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Aristotle on History

*Vita Pappas**

We do not have from Aristotle any discussion of history. The only Aristotle's pronouncements on history are to be found in the *Poetics* where, comparing history and poetry, he makes two *obiter dicta* remarks.

One of them disparages history in comparison with poetry:

ὁ γὰρ ἱστορικὸς καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς οὐ τῷ ἢ ἔμμετρα λέγειν ἢ ἄμετρα διαφέρουσιν (εἶη γὰρ ἂν τὰ Ἡροδότου εἰς μέτρα τεθῆναι καὶ οὐδὲν ἦττον ἂν εἶη ἱστορία τις μετὰ μέτρου ἢ ἄνευ μέτρων): ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποιήσις ἱστορίας ἐστίν: ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποιήσις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ' ἱστορία τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγει. ἔστιν δὲ καθόλου μὲν, τῷ ποίω τὰ ποῖα ἅττα συμβαίνει λέγειν ἢ πράττειν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, ... τὸ δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον, τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν.¹

“The difference between the historian and the poet is not that one speaks in the metre and the other without the metre (since the writings of Herodotus could be put in the metre and would be a history, whether in the metre or not). The real difference is that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. Therefore, poetry is something more philosophical and serious than history; poetry speaks more of the universal, but history speaks of the particular. The universal is the sort of thing that a person will say or do either probably or necessarily.... The particular is what Alcibiades did or what happened to him.”

The other Aristotle's statement compares the structure of an epic with that of a history:

¹ Arist. *Po.* 1451a-b.

... ἐν αἷς [ἱστορίαις] ἀνάγκη οὐχὶ μιᾶς πράξεως ποιεῖσθαι δῆλωσιν ἀλλ' ἐνὸς χρόνου, ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη περὶ ἓνα ἢ πλείους, ὧν ἕκαστον ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα. ὥσπερ γὰρ κατὰ τοὺς αὐτοὺς χρόνους ἢ τ' ἐν Σαλαμῖνι ἐγένετο ναυμαχία καὶ ἡ ἐν Σικελίᾳ Καρχηδονίων μάχη οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ συντείνουσαι τέλος, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐφεξῆς χρόνοις ἐνίοτε γίνεται θάτερον μετὰ θάτερον, ἐξ ὧν ἐν οὐδὲν γίνεται τέλος. οὕτω καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐφεξῆς χρόνοις ἐνίοτε γίνεται θάτερον μετὰ θάτερον, ἐξ ὧν ἐν οὐδὲν γίνεται τέλος.²²

"... [in history] it is necessary to show not one action, but one period of time, all the events that happened to one or more persons within the period, each of which may have random connection between them. Just as the battle of Salamis occurred at the same time as the Carthaginian battle in Sicily, but they do not converge to the same result; so, too, in any sequence of time, sometimes one event follows another, but out of them does not issue any one result."

These two statements reveal Aristotle's idea of the basic characteristics of history. From the viewpoint of contemporary knowledge of Greek historiography, some of the observations are sound and reasonable, and they can be referred to any history. Thus, history is a text in prose (*ἀνευ μέτρων / ἄμετρα*). It narrates what has happened (*τὰ γενόμενα*) as juxtaposed to what might happen (*ἂν γένοιτο*). Likewise the statement that history speaks of the particular (*τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον*) versus poetry which deals with the universal (*τὰ καθόλου*) would probably be true in most cases. Nevertheless, some of Aristotelian statements seem open to discussion.

Firstly, Aristotle's imperative statement that history must expose one period of time (*δήλωσις ἐνὸς χρόνου*) versus one action as it is in poetry (*μιᾶς πράξεως δήλωσις*), and all that happened within that time period to one or more persons (*ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη περὶ ἓνα ἢ πλείους*), seems somewhat extreme. It is definitely not possible to narrate all that happened within a time period, even if the author selects and sets apart events which happened to a person or more persons. As

²² Arist. *Po.* 1459a.

to the juxtaposition of a time period versus an action as the basis of a history, the idea is not quite clear without definition or explanation of the relevant concepts.³ Would Aristotle view a history of a war, a major event within a fixed period of time, to qualify as a time-period history or a history of an action? *Secondly*, Aristotle argues that the connection of events that happen to a person or persons in a time-period history may be tenuous (*ἐκαστον ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα*). Doubtless, it may and it may not be so. *Thirdly*, history can and often does carry an implicit universal message, but universals in history are not necessarily explicit as they are in philosophy.⁴

In order to clarify the uncertainties of Aristotelian pronouncements, to understand his reasoning and the possible underlying argumentation, it is necessary to establish which histories were the sources for his observations.

