For Europeans, the transition to stories about the past that we would now recognize as “history” began in sixth-century B.C.E. Greece (Hellas), where a philosophical revolution was taking place. In the midst of nearly continuous wars between the Greeks and the Persian and the various Greek city-states, and a series of civil wars, Greek thinkers strove to bring order to their chaotic world and develop new solutions to age-old
questions. Greek philosophers moved beyond merely accepting traditional knowledge as the truth and began to use their own logic and reason to explain the universe. The most famous Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Aristotle, began using a new inquiry-based method which applied deductive reasoning and observable evidence to all questions. Preserved and transmitted to the rest of Europe and the Mediterranean by the Greek and Roman empires, their method of asking questions, formulating hypotheses, and testing their theories with observations became the basis for modern Western notions of humanism, rationalism, and the scientific method. This had a revolutionary impact on many fields, but especially on the study of the past. GreekRoman historians, and their Early Christian and Muslim descendants, now attempted to re-create the human past as accurately as possible by using observable evidence and reason to support their arguments. Their approaches and theories became the foundation for the study of history in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

The Greek Revolution

Classical Greeks called the scientific study of the past “historia.” The word derives from “histor,” which is related to the words for “to see” and “to inquire.” In the Greek mind, therefore, historians were considered to be part soothsayers, who study the past to predict the future, and part bards, creating epic poetry in the tradition of Homer. Indeed, the Greek muse of history Clio was also the muse of poetry. Many Greeks to this day consider Homer to be their first historian. All we know of him has been handed down through the generations. Homer was supposedly a traveling poet, or bard, who made his living by telling exciting stories to his audiences. The first written copies of these stories appeared in Athens in the sixth century b.c.e., making it difficult to pinpoint the author, much less the accuracy of the stories. The two most famous stories attributed to Homer are The Iliad and The Odyssey, which told the story of early Greek heroes, gods, goddesses, and the famous Battle of Troy. Homer’s stories of the early Greek past were widely known by the fifth century b.c.e. in Greece and spread throughout the Mediterranean world by the Greek and Roman empires, their method of asking questions, formulating hypotheses, and testing their theories with observations became the basis for modern Western notions of humanism, rationalism, and the scientific method. This had a revolutionary impact on many fields, but especially on the study of the past. GreekRoman historians, and their Early Christian and Muslim descendants, now attempted to re-create the human past as accurately as possible by using observable evidence and reason to support their arguments. Their approaches and theories became the foundation for the study of history in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

Herodotus

Herodotus (c. 484–425 B.C.E.) was the first Greek to break away from the mythopoetic tradition and forge a new path in historiography. Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, a Greek town on the western coast of modern Turkey, where the revolution in Greek thought began. He lived in Athens and various other Greek cities, where he was exposed to the ideas of Socrates and other leaders of the Greek philosophical revolution. He traveled widely across the Mediterranean, and died sometime after 420 B.C.E. in exile in Thurii, an Athenian colony in southern Italy. Like most of his contemporaries, Herodotus admired Homer, but he criticized Homer for his lack of observable evidence. Like most Greek rationalists of his day, Herodotus attempted to study the world through observable evidence. As a consequence, the primary agents of history in his work were observable forces: human activities and cultures.

Herodotus’ only surviving work is The Histories, which was written while he was in exile. The Greco-Persian War is the main topic of this work, but it includes chapters on other cultures in the Mediterranean. Rather than focus simply on the political leaders and generals, Herodotus provides extensive descriptions of the various cultures of the Mediterranean, attempting to explain the origin of the wars as a cultural conflict. It is no coincidence that Herodotus chose this event as his subject. He was born in Ionia, where the war began, and this war was the most important event to affect his own life. With little written documentation available, gathering reliable evidence on events from the distant past was difficult, if not impossible. By studying an event which occurred in his own lifetime, in his own region of the world, Herodotus was able to use eyewitness accounts as his evidence, thus making his history more reliable than other stories of past events. Herodotus was interested not only in describing what happened, when, and where, but also in explaining why it happened, another key feature of history as we now know it. Herodotus’ methods of gathering evidence and applying it to historical questions about past human events became the foundation for history as it was to be practiced in Western Civilization for the next two thousand years.

While Herodotus may be the father of cultural history in the West, and one of the earliest Greeks to apply scientific methods to the study of the past, it was up to another Greek, Thucydides (c. 460–400 B.C.E.), to make a clear break from mythopoetic storytelling and question the credibility of his sources. Thucydides was born in Haliarmous, southwest of Athens in Greece. He lived in Athens when the war with Sparta broke out in 431 B.C.E., lived through the plague, was elected a general, and was banished from Athens after losing an important battle with the Spartans. Exiled in Thrace, he began writing his history of the war between Sparta and Athens, but died in 400 B.C.E. before he could complete his masterpiece The History of the Peloponnesian War. It is divided into eight books, chronologically covering the war from its beginning to the twenty-first year of the war. It is primarily a military and political history, but he does set it within the larger context of other events affecting Greece during the war. He includes numerous detailed battlefield accounts and speeches to support his overarching narrative of the war.

