistorian has recently argued in connection with the Inuit of Greenland and Canada.[26] The late anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) long ago posited the notion of 'cold' and 'hot' societies as a preferable alternative to 'peoples without history', pointing out that any culture will have an attitude to the past, either rejecting its influence on the present in an effort to make their institutions timeless and permanent, or 'internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development'.[27] We should be mindful that European cultures have at various times exhibited an equal ambivalence to change, even when they were commonly practising the writing of history.

Modern Historicity in Perspective

In a celebrated phrase, the postcolonial critic Dipesh Chakrabarty has called for the 'provincializing of Europe', noting that Europe has traditionally provided the scale against which the rest of the world is measured.[28] That being said, it is difficult to make European historiography simply one among several approaches. As most postcolonial scholars would concede, and as later chapters of this book will contend, the European-descended Western form of historiography, complete with its academic and professional institutions, *has* achieved dominance over other forms of writing or thinking about the past. This is paradoxically true even in circumstances where Western historical methods are seized and turned as a weapon on the very political or social structures that disseminated them (see Chapter 8). The more interesting questions are first, how this form of history came to be so influential, and second, whether it occurred without the 'victor' being affected in some ways by contact with the 'vanquished' (or in some cases, the 'vanished'). As Dominic Sachsenmaier has perceptively observed:

> [I]t would be wrong to simply identify diffusion from the West to the rest as the only force behind the genesis of academic historiography as a worldwide phenomenon. Rather, the global spread of cultures of rationality, the modern academic system and university-based historiography occurred in an intricate *jeu d'échelles* of trans-local and local contexts, colonial power formations, liberation movements, transnational intellectual networks and other factors. In any case, many character traits of academic historiography – such as the strong presence of Eurocentric worldviews – need to be seen not merely as export products of an allegedly pristine European tradition but also as the result of the continent's expansion and many complex socio-political transformations resulting from it. Western

historiography transformed at the same time as European academia began heavily influencing historical research elsewhere.[29]

My project in this book adopts a similar perspective, and attempts to meet Dipesh Chakrabarty at least part-way in recounting a somewhat different version of the history of history than has conventionally been told. The landscape thus takes in a variety of different historiographic traditions, running along parallel tracks for much of the time, but also criss-crossing and intersecting. These are embodied in different genres, transmitted in alternative forms of commemoration and communication (oral, pictorial, alphabetic), and created in widely varying social and political contexts. While the narrative necessarily proceeds in a sometimes non-linear manner, with rapid shifts from one part of the globe to another, I hope to convince the reader that a more pluralistic and complicated understanding of the history of history is both possible and necessary – and to demonstrate that there have been many avenues into the past, and differing beliefs about why the past matters at all.

Notes

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1983), 61.

2 Greg Dening, 'A Poetic for Histories', in his *Performances* (Chicago, 1996), 36.

3 E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York, 1961), 60.

4 Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (New York, 2003), 129.

5 Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. P. Wissing (Chicago, 1988).

6 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, CA, 1982).

7 For which see 'Further reading', below.

8 These were themselves relatively late departures from a notion of history as the record of the deeds and words of emperors of successive ruling dynasties, rather than the cumulative record of all the peoples of the 'Middle Kingdom'. *Guoshi* actually appeared in the Han era (see ch. 1), but the term first began to refer to a written acount of history in the Tang dynasty (see ch. 2) when there appeared several works bearing the title 'shi' denoting the written account of one or multiple dynasties. *Tongshi* is a much later arrival which refers to the writing of general history, ranging beyond the history of a single dynasty, though the word *tong* was used in the Tang period. The combined word *lishi*, which stands for 'history' in modern Chinese, first appears in the Ming era. I am grateful to Q. Edward Wang for assistance with the history of Chinese word usage.

9 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), 44.

10 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946; Oxford, 1961), 223.

11 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2003). Hartog uses the phrase principally to describe changing attitudes to the relationship

timeline

Twenty-fourth century BC	*Weidner Chronicle*
c. Twenty-second century BC	Sumerian King List
Tenth century to c. late seventh century BC	*Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible)
Eighth century BC	*Synchronistic History*
704–681 BC	*Eponymous Chronicle*
Seventh to sixth century BC	Neo-Babylonian Chronicle series
c. 480 BC	*Chunqiu* ('Spring and Autumn Annals')
c. 420 BC	Herodotus' *Histories*
c. 400 BC	*Zuozhuan* ('Zuo Chronicle'); Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*
mid-second century BC	Polybius' *Histories*
c. 90 BC	Sima Qian's *Shiji* ('Records of the Grand Historian')
c. AD 90	Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, *Jewish Wars* and *Against Apion*
c. AD 105–17	Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories*
c. AD 111	Ban Gu's *Hanshu* ('History of the Former or Western Han')
c. AD 361	The *Dīpavaṃsa* ('Island Chronicle')
c. AD 391	Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae Libri XXXI* ('Thirty-one Books of Deeds')
c. Fifth century AD	The *Višnu Purāṇa*

1 Foundations[1]

Introduction

Our story commences over 4,000 years in the past, with the earliest known forms of historical record-keeping in the ancient Near East. This chapter, which will cover by far the longest span of centuries in the entire book, will begin with Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Israelites. We will then turn to the Greeks, who are responsible for the very word 'history', as well as for its personification in the muse, Clio (Fig. 1), and then to their classical successors, the Romans. Because we are concerned with the history of history as a global and not simply a European phenomenon, we will also have to track the parallel (and to our knowledge not, at this point, intersecting) historical culture emerging from the most ancient civilization of the East, the Chinese. There may well have been historical thinking and commemoration in the Americas and in Africa, perhaps even in Australasia, during these early millennia, but we will defer consideration of those places until later chapters and times for which there exists firmer evidence of historiographical practices. Finally, the very different historical culture of South Asia (extending chronologically well beyond the boundaries of European antiquity) is addressed here precisely because it can provide a sharp corrective to any notion that the various types of Western historicity were the only possible perspective that the present could take on the past.

The Ancient Near East

The Near East was a complex, multilingual region extending from Egypt and what became the land of the Israelites, through the Levant, embracing Mesopotamia proper and the land of the Hittites in Anatolia and northern Syria. Within this

Figure 1 | Clio, the Muse of History. Roman marble figure, c. AD 130–40, here depicted as a Roman lady; the missing left hand may have held a scroll.

region dwelled a number of very long-lived civilizations, and they did not recall or preserve their pasts in the same ways or consistently in the same types of record. The evidence is literally fragmentary, deriving as it does from inscriptions on steles, stone tablets or rocks, and writings on papyrus; a majority of these objects have not survived entirely intact. One looks in vain for 'history' as a concept, much less for works devoted to it. There is no lexical equivalent for either 'history' or 'historiography' in any language of the region, though the Hebrew words *tôledôt* ('genealogies') and *divrê hāyyāmîm* ('words of those days') might be considered approximate equivalents.[2] Terminology is important, especially when sorting out what peoples in the past thought, and so is the nomenclature of categories – the Greeks in particular took the generic divisions of history seriously, as would

Figure 2 | The Palermo stone, one of five fragments of a stele known as the Royal Annals of the Old Kingdom, other parts of which are kept in Cairo and London. All are part of a rectangular stele of black amphibole diorite with names of pre-dynastic rulers, levels of Nile floods and royal protocols. Engraved in the twenty-fifth century BC.

Renaissance humanists two millennia later. But it would be unwise to leap from the lack of linguistic terms, or of a literary genre, to the conclusion that 'there was no history back then'.

Arguments can certainly be made for a sense of the past in ancient Egypt, and in particular an effort to memorialize the successive dynasties of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms. Very few of the 'annals' recorded by the first pharaohs remain extant: an early specimen is the 'Palermo stone' (twenty-fifth century BC, Fig. 2), a fragmentary stele (so named for one of its portions, in Palermo, Sicily) inscribed with king lists from pre-dynastic times down to the Fifth Dynasty in the mid-third millennium. This was probably used much later by the Hellenized Egyptian Manetho in his own *Aegyptiaca*, very little of which has survived. We know that the annals of the wars of Thutmose III (r. *c.* 1479–25) were extracted and copied on to a temple wall by a scribe, thereby preserving them. Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, various historical inscriptions and texts are attributable to the Hittites, Syrians and Phoenicians. A 'Tablet of Manly Deeds' was written in the seventeenth

century BC during the reign of the Old Hittite king Hattusili I, and royal annals organizing the past by years continued for several centuries. The Hittites appear also to be the earliest people to have focused on the didactic and especially political uses of history, either justifying a particular situation by appeal to the past or by using its episodes to advise and admonish. It is in Mesopotamia proper, however, that one first finds unmistakable evidence of a deliberate human intention to write about the past, especially among the Babylonians and Assyrians. The successive peoples that inhabited the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, who developed proto-alphabetic writing in cuneiform, also created the elementary forms for the representation of the past, such as king lists, annals and chronicles, and the vessels for preserving their own records, the library and the archive.

