Moral History from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus

Hau, Lisa Irene

Published by Edinburgh University Press

Hau, Lisa Irene.
Moral History from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus.
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Introduction

But as for the historians, for many reasons the statesman must read them attentively, because, even apart from the speeches they contain, it is most essential that the statesman, the man who chooses to conduct public affairs, should be experienced in events and successes and failures, which happen not only in accordance with reasonable expectation, but also at times contrary to it, to both men and states. For it is the man with the widest knowledge of what has happened to others who will carry out his own undertakings in the best way and as safely as possible in the circumstances, and who will both avoid becoming unduly arrogant in his good fortune and bear every misfortune nobly because he remains aware even in his good fortune that his situation might well change to the opposite. (Dio Chrysostom 18.9; translation modified from Cohoon)

In this way Dio of Prusa, writing in the first century AD and nicknamed Chrysostom, ‘golden-tongued’, for his eloquence, encourages men of politics to read history. Dio explicitly intends the history-reading statesman to learn from the narratives of the past. More precisely, he assumes that the reader will become better at handling state affairs from reading about ‘successes and failures’ that have happened in the past to ‘both men and states’. He also expects that reading history will teach the statesman to avoid arrogance in times of success and undignified behaviour in times of misfortune because the historical narratives will show him that such situations are often quickly reversed. Those are strikingly concrete results to
expect from reading a text. The idea that you can learn how to behave and how to think about your life from reading history also assumes a number of things which seem far from given to a modern reader of historiography; for instance, that human beings and their situations are sufficiently alike in the past and the present for the past to be instructive, and that it is actually practically possible to learn from the experiences of others.

The idea is commonplace in ancient literature. Wherever we look, we find historiographers referring to the didactic usefulness of their works and readers of historiography expecting to learn something from them. For instance, when Cicero writes to his brother Quintus advising him about how to be a good provincial governor and takes it upon himself to tell Quintus which of his legati he should trust the most, he singles out one named Tubero because he is a writer of history and so ‘could select from his own Annals many whom he would both like to and be able to imitate’ (multos ex suis annalibus posse deligere quos velit et posit imitari, Cic. Q Fr. 1.1.3). In a more theoretical vein, Lucian, the second-century AD satirist and literary critic, spends an entire essay on How to Write History admonishing the would-be historiographer to write for the utility rather than the pleasure of his readers, implying that standards have slipped somewhat in this respect in recent years. The most famous expression of this idea of historiography as a didactic genre is no doubt Cicero’s designation of history as magistra vitae, the teacher of life.¹

The usefulness these consumers of historiography had in mind was partly practical and political: Dio Chrysostom says that a statesmen will manage affairs more ‘safely’ if he reads history, and Cicero wants Tubero to be of practical use to Quintus in his governorship. But it is also partly moral: Dio’s statesman will learn to avoid arrogance and to bear changes to his fortunes ‘nobly’, and Tubero can be relied upon, Cicero implies, to treat the provincials with respect and keep his hands off their property. For a reader like Plutarch, who has much to say about the proper way to write history in his essay The Malice of Herodotus, good historiography is characterised by providing appropriate and positive examples for emulation, rather than, say, by its analysis of historical causes and motives.

Such a view of historiography as a genre concerned with the moral edification of its readers has, in fact, been the norm for much of the genre’s

¹ The famous epithet forms part of a rhetorical question, aimed more at glorifying the orator than history: Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur? (‘And history, the witness of passing times, the light of truth, the life of remembrance, the teacher of life, the message-bearer of antiquity – whose voice if not an orator’s could entrust her to immortality?’, Cic. Orat. 2, 36). It became the watchword of history writing in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (see Landfester 1972, Spiegel 2002 and Findlen 2002).
history. In the Middle Ages, Gregory of Tours filled his *History of the Franks* with examples of good and bad behaviour as a corrective for his readers in the violent times of Merovingian France, and the Venerable Bede composed a didactic history which showed how the sinful Britons had been overcome by the pious Anglo-Saxons. In the Renaissance, Machiavelli fused moral and political edification in a manner similar to that of the ancient historiographers when he assumed in his preface to *The History of Florence* that the purpose of historiography is to ‘delight and teach’ and be ‘useful to citizens who govern republics’. During the same years, Guicciardini began his *History of Italy* with a preface about the usefulness of politico-moral *exempla* which closely imitates ancient models:

> From a knowledge of such occurrences, so varied and so grave, everyone may derive many precedents salutary both for himself and for the public weal. Thus numerous examples will make it plainly evident how mutable are human affairs, not unlike a sea whipped by winds; and how pernicious, almost always to themselves but always to the people, are those ill-advised measure of rulers who act solely in terms of what is in front of their eyes; either foolish errors or shortsighted greed. (Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, prologue)

Even in the Enlightenment, which is often considered the seedbed of the modern discipline of history, some of the greatest works of historiography were written with the didactic aim of producing useful models for behavior, moral and political.