Even more so than Herodotus, Thucydides studied the actions of men, as opposed to supernatural forces, and used credible, observable evidence to establish a factual account of the past. Thucydides criticized Herodotus not only for his inclusion of
unobservable forces, but also for wasting his time studying issues of little importance.

For Thucydides, political forces were the driving forces of history, not cultural forces. In his view, the main reason for studying history was speculative: to understand political events, such as the causes and courses of wars, in order to apply this information to making future policy decisions. Like Herodotus, however, Thucydides studied an event (the war between Sparta and Athens), which took place in his own lifetime and in his own region of the world. Reliable eyewitness accounts, therefore, were readily available and could be analyzed and used to re-create a precise account of the event. Thucydides, himself, was an eyewitness in the wars, serving as a military general for part of the conflict. In fact, Thucydides included over thirty speeches in his history, most of which he reconstructed from memory, to tell the story of the war. Thucydides' emphasis on cause and effect, political history, and observable forces greatly influenced ideas about history in Western Civilization.

While Herodotus and Thucydides founded the Western tradition of history, their methods did not immediately dominate the study of the past in Greece or the rest of Europe. Homeric tales and other more entertaining versions of the past continued to be popular. The development of reliable eyewitness accounts, therefore, was readily available and could be analyzed and used to re-create a precise account of the event.

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Despite these disparaging views, the ideas of Herodotus and Thucydides spread throughout Europe and the Middle East, as the Greek Empire grew under the expansionist policies of Alexander the Great. As a consequence, Hellenic culture and Hellenic history dominated much of the Mediterranean world and Southwest Asia between the fourth and first century B.C.E.

**Roman Historiography**

When the Romans engulfed the Greek Empire, they too copied the Greek method of historical inquiry, just as they copied many other Greek practices. Ancient Romans had their own biographical tradition of storytelling, but they eventually adopted some elements of Greek methodology. Roman histories generally focused on Rome's rise to power, attributing its success to the character of its political leaders, fair policies, strong political institutions, and fate.  

**Skeptics**

B.C.E., the great philosopher Aristotle criticized Thucydidean history as the mere recitation of facts. He considered mythopoetic stories to be more important because they were imaginative and creative, and contained deeper insight to the truth than did dry factual accounts of the past. Another branch of Greek philosophers, the skeptics, went even further, claiming that since all knowledge is the perception of the individual, no one truth about anything, much less past events, could be discerned. In this view, scientific history was no more factual than mythopoetic history.

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**Polybius**

Famed Greco-Roman historian, Polybius, directly connects the Greek tradition to Roman historiography. Polybius (c. 280 B.C.E.) was born in Greece, but as a young man lived as a well-treated hostage in Rome, while Rome was overtaking the Greek Empire. A great admirer of Rome, in his great work *The Rise of the Roman Empire* Polybius used the methods of Thucydides to explain and justify Rome's rise to power. He proclaimed this a “universal history,” a history of the known world, with the Roman Empire at its center. Like Herodotus and Thucydides, his was essentially a contemporary history and attempted to express a truthful accounting of the subject.

Other Roman historians, such as Tacitus (c. 56–120 C.E.), also professed to maintain strict objectivity in their interpretations. Tacitus' motto, *sine ira et studio*, pledged to write without hatred or political bias. His works, *The Annals* and *The Histories*, however, were clearly influenced by his own personal involvement in the events he described. Tacitus was a senator writing on the lives of the Roman emperors from the death of Augustus to Domitian (14–96 C.E.), and his political opinions clearly shaped his assessment of each ruler. Still, this was a step in the direction of modern notions of objectivity.

Similar to Thucydides, Roman historians focused on political action and relied heavily on eyewitness accounts and speeches as their evidence. Their emphasis on “fate” (also called “destiny” or “fortune”), however, set them apart from the Greek tradition. While they did not go so far as to give agency to specific gods, classical Roman historians considered fate, an unseen, nonobservable supernatural force, to explain certain historical events. By continuing to use the basic methods and ideas of Thucydides and Herodotus, however, Roman historians proved essential in spreading Greek historical methods to the rest of Europe and the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire.