Many of the stories eventually captured in writing preceded its development and had previously been preserved orally. 'Epic', a genre that relates the martial deeds and adventures of heroes and kings, often in interaction with the gods, was the oldest form of historical narrative. That many of the episodes which epics recount are legendary and that their heroes were either exaggerated or may never have existed at all is not in itself evidence of a lack of history or historical thinking: the singers of and listeners to these stories almost certainly believed at some level either in their literal truth or at least in the moral principles that they embodied. Though it recounts largely legendary episodes, the oldest extant epic, that of *Gilgamesh*, so-named for its eponymous hero, the king of Uruk, thus has some connection to history, as did later Babylonian epics of the second and first millennium. Further afield, the great Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, ascribed to the bard Homer, portray what Greeks of the eighth to fifth centuries BC believed to be their own ancient past. The border between epic and something that looks to us more like history – the listing of undeniably 'real' figures – is often blurred. The same Babylonian term 'tablet-box' that featured in the beginning of *Gilgamesh* also describes the pseudo-historical monumental inscription, supposedly written by the Akkadian king Naram-Sin in the late third millennium known as the 'Cuthean Legend'.

Closer to a recognizably historical document are a class of text that can broadly be called 'chronographic' – ascribing particular events to a specific date within a sequence – and which include sub-genres such as 'king lists', 'annals' and 'chronicles' (see Box 1). Among the earliest of these is the Sumerian king list, probably initiated in the twenty-second century, and existing in several recensions of considerably later date. It stretches back into mythical antiquity but goes beyond a mere list in later times to indicate inquisitive uncertainty about the historicity of some rulers expressed in the utterance 'Who was king? Who was not king?' It is also a deliberate attempt to present the historical record in a particular light, necessitated by the circumstances of the author's own time. Various other forms of

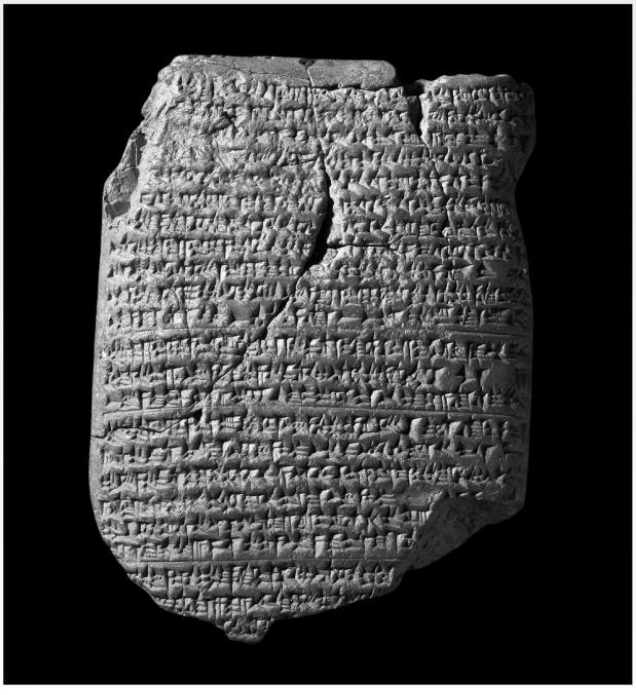

Figure 3 | Cuneiform tablet with part of the Babylonian Chronicle (605–594 BC), obverse of tablet. Neo-Babylonian, c. 550–400 BC.

Chronicle of Tiglath-pileser, a tablet describing Assyro-Babylonian relations in the twelfth to eleventh centuries, and the *Esarhaddon Chronicle* from the period of Assyrian dominance during the early seventh century, are similarly tilted towards a pro-Assyrian perspective. In contrast, those accounts written by the Babylonians themselves are often more neutral, mentioning Babylonian defeats as well as victories.

The seventh and sixth centuries produced further works such as the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle series (Fig. 3), running from 747 to the Persian capture of Babylon in 539, and the Late Babylonian Chronicle series that continued this down to the third century, by which time contact with the Greeks had broadened the outlook of the authors. Variants of earlier texts also appeared: the 'Dynastic Chronicle', really a king list, is a late version of the much older Sumerian king list. The latest Babylonian work is that of Berossus, a contemporary of the Egyptian Manetho in the third century. Nothing of Berossus' original work (written in Greek rather than Akkadian) has survived though it was well known in Hellenistic and Roman times, though even then it had already doubtless been altered and edited; it is one of the long list of ancient texts of which we possess indirect or partial knowledge because later writers quoted from it.

The Persians, successors to Babylonian power in the sixth century, would continue this historiographical activity rather more modestly. There is little evidence of it from the reigns of the first two Achaemenid kings, Cyrus the Great

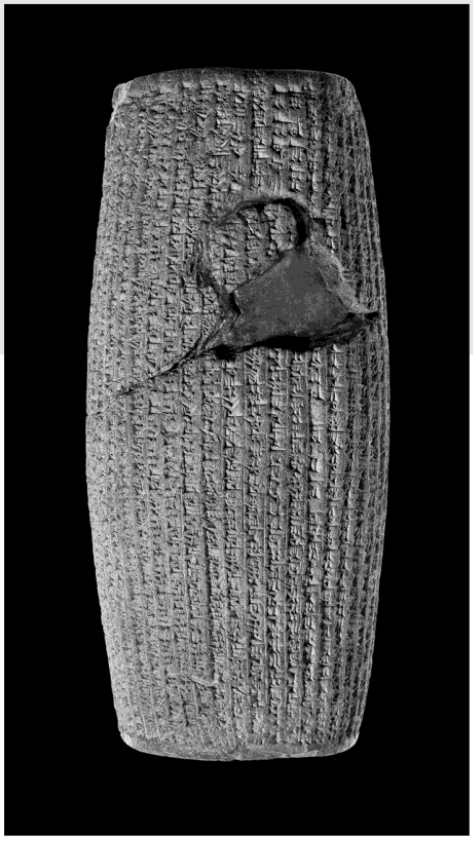

Figure 4 | The Cyrus cylinder, 530s BC. An account by Cyrus of Persia of his conquest of Babylon and the capture of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king.

(r. mid-sixth century) and his son Cambyses: the clay record in the British Museum, known as the 'Cyrus cylinder' (Fig. 4), on which is inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform an account of Cyrus' conquest of Babylon, appears to be of Mesopotamian rather than Persian origin. But with the multilingual Behistun Inscription, Darius I (r. 521–486) became the first Persian king to have composed history. The inscription, whose paragraphs generally begin 'Darius the king says', is also the longest text produced by a Persian ruler, and the only one commonly taken to have been conceived as historical, insofar as it recalls events in the first few years of Darius' reign.

R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943), a respectable archaeologist and later an important philosopher of history, was reluctant to consider any Near Eastern or biblical text as legitimately historical. Like many of Collingwood's quotable utterances and blanket statements, this seems unduly restrictive.[3] There is evidence that, unlike straightforward king lists or chronicles that simply recorded events progressively as they happened, some of these authors sought to write about past occurrences. Since there is little evidence of a continuous tradition of record-keeping or

chronicle-writing, wherein one author simply added to a work begun by his predecessors, then many of the works must have been the result of what we would now call 'research' – the examination, selection from and collation of multiple earlier sources. Many went beyond simply relating former events, aspiring to provide advice, counsel or cautionary tales, a recurring theme through much of the global history of historical writing. A didactic purpose emerges from one of the best-known examples of early Mesopotamian historical writing, the Old Babylonian *Weidner Chronicle*, a propagandistic composition reaching back to the early third millennium but largely devoted to the Sargonic dynasty of Akkad in the twenty-fourth and twenty-third centuries. Surviving only in much later copies, this is one of the first historical works clearly designed to recover and preserve the past for the edification of present and future, with a lesson attached, in this case the propagation of the cult of the god Marduk. Framed as a dialogue among divine beings, the account in the *Weidner Chronicle* of Sargon of Akkad and his grandson Naram-Sin contrasts the godliness of the former with the disobedience to Marduk of the latter, with the consequence of the downfall of Akkad at the hands of Gutian barbarians. The long-standing explanation of events through an alternating current of divine favour and punishment, a recurrent theme for many centuries, thus had an early start. It turned up again in the early seventh century when the later Assyrian defeat of Babylon was ascribed to Marduk's displeasure at recent kings, and it appears frequently throughout the travails of the children of Israel at the hands of foreign hosts depicted in the Hebrew Bible.