Aristotle certainly had rich abundance of histories available. First of all, there are the histories of Herodotus (c. 484–425 B.C.) and Thucydides (c. 460–395 B.C.), the 5th-century B.C. classics and models for the later historiography. Historiography was well developed in the 4th century B.C. The collection of the fragments of historians – Carl Müller’s *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* – contains references to and quotations from hundreds of authors. In most cases, their histories have not survived. The rich and many-sided tradition of historiography was certainly known to Aristotle, as knowledge of history in view of the philosopher’s many-sided interests is impossible to exclude. Unfortunately, it is difficult to be more specific. We do not know which author or authors Aristotle had in mind when he made his statements about history.

Some conclusions can be made from the textual evidence of *Corpus Aristotelicum*. The only historian whom Aristotle ever mentions is Herodotus, *pater historiae*.⁵ Altogether there are eight references

³ G.M.A. Grube (1989), 18, n.1; (1995), 84.

⁴ G.M.A. Grube (1989), 83–85.

⁵ Cic. *Leg.* 1.5.

to Herodotus in Aristotle's texts⁶ (in the treatises *Constitution of the Athenians*⁷, *Ethica Eudemia*⁸, *De generatione animalium*⁹, *Historia animalium*¹⁰, *Rhetorica*¹¹, *Poetica*¹²), and in view of the huge amount of Aristotle's writings, it is not much. Besides, only two references to Herodotus are in a historiographical context (in the *Constitution of the Athenians* and the *Poetica*). All in all, Aristotle does not seem to have held Herodotus in high regard – he calls Herodotus a story-teller (*μυθόλογος*)¹³ and criticizes him for imparting inaccurate information in matters of natural sciences.¹⁴

The other major Greek historian, Thucydides, is a special case.¹⁵ Although his name never appears in Aristotelian texts, there is a reason to suppose that a pronouncement of Aristotle is a testimony of his knowledge of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian war*.

Thus, in the *Poetics*, characterizing the idea of the particular in a history, Aristotle provides an example to his pronouncement saying that the particular is "what Alcibiades did or what happened to him" (*τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν*).¹⁶

We know of two historians who speak of Alcibiades and whose histories from the chronological point of view could have been known to Aristotle. One of them is Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC), an elder contemporary of Aristotle. In Xenophon's *Hellenica*, Alcibiades hardly emerges as a

⁶ I. A. 320.

⁷ Arist. *Ath.* 14.4.7.

⁸ Arist. *E. E.* 1236b9.

⁹ Arist. *G. a.* 736a10; 756b6.

¹⁰ Arist. *H. a.* 523a17.

¹¹ Arist. *Rh.* 1409a28; 1417a7.

¹² Arist. *Po.* 1451a.

¹³ Arist. *G. a.* 3.5.

¹⁴ Arist. *G. a.* 3.5.

¹⁵ G.E.M. de Ste Croix (1992), 27–28.

¹⁶ Arist. *Po.* 1451b.

character and an individual. He is mentioned as a commanding officer in the battles of Abydus and Cyzicus,¹⁷ and later he returns to Athens.¹⁸ This would hardly qualify him to be mentioned by Aristotle as an example of the particular in a history.

Alcibiades is much more prominent in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian war*.¹⁹ Thucydides describes Alcibiades' pertinent events of ten years' duration (421–411 B.C.). This time period constitutes the *acme* of Alcibiades' political and military activities – rise to prominence by advocating aggressive action against Sparta after the Peace of Nicias had been signed, military career, role in the disastrous Sicilian expedition, defection to Sparta and later to Persia, recall to Athens and reinstatement there as the supreme commander.²⁰ Therefore, it is fairly safe to assume that Aristotle's pronouncement, "what Alcibiades did or what he happened to him", indicates his knowledge of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian war*.

Another source for Aristotle on Alcibiades' career may have been the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, a history, the fragments of which were discovered at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. As the time period described in the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* coincides with the time of Alcibiades' major military activities, Alcibiades may have had some role in this text – we do not know that.

