

WHAT IS HISTORY?

Construct a historical account of yourself.

Constructing a Historical Account

- What questions came to mind as you started to write about yourself?
- What questions framed your understanding of yourself?

Constructing a Historical Account

Guiding Questions:

- What do I know about ABC XYZ?
- How do I go about finding out?
- Who can I ask?
- *What else?*

What do you think of this text?

"Other Indians dwell near the town of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country,¹ north of the rest of India; these live like the Bactrians; they are of all Indians the most warlike, and it is they who are sent for the gold; for in these parts all is desolate because of the sand. [2] In this sandy desert are ants,² not as big as dogs but bigger than foxes; the Persian king has some of these, which have been caught there. These ants live underground, digging out the sand in the same way as the ants in Greece, to which they are very similar in shape, and the sand which they carry from the holes is full of gold. [3] It is for this sand that the Indians set forth into the desert. They harness three camels apiece, males on either side sharing the drawing, and a female in the middle: the man himself rides on the female, that when harnessed has been taken away from as young an offspring as may be. Their camels are as swift as horses, and much better able to bear burdens besides." (Chp 102, Book III)

Herodotus, *The Histories*. A. D. Godley, Ed. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920.

How do we know if this is true?

Why did Herodotus write that?

"These Egyptian stories are for the benefit of whoever believes such tales: my rule in this history is that I record what is said by all as I have heard it. The Egyptians say that Demeter and Dionysus are the rulers of the lower world.¹ [2] The Egyptians were the first who maintained the following doctrine, too, that the human soul is immortal, and at the death of the body enters into some other living thing then coming to birth; and after passing through all creatures of land, sea, and air, it enters once more into a human body at birth, a cycle which it completes in three thousand years. [3] There are Greeks who have used this doctrine, some earlier and some later, as if it were their own; I know their names, but do not record them." (Chp 123, Book II)

Herodotus, *The Histories*. A. D. Godley, Ed. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920.

Entertainment?

What is History?

Discovering
buried artefacts
by removing the
sands of time

Complete fabrication
of what may not even
have happened in
the past

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- Which of these better reflects how history is written?
 - Is there a middle ground?
 - What assumptions am I holding in each view?

Thucydides (~460-400 BCE)

“In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time” (1.22, Book I)

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Truth?

What about sources?

Key Sources on Julius Caesar:

- Caesar's own accounts of the Gallic Wars
- The speeches of Cicero
- Sallust's account of Catiline's War
- Suetonius's section on Caesar in Twelve Caesars
- Plutarch's section on Caesar in Plutarchs's Lives

Well...

- Sallust & Cicero were contemporaries of JC
- But Suetonius and Plutarch wrote in the early second century.
That's more than 100 years after the time of Caesar.

What about sources?

- Caesar's account - around 12 manuscripts. Oldest manuscript is from the ninth century—a full 900 years removed from the actual events. The list extends to manuscripts from the 12th century.
- Cicero's speeches - 15 manuscripts ranging from AD 400 to 800 (even older!)
- Sallust's account - around 20 manuscripts from the 10th and 11th centuries.
- *Plutarch's Lives* is also mostly divided across six key manuscripts that range from the 10th and 11th centuries.
- Suetonius's manuscript is dated AD 820.
- Classics scholars build much of our understanding of Caesar around these sources, even though their manuscript traditions contain significant gaps of time.

What is History?

- What if there aren't enough sources... or too many?
- Paucity of Records
- Abundance of Records
- What problems does this pose for the writer?
- The Problem of Selection