The Beginnings of Jewish Historical Thought

No other Western civilization has proved as difficult to explain, historiographically, as the Israelites, or Jews as they later became. Like most Near Eastern cultures they had a term for neither 'history' nor 'myth', and appear not to have held any strong belief about a distinction between the two. Somewhat exaggerated claims have been made for the uniqueness of the historical sense in the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible), to the point of viewing the Hebrews, even more than the Greeks, as the inventors of history, or at least of History, in the sense of a cumulative flow of events towards a divinely ordained conclusion. All of this has been complicated by the modern and considerably more sophisticated understanding of the sequence and chronology of sections in the *Tanakh*, now known to have been the work of several hands, and to have been written in periods from the Davidic kingship (tenth century) to the Babylonian Exile (sixth century).

Another generalization, beloved of modern theologians and Christian religious historians, runs like this: the monotheistic religion of the Hebrews, and their belief

in a covenant with a single God gave them a distinctive and unrivalled sense of past, present and future, and of a linear direction to time that differs sharply from the cyclical vision in other parts of the world, including the classical civilizations. Apart from the fact that one finds both a linear and cyclical sense of time in Greek and Roman writers (as we will see below), this argument has been discredited by the unmistakable evidence in Hebrew writings of historical cycles, the most obvious one being that of alternating divine pleasure and displeasure with the chosen people, leading in this world to the repeated experience of slavery and liberation, captivity and freedom. Certainly the use of typology and prefiguration which is an important part of the Jewish canon is hard to imagine on a strictly linear and eschatological vision of time, though the fulfilment of earlier events by later ones implies a progression rather than mere repetition. Contextually, it is also difficult to see the Israelite/Jewish sense of history as entirely extractable and insulated from its geographic setting, given the early contacts between the Israelites and the other peoples of the region.

All this aside, there is something going on in the *Tanakh* that is harder to find in the more fractured evidence from Mesopotamia. Biblical scholars of the past century, faced with the fact that a literal reading of the Hebrew Bible is difficult to sustain – and holding to the then widely held attitude that judged a history's value almost wholly by its reliability as a source – have sometimes distinguished between oral and ahistorical tales or *Sagen* and the more reliable written *Geschichte* (the terms are German because much of the modern scholarship has been conducted in that language). The most unarguably 'historical' section of the *Tanakh*, in that it describes times, persons and events of whose existence we are reasonably confident because there is evidence for them in external sources, was possibly the work of a single writer, the so-called Deuteronomistic Historian, and stretches from Deuteronomy (the last of the 'Five Books of Moses' or Torah) through 2 Kings, but even its reliability has been challenged. Recent scholarship has therefore cast doubt on the *historicity* of the *Tanakh* (that is, its basis in fact), without necessarily jettisoning the idea that one can find *historiography* (a deliberate effort to represent the past) within it, albeit a historiography never intended to capture literal, as opposed to religious, truth. In the early genealogies of Genesis and in the more chronological accounts of the Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, one finds both an effort to memorialize events accurately as a written record and a strong sense of the divine destiny of the Israelites as a chosen people, a linear progress through which oscillates a recurrent cycle of triumph and misery as God first rescues his children from Egyptian slavery and then alternately chastises the erring Israelites for disobedience, sin or idolatry, and delivers them from successive oppressors. This achievement is striking – all the more so when one contrasts it with the dearth of Jewish secular historical writing during the millennium-and-a-half of Diaspora between Flavius Josephus (*c.* AD 37 to *c.* 100) and the sixteenth

century when Jews, still scattered across Eurasia, began to rediscover the formal study of the past.

Of all the Jews, it is Josephus, who lived near the end of antiquity, who has given us the closest thing to a history in the classical sense. Josephus wrote several centuries after the authors of the *Tanakh*, and with a foot in both the Jewish and the Roman-Hellenistic worlds. This has made him an early example of a phenomenon we will see repeatedly, a historian from one culture writing in the milieu and style of another. He became a Roman citizen and adopted the name Flavius from the family name of his patrons, the Emperors Vespasian and Titus. All of this, plus his failure to die with his colleagues in Galilee during the rebellion against Rome, has led to the vilification of his character for two millennia. But of the value of his historical works, surviving versions of which were composed in Greek, there seems little doubt: his *Antiquities of the Jews* has proved an invaluable source for the social, legal and religious customs of the Jews; and his *Jewish Wars* is useful for the conflicts between the Jews and their enemies from the Seleucid capture of Jerusalem in 164 BC through to the sacking of the city and the destruction of its temple in Josephus' own time. Both works make a case for the antiquity of the Jews, and for their capacity to live peaceably within Roman rule, the rebellions having been in his eyes the work of successive generations of fanatics. In a further work, *Against Apion*, Josephus had occasion to criticize some of his Greek predecessors by way of defending the greater antiquity of Jewish tradition, announcing a feature which recurs in later ages, arguments over the relative age of institutions, nations, religions and even families.

Greek Historiography

Josephus wrote at the end of five centuries of Greek historiography. The Greeks have figured prominently in histories of history with good reason, even if this has often occurred to the neglect of achievements of greater antiquity further east. Why so much attention? For one thing, the very word 'history' itself is of Greek origin, first used in connection with the study of the past by Herodotus of Halicarnassus (see below). Second, it is with the Greeks that Europe began routinely to associate histories and their authors. While there are some anonymous Greek writings, we by and large know the names, or at least the supposed names, of the authors of most extant works, even the many that are fragmentary. Indeed, in some cases, *all* we have is the name and the knowledge that the person at some point wrote a history, once familiar to contemporary or subsequent writers but since lost. Third, with the Greeks we also leave behind – albeit only temporarily – the rather confining format of annals and chronicles, without abandoning chronological writing.

Herodotus did not limit his scope to events themselves, though they remain at the core of his story; he paid attention to ethnographic issues, recording the customs and traditions of the Persians and other, non-Greek peoples. If he is the 'father' of history, it is of history in its more inclusive sense, which in our own day has swung heavily back into vogue with the rise of interest in the social and cultural past.

Herodotus began his *Histories* with perhaps the most succinct and naively unpretentious statement of purpose imaginable:

> These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the Barbarians from losing their due meed of glory; and withal to put on record what were their grounds of feuds.[4]

He wished to inquire as to why, in the decades just previous to his birth, the Greeks and the *βάρβαρος* ('Barbarians', originally a Greek term for non-Greek-speaking peoples and which in his time had only just begun to acquire its derogatory associations) fought each other; and, following the epics from which he drew inspiration, he wanted to celebrate their achievements. The barbarians in question were the Persians under first Darius I and then his son Xerxes, and as it happens it is to Herodotus' story that we owe much of our knowledge of the rise of the Achaemenid dynasty, of the failed Persian invasions of Hellas (Greece) in the early fifth century, and of their defeats at the celebrated battles of Marathon in 490 and then Thermopylae, Plataea and the naval engagement of Salamis a decade later. The Greece of Herodotus' own time – dominated by an Athens increasingly resented by its own empire and feared by its rival Sparta – had been built on the outcome of the Persian conflict. But to explain the early fifth-century struggles, Herodotus realized that he had to look back further in time, and after an almost pro forma summary of legendary and epic episodes he begins his fascinating story with the wealthy Croesus of Lydia, conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia, and with the rather vicious Medean king Astyages, Cyrus' own grandfather, whom he would depose.

Although far too young to have witnessed any of these sixth-century events, or even the Perso-Greek conflicts earlier in his own century, Herodotus travelled widely, spoke to many witnesses or those who had information from witnesses, and set down the truth as he believed it. While he was defended by later writers, Herodotus' reputation in subsequent centuries was not a positive one, as he was accused of credulity or even outright falsehood. The 'father of history' was often called the 'father of lies', the author of a history that lay on the foggy borderland between fact and fiction, its assertions not to be trusted. The sniping started almost immediately with an assault by Ctesias, a Persophile with access to Achaemenid records whose assault on his predecessor was so intemperate as to be self-undermining. Greeks were on the whole disinclined to theorize about the

2: Thucydides on His Own Historical Methods

With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said. And with reference to the narrative of events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible. My conclusions have cost me some labour from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eye-witnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other. The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content. In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.

From Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.1.22–23, trans. R. Crawley (1910; New York: Modern Library, 1951).

writing of history, but the first-century AD biographer Plutarch would go to the trouble of cataloguing Herodotus' alleged crimes in a treatise 'On the Malice of Herodotus'. The great Italian historiographer Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–87) once noted that Herodotus' critics put him between the rock of accusations that he plagiarized from his predecessors and the hard place of being charged with outright invention. He came out either thief or liar.[5]

His immediate successor, Thucydides, did not attack Herodotus by name but almost certainly had him in mind among the retailers of a history 'attractive at truth's expense' (*Pelop. War* 1.1.21). Thucydides (d. *c.* 401 BC) may be the most widely revered past historian in the entire European tradition, though he too was not without his critics even in antiquity. In the eighteenth century, when Thucydides' reputation was especially high, the philosopher-historian David Hume would declare the first page of the *Peloponnesian War* to be the commencement of 'real' history. Whether or not this is justified, it is true that Thucydides was father to a very different sort of history than his predecessor. It is quite likely that he heard an oral public reading of Herodotus some time in the 420s, when the latter's work first appeared in Athens (it may have been the subject of a parody in the comedian Aristophanes' play the *Acharnians* in 425) and this may have inspired Thucydides' own later efforts, despite their differences in approach (Extract 2). Where Herodotus

was a perennial traveller, Thucydides was an Athenian through and through, a politician and unsuccessful general who found himself out of favour at a critical juncture in the Peloponnesian War. That conflict between Athens and Sparta (and their respective colonies and allies) endured for three decades and ultimately proved the ruin of Athens and the start of a rather short-lived period of Spartan hegemony. It is likely that Thucydides did not live to see the eventual outcome of this process, probably surviving the end of the war by only a few years, and his history breaks off at 411 without the war resolved, but it is a masterful account of the precipitous and unexpected defeat of the once-mighty *polis* that only decades before had humiliated Xerxes.

Like Herodotus, Thucydides relied on the spoken much more than the written word, though in a very different way. Herodotus had built much of his *Histories* on the foundation of oral tradition rather than written authority. Thucydides similarly did not practise very often that most basic form of research to all modern historians, study of older documents and their criticism and comparison, something often forgotten by those wishing to enthrone him as the visionary forefather of modern method. In fact, he relied on written sources only where he could not find a living witness, as for example in his account of the early history of Sicily. However, there the similarities end, and we observe Thucydides eschewing entirely several practices that were characteristic of Herodotus. For one thing, Thucydides was reluctant to look very far back for the causes of events. For another, he implied that only those who were 'insiders' to events such as himself could accurately recount those events: the belief that the historian should be a 'man of affairs' if not necessarily a general or a statesman was essentially born with his work. Privileged knowledge thus replaced an inferior form of hearsay: though Thucydides says rather little about his precise methods and sources, there would be no wandering interviews of possible eyewitnesses, and little reliance on oral evidence beyond the near-contemporary.

There is scant reference in Thucydides to the marvellous and unusual, a feature that enlivens Herodotus and which has remained a commonplace of ethnographically focused history throughout the centuries as one culture has discovered others. Where Herodotus, who had inherited some of the genealogical interests of his predecessors, populates his history with hundreds of named individuals there is a much more modest cast to the drama Thucydides stages. Where Herodotus painstakingly intervened in his own narrative to ensure that readers understood the problem of conflicting versions and incomplete sources, Thucydides tended to present a picture of seamless confidence, the complexities of evidence swept under a brilliant narrative rug. There is apparent certitude in his assertion that the cause of the Peloponnesian conflict lay not in the public reasons or triggers (disputes over colonies of Athens and Sparta) but in the wider phenomenon of Athens' rise to power and Sparta's rising fear of that power. Finally, Thucydides is also perhaps

the first historian in the West to state very clearly the target audience for his work. If Herodotus sought to explain to his contemporaries the events of the previous decades, Thucydides openly admitted that he wrote his work not for 'the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time' (*Pelop. War* 1.1.23), asserting, too, that the human condition was such as to make the future sufficiently like the present, and thus make his history a benefit and not merely an amusement for subsequent ages.

Thucydides' reputation for strict accuracy and truthfulness has not passed unchallenged. The classicist F. M. Cornford (1874–1943) argued that Thucydides had twisted his materials to fit the dramatic conventions of tragedy and that he had entirely overlooked the commercial causes of the war. Cornford's younger contemporary, R. G. Collingwood, was deeply sceptical of Thucydides' veracity and even his claim to the title of historian.[6] Nor have readers always preferred the Athenian's austere, matter-of-fact narrative to the warmer and more colourful tapestry woven by Herodotus. As early as the first century BC, the Greek historian of Rome, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who adhered to the general opinion that Thucydides 'has been most careful of the truth, the high-priestess of which we desire history to be',[7] was nonetheless critical of the Athenian and rather laudatory of Herodotus, whose subject of the Persian Wars seemed more noble and less distasteful than Thucydides' tale of calamity and folly. But no feature of Thucydides' history has caused his defenders so much trouble as his practice of including supposedly genuine speeches at critical points in his narrative. This concern of scholars derives from a long-standing fixation on what is best called by its German term, *Quellenkritik* ('source criticism'), the separation of tiny kernels of knowable and authentic wheat from baskets of supposititious, legendary or even outrightly mendacious chaff.

Recent scholarship has been more forgiving. We know, and Thucydides openly admits, that he did not personally hear all of the speeches that he relates, and that his memory of those that he did hear is imperfect – he did not record them word for word. On the other hand, one recent scholar has asserted that there is no single speech in Thucydides of which it can be said that it could *not* have been given in the manner and form in which he represents it.[8] The practice of including such speeches, possibly influenced by Greek tragedy, would not be short-lived, and it fulfilled an important role within a history, since words were deemed as significant and influential as deeds – in a sense, a famous and effective speech *was* a deed. The speech also provided an important narrative linkage between events, a device which the talented historian could use to enrich his account and transcend the boundaries of calendrical years. 'Speeches, so to speak, sum up events and hold the history together', Polybius would comment in the second century.[9] In the end, the only ancient historian known to have avoided speeches entirely is Pompeius

Box 2 Xenophon

An early heir to Thucydides' mantle as 'historian as soldier/statesman', Xenophon was born about the beginning of the Peloponnesian war (*c.* 431). He wrote his *Anabasis* (or 'march up-country') as an account of his own leadership of a group of Greek mercenaries after the defeat of their employer, Cyrus the Younger of Persia, who was challenging the authority of his older brother, the Persian king Artaxerxes II. While this text, and the *Cyropaedia* ('The Education of Cyrus'), about the upbringing and career of the same-named sixth-century Persian king, have been widely read by students of Greek language, Xenophon's major historical achievement rested with his *Hellenica*, covering Greek affairs from 411, where Thucydides broke off, to 362. In some ways this was the first example of a genre later known as 'the History of my own Life and Times'. It is a work that leaves out many important facts, but it illustrates better than most the fine line that historians were now treading between recounting the strict and unadorned truth and serving the higher purpose of lesson-provision, which sometimes required a deliberate distortion of chronology or exaggeration of events.

Trogus (*fl.* first century BC), and the practice would be revived by the classicizing humanist historians of the Renaissance.

With the declining autonomy and power of the ***polis***, the independent Greek city state, and the failure of Athenian democracy, the fourth and third centuries saw increasing numbers of prominent and colourful tyrants, mercenaries, warlords and monarchs, culminating in Alexander the Great. There was unsurprisingly a refocusing of historical writing towards individuals and their achievements, as well as more direct authorial commentary on their characters. The beginnings of another long tradition, the role of the historian as not only the reporter but also the 'judge' of past misdeeds, can be found in what remains of the highly oratorical work of Ephorus and especially Theopompus, a severe critic of historical figures. In terms of surviving texts, we have fared rather better with a third major fourth-century historian, Xenophon (*c.* 431 to *c.* 352), who has enjoyed a generally high reputation (see Box 2).

Of the Greek historians after Thucydides, perhaps none has won as high praise as Polybius (*c.* 200–118), though this admiration was rather slow in coming and did not really peak until the Renaissance, which admired his sober tone, his keen

many of the Greek historians. The survival rate among known texts of Roman historians has been even worse. The work of Vergil's friend Gaius Asinius Pollio (d. AD 4) has vanished without a trace. Scant fragments remain of Aulus Cremutius Cordus, famous for being forced to commit suicide in AD 25 during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, perhaps for having treated Julius Caesar's assassins too even-handedly. Of others such as Sallust we have their relatively minor works but not their major ones, or, as with Livy and Tacitus, what we have is a body of work missing several limbs and a good chunk of the torso. And, as with the Greeks, there are undoubtedly others whose very names have been lost along with their writings.