It is not possible to evaluate Aristotle's familiarity with the texts of his contemporary historians. None of these historians is mentioned in his texts. Probably, Aristotle's neglect of such eminent authors as Theopompus (c. 380–315 B.C.) and Ephorus (c. 400–330 B.C.) was due to personal reasons. Both these historians were students of Isocrates²¹, Aristotle's rival in the teaching of rhetoric.²²

¹⁷ X. *H.G.* 1.1.5; 1.1.17–23.

¹⁸ X. *H.G.* 1.4.8–13; 1.4.18.

¹⁹ D. Gribble (1999), 159–213.

²⁰ Th. 6–8.

²¹ Cic. *Brut.* 204.

²² Cic. *De or.* 3.139; Quint. 3.1.14.

Because of the lack of direct first-hand testimony on the textual background which would provide argumentative basis for Aristotle's views on history, I shall correlate the disputable Aristotelian observations with the historiographical practice of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Such a study may help to understand Aristotle's ideas.

The first issue to consider is Aristotle's idea that history requires exposition of a period of time, i.e., that history is, in fact, a narrative about a time period. Primarily, a reservation is necessary. As the concepts of a time-period history and an action history may carry a different meaning for Aristotle (a history of war could be viewed as a history of an event), for further correlation of Aristotelian statements with the practice of historiography, I shall consider also Herodotus and Thucydides.

The aim of Herodotus, as he himself defines it in the introductory lines of his history, is to preserve memory:

... τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται, μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεῖα γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δι' ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι.²³

"... so that things done by man may not forgotten with time, and that great and marvellous deeds, some displayed by the Hellenes, some by the barbarians, may not lose their glory, also other things and what the cause of their waging war on each other was."

Actually Herodotus speaks of a great event which he considers to be worthy of renown – the Greek-Persian wars –, and his motivation is the greatness of the subject.²⁴ This major event is expounded on a vast chronological scale. The story of the war is preceded by a lengthy narrative tracing the prehistory of the event, i.e., the growth of the Persian Empire and its attempts of aggression. Starting with Ionian revolt, Herodotus narrates the preliminaries of the wars. Culmination of the story is the account of the Persian King Xerxes' invasion of Greece and the memorable Greek

²³ Hdt. 1.1.

²⁴ J. Marincola (2004), 34–35.

victories at Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale. The narrative ends with the Greeks crossing the Aegean and expelling Persian military from the coastal cities of Thrace and Asia Minor. Thus, although the Greek – Persian wars are discussed within a chronologically expanded framework, Herodotus' history is a history of an action (*μιας πράξεως δήλωσις*).

Like Herodotus, Thucydides defines the focus of his history at the very beginning of his narrative. His motivation is the unique greatness of the Peloponnesian War:

Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, ὡς ἐπολέμησαν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ἀρξάμενος εὐθύς καθισταμένου καὶ ἐλπίσας μέγαν τε ἔσεσθαι καὶ ἀξιολογώτατον τῶν προγεγενημένων, τεκμαιρόμενος ὅτι ἀκμάζοντές τε ἦσαν ἐς αὐτὸν ἀμφοτέροι παρασκευῇ τῇ πάσῃ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο Ἑλληνικὸν ὄρων ξυριστάμενον πρὸς ἑκατέρους, τὸ μὲν εὐθύς, τὸ δὲ καὶ διανοούμενον. κίνησις γὰρ αὕτη μεγίστη δὴ τοῖς Ἑλλησιν ἐγένετο καὶ μέρει τινὶ τῶν βαρβάρων, ὡς δὲ εἶπεῖν καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἀνθρώπων.²⁵

“Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, how they warred with one another, starting as soon as it broke out, and believing that it would be a great war, and more worthy of being told about than any that had preceded it. He realized this from the fact that both the sides in every respect were perfectly prepared, and seeing the rest of the Hellenes either siding with one or the other of them, some at once, some intending to do so. Indeed, this was the greatest commotion of the Hellenes and a part of the barbarians – so to say, affecting most of the people.”

After a brief overview of early Greek history and a few programmatic historiographical statements, Thucydides explains the causes of the Peloponnesian war. Throughout the text, Thucydides maintains his focus on the war.²⁶ The narrative traces the course of the war throughout its

²⁵ Th. 1.1.1–2; also 5.26.1–5.