**Early Christian Historiography**

Western historiography took an even more dramatic turn way from secular history as a result of the emergence and spread of the Christian religion within the Roman Empire. With its epicenter located in the Roman Province of Judea, Christianity was shaped by Judaism, as well as by Greco-Roman culture, but Christian historians added a unique twist to historiography. From the very beginning, history was essential to the Christian religion, just as it was to Judaism. The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles in the Christian Bible (New Testament), similar to the Jewish Bible, are essentially historical narratives. History helped Christians not only to convert new followers and instruct fellow Christians by telling the history of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers, but also to defend Christianity from its enemies and prove that the ideas of the early Christian church were a direct succession from Jesus’ apostles. Christians saw the
world as divided into two: good and evil, the sacred and the secular, the age Before Christ (b.c.) and the age of Christ (Anno Domini or a.d.). This duality informed their historical perspectives. These perspectives made Christian history different from its Judaic and Greco-Roman predecessors.

Eusebius (275–339), an early Bishop in the Christian church and confidante of Roman Emperor Constantine, was a leader in shaping this new Christian historical philosophy. Like Greco-Roman histories, Eusebius’s *Chronicle* and *Ecclesiastical History* used credible evidence such as eyewitness accounts, speeches, and written documents to support his arguments. Eusebius, however, had a different motive for writing his histories and this clearly showed in his choice of topics and interpretation of events. His *Chronicle* attempted to validate the main events of the Old Testament by aligning them with ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Greek chronologies, and placing them all in relation to the life of Christ. His Christian chronology became the basis for the European understanding of ancient history for the next several centuries. Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* was similarly influential as it recorded the “official” Christian version of the early history of the Christian church. He saw history as the unfolding of God’s will, and the Christian church as predestined to be victorious over its evil enemies and become the official religion of the Roman Empire (as he witnessed in his own lifetime). Like earlier Roman historians, therefore, Eusebius and other Christian historians retained a providential philosophy of history, viewing destiny as the driving force of historical change. Eusebius’s Christian moral philosophy and motivations for writing, however, clearly distinguished his history.

As the Roman Empire crumbled and Christianity struggled to survive and spread, Christian historians continued to emphasize the importance of religion, specifically the power of the Christian God, in the history of mankind. As one of the most important Christian philosophers of all time, Augustine of Hippo in North Africa (354–430) had an enormous impact on Christian historiography. Augustine’s *City of God*, written in the fifth century, envisioned all of history as a recurrent conflict between the City of God (the sacred) and the City of this World (the profane). In this way, history was cyclical, but also linear in that God’s will for humankind was unfolding from creation toward the Second Coming of Christ (the end). Even more so than Eusebius, Augustine imagined supernatural forces (God and Satan) as primary agents in history. The Augustinian version of the world dominated European scholarship throughout the Middle Ages.

As Christianity spread to the northernmost reaches of the former Roman Empire, Christian monasteries became centers of learning and among the primary producers of history in the Middle Ages. The most important monk-historian in England in this period was the “Venerable” Bede (673–735). Bede lived in the eighth century when Christianity was still displacing the original beliefs of the ancient tribes of Britain. He was raised and lived most of his life in monasteries in northern England. There he learned to read and write Latin, and through this language of the Roman Empire and the Western Christian church, was able to access many documents relating to the history of the Christian church and prominent people in the British Isles. Bede wanted to preserve the history of the heroes of the Christian church in Britain, and use their lives as role models for other Christians. He spent many years compiling information on the introduction and spread of Christianity in the British Isles, focusing primarily on the role of religious and political leaders. He gathered information from a variety of written and oral sources, examining their reliability in his attempt to present the events as accurately as possible. He completed his *History of the English Church and People* in 731. This work is an excellent representation of Christian historiography and is also important as an early example of a national history. It not only promoted the Christian church, but also promoted an early sense of national unity in England by giving all its citizens common English heroes and a sense of a common past. English Kings quickly realized the powerful potential of his work and had it translated into the English vernacular, making Bede’s *History* much more popular than the works of other monks. Bede’s *History* shaped English historiography for centuries afterward.

Only a handful of histories in the Greco-Roman tradition were written in Europe in the centuries after Bede. Some were narratives about the past, but were only loosely based on real events and evidence. For example, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s (c. 1100–1155) *History of the Kings of England* is more accurately described as historical fiction. He claimed to have written it as a translation of a very old Welsh book, but there is no evidence that the book ever existed. Monmouth’s book is most famous for telling the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, most of which was pieced together from local legends. Despite its lack of supporting sources, this story continues to be told and believed by many today.

Another more popular form of describing the past in the later Middle Ages was the chronicle. Chronicles were lists of events arranged in chronological order. They originated as calendars, kept by monasteries and businesses. Some of the more famous national chronicles include The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Grandes Chroniques de France, but most chronicles were more local in focus, often listing events in a specific town or monastery. Chronicles included a variety of facts, such as deaths and successions of popes and other church officials and kings, as well as natural disasters and battles, but they are not narratives, have no explanatory connections between the entries, no explanations of cause and effect, or why things happen, and consequently are not normally considered “history.”