Historiography started slowly in Rome: whereas in Greece it had followed epic, the greatest Latin epic, the *Aeneid*, was a late arrival, composed by Vergil in the first century BC, and thus at virtually the same time that Livy, the great historian of the republic, was writing his prose history. There were early verse efforts at a narrative of the city's early history, in particular Gnaeus Naevius' (270–201) poem on the first Punic war, and Quintus Ennius' (239–169) *Annales*, an account of history from Aeneas to the early second century; barely sixty lines of Naevius and six hundred of Ennius now remain. Apart from these, two major families or groups of history-writing survive from early Rome, both of which had Greek influences. The first, perhaps derived from Greek horography, consisted of records maintained by a civic and religious official, the *pontifex maximus*, and annually transferred to bronze inscriptions in the Forum. These *Annales maximi* were little more than records of the sequence of annually appointed major officials – consuls, praetors, etc. The recurrent complaint by narrative historians of the triviality of the annalistic method, a commonplace during the Renaissance, would receive an early start in Cato's declaration that the records of the pontifex should not be imitated since they often amounted to 'how often grain was costly, how often darkness or something else blocked the light of the moon or the sun'.[11] Apart from the pontifical records, funeral orations, public inscriptions, family records and accounts by other magistrates of their periods in office (*commentarii*) would also provide material for historians. The second major family includes Roman writers who may have written continuous prose and, at least at first, composed their works in Greek. This included Quintus Fabius Pictor (*fl.* 225 BC), little of whose history has survived, though again he is known through later authors (he is one of Polybius' targets). Fabius is believed to have used a variety of sources ranging from earlier Greek writers to the *Annales maximi*, oral tradition, magistrate lists and chronicles kept by his own and other families. His work, which established the shape of early Roman history, would be complemented and revised by later historians.

The earliest-known prose history written in Latin, which has not survived, was the *Origines*, by the fiercely xenophobic politician and protector of Roman virtue, Cato the Censor (234–149), whose very choice of Latin was a protest against the

Greek influences which he saw as dangerously corrupting. Even he, however, followed the Greek model of continuous prose, and borrowed other aspects of Greek historiography such as the inclusion of what might be called 'remarkable facts'.[12] Later annalists such as C. Licinius Macer expanded the somewhat cursory account of early Roman history in their predecessors; interestingly, they have often been dismissed in subsequent ages as men of humble origins, with narrowly pro-Roman views and fertile imaginations, writers of entertainment quite without the senatorial seriousness and experience, much less the first-hand knowledge, of a Cato. This would not be the last time that high birth was seen as a necessary condition of historiographic talent.

Non-annalistic history remained for some time largely in Greek hands. The first-century works of Diodorus Siculus (*c.* 90–30) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*c.* 60 to after 7 BC) have survived rather more completely than most. Diodorus was a Sicilian Greek who, like Herodotus four centuries earlier, had travelled widely prior to writing his *Bibliotheca historica*. Another universal history in the manner of Polybius, it originally consisted of forty books, of which we have about a third intact. The title of 'Historical Library' was a reference to the number of earlier sources from which Diodorus drew his materials, which has often been a reason for dismissing this author as an unoriginal hack, though he would have understood himself instead as the culmination of a long stream of predecessors; 'tradition', a critical aspect of the historical enterprise, was beginning to weigh more heavily upon historians' choice of subjects and their arrangement of materials. Diodorus began with several books of geography and ethnography before launching into his narrative of events from the Trojan War to *c.* 60; as the ending has been lost, we do not know how far he got. The work is notable among other things for its practice of 'euhemerism' – the rationalization of reputed divine and semi-divine figures into human heroes and inventors in an attempt to historicize myth.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus focused more exclusively on Rome, and the main point of his *Roman Antiquities* was to defend Roman influence over the Greek world. In it we see the triumph of the rhetorical and hortatory strain of history-writing first seen in the time of Ephorus and Theopompus. It is Dionysius who coined the oft-repeated definition of history as 'philosophy teaching by example', and he continued the tradition of declaring, up-front, his own methods and preferences. Thus Dionysius would begin his *Roman Antiquities* with the following remarks:

> Although it is much against my will to indulge in the explanatory statements usually given in the prefaces to histories, yet I am obliged to prefix to this work some remarks concerning myself. In doing this it is neither my intention to dwell too long on my own praise, which I know would be distasteful to the reader, nor have I the purpose of

censuring other historians, as Anaximenes and Theopompus did in the prefaces to their histories; but I shall only show the reasons that induced me to undertake this work and give an accounting of the sources from which I gained the knowledge of the things I am going to relate.[13]

It should be clear by now that *historia* in its Latin or Graeco-Latin form had moved a great distance from the senses in either Herodotus or Thucydides. Where Herodotus had intended the word to mean 'inquiry', and had not linked it specifically to the past, and Thucydides had defined it more narrowly as the recounting of recent or contemporary events, history had by the time of Diodorus and Dionysius become firmly associated with a *narrative of the past*, remote or recent, and increasingly with a focus on the political and military, despite the inclination of several authors to begin their works with geographic sections. Similarly, history was now quite definitively a branch of literature and specifically of rhetoric. Persuasion had triumphed over research, or at least taken primacy, with the praise of the virtuous and successful, and condemnation of the corrupt, wicked or weak, a key motivation for any historian. If 'renown' was a feature of Greek historical writing and epic, its Latin counterpart *fama* now became inextricably linked to history, not only because historians saw it as their duty to praise and blame, but because the very fact that they did so provided an inducement to historical actors to do good.

The Romans were not much interested in knowledge of the past for its own sake and they produced very little of what we would call 'antiquarian' erudition since there was little hortatory value to be derived from it. Apart from the *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellius (AD 125–180), which has antiquarian content, the sole exception is the fragmentarily surviving *Antiquitates* by the prolific M. Terentius Varro (116–27). Roman authors, in contrast to the Greeks, also spent very little time thinking about *how* to write about the past and in what sub-genres. It is thus no accident whatever that the first really clear theorizing about history by a Roman was the product of a powerful orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43), whose discussion of history would be found principally in a dialogue entitled *De oratore* ('On the Orator'). For Cicero (*De Orat.* 2.36), history was *testis temporum, lux veritatis, nuncia vetustatis* – the witness of times, the light of truth and herald of antiquity. He articulated certain principles that would become axiomatic in later times, such as the obligation of the historian to tell nothing but the truth, without partiality (*De Orat.* 2.62), and he emphasized its connection with rhetoric by promoting an ornate style. Cicero's definition was scarcely profound, but it had the benefit of conciseness, and the weight of his great reputation, especially fifteen centuries after Cicero during the European Renaissance when his star was at its apogee. The rhetorical emphasis would be maintained two centuries later in the first work

Box 3 Julius Caesar

If Livy personified the historian as professional literary man, Gaius Julius Caesar was his opposite, an embodiment of the notion that generals are their own best historians, and together with one or two medieval Spanish kings and the sixteenth-century Mughal Emperor Babur, a member of that select group of rulers who have written their own histories. Caesar's two *Commentaries*, as he called them, relayed the stories respectively of his Gallic wars and expedition into Britain, and of the subsequent civil war he fought with his former colleague, Pompey the Great. Unsurprisingly self-laudatory (though he wrote in the third person), Caesar is not unfair to his opponents, and the *Commentaries*, allowing for their perspective, are a useful source for the last years of the republic. To the displeasure of several centuries of schoolboys, they would eventually prove even more popular as a Latin teaching-text.

devoted entirely to the proper writing of history, Lucian of Samosata's (*c.* AD 129 to after 180), *How to Write History*.

The major Roman innovation in historiography was a shaping of history into the cumulative story of world events. This was not, of course, strictly their invention – Polybius deserves much of the credit or blame for making Roman history move towards a goal. But the Romans had a strong sense of the divine destiny of their city and its expanding empire, and this provided both a horizon and an occasion for their history-writing in the way that curiosity about the known world as a whole had done for the Greeks. The Romans, however, also injected a teleological and progressive element that was absent in Greek historians before Polybius. Where cycles of rise and fall and the random hand of *Tyche* (fortune) appear in many of the Greek historians, history becomes more purposeful and almost providential among the Romans. When linked eventually with the eschatological elements of Jewish thought (Josephus providing an important bridge between these two worlds), this would provide a powerful basis for Christian historiography.