²⁶ J. Marincola (2001), 85–86; (2004), 35–36.

first ten years, up to the signing of the Peace of Nicias, a treaty which is expected to guarantee peace for fifty years. As the peace treaty is not honoured and military activity is resumed, Thucydides proceeds with a narrative of the Sicilian expedition and the following events disastrous for the Athenians – revolt of the allies and civil war in Athens. The history ends unfinished.

Although the military activities described by Thucydides were interrupted for a few years after the Peace of Nicias had been signed, Thucydides emphasizes his view of the conflict – it is a single war.²⁷ Due to the structuring of the narrative and Thucydides' explicit commentary, his history is a history of an action (*μιᾶς πράξεως δήλωσις*).

Thucydides' narrative of the Peloponnesian war was continued by at least four historians: Xenophon, Theopompus, Cratippus and the author of *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*.

Of these histories, the only one to survive is Xenophon's *Hellenica*. The *Hellenica* of Theopompus, an originally voluminous history in twelve books,²⁸ has come down in fragments. Very little is known about Cratippus. Plutarch says that Cratippus was an Athenian historian, intermediate in date between Thucydides and Xenophon, and that his work continued the narrative of Thucydides down to the Battle of Cnidus.²⁹ *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* is the name given to a history of Greece of the late 5th and early 4th centuries B.C., papyrus fragments of which were discovered at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. The entire history seems to have been a continuation of Thucydides covering events from 411 BC to 394 B.C., much like Xenophon's *Hellenica*. One of the two major fragments deals with the battles of the late Peloponnesian War, particularly the Battle of Notium. The other fragment narrates the events of the early 4th century. The authorship of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* is uncertain – efforts have

²⁷ Th. 5.24–26.

²⁸ D. S. 13.42.5; 14.84.7.

²⁹ Plu. G. A. 1.

been made to identify the author with Ephorus or Theopompus,³⁰ or Cratippus.³¹

This material is insufficient to make definite conclusions about the compliance of these texts to Aristotle's pronouncement that exposition of a time period is a distinctive feature of a history. Still, some ideas can be developed.

Firstly, it is not known whether the continuators of Thucydides' history, Theopompus, Cratippus and the author of *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, emphasized the greatness of the event they were going to describe. Xenophon did not do it, and he makes it quite clear that, although he is narrating events worthy of being remembered, there are and will be events of similar magnitude. Consequently, Xenophon's focus is not on a single major event.³²

Secondly, each of the above mentioned texts started the narrative with the year 411 B.C., i.e., the year where Thucydides had left off, but each ended at a different point. Xenophon concluded his history with the battle of Mantinea in 367, Theopompus and Cratippus with the battle of Cnidus in 394. Where the author of *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* concluded, is not known. Those ending dates are significant as they show that Thucydides' followers appreciated Thucydides' choice of contemporary history, but rejected his evaluation of the Peloponnesian war as "the greatest commotion of the Hellenes and a part of the barbarians –... affecting most of the people".³³ Thucydides' followers passed beyond the end of the Peloponnesian war in 404, thus re-orienting their histories to time-period histories.³⁴

There is another author, an elder contemporary of Aristotle, who wrote a history that could probably be called a time-period history, although the available insufficient information about it permits but highly

³⁰ W.A. Goligher (1908), 277–283; E. Walker (1913), 15–110.

³¹ Ph. Harding (1987), 101–104; K. Meister (2003).

³² J. Marincola (2004), 36.

³³ Th. 1.1.1–2.

³⁴ J. Marincola (2001), 106.

tentative conclusions. It is Aristotle's contemporary Ephorus.³⁵ Ephorus, according to Polybius, was the first historian to write a universal history (τὰ καθόλου),³⁶ which covered more than 700 years, starting with the return of the descendants of Heracles from exile, and ending with the siege of Perinthus by Philip of Macedon.³⁷ Parts of Ephorus' history are preserved as lengthy inserts in Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca historica*.

Thus it can be argued that the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides are histories of an action (μιας πράξεως δήλωσις), not of a time period. Xenophon's *Hellenica* could be called a history of a time period, and most probably the histories of Aristotle's contemporary historians are time-period histories (δήλωσις ενός χρόνου).

