

The Use and Purpose of History in the Graeco-Roman World

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- [1] On “intentionale Geschichte”: Gehrke 2001 (quote 286).
- [2] Pol. 1.1; Thuc. 1.1; Hdt. pref.
- [3] Cicero (*De or.* 2.62) says it categorically: the first law of history is “not to dare to say anything but the truth,” the second, never “not to dare to say the truth” (*ne quid falsi dicere audeat... ne quid veri non audeat*) and to avoid partiality (*gratia*) and malice (*simultas*). See Leeman et al. 1985: 266-67; furthermore, e.g., Wheeldon 1989; Moles 1993; Wiseman 1993; Grant 1995: esp. chap. 5; Marincola 1997: 158-74, esp. 160-1; 2007.
- [4] Tony Woodman has done most to elucidate the aspects I am discussing here: Woodman 1988, 1998.
- [5] Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.2-3: Famous writers have recorded Rome’s early glories and disasters. The Augustan Age, too, had its distinguished historians. But then the rising tide of flattery exercised a deterrent effect. The reigns of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were described during their lifetimes in fictitious terms, for fear of the consequences; whereas the accounts written after their deaths were influenced by still raging animosities. So I have decided to say a little about Augustus, with special attention to his last period, and then go on to the reign of Tiberius and what followed. **I shall write without anger and partisanship (*sine ira et studio*): in my case the customary incentives to these are lacking.** Trans. Michael Grant, mod.
- [6] *Hist.* 1.1: Many historians have dealt with the 820 years of the earlier period..., and the story of the Roman Republic has been told with equal eloquence and independence. After the Battle of Actium, when the interests of peace were served by the centralization of all authority in the hands of one man, that literary genius fell idle. At the same time truth was shattered under a variety of blows. Initially, it was ignorance of politics which were no longer a citizen’s concerns. Later came the taste for flattery or, conversely, hatred (*odium*) of the rulers. So between malice on the one side and servility on the other the interests of posterity were neglected. But historians find that flattery soon incurs the stigma of slavishness and earns for them the contempt of their readers, whereas people readily open their ears to slander and envy, since malice gives the false impression of independence... **But those who lay claim to unbiased trustworthiness (*incorrupta fides*) must speak of no man with either hatred or affection (*neque amore et sine odio*).** Trans. W.H. Fyfe and D.S. Levene.
- [7] Reinhold 1985; see Woodman 1989 (1998: ch.9) for discussion of the standard view and an alternative explanation. For the view that ancient beliefs about character were more complex, see Gill 1983.
- [8] Tacitus and Tiberius: Klingner 1953; Woodman 1989; Baar 1990.
- [9] Marincola 1999.
- [10] Vogt 1936; Luce 1989.
- [11] Woodman 1988: 197. The affinity between history and rhetoric is unquestioned in Cicero’s thought: e.g., *De leg.* 1.2.5; *De orat.* 2.53-64; *Brut.* 11.42; Leeman et al. 1985: 248-69.
- [12] I am aware that without explicit authorial statements such intentions ultimately cannot be retrieved with certainty (e.g., Rutledge 1998: 154 n. 1, with ref. to Kennedy 1992) but still think that much can be gained in exploring them.
- [13] Cremutius Cordus: *Annals* 4.34-35.
- [14] Cic. *Pro Marcello* 29: Work, I ask you, for a verdict from those judges who are going to judge you many centuries from now. Their decision is likely to be more unbiased than our own, since they will be judging without partisanship or self-interest (*sine amore et sine cupiditatibus*), without rancor or jealousy (*sine odio et sine invidia*).
- [15] See, for example, Tac. *Dialogus*; *Agr.* 2 (“We have indeed set up a record of suservience. Rome of old explored the utmost limits of freedom; we have plumbed the depths of slavery, robbed as we are by informers even of the right to exchange ideas in conversation”); *Hist.* 1.1 (above): ignorance of politics which were no longer a citizen’s concerns; *ibid.* 1.1.4 (on the reigns of Nerva and Trajan): It is the rare fortune of these days that a man may think what he likes and say what he thinks. Dio Cassius 53.19 (on the difficulty of writing history under a regime that suppresses the flow of information).
- [16] *Agr.* 2-3: In the first dawn of this blessed age, Nerva harmonized the old discord between autocracy and freedom (3).
- [17] Woodman and Martin 1996: 20.
- [18] On Germanicus’s death and the trial of Piso: Tac. *Ann.* 2.41-42, 53-61, 68-83; 3.1-19; see, e.g., Damon and Takács 1999; Eck 2000 (with earlier bibliog.). For a more detailed examination of Tacitus, see Raaflaub 2008.
- [19] Thuc. 5.89: We will use no fine phrases saying... that we have a right to our empire because we defeated the Persians... — a great mass of words that nobody would believe (trans. Rex Warner). 1.23.6: The truest but never mentioned cause (*alēthestatēn prophasin, aphanestatēn de logōi*) I believe to have been the growth of Athenian power, which terrified the Spartans and forced them into war (tr. Hornblower, mod.). “Cause closest to the truth”: suggested by Alan Boegehold. See Raaflaub 2004: 166-93 (Athens); 193-202 (Sparta).
- [20] On Polybius, see esp. Walbank 1957: 6-9; Sacks 1981: chap.4; Eckstein 1995: 16-27.
- [21] Pol. 1.1.5: There can surely be nobody so petty or so apathetic in his outlook that he has no desire to discover **how and under what type of constitution (*genos politeias*) the Romans succeeded... in bringing under their rule almost the whole of the inhabited world**, an achievement which is without parallel in human history (trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert).