None of these historiographers, however—ancient, medieval, Renaissance or Enlightenment—conceived of their works as in any sense ‘untrue’. They all believed that they were uncovering the truth about the past and serving

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3 ‘These two causes (with all respect to them) appear to me wholly unworthy of great men, because if anything in history delights or teaches, it is what is presented in full detail. If any reading is useful to citizens who govern republics, it is that which shows the causes of the hatreds and factional struggles within the city, in order that such citizens having grown wise through the sufferings of others, can keep themselves united’ (Machiavelli 1989: 1031; translation by A. Gilbert).
4 On the moral didacticism of Renaissance historiography see also Landfester (1972), Hampton (1990), Koselleck (2004) and Burke (2011).
5 See e.g. the preface to Voltaire’s *History of Charles XII*, which explicitly frames the work as a guide to rulers (1957: 55). His essay ‘Nouvelles Considérations sur l’Histoire’ is a satiric attack on ‘useless’ antiquarian historiography and concludes with stating that ancient history may be morally useful, but only a ‘political and philosophical’ history of recent times which investigates the ‘basic vice and dominant virtue of a nation’ can be practically useful (1957: 46–9). For a discussion of Voltaire as a historian concerned partly with moral didacticism (although she does not use this phrase) of a neo-Classical kind see O’Brien (1997: 21–55). For a good overview of Enlightenment historiography, with a useful bibliography, see Wright (2002).
a didactic purpose at the same time. This began to change only with the rise of historicism in the late eighteenth century. Historians now began to stress the uniqueness of the events and situations they were describing and, by extension, their uselessness as examples and models for the future. Didactic historiography was further discredited by the spread of positivism from the sciences to the increasingly professionalised discipline of history in the nineteenth century, when historians began not only to think of their task as conducting ‘scientific’ research and presenting its results in the clearest, least prejudiced, least adorned and least moralising way possible, but also to insist that this was the only way to produce a truthful account of the past. The most famous formulation of this, which came to be seen as a prescription for history writing, is Leopold von Ranke’s falsely modest ‘To history has been given the function of judging the past, of instructing men for the profit of future years. The present attempt does not aspire to such a lofty undertaking. It merely wants to show how, essentially, things happened (wie es eigentlich gewesen).’ This ideal of historical ‘objectivity’ spread like wildfire from Germany to the rest of Europe and America and came to hold sway over the discipline of history for almost 150 years. Under the influence of this scientificising of history several generations of readers and writers of history have now grown up to consider it the goal of historiography to present things ‘as they really happened’ and ‘let the facts speak for themselves’ with no didactic agenda. In Classics, this has made scholars place Thucydides (and, to a lesser extent, Polybius) on a pedestal unreachable by any other ancient historiographers. It has also turned ‘moralising’ into a dirty word used only of historians whose works have been perceived to be substandard, such as Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus,


7 The foundational work is Herder, ‘Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte’ (2002 [1774]), but it was only turned into an ‘ism’ in retrospect; see Meinecke (1972 [1959]: 1v–lvi). Koselleck (2004 [1967]) offers a now classic analysis of the move away from the idea of history as teacher, arguing that it was replaced with ‘the discovery of the uniqueness of historical processes and the possibility of progress’ (p. 36) brought on by the French Revolution.


9 For its British incarnation see the inaugural lecture of J. B. Bury (1903) in Bury (1930), e.g. ‘this view, which ascribed to [history] at best the function of teaching statesmen by analogy, at worst the duty of moral edification, prevailed generally till the last century’ (pp. 8–9) and ‘Girded with new strength [history] has definitely come out from among her old associates, moral philosophy and rhetoric; she has come out into a place of liberty; and has begun to enter into closer relations with the sciences which deal objectively with the facts of the universe’ (p. 11). For a lucid account of how the idea of objectivity spread in the USA, see Novick (1988: 1–108).
Introduction

or of a particular branch of Hellenistic historiography originating with the influence of the rhetorician Isocrates over his historiographer pupils Theopompus and Ephorus.\(^\text{10}\)

A change has happened in the discipline of history over the last few decades. The possibility of complete objectivity has been questioned since the 1930s, but the rise of postmodernism in the 1970s gave the questioning increased seriousness and sophistication. Today, after four decades of postmodern philosophy of history, most writers of history accept that such an ideal is impossible to reach, but argue that it should still be aimed for.\(^\text{11}\) Some even accept Hayden White's argument that the chaotic events of real life only become historical narrative through a process of invention and emplotment, and that the historian needs to be explicit about his or her narrativisation of events.\(^\text{12}\) Classicists have been a lot happier to accept this approach to historiography than have historians, and a wave of scholarship using sophisticated narratological tools to analyse works of ancient historiography has appeared.\(^\text{13}\) So far, however, none has faced the issue of the pervasive moralising of the ancient historiographers head on.

This needs to change. If we are going to understand ancient historiography, as a literary genre and as a collection of invaluable historical sources, we need to begin to take its claims to moral-didactic value seriously. Taking my cue from Hayden White's provocative statement that historical narratives are "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found" (1978: 82, his emphasis) and his insistence that narrative shape is given to the past only through a process of emplotment necessarily driven

\(^\text{10}\) For Xenophon as moralising and therefore inferior see Westlake (1966–7) and Grayson (1975); for Diodorus see e.g. Drews (1962), Hornblower (1981) and Stylianou (1998). For the moralising, rhetorical and inferior nature of Hellenistic historiography generally see e.g. Usher (1969), Walbank (1990), Meister (1990: esp. 80–1), Luce (1997: 168), Gehrke (2001: 299). Even Pownall (2004), whose study is dedicated to uncovering 'the moral use of history in fourth-century prose', considers such moralising suspect, presenting her project as 'an examination of the tendency of certain Greek historians of the fourth century B.C. to sacrifice accuracy, relevance, and impartiality to the presentation of moral exempla' (p. v). For all of ancient historiography blemished by moralising see Grant (1995).


by a ‘moralising impulse’, I argue that the moral-didactic agenda of the ancient works of history does not diminish their worth as history any more than the worth of twentieth-century works of history is impaired by their various agendas and emplotments – Marxist, feminist, *longue durée* or otherwise. At least most of the ancient historiographers are explicit about their moral agenda. Once we have studied the moral-didactic practice of the ancient historiographers in detail, in the Conclusion we shall turn to considering whether there may even be lessons that twenty-first-century writers of history could take from it.