The Greco-Roman approach to history remained strong, however, in the Byzantine and Islamic empires throughout the Middle Ages. Byzantine historians continued on in the Thucydidean tradition, focusing on political events, observable forces, and evidence. One Byzantine historian, Anna Comnena (1081–1188), was

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especially notable for being the first female historian in Europe. She was the daughter of Emperor Alexius and her histories focused on the wars and political events of his reign. Although she used Greek methods, she was not too concerned about the reliability of her sources or her own objectivity in interpreting them. Still, her *Alexiad* influenced Byzantine histories for many generations.\(^\text{11}\)

In the Middle Eastern and North African areas of the former Roman Empire, Islam replaced Christianity as the dominant religion after 700 C.E. Muslim historians, however, did not always emphasize God (or Al'Lah) as the primary agent in history. Following more directly in the footsteps of Thucydides and Tacitus, Muslim historians stressed human agency in the rise and fall of civilizations. While there were many important Muslim historians, the most famous of these is ‘Abd-ar-Rahman Abu Zaid Wali-ad-Din Ibn Khaldun (1332–1395 C.E.). Ibn Khaldun’s family originally came from southern Arabia, but had migrated to Spain and finally Tunisia in North Africa before he was born.\(^\text{12}\) Ibn Khaldun was a devout Muslim, and like all Muslim scholars, was trained in the Qur’an. Well-educated, he was a legal scholar, judge, professor, and advisor to rulers at various times in his life. Like his Christian contemporaries, he sought to defend his religion from its critics, legitimize the authority of his political leaders, and glorify God through his work. Unlike many Christian and Muslim scholars, however, he studied secular events and emphasized human agency, specifically group feeling, as the true force behind history. His most famous work was *The Muqaddimah* (“the Introduction”), which explains his historical theories and methodology, and applies them to the history of the Islamic world. Although political forces, such as rulers, wars, taxes, and laws, play an important role in this history, social relationships, ethnic identities, and cultural and economic factors were the driving forces of historical change. While few historians in Western Europe knew of Commena and Ibn Khaldun, they provide the link between the Greco-Roman historical tradition and those of modern Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Early Greek, Roman, and Christian histories forged a new way of thinking and writing about the past. Because of their emphasis on rational explanation and observable human events, history emerged in Europe as a practice distinct from poetry and mythology. As such, these early histories laid the foundations for Western historiography.

### Herodotus, *The Histories*

#### Book One

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds—some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians—may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other.

Learned Persians put the responsibility for the quarrel on the Phoenicians. These people came originally from so-called Red Sea; and as soon as they had penetrated to the Mediterranean and settled in the country where they are today, they took to making long trading voyages. Loaded with Egyptian and Assyrian goods, they called at various places along the coast, including Argos, in those days the most important place in the land now called Hellas [Greece].

Here in Argos they displayed their wares, and five or six days later when they were nearly sold out, a number of women came down to the beach to see the fair. Amongst these was the king’s daughter, whom Greek and Persian writers agree in calling Io, daughter of Inachus. These women were standing about near the vessel’s stern, buying what they fancied, when suddenly the Phoenician sailors passed the word along and made a rush at them. The greater number got away; but Io and some others were caught and bundled aboard the ship, which cleared at once and made off for Egypt.

This, according to the Persian account (the Greeks have a different story), was how Io came to Egypt; and this was the first in a series of unjust acts… Such then is the Persian story. In their view it was the capture of Troy that first made them enemies of the Greeks.

As to Io, the Phoenicians do not accept the Persians’ account; they deny that they took her to Egypt by force. On the contrary, the girl while she was still in Argos went to bed with the ship’s captain, found herself pregnant, and, ashamed to face her parents, sailed away voluntarily to escape exposure.

So much for what Persians and Phoenicians say; I have no intention of passing judgment on its truth or falsity. I prefer to rely on my own knowledge, and to point out who it was in actual fact that first injured the Greeks; then 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…

#### Book Two

Cambyses, the son of Cyrus [ruler of the Persian Empire] … on the ground that he had inherited his father’s dominion over the Ionians and Aelionians [Greeks], included them amongst his other subjects in the army he was preparing for an expedition against Egypt.