The first century BC produced two great Latin historians (three if we include Julius Caesar (see Box 3)) who composed rather different works. Easily the most influential was Titus Livius or Livy (59 BC to AD 17), who stands at the end of that line of republican annalists which began with Pictor. Most of Livy's long and ambitious work has been lost, but we have enough to know its shape and scope. (Of 142 books, 35 now survive and there are extant summaries of most of the lost ones.)

Organized into a set of 'decades' and 'pentads' (units of ten or five books), and within these as annals, Livy's first book – a self-contained text that he published in order to test the market for a history by a private citizen who held no major office or military command – begins with the Trojan arrival in Italy before moving to the establishment of Rome by Romulus (traditionally placed at 753 BC) and the period of the seven kings. Entitled *Ab Urbe Condita* ('from the foundation of the city') Livy's history was, for its time, the definitive account of the Roman republic which he, a provincial observer from Padua, had witnessed collapse after a half century of civil war, ending in the principate of Octavian or Augustus Caesar. Written in a Latin that later ages regarded either as impeccably pure or overly florid, the history combined the annalistic approach, with its recording of the year's officers, and a continuous prose narrative. In a way, it turned the genre of local history almost by accident into a variant of universal history, since Rome, at its peak of international influence and on the verge of becoming an empire in governance as well as influence, now controlled most of the Mediterranean world.

The other, and perhaps more interesting, major first-century historian was the politician and soldier known to us as Sallust (Caius Sallustius Crispus, 86–34 BC). Of plebeian origins, he was initially associated with Julius Caesar's 'popular' party and his official career climaxed with an undistinguished spell as governor of the province of Africa Nova. On his return to Rome Sallust turned to historical writing, penning histories first of the notorious conspiracy of the patrician Catiline in the year 63 and then of the war against the African king Jugurtha in the late second century. Sallust was widely respected in subsequent centuries, his works providing a template for writing the history of a particular event such as Catiline's conspiracy. More than any other Roman historian, Sallust was (and declared himself to be) the disciple of Thucydides, though he adopted a far more judgmental tone than had the Athenian. Sallust created the enduring theme – a favourite of historians from his own time through St Augustine and down to modernity – that Roman decline could be traced directly to the destruction of Carthage, which had left the Romans masters of their universe, but prey to the twin corruptors avarice and ambition, their growing empire the playground for internecine strife. Sallust also took Polybius' semi-rational *Tyche* and turned it into the feminine, capricious *Fortuna*, thereby handing on this all-purpose explanatory mechanism to late antiquity and beyond.

Imperial Rome, commencing with the rule of Augustus Caesar following the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, also had its historians, among whom the most highly regarded was, and remains, Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (*c.* AD 56 to *c.* 117). Where Livy had written in a flowing rhetorical style, Tacitus seems closer to Sallust, whom he admired, or, more remotely Polybius. Where Livy's work had been written with oral recitation in mind, Tacitus' was directed at the private

and other peoples such as the Franks, Saxons, Jutes and Lombards would eventually set up a series of independent monarchies in what remained of the former Roman dominions in Europe.

These internal and external phenomena were obviously not unrelated, but we should treat their historiographic consequences in turn. Deferring the Christian historians of late antiquity to our next chapter, this section will be devoted to the last of the pagan historians of Rome, who were variously Greeks, Romans or inhabitants of the wider empire. Most of these have enjoyed nothing like the attention meted out to the likes of Livy and Tacitus, a neglect not always fair. Cassius Dio (*c.* 155 to after 229), for example, authored a respectable history of Rome from Aeneas to 229, a period of nearly a millennium. Lucius Florus (*fl.* early second century AD), who would be briefly popular in the seventeenth century, is conventionally dismissed as a prosaic and unimaginative epitomizer of Livy, but it is through his work that we know something about those sections of Livy which have vanished; moreover, the epitomizer also developed a rather clever metaphor for the decline of Rome according to the human aging process in seven stages from infancy through senility and death. A more problematic work, the authenticity of which has remained a matter of dispute, is the collection of biographies known since the Renaissance as the *Historia Augusta*. This work, supposedly written by six different *scriptores* (authors) under the names Aelius Spartianus, Julius Capitolinus, Vulcacius Gallicanus, Aelius Lampridius, Trebellius Pollio and Flavius Vopiscus at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century, purports to recount the rather sorry spectacle of a number of emperors and usurpers from Hadrian in the early second century to Numerian in the late third.

It is hard to dispute the suggestion, based on works like the *Historia Augusta*, that most of the late ancients are less interesting and innovative as historians than their illustrious predecessors, and most can be omitted in a survey such as this. But it is also true that several centuries of historiographers have seen the late antique pagan historians as small fish struggling in a rising Christian tide. In many cases we know very little about these authors and have only traces of their original works. Thus the reputation of the virulently anti-Christian Eunapius of Sardis (349–404), who had the dual misfortune of having his works lost and backing the wrong religious horse, has not flourished, though by all accounts he was a learned man, authoring a set of *Lives of Sophists* and a *Universal History*. At the outer end of the period, the late fifth-century author Zosimus was a minor official who wrote a *Historia Nova* (New History) of Rome describing its decline in the context of earlier empires like Persia and Macedonia – in some ways his was the 'downhill' slope intended to complete the 'uphill' story once related by Polybius, to whom Zosimus refers at the very outset of his own work.[14]

The most notable exception to this underwhelming group is the *Res Gestae Libri XXXI* ('Thirty-one Books of Deeds') by a Greek soldier from Antioch named Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 325 to after 391). The first thirteen books of Ammianus' thirty-one-book history have not survived, though we know from his own comments that he began it where Tacitus' *Histories* had left off, with the Emperor Nerva (r. 96–8). Ammianus is almost universally considered to be the last of the great ancient historians of Rome, and one of the last European historians for some centuries to compose his history in the grand rhetorical style, complete with speeches and a dearth of dates beyond those indicated by his annalistic framework. Ammianus' reputation has not been especially sullied by his unapologetic nostalgia for the glory days of pagan Rome or his enthusiasm for the Emperor Julian 'the Apostate' (r. 361–3), who briefly restored the old gods following Constantine's promotion of Christianity as the empire's favoured religion. Though a Greek, Ammianus wrote in Latin, the last in a series of citizens of the empire like Polybius and Josephus who had fallen in love with Rome. Unlike them, Ammianus also adopted the rulers' vocabulary, borrowing turns of phrase from the likes of Ovid, Lucan, Aulus Gellius and especially Cicero. Ammianus saw himself in relation to the Emperor Julian much as Polybius had stood in relation to Scipio Aemilianus, and he substituted the notion of a vengeful godlike 'Justice' for Polybian *Tyche*. It is Ammianus who first gave us, or at least popularized, the familiar designation of Rome herself as *urbs aeterna* (the eternal city). Later historians have valued his eyewitness account of the decline of the once-mighty Rome and his attention to economic and social as well as political causes of these drawn-out death throes. Ammianus' history is full of interesting information on the various parts of the empire and its peoples, and he is rather less unsympathetic to most of them than Tacitus, for example, had been to the Jews. He even includes scientific topics such as earthquakes and eclipses. Ammianus' attention to such matters is all the more remarkable and perhaps even unintended since he himself proclaimed that history should concentrate on the important and prominent events and ignore the trivial or commonplace (Ammianus 26.1.1–2), which should warn us that the announced intentions of historians, and the theories or protocols to which they purportedly subscribe, are as often as not violated in practice.