**CHOICE OF MATERIAL**

This study discusses the *Histories* of Herodotus, the *History* of Thucydides, the *Hellenica* of Xenophon, the *Histories* of Polybius, the *Bibliotheke Historike* of Diodorus Siculus, and a selection of fragmentary works of history from the Classical and Hellenistic period. The reasoning behind this choice of material is as follows: Herodotus and Thucydides are essential for any discussion of a Greek historiographical tradition. Polybius and Diodorus are the only two reasonably well-preserved historiographies from the Hellenistic period, before the Greek and Roman traditions become irrevocably entangled in Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The choice to include Xenophon’s *Hellenica*, but not his *Anabasis* (apart from a few comparative remarks at the end of Chapter 6), rests on their belonging to different subgenres (by modern definition) of historiography: the *Anabasis* follows a single group of people through their travels and experiences and is (primarily) focalised through a single participant, which makes it a very different reading experience from the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius and Diodorus, and indeed from Xenophon’s *Hellenica*, all of which shift their focus and focalisation from people to people and from one political leader or faction to another as they narrate their stories of international war and politics. Similar considerations have guided my choice of what fragmentary historiographies to include: the Alexander historians, who continued the tradition of the *Anabasis*, have been left out of the investigation, and so have works of local history and monographs on single wars. In practice, this means that the focus of this study, after Herodotus and Thucydides, remains on what has recently been termed ‘continuous history’, namely international history with a Greek (or Greek

14 For the theory of emplotment see White (1973, 1978); for the ‘moralising impulse’ see White (1980). Throughout this study I use the word ‘emplotment’ in the weak sense of ‘endowing historical events with a plot’, as an almost-synonym of ‘narrativisation’, without committing to White’s argument that there are only four types of plot in works of historiography, i.e. comedy, tragedy, satire and farce.
Sicilian) focus which picks up where a predecessor has left off and expects
to be picked up and continued in its turn, and to a certain degree on ‘uni-
versal history’, that is, world history. The investigation ends at Diodorus
Siculus because he stands on the threshold between the Greek and Roman
historiographical traditions, which then start to conflate.

It is perhaps also necessary to explain the persistent use throughout
this study of the word ‘historiographer’ instead of ‘historian’ to refer to
the ancient authors that are our subjects of investigation. The intention is
not to denigrate the ancient works of history or to deny that their authors
did historical research, but to emphasise that this is a study of the literary
representations of the results of that research. The moral didacticism is,
after all, a part neither of the historical events that form the topic of the
ancient historiographers’ research nor of that research itself (although a
tendency to think about historical questions in moralistic terms may affect
the sorts of questions the historian asks of his or her material), but of the
literary form in which it was presented, and much of this study is devoted
to analysing how it manifests itself by means of literary techniques. The
choice of ‘historiographers’ over ‘historians’ also helps to avoid confusion
with modern historians working on the ancient past, who are also com-
monly termed ‘ancient historians’. Finally, it neatly sidesteps the question
of whether one can legitimately call a ‘compiler’ like Diodorus Siculus a
historian; a historiographer he definitely was.

MORAL DIDACTICISM AND TECHNIQUES
OF MORALISING

This book examines the earliest works of European historiography from
the point of view of moral didacticism. In no way does it wish to deny that
an important purpose of these works was to explain what had happened
in the past; rather, it argues that the two purposes, moral didacticism and
historical explanation, are not mutually exclusive.

Throughout this book, moral didacticism is to be understood in a broad
sense, as a strategy employed by an author to teach the reader something
about the ethical implications of various human actions and behaviours.

15 This is not to imply that these are terms of fixed genres; they are simply useful short-
hands for modern-day scholars to use when thinking about the traditions in which the
ancient historiographers saw themselves, and what predecessors they imitated. For ‘con-
tinuous histories’ see Tuplin (2011). These works were often titled Hellenica, sometimes
(in the case of Duris of Samos and perhaps Hieronymus of Cardia) Macedonica or Sicelica.
The genre of Sicelica was regarded by its authors not as local history, but as a parallel to
Hellenica (cf. Jacoby 1955: 480–1, 535–6, and Walbank 1989–90: 44); the same was certainly
true of Macedonica. For the fluid concept of ‘universal history’ see Alonso-Núñez (1990),
Such strategies can be action-directing, that is, aiming to influence a reader’s actions or behaviour, or thought-directing, that is, aiming to influence the way a reader thinks about the world and the way of behaving in it. Often it is both. Cognitive linguistics has now confirmed what Classicists have always known, that a reader’s understanding of a text is established on a number of different levels, from the choice and position of individual words and syntactical constructions to the structure and phrasing of narrative episodes.\textsuperscript{16} This makes it imperative to study moral didacticism not just as a phenomenon that happens in the explicit representation of historical characters as \textit{exempla} (Latin) or \textit{paradeigmata} (Greek), examples for emulation or avoidance, but as a large number of different strategies employed by authors at every level of the text with different degrees of explicitness. Throughout this book, the term ‘moral didacticism’ will be used to cover the overall purpose and practice of teaching something of moral significance, while the term ‘moralising’ will be reserved for the way in which the moral didacticism is pursued.

As the Dio Chrysostom passage with which we began illustrates, moral didacticism was intimately bound up with political didacticism in ancient thought. Political views and moral views necessarily go hand in hand for any person in any age, but this was perhaps even more true in antiquity: if anyone had asked Plato whether he was writing political philosophy or ethics, he would have been shocked that they could think of dividing the two. The close relationship between politics and ethics is also demonstrated by Aristotle’s confident statement in his introduction to the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} that politics is a science concerned with morality and justice (τὰ δὲ καλὰ καὶ τὰ δίκαια, περὶ ὣν ἡ πολιτικὴ σκοπεῖται: \textit{Eth. Nic.} 1094a18). It seems clear that neither the writers nor the readers of historiography generally distinguished between political philosophy and ethics. In the chapters that follow we shall sometimes try to make the distinction in order to understand the thought behind the moralising fully, but equally often we shall accept that they are two sides of the same coin and resist an artificial separation.