The second issue to consider is that of a time-period history narrating all the events which happened to a person or persons (ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη περὶ ἓνα ἢ πλείους).³⁸

In the histories of Aristotle's contemporaries, it is difficult to evaluate this due to the very limited availability of their texts. If Agesilaus in Xenophon's *Hellenica* is a representative example, then a single person barely emerges as an individual. The actions are centred round city-states. In this respect, time-period texts are no different from Herodotus' and Thucydides' histories. Though Herodotus' text abounds in characters, the actors in the history are not individuals, but the protagonists – the Greeks and the non-Greeks. In Thucydides' narrative, even important figures like Pericles or Alcibiades hardly emerge as individualities. The actors are city-states, especially Athens and Sparta.³⁹

³⁵ T.E. Duff (2004), 48.

³⁶ Plb. 5.33.2.

³⁷ D. S. 16.76.

³⁸ Arist. *Po.* 1459a.

³⁹ T.E. Duff (2004), 37.

Probably the first historian to narrate events that happened to a single person was Theopompus.⁴⁰ In his *Philippica*,⁴¹ he structured events around the person of Philip of Macedon, stating the reason for this, the fact that there had never been a man like Philip.⁴² Thus Theopompus created an individual-centred history. His method was taken over by those historians of later times who narrated the activities of Philip's son, Alexander.⁴³ Theopompus may be the author Aristotle had in mind when he spoke of history as depicting what happened to an individual over a time period.

Of all Aristotle's pronouncements on history, the most difficult to understand is his statement that in history, events, although sometimes they may follow one another in time (*ἐν τοῖς ἐφεξῆς χρόνοις ἐνίοτε γίνεται θάτερον μετὰ θάτερον*), *firstly*, may have random connection (*ἕκαστον ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα*) and, *secondly*, out of them does not issue any one result (*ἐν οὐδέν γίνεται τέλος*).⁴⁴ The example Aristotle mentions for this statement is that of the naval battle of Salamis and the battle of Carthagians in Sicily, obviously the battle of Himera, which were fought at the same time.⁴⁵

Aristotle's pronouncement is not applicable to Herodotus and Thucydides. In the histories of both authors, causality plays a prominent role. Both the authors explicitly define their aim to describe a major

⁴⁰ T.E. Duff (2004), 46–48.

⁴¹ Theopompus' *Philippica* was a monumental work of at least fifty-eight books, beginning with Philip's ascension to the throne in 360 (D. S. 16.3.8), and probably ending with his death in 336.

⁴² Plb. 8, 11.

⁴³ J. Marincola (2001), 106–107.

⁴⁴ Arist. *Po.* 1459a.

⁴⁵ Aristotle's example is not very fortunate. The battle of Salamis and the battle of Himera were fought on the same day (Hdt. 7.166). They were both Greek fights with an enemy whose strength by far surpassed that of the Greeks. Both the battles ended in a decisive Greek victory, and antiquity ascribed the same *telos* to them – liquidation of the Punic-Persian conspiracy aimed at destroying Greek civilization (D. S. 11.1).

event – a great war – and its causes.⁴⁶ For Thucydides, causality is even more prominent. He sees and differentiates the real underlying cause of the Peloponnesian war (*ἀληθυστάτη πρόφασις*) from the alleged reasons and pretexts (*λεγόμεναι αἰτίαι*).⁴⁷

For both authors, causality is two-dimensional, and it functions at two levels – the practical or “tangible” and the philosophical. The practical dimension is the exposition of the direct cause-and-effect relationship within an event. This relationship can be chronologically close or distant, but it is generally explicitly obvious. The philosophical perception of causality in Herodotus’ and Thucydides’ texts is the concept of *hybris* and *nemesis*. *Hybris* materializes in the form of actions dictated by arrogance, excessive self-confidence. Its intrinsic *telos* is *nemesis*, humiliation and fall. In Herodotus’ history, the narrative of the Persian invasion of Greece and the subsequent loss of the war which, by all human reasoning, should have ended in the Persian victory, is a clear illustration of the *telos* of *hybris*.⁴⁸

Thucydides’ history traces the development of Athenian power through the growth of the Athenian empire in the years of the first half of the 5th century.⁴⁹ The legitimacy of the empire is explored in several passages, especially in the speech where an anonymous Athenian legation defends the empire on the grounds that it was freely given to the Athenians and not taken by force.⁵⁰ The subsequent expansion of the empire is defended by these Athenians, as “...the nature of the case first compelled us to advance our empire to its present height; fear being our principal motive, though honour and interest came afterward”.⁵¹ They claim that anyone in his position would act in the same fashion. The highest point of Athenian arrogance and self-confidence – *hybris* – can be seen in Pericles’ funeral oration. Significantly, this praise to Athens and its

⁴⁶ Hdt. 1.1; Th. 1.1.1–2.