Chinese Historiography from Earliest Times to the Han Dynasty

The Romans' conquests took them to the Near East, Syria and Egypt, but no further; it would fall to Italians of a millennium later to visit China, an empire of equivalent size and greater longevity. No civilization in the world has consistently and continuously placed as high a priority on the recording and understanding

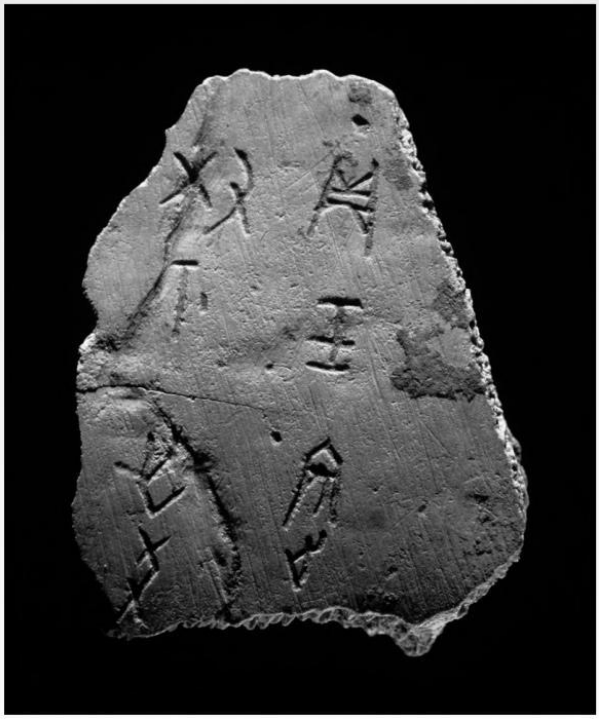

Figure 6 | Chinese oracle bone. Shang dynasty (1650–1066 BC).

of its past as the Chinese. Convention and their invention of the word 'history' has put the Greeks first in the present narrative, but we could just as easily have begun much farther east. As in Mesopotamia, the earliest forms of what became historical writing started as record-keeping, but with a much clearer tie to the past. The 'oracle bones' (inscribed fragments of bone or shell first unearthed in the late nineteenth century) which are the earliest extant source for the first definitively historical dynasty, the Shang (*c.* 1600 to *c.* 1046 BC), appear to have been created in direct response to the royal family's veneration of ancestors, and contain direct petitions to or communications with them (Fig. 6); their closest analogue may be the omen-texts of the contemporary Assyrians.

Exact analogies between Chinese and classical European historiography should be drawn within an awareness of their fundamental differences. For a start, the differences between an alphabetic and a logogrammatic mode of writing are significant. Though, as already noted, it changed its meaning after Herodotus' initial use, there is relatively little ambiguity about what the Greek word *ἱστορια* denotes. In Chinese, an uninflected and tonal language in which individual characters represent single syllables (a very small number of which are pictographic), and character-combinations represent multi-syllabic words, the same term can mean

very different things depending on its context. *Shi* is not unambiguously the word for defining either history or its author. One should also not underestimate the profound differences posed by the complexities of *writing* in a logogrammatic system such as Chinese. Apart from their enormous reverence for tradition, one reason that scholars, from a very early stage, paid tireless attention to the verification of sources (and often deliberately eliminated inferior versions) is that the opportunities for a scribe to misunderstand what he was copying were incomparably greater given the ambiguity of particular logograms. The famous Chinese 'block printing' that was used beginning in the tenth century AD for reproducing manuscripts, well before the arrival of moveable type in Europe, did not necessarily reduce the risk of corruption as damaged blocks could produce distorted characters and bizarre meanings.

Moreover, certain fundamental mental assumptions were quite different. Most European thought until relatively recent times has seen time as corrosive, and change as an inevitable but overwhelmingly bad thing. The earliest Chinese philosophers, for all their intense reverence of tradition, saw time, rather like the Polybian *Tyche*, as an agent of change rather than a vessel in which change occurred, and they valued change as progressive and maturing rather than chaotic or regressive. The upheavals attending the transitions from one dynasty to the next were not so much the mark of failure as of the loss of the prime justification for rule, the 'Mandate of Heaven' (*tianming*). This was a much more deliberate and less wilful concept than the divine displeasure of the Greeks and Babylonians, though not the righteous and absolute deity of Judeo-Christianity. The Grand Historian Sima Qian (see below) would point out examples of good and wise men suffering hard lives and miserable deaths while villains prospered and died in their beds. Chronology, to which Chinese historians paid careful attention, was also conceived of very differently, based on frequently changed era names (the practice used in many Asian countries until the twentieth century) rather than the single chronology *ab orbe condita* (from the creation of the world), *ab urbe condita* (from the founding of the city) or (especially since the seventeenth century) BC and AD – this accounts for the much earlier development in China than in Europe of synchronous chronological tables. The Chinese also conceived of the various genres of history in ways we would find surprising: where 'annals' in the European tradition have usually been regarded as the most rudimentary form of historical record, traditional Chinese historiography regarded the annal as the highest form, the distillation of knowledge from other sources. Grant Hardy has argued that the modern preference since the Renaissance for the single-voiced omniscient narrator and an internally self-consistent story fits ill with the multiple voices and often competing accounts of a single event included by the greatest of ancient Chinese historians, Sima Qian, in his *Shiji*.[15]

Western historiography places a high value upon the independence of the historian from outside interference, though that arm's-length relationship has been ideal rather than fact in most circumstances. Official history, courtly history and other variants have traditionally not fared well in the estimation of modern Euro-American historiographers, for whom autonomy and freedom from influence is highly valued. In China, history was almost from the beginning connected with governance and eventually with the ruling dynasty of the day – yet Chinese historians saw no fundamental contradiction between this and their duty to record the truth, often at great personal risk. Indeed, it has been plausibly argued that the lack of a counterpart to the absolute truth of revealed religion in Christian Europe permitted the Chinese to invest the past with the equivalent quality of certainty. Finally, the historians of imperial China saw historical writing as a process of compilation from earlier sources, including verbatim inclusion of another historian's work. This is relatively foreign to Westerners who virtually since Herodotus have reacted rather sharply to plagiarism, and generally sought to proclaim their independence from previous authors. Confucius declared himself not a maker but a transmitter of wisdom, and the earliest historians similarly envisaged their work as primarily vehicles for the handing down of past knowledge. In practice they did much more, not uncommonly adding the value of moral judgments to bring out the normative aspects of the past and its clues to the meaning of the universe. Truth to an ancient Chinese historian was not the conformity of the history to *actual* reality, but its fidelity to its *sources*: the word *xin* does not mean truth in the modern sense but something more like 'trustworthiness' or reliability. Consequently, compared to the fragmentary survival of classical histories, many Chinese texts of similar antiquity have come down to us virtually wholesale, though modern scholars are rightly sceptical of the notion that Chinese historians added nothing of their own to their inherited materials.

Sir Geoffrey Lloyd, one of the few modern scholars equally at home in classical antiquity and early China, has written extensively comparing the two cultures. Lloyd repeats a well-known episode, taken from the celebrated commentary known as the *Zuozhuan*, concerning the assassination of Duke Zhuang of Qi by his minister, Cui Shu.[16] The story was repeated by Sima Qian, and periodically thereafter. It is famous principally because it epitomizes the Chinese historians' image of themselves as selfless defenders of the truth and of virtue. Three successive brothers, all historians (*dashi*), are put to death by Cui Shu after recording his treachery. Only when the entry, erased every time previously, is finally allowed to stand is a fourth brother satisfied, and even then a historian from the south was prepared to take his place in turn. This vigorous demonstration of the duty of the historian to report the truth, even to the point of death, is undercut by the fact that documents at other times are known to have been altered or even falsified, while

from the fourth year of Duke Yin (719 BC) gives some flavour of the work, including the use of direct quotation and the pointed moral at the end:

In the spring Chou-hsü of Wei assassinated Duke Huan and set himself up as ruler.

The ruler of Lu and the ruler of Sung were planning to meet, intending to renew their former alliance, but before the date of the meeting arrived, men from Wei came to Lu to report the rebellion in Wei .... [the writer goes on to describe Chou-hsü's own weaknesses as ruler and his failure to practise 'true virtue']

Shih Hou thereupon accompanied Chou-hsü on a visit to Ch'en. Shih Ch'üeh meanwhile sent an envoy to Ch'en to report, saying: 'Wei is a small and insignificant state, and I am an old man – the fact is that these two men have assassinated my lord, the ruler of Wei. May I ask you to take care of them for me?'

The men of Ch'en seized Chou-hsü and Shih Hou and requested Wei to supervise the matter.

In the ninth month the men of Wei dispatched Ch'ou, superintendent of the right, to supervise the execution of Chou-hsü at P'u. Shih Ch'üeh dispatched his house steward Nou Yang-chien to supervise the execution of his son Shih Hou in Ch'en.