- 3.118.9: **[T]hrough the peculiar virtues of their constitution (*politeumatōs idiotēs*) and their ability to keep their heads** they not only won back their supremacy in Italy and later defeated the Carthaginians, but within a few years had made themselves masters of the whole world. See also 6.2.3; 6.2.9-10: **Now in all political situations... the principal factor which makes for success or failure is the form of a state's constitution (*sustasis politeias*)**; it is from this source, as if from a fountainhead, that all designs and plans of action not only originate but reach their fulfilment. Digression on the cycle of constitutions (6.3-10) and Rome's ideal mixed constitution (11-18); see Cornell 1991; Walbank 2002: chap. 18.
- [22] 3.118.12: **I shall give a separate account of the Roman constitution** before proceeding with the rest of my history. **I believe that a description of this** not only has an important bearing upon the whole scheme of my work, but **will prove of great service both to students of history and to practical statesmen in the task of reforming or drawing up other constitutions**. 1.1.1-2: Certainly humankind possesses no better guide to conduct than the knowledge of the past. But in truth all historians without exception, one may say, have made this claim the be-all and end-all of their work: namely that **the study of history is at once an education in the truest sense and a training for a political career**. See also 3.12; 3.31-32; 12.25a.
- [23] Thuc. 1.22.4 (below n.25); cf. Marincola 1997: 21.
- [24] The significance of constitutions is visible in book 8 on the oligarchy of the 400 and the moderate oligarchy of the 5000 (8.97.2), in the “pathology of civil war” in Corcyra (3.70ff., esp. 82-84: an indictment of the ideological, political, and social abuse of constitutions), and especially in Thucydides' ongoing analysis of the working of democracy and its impact on political decisions, foreign policy, war, and empire; see Pope 1988; Raaflaub 2006. Generally on Thucydides and constitutions: Leppin 1999.
- [25] Thuc. 1.22.4: It will be enough for me if these words of mine are **judged useful by those who want understand clearly** the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future. **My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to be a possession for ever (*ktēma es aiei*)**. See recently Dewald 2005: 7-22; Kallet 2006; Grethlein 2010: 268-79.
- [26] Human nature: e.g., 1.84.4; 3.82.2; see above n. 7.
- [27] Physician and anthropologist: most clearly visible in the description of the plague (2.47-53) and the “pathology of civil war” in Corcyra (3.81-84); see Finley 1942: 68-72; Thomas 2006. Distinct character of communities: 1.70-71; similar reactions: 1.76.
- [28] Artful reporter: Hunter 1973; deceitful reporter: Badian 1993. Shaping of narrative: Greenwood 2006.
- [29] “Philosophy of history”: Fornara 1971b: index s.v. “philosophy of history.” Hdt. 1.5: I will proceed with my history, telling the story as I go along of small cities of men no less than of great. For most of those which were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time. Knowing, therefore, that human prosperity never abides long in the same place, I shall pay attention to both alike. 1.207 (Croesus to Cyrus): If you recognize the fact that both you and the troops under your command are merely human, then the first thing I would tell you is that human life is like a revolving wheel and never allows the same people to continue long in prosperity. 1.32 (Solon to Croesus): Only the man who was favored in his life *and* dies a peaceful death deserves to be called happy.