It will be useful to set out a basic typology of moralising techniques as a starting point for analysing and discussing the moral-didactic strategies of a given text. By doing this I do not mean to suggest that moralising is carried out in a schematic way by the Classical and Hellenistic historiographers, or that all instances of moralising will fit neatly into one type; the terminology is simply a baseline, which provides a useful starting point for examining the variations of moralising displayed across a range of material and for comparing different approaches.

\textsuperscript{16} See e.g. Fludernik (1993, 2003), Herman (2002, 2003) and Dancygier (2011).
Firstly, moralising takes place on a spectrum from more to less explicit and can be prescriptive or descriptive. Explicitly prescriptive moralising which sets up specific rules, such as ‘this example teaches us never to act arrogantly in good fortune’, is found at one end of the spectrum. Next to it is found equally explicit descriptive moralising, which is just as clear about the moral lesson it is trying to teach, but lets the reader draw his own conclusion about how to apply it in his own life, such as ‘thus his wicked ways led to a fitting death’. Further down the spectrum are found types of moralising that are a lot less explicit about their lessons. Few would dispute, for instance, that the story of Solon and Croesus in Herodotus book 1 teaches some kind of moral lesson, but it is difficult to draw a clear message about how to behave from it. Rather, the reader is supposed to take away a general lesson about happiness, arrogance, the ephemeral nature of wealth and power, and the ultimate powerlessness of human beings. This type of moralising is implicit, descriptive and thought-directing – exploratory, we could say, rather than expository – and a large part of the present book will be concerned with analysing how exactly such passages impact on a reader. In practice, only a fraction of the moralising found in Greek historiography is explicit and an even smaller portion is prescriptive.

For that reason, a more useful way to define moralising techniques in our material is to distinguish between moralising that takes place in pauses in the narrative (which is most often explicit) and moralising that takes place in the course of the narrative of events itself (which is most often implicit). Here it is necessary first to define ‘narrative of events’. It is now commonplace to distinguish between a text’s story and its discourse, that is, between the events narrated and the narration. This distinction works well for both fictional and historical narratives. Thus, we can talk of Thucydides’ ‘story’ of the fall of Plataea without implying that any part of that story is fictitious; it is simply a way of referring to the events that according to Thucydides took place during and leading up to Plataea’s fall. However, in historiography much more than in (most) fiction, there is a third element, namely the running commentary provided by the historian-narrator. This commentary is technically part of the discourse and takes place in narrative pauses, that is, when the narrator pauses the story in order to provide analysis, evaluation, background information or the

17 The terms ‘expository’ and ‘exploratory’ moralising have been used by Pelling (1995) in a study which explores Plutarch’s moralising spectrum and stresses the blurred line between descriptive and prescriptive (or ‘protreptic’) moralising.

18 This distinction is formalist in origin and is the basic tool of narratology. ‘Story’ and ‘discourse’ are also called ‘fabula’ and ‘sjuzet’. De Jong and her followers operate with a tripartite structure of ‘fabula’, ‘story’ and ‘discourse/text’.
like. Because of the frequency of such pauses in ancient historiography and their frequent use for purposes of moral didacticism, this study will regularly make use of the terms ‘narrative of events’ and ‘narrative pauses’ to distinguish these two parts of the discourse.

Most explicit moralising, then, takes place in narrative pauses. It is useful to distinguish between moralising digressions and guiding moralising. **Moralising digressions** come in many different styles, but common to most of them is that they are connected with a specific episode of the narrative at their beginning and end, but stray far away from it in the middle. Here they often generalise about human behaviour or certain types of events, or discuss earlier or later episodes of history brought to the narrator’s mind by the events just narrated. Digressions in the Classical and Hellenistic historiographers seem broadly to be triggered by five different motivating factors: a desire to evaluate morally actions or events in the narrative, a desire to explain actions or events (e.g. by providing a background story or motivation), a desire to philosophise about human behaviour or the course of history on the basis of narrated events, a desire to polemicise against others who have got certain facts wrong, and a purely associative desire to tell a story brought to mind by the events narrated. All of these five types of digressions can contain moralising. **Guiding moralising** takes the form of moralising introductions and conclusions to narrative episodes, or occasionally a moralising comment in the middle of an episode, which we can call ‘concomitant moralising’. It may range in length from a sentence or two telling the reader how to interpret an episode, to a much longer stretch of text, and the borderline between these and moralising

19 The distinction between historiography and fiction has been much discussed (see e.g. Barthes 1986 [1967], White 1978, 1980, Cohn 1990, 1999, Doležel 1999, Lippert 2009) and is too complex to enter into here, except to note that this ‘commentary track’ seems to me to be an important part of any formal distinction. Vercruysse (1990), in an analysis of programmatic passages in Polybius, calls the two modes discours narratif and discours commentatif.

20 E.g. ‘And so these men died meeting a fitting end to life, and especially because of their unlawful behaviour towards Aratus’ (οὗτοι μὲν οὖν τῆς ἁρμοζούσης τυχόντες καταστροφῆς ἐξέλπον τὸν βίον, καὶ μάλιστα διὰ τὴν εἰς Ἄρατον γενομένην ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀσέλγειαν: Polyb. 5.28.9).