The next [Egyptian] king after Proteus was Rhamspinitus, who is remembered by the entrance gates which he erected at the western end of the temple of Hephaestus…. Rhamspinitus possessed a vast fortune in silver, so great that no subsequent king came anywhere near it—let alone surpassed it…. Another story I heard about Rhamspinitus was, that at a later period he descended alive into what the Greeks call Hades, and there played dice with Demeter [Greek goddess of grain and fertility], sometimes winning and sometimes losing, and returned to earth with a golden cloth which she had given him as a present. I was told that to mark his descent into the underworld and subsequent return, the Egyptians instituted a festival, which they certainly continued to celebrate in my own day—though I cannot state with confidence that the reason for it is what it was said to be. The priests weave a robe, taking one day only over the process; then they bandage the eyes of one of their number, put the robe into his hands, and lead him to the road which runs to
were 400, from Phlius 200, and from Mycenae 80. 1000 from the rest of Arcadia; from Corinth there was made up of the following contingents: 300

force which here awaited the coming of Xerxes the country from Trachis northward, the other

of the two armies, one being in control of all

while the Greeks occupied the pass known locally

with his force at Trachis in Malian territory,

Book Seven

continue the account which the priests gave me) Rhampsinitus, Egypt was excellently governed

their own. Their names are known to me, but I

earlier, some later, who have put it forward as

tion occupies three thousand years. This theory

body of a man. The whole period of transmigra-

death it enters another creature at the moment

immortality of the soul, and to maintain that after

first people to put forward the doctrine of the

ers in the underworld; and they were also the

record the traditions of the various nations just as

tales, if he is sufficiently credulous; as for myself,

twenty furlongs from the city, by two wolves

it is supposed that he is escorted to the temple,

the temple of Demeter. Here they leave him, and

Eurymachus. The reason why he made a spe-

under the command of Leontiades, the son of

Cleombrotus, Anaxandrides' youngest son, and

s laying was the Spartan, who was in command of the whole

army. Leonidas traced his descent directly back to Heracles, through Anaxandrides, Euryocrates, Polydorus, Alcamenes, Telechles, Archelaus, Agesilaus, Doryssus, Leobotas, Echestratus, Agis, Eurythestes, Aristodemus, Aristochamus, Cleoadeus—and so to Hyllas, who was Heracle's

son. He had come to be king of Sparta quite

Cleodaeus—and so to Hyllus, who was Heracle's

child, his giving her to Darius was equivalent to

names of all the three hundred. Amongst the

Persian dead, too, were many men of high dis-

inction, including two brothers of Xerxes, Habrocomes and Hyperanthes, sons of Darius by Artanes' daughter Phratagune. Artanes, the son of Hystaspes and grandson of Aesames, was Darius' brother; as Phratagune was his only

child, his giving her to Darius was equivalent to

giving him his entire estate.

There was a bitter struggle over the body of

Leonidas; four times the Greeks drove the enemy out, and at last by their valor retained it. So it went on, until the troops with Ephialtes were close at hand; and then, when the Greeks knew that they had come, the character of the fighting changed. They withdrew again into the narrow neck of the pass, behind the wall, and took up a position in a single compact body—all except the Thebans—on the little hill at the entrance to the pass, where the stone lion in memory of Leonidas stands today. Here they resisted to the last. The Thebans, who had

them, and, if not, with their hands and teeth, until the Persians, coming in from the front over ruins of the wall and closing in from behind, finally overwhelmed them with missile

weights.

Of all the Spartans and Thespians who fought so valiantly the most signal proof of cour-

age was given by the Spartan Diocetes. It is said that before the battle he was told by a stranger from Trachis that, when the Persians shot their arrows, there were so many of them that they hid the sun. Diocetes, however, quite unmoved by the thought of the strength of the Persian army, merely remarked: 'This is pleasant news to them, as well as to us.' He is said to have left on record other

sayings, too, of a similar kind, by which he will be

remembered. After Diocetes the greatest distinc-

tion was won by two Spartan brothers, Alpheus and Maron, the sons of Orsiphantes; and of the Thespians the man to gain the highest glory was a certain Dithyrambus, the son of Harmatides.
The dead were buried where they fell, and with them the men who had been killed before those dismissed by Leonidas left the pass. Over them is the inscription, in honour of the whole force:

Four thousand here from Pelops’ land

Against three million once did stand

The Spartans have a special epitaph; it runs:

Go tell the Spartans, you who read:
We took their orders, and here lie dead.

Questions for Consideration

1. How does Herodotus’ attempt to be objective and rational, and include multiple perspectives in this history?
2. In what ways might this history be considered mythopoetic? How does Herodotus attempt to move away from mythopoetic storytelling toward a history based on observable forces?
3. How did Herodotus’ worldview shape this history? What knowledge does he assume of his readers?

Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War

Book One: Introduction

THUCYDIDES the Athenian wrote the history of the war fought between Athens and Sparta, beginning the account at the very outbreak of the war, in the belief that it was going to be a great war and more worth writing about than any of those which had taken place in the past. My belief was based on the fact that the two sides were at the very height of their power and preparedness, and I saw, too, that the rest of the Hellenic world was committed to one side or the other; even those who were not immediately engaged were deliberating on the courses which they were to take later. This was the greatest disturbance in the history of the Hellenes, affecting also a larger part of the non-Hellenic world, and indeed, I saw, too, that the rest of the Hellenic world was based on the fact that the two sides were at war and more worth writing about than any of the wars which had taken place in the past. My belief was, therefore, that the two sides were at war and that there was no settlement to be expected. I therefore built no cities of any size or strength, nor acquired any important resources. Where the soil was most fertile there were the most frequent changes of population, as in what is now called Thessaly, in Bocotia, in most of the Peloponnesus (except Arcadia), and in others of the richest parts of Hellas. For in these fertile districts it was easier for individuals to secure greater powers than their neighbors, which in any case were more likely than others to attract the attention of foreign invaders.

It is interesting to observe that Attica, because of the poverty of her soil, was remarkably free from political disunity, has always been inhabited by the same race of people. Indeed, this is an important example of my theory that it was because of migrations that there was uneven development elsewhere; for when people were driven out from other parts of Greece by war or by disturbances, the most powerful of them took refuge in Athens, as being a stable society; then they became citizens, and soon made the city even more populous than it had been before, with the result that later Attica became too small for her inhabitants and colonies were sent out to Ionia...

Different states encountered different obstacles to the course of their development. The Ionians, for instance, were a rapidly rising power; but King Cyrus and his Persians, having eliminated Croesus, invaded the country and placed a navy between the river Halys and the sea, and brought the Ionian cities on the mainland into the Persian Empire. Later Darius, with the aid of the Phoenician navy, conquered the islands as well.

In the Greek language, ancient as well as modern, the name of the country is ‘Hellas,’ of the people ‘Hellenes.’ ‘Hellas’ included all Greek communities, wherever they were established, but here Thucydides is referring more narrowly to the Greek peninsula.
who later revolted from the King of Persia—split into two divisions, one group following Athens and the other Sparta. These were clearly the two most powerful states, one being supreme on land, the other on the sea. For a short time the war-time alliance held together, but it was not long before quarrels took place and Athens and Sparta, each with her own allies, were at war with each other, while among the rest of the Hellenes states that had their own differences now joined one or the other of the two sides. So from the beginning of the Persian War till the begin-
ing of the Peloponnesian War, though there were some intervals of peace, on the whole these two Powers were either fighting with each other or putting down revolts among their allies. They were consequently in a high state of military pre-
paredness and had gained their military experi-
ence in the hard school of danger.

The Spartans did not make their allies pay tribute, but saw to it that they were governed by oligarchies, such as were in the Spartan inter-
est. Athens, on the other hand, in the course of time taken over the fleets of her allies (except for those of Chios and Lesbos) and had made them pay contributions of money instead. Thus the forces available to Athens alone for this war were greater than the combined forces had ever been when the alliance was still intact.

In investigating past history, and in forming the conclusions which I have formed, it must be admitted that one cannot rely on every detail which has come down to us by way of tradi-
tion. People are inclined to accept all stories of ancient times in an uncritical way—even when these stories concern their own native countries. Most people in Athens, for instance, are under the impression that Hipparchus, who was killed by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, was tyrant at the time, not realizing that it was Hipparchus who was the eldest and the chief of the sons of Pisistratus, and the Hipparchus and Thessalus were his younger brothers. What happened was this: on the very day that had been fixed for their attempt, indeed at the very last moment, Harmodius and Aristogeiton had reason to believe that Hippia-
s had been informed of the plot by some of the con-
spirators. Believing him to have been forewarned, they kept away from him, but, as they wanted to perform some daring exploit before they were arrested themselves, they killed Hipparchus when they found him by the Leocorium organizing the Panathenic procession.

The rest of the Hellenes, too, make many incorrect assumptions not only about the dimly remembered past, but also about contemporary history. For instance, there were a general belief or else I have heard of them from eye-witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible. Not that even so the truth was easy to discover: different eye-witnesses give different accounts of the same events, speaking out of partiality for one side or the other or else from imperfect memories. And it may well be that my history will seem less easy to read because of the absence in it of a romantic element. It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to 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 last forever.