The gentleman remarks: Shih Ch'üeh was a minister of utmost fidelity. He hated Chou-hsü, and his son Hou was allied with Chou-hsü. Is this not what is meant by the saying, a larger duty cancels out the bonds of kinship?[18]

Although the shape and tone of this extract seems very different from something we might read in Herodotus or Tacitus, there are many elements in common. Themes such as revenge and ambition, and a stock virtuous character such as the loyal servant, could just as easily be found in Greek writing of about the same time, while Shi Que's (= Shih Ch'üeh) rather ruthless execution of his own son may remind some readers of a celebrated episode in Livy, the condemnation of his own sons for treason by the famous deposer of tyrants, Lucius Junius Brutus. The punch-line to these episodes, delivered by 'The gentleman' (the author himself) is a slightly more intrusive and less subtle counterpart to Tacitus' sentences – though the intrusion is itself much more explicitly signalled. As with Tacitus, the wise utterances are just as often placed in the mouths of the protagonists during the main part of the account, and in a similarly dense and terse style.

The commentators drew on the *Chunqiu* and other early chronicles to present historical anecdotes and speeches in support of a Confucian outlook which, like the Buddhist, tended to a cyclical view of time that dominated Chinese historical thought until the nineteenth century. The *Zuozhuan* (Extract 3) has been identified by one scholar as the first Chinese historical text to bring together two previously distinct Chinese concerns in a single narrative, namely the traditional concern for remembrance and the wish to find meaning in historical events. Its authors followed chronology relentlessly, to the point that a reader would be required to

3: Early Chinese Historical Writing: the *Zuozhuan*

extract

On the day *i-ch'ou*, Chao Ch'uan attacked and killed Duke Ling in the peach orchard.

Chao Tun, who had not yet crossed the mountains [on the border of the state], returned to the capital.

The grand historian [Tung Hu] wrote: 'Chao Tun assassinated his ruler' and showed the document to the court.

Chao Tun said, 'That is not true!'

The historian replied, 'You are the chief minister. When you fled you did not cross the border. Now you have returned you do not punish the culprit. If you are not responsible, who is?'

Chao Tun said, 'Alas! The words:

These longings of mine,

they've brought this grief on me!

apply to me.'

Confucius said: 'Tung Hu was a good historian of ancient times. In recording principles he did not conceal anything. Chao Tun was a good official of ancient times. For the sake of the principle he was willing to receive a bad name. What a pity! If he had crossed the border he might have escaped the charge.'

Selected from *The Tso Chuan: Selections from China's Oldest Narrative History*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Reprinted with permission from the publisher. Watson's notes have been omitted but his bracketed interpolations allowed to stand; Wade-Giles transliteration is here retained. This selection from the *Zuozhuan*, recounting events from the year 607 BC, illustrates the early importance of historians in China and their close relation with rulers. The selection quotes Confucius' own commentary on the earlier historian Tung Hu.

move around the text in order to find the outcomes of events, creating 'a feeling that multifarious events have no definite beginnings and endings, that everything is indeed connected to everything else'.[19] The notion of cycles is raised here to a level beyond that which a Greek like Polybius could embrace: specific events, not just general patterns, were so likely to recur that the properly prepared reader could divine their signs in earlier events through complete knowledge and attendance to ritual propriety.

Given this conception of the orderly movement of events, Chinese historians acquired very early the understanding that history could provide a pool of examples with which to guide moral and especially political life. According to Sima Qian, who discussed Confucius' supposed compilation of the ***Chunqiu***, the great sage believed that his own reputation would rest on his success as a historian. Sima

also quoted one of his own contemporaries, Dong Zhongshu, to the effect that Confucius had 'judged the rights and wrongs of a period of 242 years and made a standard for an empire'.[20] Confucius' reported declaration that his political creed was better demonstrated by the examples of 'actual affairs' than in 'theoretical words' may be the first articulation of that superior exemplarity of history advocated by European historians from Dionysius of Halicarnassus through to Lord Bolingbroke in the eighteenth century, and disputed by philosophers and poets from Aristotle onward.

The Chinese worked anecdotal digressions into their accounts, making frequent use of flashbacks when a story, though chronologically out of place, could be adduced to deliver a moral message. They also included speeches and even conversations in their histories just as contemporary Greek authors had done. They also sometimes shifted events around either for aesthetic or rhetorical reasons. The Zuo commentators recount the story of one King Ling, brought down by his frivolous and spendthrift love of luxury and lack of respect for tradition. Ling was eventually deposed by his younger brother and obliged to commit suicide in 529, but the historiographers had his story climax a year earlier. Their narrative of the king's ruin, and the lessons drawn from it, occurs while the ruler, on one of his winter travels, is grief-stricken at the realization of his folly. The lessons are pointed much more sharply than following any European historian prior to Tacitus:

> Confucius said, 'There is a maxim from times long past: "To control oneself and to restore rites is benevolence." Fine Indeed! If King Ling of Chu had been able to do this, how could he ever have been shamed at Ganxi.'[21]

Other philosophical schools departed from the dominant Confucianism, and the range of opinions on the process of historical change is considerably more varied than anything in the West during antiquity or the Middle Ages. The Daoists, pursuing harmony with nature and retreat from a world of cyclical but unpredictable change, did not accept that history had any discernible pattern or didactic value. Zou Yan (305–249), the putative founder of the 'Yin-Yang and Five Phases' school, postulated a comprehensive theory of historical change whereby each of five ages was characterized by a particular element – the legendary Yellow Emperor by earth, for instance, and the ensuing Xia dynasty by wood. These five phases, which Zou borrowed from the *Classic of History*, resemble Hesiod's five ages of gold through iron, but go much further. For Hesiod those terms were largely descriptive of a declining state of being and happiness. In Zou Yan's hands, the virtues of each age became determinative and explanatory as one element naturally triumphed over another and was in turn prevailed upon by the next, forcing a series of era-changes. The Mohists (followers of Mozi) and the Legalists also saw discernible patterns of progress, though the latter, adherents of a totalitarian philosophy

Figure 7 | The Qin book-burning under the Emperor Shi Huangdi, late third century BC, depicted in a seventeenth-century history of the lives of Chinese emperors.

adopted by the brutal Qin dynasty (221–206 BC), asserted that such progress, enforced by state control over naturally evil individuals, made the past largely irrelevant. After the Qin unification of various 'Warring States' into a single empire, their first emperor ordered an infamous book-burning and mass execution of scholars (Fig. 7), virtually eliminating records of the subordinated kingdoms.

There is a troubling similarity between the Legalists' view of history (and that of Zou Yan, which the Qin also found appealing) and much later versions emanating from twentieth-century totalitarianism.

The succeeding Han dynasty took power for most of the next four centuries, in the course of which Confucianism became the official creed. The most important early figure in Chinese historical thought and writing emerged in this world of a consolidated *Zhongguo* (literally, the 'Middle Kingdom', the Chinese name for their own country). Sima Qian (145–86 BC) is the first Chinese historian about whom we know a considerable amount, both because he himself made no pretence at anonymity and included a detailed genealogy of his own family back to legendary times, and because a first-century AD historian, Ban Gu, wrote a biography of his famous predecessor. Sima Qian did not originally intend to take up scholarship but felt an obligation to continue a work already begun by his father, Sima Tan, who had himself occupied the apparently hereditary office of *taishi* (variously translated as grand astrologer, grand scribe or sometimes grand historian) held by his family since the Zhou dynasty. So strongly did the younger Sima feel this imperative that when he fell out of favour with the emperor for defending a defeated general, he submitted to the disgraceful punishment of castration rather than commit suicide with honour but thereby fail in the completion of his father's work. By about 90 BC, he had composed the *Shiji* ('Records of the Grand Historian').[22]

The *Shiji* was arranged in five major sections, each of which proved a foundational model for future Chinese historical writing. The first section of twelve chapters, 'Basic Annals' (*benji*), provided an account of the major dynasties in series, from rise to fall; the second was a set of ten chapters of chronological tables (*biao*); the third held eight chapters of 'treatises' (*shu*) on branches of knowledge from astronomy and the calendar through agriculture, literature and music; the fourth includes thirty chapters on the great 'hereditary houses' (*shijia*) along with biographies of famed sages like Confucius; and finally, the fifth section contains seventy biographical 'arrayed traditions' or 'transmissions' (*liezhuan*) on statesmen, scholars and other categories, often paired (as the Greek biographer Plutarch would later do) to illustrate a character type. At the end of most of his chapters, rather like the author of the *Zuozhuan*, Sima would offer up a moral or comment upon the history just recounted. This, too, is not unlike classical European practice with the exception that the Chinese signal their authorial interventions much more clearly: Sima Qian's little excursuses are prefaced 'The Grand Historian says...', but as with most Chinese historians and the Greeks he makes free use of invented speeches, some of them admittedly copied from earlier works. The chronological tables, where some of Sima's most original writing occurs, were a particularly brilliant innovation, presenting a great deal of disparate data in grid format, and