21 E.g. ‘fortune, as if on purpose, demonstrating its power to other human beings by what had happened to these men. For the things which they themselves had been expecting imminently to suffer at the hands of their enemies she granted them to do themselves to those enemies a very short time later. And the Aetolians, in suffering this unexpected disaster, taught everyone never to deliberate about the future as if it has already happened and never firmly to expect things which may yet possibly turn out otherwise, but to allot a portion to the unexpected in all matters since we are human, and especially in war’ (τῆς τύχης ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις ἐπί τῶν ἐκείνων συμβαίνοντων ἐνδεικνύμενης τὴν αὐτῆς δύναμιν. ἃ γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐξήθρων αὐτῶν προσεδόκων ὅσον ἴδον ἡδεσσάθαι, ταῦτα πράττειν αὐτοῖς ἐκείνους παρέδωκεν ἐν πάνω βραχεί χρόνον κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων. Αἰτωλοὶ δὲ τῇ παραδόξῳ χρησάμενοι συμφορὰ πάντας ἐδίδαζαν μηδέποτε βουλεύεσθαι περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος ὡς ἴδο
digressions is fluid. The basic difference is that guiding moralising stays focused on a particular episode and guides the reader’s interpretation of that episode, whereas moralising digressions use the episode as a springboard to moralise on wider or more general issues.

However, much of the moralising of the Greek historiographers takes place not in narrative pauses, but in the course of the narrative of events itself. Such moralising is largely implicit and takes a variety of different forms, which will not be described in any detail here; rather the practice of each historiographer will be fully discussed in the relevant chapters. The following overview is simply meant to provide a sense of the variety in the means of moralising employed by the Classical and Hellenistic historiographers, and to introduce the basic terminology which will be used in the analysis.

The simplest form of moralising is the use of evaluative phrasing to colour a reader’s moral interpretation of an episode. Closely related to this technique and often used in tandem with it is moralising by internal evaluation, that is, when the reader is told what certain characters in the story think about an incident or behaviour. The degree to which a reader takes such an evaluation as a model for how to respond is affected by the extent to which the character(s) in question has or have been set up by the narrator as a moral authority. Strong internal authorities may be characters who are frequently or emphatically praised by the narrator, characters who are closely connected with the action evaluated or the character committing it, or a character who is supposed to be the author’s younger self (such as ‘Polybius’ in the last books of Polybius’ Histories).

An extension of the internal evaluation is moralising in speeches delivered by characters. A reader is, of course, not justified in assuming that the views expressed by a character in any literary work, historical or fictional, are those of the author, and so speeches in such a work can never be straightforwardly moral-didactic. Rather, the reader’s perception of the moral message depends on a number of factors including the moral authority of the speaker, the reception of the speech by its internal audience, and the degree to which it corresponds to other moralising in the work. Closely related to, and sometimes incorporating, speeches, the moral vignette is an exploratory way of presenting the reader with situations that call for a moral response. Moral vignettes are scenes played out in ‘real time’, often described with visual details, and almost always featuring direct speech

γεγονότος, μηδὲ προκατελπίζειν βεβαιωμένους ὑπὲρ ὃν ἄκινθην ἐνδεχόμενον ἀλλος γενέσθαι, νέμειν δὲ μερίδα τῷ παραδόξῳ πανταχῷ μὲν ἀνθρώπους ὄντας, μᾶλλον δ᾽ἐν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς: Polyb. 2.4.3–5).

22 The importance of the internal reception of the speech for the reader’s response to it is well noted by Foster (2012).
by one or more characters. The utterance can be a single sentence, often witty or punchy, or a speech of varying length. The moral of the vignette is usually left unexpressed; it is picked up by the reader from the moral authority of the characters involved and from the correspondence between the vignette and the surrounding narrative. Sometimes the lesson is deliberately multifaceted or ambiguous.

Another set of moralising techniques gain effect by encouraging the reader to see connections between different parts of the text. Thus, juxtaposition of information can be an effective way of making a moral point,\(^{23}\) as can deliberate contrasts between behaviours.\(^{24}\) Finally, the correlation between action and result, that is, the way the narrative shows some types of behaviour leading to success and some to failure, is a powerful tool of moralising because it is intimately bound up with each historiographer’s representation both of historical causation and, more generally, of how the world works.

A third type of moral didacticism takes place neither in the course of the narrative of events nor in narrative pauses, but on the overarching, structural level of a work. When reading a literary work such as an ancient work of history from cover to cover, patterns and repetitions become obvious and demonstrate to the reader how the world of this story works. Such patterns and repetitions are what mainly contribute to the emplotment of a series of events into a story, and they very often carry moral lessons.\(^{25}\)

It may well be asked in what way moralising as subtle as what has just been described can be didactic. I would suggest that we think of the moralising in narrative pauses as lecturing, and of moralising in the narrative of events as conditioning. While the moralising digressions, and on a smaller scale the guiding moralising, discuss moral topics and explain to the reader why he should consciously consider some behaviours right and others wrong, narratives using more implicit techniques condition the reader unconsciously to respond positively or negatively to certain kinds of behaviour. Such conditioning is most effective when the framework is already in place, that is, when the evaluative vocabulary reinforces the moral didacticism expressed explicitly elsewhere in the work. The effectiveness is further enhanced when the moral stance taken by the narrator is

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\(^{23}\) E.g. ‘During the seven days that Eurymedon stayed there with his sixty ships, the Corcyraeans continued to slaughter those of their own citizens whom they considered to be their enemies’ (ἡμέρας τε ἑπτά, ἃς ἀφικόμενος ὁ Εὐρυμέδων ταῖς ἑξήκοντα ναυσὶ παρέμεινε, Κερκυραῖοι σφῶν αὐτῶν τοὺς ἐχθροὺς δοκοῦντα ναισὶ παρέμεινε, Thuc. 3.81).