The greatest war in the past was the Persian War; yet in this war the decision was reached quickly as a result of two naval battles and two battles on land. The Peloponnesian War, on the other hand, not only lasted for a long time, but throughout its course brought with it unprecedented suffering for Hellas. Never before had so many cities been captured and then devastated, whether by foreign armies or by the Hellenic powers themselves (some of these cities, after capture, were resettled with new inhabitants); never had there been so many exiles; never such loss of life—both in the actual warfare and in internal revolutions. Old stories of past prodi-
gies, which had not found much confirmation in recent experience, now became credible. Wide areas, for instance, were affected by violent earthquakes; there were more frequent eclipses of the sun than had ever been recorded before; in various parts of the country there were extensive droughts followed by famine; and there was the plague which did more harm and destroyed more life than almost any other single factor. All these calamities fell together upon the Hellenes after the outbreak of war.

War began when the Athenians and the Persians broke the Thirty Years Truce which had been made after the capture of Euboaa. As to the reasons why they broke the truce, I propose first to give an account of the causes of complaint which they had against each other and of the specific instances where their interests clashed: this is in order that there should be no doubt in anyone’s mind about what led to this great war falling upon the Hellenes. But the real reason for the war is, in my opinion, most likely to be seen in what I shall call partiality for one side or the other. What made what war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta. As for the reasons for breaking the truce and declaring war which were openly expressed by each other, they are as follows:...
to pay them the honor of recalling what they did. In this love, they have always been the same people living from generation to generation until now, and they, by their courage and their virtues, have handled it to us, a free country. They certainly deserve our praise. Even more so to our fathers deserve it. For to the inheritance they had received they added all the empire we now have, and it was without blood and toil that they handled it down to us of the present generation. And then we ourselves, assembled here today, who are mostly in the prime of life, have, in most direction, added to the power of our empire and have organized our state in such a way that it is perfectly well able to look after itself both in peace and in war.

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of setting private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is as question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to serve the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks in our neighborhood of Lemnos and elsewhere, but there was no record of the disease being so virulent anywhere else or causing so many deaths as it did in Athens. At the beginning the doctors were quite incapable of treating the disease because of their ignorance of the right methods. In fact mortality among the doctors was the highest of all, since they came more frequently in contact with the sick. Nor was any other human art or science of any help at all. Equally useless were prayers made in the temples, consultation of oracles, and so forth; indeed, in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things.

The plague originated, so they say, in Ethiopia in upper Egypt, and spread from there into Egypt itself and Libya and much of the territory of the King of Persia. In the city of Athens it appeared suddenly, and the first cases were among the population of Piraeus, where there were no walls at that time, so that it was supposed by them that the Peloponnesians had poisoned the reservoirs. Later, however, it appeared also in the upper city, and by this time the deaths were greatly increasing in number. As to the question of how it could first have come about or what causes can be found adequate to explain its powerful effect of nature, I must leave that to be considered by other writers, with or without medical experience.

Questions for Consideration

1. Compare Thucydides’ approach to that of Herodotus. How are they similar and different? Which is more similar to the modern histories we read? Whom would you consider the true “Father of History”?
2. Is Thucydides objective in his telling of this conflict or does he side with the Athenians because he was an Athenian general?
3. What kind of evidence does Thucydides use? Why does he use this kind of evidence?
4. What lessons is Thucydides trying to teach us with this history? What is the moral of the story?

Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation

Preface

To the most glorious King Ceolwulf

Bede the servant of Christ and Priest.

In the meantime, the aforesaid famine distressing the Britons more and more, and leaving to posterity a lasting memory of its miscarriage, obliged many of them to submit themselves to the depredators; though others still held out, putting their trust in God, when human help failed. These continually made raids from the mountains, caves, and woods, and, at length, began to inflict severe losses on their enemies, who had been for so many years plundering the country. The bold Irish robbers thereupon returned home, intending to come again before long. The Picts then settled down in the farthest part of the island and afterwards remained there, but they did not fail to plunder and harass the Britons from time to time.

Now, when the ravages of the enemy at length abated, the island began to abound with such plenty of grain as had never been known in any age before; along with plenty, evil living increased, and this was immediately attended by the tint of all manner of crime; in particular, cruelty, hatred of truth, and love of falsehood; insomuch, that if any one among them happened to be milder than the
the rest, and more inclined to truth, all the rest abhorred and persecuted him unreservedly, as if he had been the enemy of Britain. Nor were the laity only guilty of these things, but even our Lord’s own flock, with its shepherds, casting off the easy yoke of Christ, gave themselves up to drunkenness, enmity, quarrels, strife, envy, and other such sins. In the meantime, on a sudden, a grievous plague fell upon that corrupt generation, which soon destroyed such numbers of them, that the living scarcely availed to bury the dead: yet, those that survived, could not be recalled from the spiritual death, which they had incurred through their sins, either by the death of their friends, or the fear of death. Whereupon, not long after, a more severe vengeance for their fearful crimes fell upon the sinful nation. They held a council to determine what was to be done, and where they should seek help to prevent or repel the cruel and more severe vengeance for their fearful crimes, either by the death of their friends, or spiritual death, which they had incurred through those that survived, could not be recalled from the living scarcely availed to bury the dead: yet, a grievous plague fell upon that corrupt generation, drunkenness, enmity, quarrels, strife, envy, and other such sins. In the meantime, on a sudden, a grievous plague fell upon that corrupt generation, which soon destroyed such numbers of them, that the living scarcely availed to bury the dead: yet, those that survived, could not be recalled from the spiritual death, which they had incurred through their sins, either by the death of their friends, or the fear of death. Whereupon, not long after, a more severe vengeance for their fearful crimes fell upon the sinful nation. They held a council to determine what was to be done, and where they should seek help to prevent or repel the cruel and