⁴⁷ Th. 1.23.

⁴⁸ J. Marincola, (2001), 48–58.

⁴⁹ Th. 1.89–118.

⁵⁰ Th. 1.73–78

⁵¹ Th. 1.75.3.

model role in the Greek world is followed by the description of plague. The brutality of human nature develops and comes to the fore already in the first events of the civil war. Athens' aggressive imperialism in the Melian Dialogue is suggestively placed before the narrative of the disastrous Sicilian expedition when the Athenians are nearly destroyed by their imperial ambition. The defeat of Athens is a just punishment for a crime – unrestrained lust for power. The same idea is evident in Thucydides' narrative of Alcibiades' career. Alcibiades is a man whose ambition and lack of public values are singularly well-suited to his times. The story of his career in the framework of Athenian defeat illustrates Thucydides' idea of the dangers of the belief of the superiority of individual interests over public good – initial success ends in general fiasco, providing 'an outstanding example of a wider pattern of Athenian political decay'.⁵²

Aristotle was obviously thinking of his contemporary historians when he spoke about the random connection of events in a history and possible lack of *telos*. Today, the only text which can be examined from this perspective is Xenophon's *Hellenica*. In this history, causality is shown infrequently, mainly as divine intervention in human affairs. For example, Sparta's defeat in the battle of Leuctra is explained by divine retribution for the action of a Spartan officer who seized the Theban acropolis in the time of peace, thus violating the conventions of war.⁵³

As to the Aristotelian idea that history deals with the specific versus the general – this is hardly true of Herodotus' and Thucydides' histories.

The generalizing message in Herodotus' history is the instability of human fortune. Human prosperity changes, and the great fall and the small become great. Fortune is a wheel which never stops turning, as the story of the Greek-Persian wars proves.⁵⁴ There is an eloquent generalizing message in Thucydides' history as well. Ambition and war destroy people, if not physically, then morally. In Thucydides opinion, this is an eternal and unchanging truth, *κτῆμα ἐς αἰεὶ*.⁵⁵

⁵² D. Gribble (1999), 212.

⁵³ T.E. Duff (2004), 42-43.

⁵⁴ T.E. Duff (2004), 21-24.

⁵⁵ T.E. Duff (2004), 33-38.

The *Hellenica* of Xenophon would correspond well to Aristotle's criticism of history due to its focus on the specific and insufficient concern with the general. The only generality that can be extracted from Xenophon's *Hellenica* is the idea of the didactic potential of a history, as the examples of praiseworthy or condemnable conduct provide models to posterity for imitation or avoidance of certain actions.⁵⁶

Conclusion

1. Aristotle's abrupt remarks on history in the *Poetics*, which the classicist George Grube harshly calls "woefully inadequate",⁵⁷ do not permit to extract some Aristotelian theory of history. Besides, in the brief extracts from the *Poetics*, history is just mentioned as a point of comparison with a narrative in metre, i.e., epic poetry, and it is found to be inferior just as epic poetry is inferior to tragedy.
2. Aristotle does not have high opinion of history as a genre, calling it less philosophical and serious than poetry. As it is oftentimes in the *Poetics*, his critical observations are expressed in an abrupt and somewhat vague manner. Aristotle does not indicate the texts which have served as textual sources for his conclusions. Thus some of Aristotle's ideas seem unclear.
3. Correlation of Aristotle's pronouncements on history with the texts of his contemporary historians and those of the previous generation helps to clarify Aristotle's views.
4. Aristotle's pronouncements on history do not correspond to the historiographical practice of Herodotus and Thucydides and, consequently, cannot stem from these histories.
5. Xenophon's *Hellenica* fully corresponds to all Aristotle's pronouncements. As to the rest of Aristotle's contemporaries, correspondence is readily seen in those aspects which the poor survivability of the texts permits to examine.

⁵⁶ T.E. Duff (2004), 43–44.

⁵⁷ G.M.A. Grube (1989), 18, n.1; (1995), 84.

6. Aristotle's criticism of history is directed at his contemporary historians.

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