\(^{24}\) E.g. the contrast between the loyal-unto-death Phliasians and the fickle Euphron in Xen. Hell. 7.2–3.

\(^{25}\) The selection and structuring of events are what White (1980) says are necessarily driven by a ‘moralising impulse’. 
traditional and dominant (or at least theoretically dominant) in the reader’s own society. Such correspondence with popular/traditional morality also works to build a bond between narrator and narratee and bolster the narrator’s authority. Indeed we shall see that the Hellenistic historiographers generally use moralising in the narrative of events only to reinforce traditional and widely held moral attitudes and discuss more controversial moral issues in moralising digressions. The Classical historiographers, however, regularly offer moral dilemmas in the narrative of events.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

In order to understand the moral didacticism of the works under scrutiny we need to ask who it is intended for. Thucydides says that he is writing for ‘those who want to understand clearly the events of the past and the future’, implying that a clear understanding of past events will help the reader to understand events in his own present.26 (Here it is probably necessary to explain my use of the pronoun ‘he’. By using ‘he’ to refer to ancient readers, I intend to reflect the incontrovertible fact that the ideal or intended readers of ancient historiographers were male. It is not meant as a statement about who actually read the works in question, although I would assume that the majority of real ancient readers of historiography were, in fact, male. Today, the readership of ancient historiography is obviously very different from its intended one.)

Thucydides says nothing about how far his future readers are expected to be involved in politics, but his politico-military focus and the citizen-run democracy in which he lived make it likely that he imagined his readership to be primarily those whose actions could make a difference on the political and/or military scene. Polybius, more explicitly, says that he is writing for statesmen and generals, and he seems to imagine these as partly Greeks living in a reality dominated by Rome, partly Romans finding themselves underprepared masters of a world steeped in Greek traditions.27 Diodorus is the first of our authors explicitly to aim his work not just at political and military leaders, but at a broader part of the population: in his preface, he declares that historiography makes ‘private citizens worthy of leadership’ and ‘prepares soldiers to face danger more readily’, showing – or pretending? – that he expected even such lowly individuals to read his work (Diod. Sic. 1.1.5).

Even Thucydides and Polybius must have known, however, that in

26 ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ ἀθικὰ κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπων τοιοῦτον καὶ παραπλήσιων ἔσεσθαι, ὀφέλειμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκοῦντος ἔξει (Thuc. 1.22.4).
27 See e.g. Polyb. 1.1.5, 1.3.7–10, 6.11.3–8.
reality not all their readers would be the prime movers and shakers of the world, and their didacticism is not aimed exclusively at these. Their moralising is based on the belief that it is possible not just to learn from the past, but to learn from the past experiences of others in different life-situations from one’s own.\(^{28}\) When Polybius moralises on the actions of kings such as Eumenes of Cardia and Perseus of Macedon, he is not writing exclusively for an intended readership of kings; rather he is expecting his non-royal readers to learn from larger-than-life paradeigmata. The same is certainly true of Herodotus’ moral-didactic use of the Persian kings and most probably also of Thucydides’ narrow focus on a handful of Athenian and Spartan statesmen rather than the much larger number who were actually active during the Peloponnesian War. In this respect the moral didacticism of historiography resembles that of Classical Athenian tragedy.

Another pertinent question is why readers should follow the moral recommendations. What will they get out of it? This might seem like the wrong question to ask: after the influence of two thousand years of Christianity we are conditioned to think that morally good actions are only truly good if they are performed for no other reason than because it is ‘the right thing to do’. But although such moral behaviour with no pay-off is sometimes praised or recommended by the ancient historiographers, most of them do in fact make an effort to show that those who behave morally tend to be rewarded, if not by outright practical success, then by obtaining a good reputation among their contemporaries or, if nothing else, by posthumously earning the immortal praise of history and possibly divine approval, a heroic type of reward celebrated by Homer. The fact that there are significant differences between the historiographers in terms of the rewards envisioned, and the degree of certainty with which rewards can be expected, is an indication of their profoundly different ways of viewing the world. This will be a theme of later chapters; for now, it is important to note that the fact that morally correct behavior is rewarded, and that people sometimes engage in it with an eye to those rewards, does not in the eyes of the ancient historiographers take anything away from the praise-worthiness of the actions.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND OTHER GENRES

Historiography was, of course, not the only genre with moral-didactic impact in Classical and Hellenistic Greece. The practice of offering moral instruction through story-telling goes back, like everything else in Greek

\(^{28}\) The slippage in intended readership can be seen in Polybius’ second preface at 3.4.
literature, to Homer, although his moral lessons are always implicit. Herodotus says that the Greeks learned their ideas of religion from Homer and Hesiod (Hdt. 2.53), and even in the fourth century BC a man could still be deemed morally proficient on the basis of having memorised the Homeric poems (Xen. Symp. 3.5–6). From these epics people could learn that strength and courage in battle would be rewarded with immortal glory, that human beings are at the mercy of the gods and must show them respect, and that forgiveness is ultimately better than revenge. However, other lessons were less apt for a civilised society, and it was certainly not expected that anyone would imitate Odysseus in either his deceit of friends or his killing of the suitors. In fact, many of the moral codes followed (or broken) by Homeric heroes are so different from those governing the actions of characters in historiography and the lives of its readers that any lessons absorbed may well have been inapplicable or counterproductive in practice.