Chap. XV. How the Angles, being invited into Britain, at first drove off the enemy; but not long after, making a league with them, turned their weapons against their allies.

In the year of our Lord 449, \(^2\) Mercian, the forty-sixth from Augustus, being made emperor with Valentinian, ruled the empire seven years. Then the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, \(^3\) arrived in Britain with three ships of war and had a place in which to settle assigned to them by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, on the pretext of fighting in defense of their country, whilst their real intentions were to conquer it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and the Saxons obtained the victory. When the news of their success and of the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, reached their own home, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a greater number of men, and these, being added to the former army, made up an invincible force. The newcomers received of the Britons a place to inhabit among them, upon condition that they should wage war against their enemies for the peace and security of the country, whilst the Britons agreed to furnish them with pay. Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany—Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, including those in the province of the West-Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East-Saxons, the South-Saxons, and the West-Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Angulus, \(^4\) and which is said, from that time, to have remained
desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East-Angles, the Midland-Angles, the Mercians, all the race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the Angles. The first commanders are said to have been the two brothers Hengist and Horsa. Of these Horsa was afterwards slain in battle by the Britons, \(^7\) and a monument, bearing his name, is still in existence in the eastern parts of Kent. They were the sons of Wicthilhus, whose father was Vitta, son of Vecta, son Woden; from whose stock the royal race of many provinces trace their descent. In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over into the island, and the foreigners began to increase so much, that they became a source of terror to the native themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time repelled by force of arms, they began to turn their weapons against their allies. At first, they obliged them to furnish a greater quantity of provisions; and, seeking an occasion of quarrel, protested, that unless more plentiful supplies were brought them, they would break the league, and ravage all the island; nor were they backward in putting their threats into execution. In short, the fire kindled by the hands of the pagans; proved God’s just vengeance for the crimes of the people; not unlike that which, being of old lighted by the Chaldeans, consumed the walls and all the buildings of Jerusalem. For here, too, through the agency of the pitiless conqueror, yet by the disposal of the just Judge, it ravaged all the neighboring cities and country, spread the conflagration from the eastern to the western sea, without any opposition; and, overran the whole face of the doomed island. Public as well as private buildings were overturned; the priests were everywhere slain before the altars; no respect was shown for office, the prelates with the people were destroyed with fire and sword; nor were there any left to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered. Some of the miserable remnant, being taken in the mountains, were butchered in heaps. Others, spent with hunger, came forth and submitted themselves to the enemy, to undergo for the sake of food perpetual servitude, if they were not killed upon the spot. Some, with sorrowful hearts, fled beyond the seas. Others, remaining in their own country, led a miserable life of terror and anxiety of mind among the mountains, woods and crags.

**Questions for Consideration**

1. How does Bede’s approach compare to that of Herodotus and Thucydides? Does he seem to build upon their techniques or is he oblivious to their histories?

2. In what ways is this history “providential”? How does this differ from mythopoetic stories?

3. If you knew nothing about Bede, how could you tell that this history was written by an English Christian?

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1Though he is the subject of many legends, Vortigern is doubtless a historical figure, a ruler of south-eastern Britain. Bede’s form of the name, Uurtigernus, is right. It is a British word, meaning “supreme lord” (Rhyss).

2The date of Mercian’s succession is 450.

3Bede only professes to give the date of the invasion approximately: cf. V, 24 (“quorum tempore”), I, 23; II, 14; V, 23 (“circiter”), calculating in round numbers apparently. He refers here to their first settlement, which, of course, does not preclude earlier attacks.

4I.e., Vortigern.

5Angulus was believed to be derived from Angulus. The country is the modern Schleswig, which the Angles appear to have almost entirely evacuated. For the Continental Saxons, cf. V, 9. It has been supposed that the Jutes came from Jutland, where, at a later period, they mingled with the Danes (ibid.), but this is now regarded as doubtful.

6At Aylesford, in Kent. Horsted is the traditional burial-place of Horsa.