- [30] Raaflaub 2002b: 167-74.
- [31] Such references are collected in Schmid-Stählin 1934: 590 n.9. For those to the time of the Peloponnesian War, see Fornara 1971a: 32-34; 1981: 149-51.
- [32] Athenian merits for Greek freedom: e.g., 7.139: At this point I find myself compelled to express **an opinion which I know most people will object to**; nevertheless, as I believe it to be true, I will not suppress it... **One is surely right in saying that Greece was saved by the Athenians...** It was the Athenians who, having chosen that Greece should live and preserve her freedom, roused to battle the other Greek states which had not yet submitted. It was the Athenians who — after the gods — drove back the Persian king. See also 8.142: the Spartans' concern about the possibility of a deal between Athens and Persia: **It would be an intolerable thing that the Athenians, who in the past have been known so often as liberators, should now be the cause of bringing slavery upon Greece**. The Athenian response to the Persian envoys (8.143): **As for making terms with Persia,... we shall never consent... Tell Mardonius, that so long as the sun keeps his present course in the sky, we Athenians will never make peace with Xerxes**. On the contrary, we shall oppose him unremittingly... The Athenian response to the Spartans (8.144): **There is not so much gold in the world nor land so fair that we would take it for pay to join the common enemy and bring Greece into subjection**. There are many compelling reasons against our doing so, even if we wished: the first and greatest is [I summarize: our obligation to avenge the Persian destruction of our temples.] Again, there is the Greek nation — the community of blood and language, temples and ritual, and our common customs; if Athens were to betray all this, it would not be well done.
- [33] On the connection between a people's country and character, see Thomas 2000: 102-34.
- [34] Authorial comments: Dewald 1987; on speeches, see now Pelling 2006.
- [35] Fornara 1971b: 21-23.
- [36] On the final chapter, see Flower and Marincola 2002: *ad loc.*; Dewald 1997.
- [37] Fornara 1971b: 35-36.

- [38] Raaflaub 1987; 2002a.
- [39] Raaflaub 2002a: 15-27, based, not least, on strong correspondences between Thucydides' Sicilian debate (6.8-26) and Herodotus' debate at Xerxes' court (7.5-18).
- [40] Warning the Athenians: Moles 1996; see also Stadter 1992. Orientation: Meier 1987.
- [41] Hartog 1988.
- [42] Thomas 2000. Political reflection in early poetry: Raaflaub 2000. Herodotus and Homer: Strasburger 1972; Boedeker 2002; see also Marincola 2006. "Most Homeric": see Boedeker 2002: 97-109, with reference to a 2nd-century BCE inscription set up in Halicarnassus that celebrates Herodotus as "the pedestrian (i.e. prose) Homer of historiography" (97).
- [43] Raaflaub 2006. On Thucydides' shaping of history, see now Greenwood 2006.
- [44] A longer and annotated version of this paper has recently been published (Raaflaub 2010). For my continuing efforts to grapple with the questions addressed in this paper, see Raaflaub 2011a, 2011b, 2011c.

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