Explicitly didactic poetry survives in its earliest form in Hesiod, but his collection of pious and practical advice is still very different from what we later see in historiography. The moralising of historiography, however, has strong affinities with three other genres: elegiac poetry, epinician poetry and Athenian tragedy.

Elegiac poetry comes the closest to historiography in that its moralising is often explicit, supposedly relates to the real world, and is concerned with similar virtues and vices to its historiographical counterpart. Like historiography, it also blends moral and political didacticism to a degree where it becomes meaningless to try to distinguish the two. However, three features set it apart (beyond the obvious fact that elegiac moralising is cast in poetic language and written in metre). Firstly, where (universal, continuous) historiography is characterised by a multiplicity of theatres of action and offers moralising in the context of the behaviour of people of a variety of nationalities in many geographically different locations, the moralising of elegy is securely embedded in its own civic context, bound by a distinct polis and a unique political context. It moralises on the condition of ‘the city’ and the behaviour of factions within it (Solon, Theognis),

29 Even if Xenophon’s portrayal of Niceratus is ironic and meant to show that his ‘wisdom’ is pure pompousity (Hobden 2005, Hau 2012), the exchange still demonstrates the role that the Homeric poems played in popular thought and morality.

30 Adkins (1960, 2011) still seems to me to be generally right about this even if studies such as Zanker (1994) show that there are lessons of cooperation as well.

31 Explicitly moral-didactic: ταῦτα διδάξαι θυμὸς Ἀθηναίους με κελεύει: Solon F 4.30–2. Similar lessons to historiographical moralising: Archil. 114W (the good commander), 128W (moderation in both good and bad fortune); Callinus 1W and Tyrtaeus 10W (courage on the battlefield); Thgn. 39–52 (greed and injustice), 129–30 and 133–42 (the changeability of fortune), 143–4 and 151–2 (divine justice).
on the actions of a named tyrant (Alcaeus) or the condition of its fighting citizens (Callinus, Tyrtaeus), and the events, the moralising, the narrator and the narratee all belong to the single community of a single city. Correspondingly, the range of actions moralised on is limited to those of personal or national importance and does not include the kind of actions associated with interstate warfare, such as diplomatic negotiations and the treatment of captives and the defeated, which loom large in the moral didacticism of the historiographers. Secondly, the narrator of most elegiac poetry is a much more present and personality-infused ‘I’ than the covert narrator of post-Herodotean historiography. Thirdly, the moralising of elegiac poetry is usually generalised, often in the form of gnomai, which is only one of the registers of historiographical moralising, and not a dominant one.

Gnomai are also characteristic of the other type of lyric poetry that engages with moral didacticism in a way similar to that of historiography, namely epinician poetry. In epinicia, the gnomai often function as the moral to a lengthy narrative of events, in a manner parallel to some of the explicit moralising seen in Hellenistic historiography, although the relationship between narrative and moral is usually rather less obvious in praise poetry. With equal frequency, the moral of epinician narratives is left unstated, however, and is for the reader to extract from the juxtaposition of mythological stories or of myth and contemporary events. Such moralising by juxtaposition and patterning is a characteristic of early historiography, especially Herodotus, but also Thucydides, as we shall see in later chapters. A further intriguing parallel between epinician poetry and historiography is that both deal with real, historical people, and often with those who are still living. This lays epinician poetry open to criticism for flattery or personal enmity, as contemporary historiography was, and indeed we see Pindar (but not Bacchylides) laying claim to objectivity and truthfulness in his application of praise and blame just like some of the historiographers, most explicitly Polybius. Importantly, however, the epinician narrators never use a living person as a negative paradeigma. For that purpose they use mythological characters and, in the case of Pindar, generalised entities such as ‘envious people’ or ‘the greedy’. Overall, it is naturally the case that epinician poetry – commissioned by wealthy clients

32 For the connection between moralising and community-building in lyric poetry see Griffith (2009).
33 The ‘I’ of elegiac poetry has attracted much scholarship in recent years; see e.g. Carey (1986), Irwin (2006), Stehle (2006).
34 For gnomai in epinician poetry see Stenger (2004), Boeke (2007).
35 For claims to truth and objectivity in Pindar see Pratt (1993: 115–30).
36 For Pindar on ‘envious people’ see Boeke (2007: 87–90).
desiring that their *kleos* be sustained -- is less interested in negative than positive *paradeigmata*.\(^\text{37}\)

Athenian tragedy is less obviously moralising than either elegiac or epinician poetry, but most twenty-first-century scholars would agree that the plays are in some way didactic.\(^\text{38}\) The lessons taught by tragic plays are generally more complex, multilayered and obscure than those found in historiography. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for instance, there are lessons to learn about the unfathomable power of the gods versus the limited power of human beings, but also about family, gender roles, the cost of rebelling against autocratic power, the hard choices a leader must make, and the process of healing a community after civil war. The lessons are thought-directing rather than action-directing, and some may resist calling them lessons at all and prefer to talk about the ‘meaning’ or ‘impact’ of the play. In its multilayeredness and lack of prescriptions for behaviour the moral didacticism of such tragedies resembles that of Herodotus, and to a lesser extent Thucydides and Xenophon – not coincidentally, the historiographers contemporary with the surviving tragedies – as we shall see in the relevant chapters. What distinguishes the moral didacticism of Classical historiography from that of tragedy is above all its setting in the supposedly real and mostly contemporary world, which makes the moralising more immediately applicable for the reader, even if it does not explicitly tell him what action to take.\(^\text{39}\) Aristotle famously said that tragedy deals more with universal concerns and historiography more with particular instances of behaviour.\(^\text{40}\) However, this distinction only holds true up to a point, as Aristotle’s ‘more’ (μᾶλλον) indicates: extrapolation from the particular situations moralised on by historiographers to more universal observations about human nature and behaviour is sometimes explicitly encouraged;\(^\text{41}\) at other times the specific events are explicitly offered by the historiographical narrator as instances illustrating generalising moral maxims.\(^\text{42}\) This interplay between the specific and the universal is also a


\(^{38}\) The earliest surviving expression of the idea of tragedy as didactic is Aristophanes’ *Frogs*. The question of what it is that tragedy teaches has played a large part in scholarly analyses of both individual tragedies and tragedy as a genre since the 1980s, but the fact that it is didactic is now more or less the *communis opinio*. It has more recently been succinctly restated by Griffith (2011: 2).

\(^{39}\) For tragedy as fiction or make-believe see Zeitlin (1980) and Ruffell (forthcoming).

\(^{40}\) ἀλλὰ τοῦτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ’ ἱστορία τὰ καθ’ ἐκείστων λέγει (Arist. *Poet.* 1451b). For tragedy as dealing with universals see also Taplin (1986).

\(^{41}\) E.g. Thuc. 1.22.4, 3.82.2; Polyb. 1.35, 2.4.3–5.

\(^{42}\) E.g. Diod. Sic. 14.1–2
feature of the moral didacticism in elegy and, more prominently, epinician poetry.

Interestingly, the moral didactic themes are similar across genres: the changeability of fortune and powerlessness of human beings are common themes of lyric poetry and tragedy as well as historiography (Herodotus and lyric poetry are particularly similar in their moral themes, perhaps unsurprisingly considering their close proximity in time); courage, moderation and piety are virtues in all genres, and greed, brutality and impiety are equally universal vices. Even some standard metaphors such as the winds of fortune and the ship of state are repeated across genres. Moralising in historiography was not an isolated genre feature, then, but was part of what connected historiography with its society, a way of creating a fellow-feeling between author and reader by placing them in a common world of well-known and generally accepted values.43

**STRUCTURE**

One of the central arguments of this book is that moral didacticism was not an add-on to ancient historiography invented by rhetorically degenerate Hellenistic authors,44 but an integral feature of the genre from its very inception. In order to show this effectively, the investigation begins with an analysis of the moralising of Polybius and Diodorus in the Hellenistic period, which is for a large part explicit and obvious (although often ignored by scholars who find it an embarrassing blemish on Polybius and an indication of inferior worth in Diodorus).45 This analysis will allow us to get a detailed impression of a vast range of moralising techniques, tropes and themes, against the background of which we can more easily examine the more subtle moralising of the Classical historiographers. In this way we shall see that while there were change and development in the moral didacticism of the genre over time, there were also continuity and shared values, both on a moral and on a literary level.

Chapters 1–2 and 4–6 are thus author chapters: Polybius, Diodorus,

43 In this sense, the moralising works like the moralising in oratory, but oratory is generally not didactic; i.e. it does not aim seriously to educate its audience, only to persuade them; hence its absence from the preceding discussion. A partial exception is the funeral speech, which can combine memorialisation with exhortation to follow the example of the fallen in a way similar to some of the explicit moralising found in Diodorus.

44 The idea that Hellenistic historiography is ‘rhetorical’ and therefore inferior to Classical historiography is remarkably hard to kill despite the growing acceptance of the importance of narrative, and thereby ‘rhetoric’, in historiography generally. See e.g. such otherwise insightful studies as Gehrke (2001), Pownall (2004) and Bleckmann (2005), nicely counter-argued by Parmeggiani (2011).

45 See e.g. Walbank (1938, 1957: 19) and Hornblower (1981).
Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon. Each chapter discusses first the approach to moral didacticism announced in the work’s preface and programmatic statements, then the techniques by which moralising is carried out, and thirdly the moral lessons the reader is meant to take away. Within this structure there is room for variation: Chapter 2 contains a discussion of Diodorus’ handling of sources, and Chapter 6 compares the moral didacticism of the *Hellenica* with that of Xenophon’s other works in order to draw some conclusions on the nature of specifically historiographical moral didacticism. Throughout the chapters there will be an emphasis on comparing the practice of the different historiographers and drawing out what can be said to be the essential features of moral didacticism in Classical and Hellenistic historiography.

Chapters 3 and 7 examine the possible remnants of moralising in the fragments of some of the most well-known but less well-preserved ancient historiographers. Chapter 3 covers the Hellenistic works of Timaeus of Tauromenium, Duris of Samos, Phylarchus (of Athens?), Agatharchides of Cnidus and Posidonius of Apamea. Chapter 7 deals with the Classical works of the so-called Oxyrhynchus Historian, Ephorus of Cyme and Theopompus of Chios. The selection is based on the number and nature of references to these historiographers in their successors and in other authors, which it is hoped reflect their importance for the development of the genre of historiography. The discussion of each historiographer begins with an overview of the nature of preserved ‘fragments’ and then proceeds to investigate what we can plausibly tell about the presence or absence of moral didacticism in the work, its moral lessons, and the moralising techniques used. Although it is impossible to draw firm conclusions about what the original text of these works looked like, the analysis indicates a genre that had an important moral-didactic dimension throughout the period under investigation. Chapter 7 on fragmentary Classical historiographers also considers the change in moralising techniques which took place between the Classical and Hellenistic periods and discusses how this came about.

The book as a whole aims to show how the ‘moralising impulse’ identified as essential for the narrativising of history by Hayden White has shaped the narrative at every level of the best-known works of Greek historiography, making moral didacticism an integral part of each work without which it could not exist. In the Conclusion, I shall turn to the larger question of what good historiography is, and argue that the strong moral-didactic strain is a strength of Greek historiography rather than a weakness.