

ANCIENT GREECE

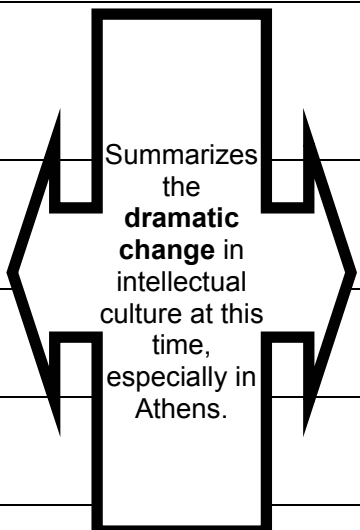
Background Information 3: History / Writing / Recording.

History:

- Greeks were the first to take a formal interest in 'history'.
- The word *history* comes from the Greek *historia*, meaning *knowledge gained from enquiry* (as meaning remains in contemporary, *Natural History*.)
- History developed into a science – meant to be non-mythical.
- History came to mean the narrative of the past.

Significant Individuals:

- 6th / 5th C. BC First historian of any significance. Wrote '*History*' and '*Tour Around the World*'
- Hecateus fragments survive. The historical knowledge and record-keeping of the Egyptian priests impressed him.
- Herodotus (c.484 – 425 BC) Known as the '*Father of History*.'
- Thucydides (c.460 – 400 BC) Herodotus' immediate successor and rival.
- Xenophone Less rigorous 'historian' – but wrote in lovely Athenian prose!
- Theoponus of Chios

HERODOTUS (c.484 – 425 BC)	shared views / approaches	THUCYDIDES (c.460 – 400 BC)
	History should be scientific – not mythical.	
	History should be critical of sources & evidence.	
	History should attempt to separate the true from the false.	
A critical attitude to evidence.		VERY critical & selective attitude to evidence. Raised issues of a) fallibility of human memory, and b) prejudice.
Wrote about the Persian Wars in his <i>Histories</i> – events in the relatively near past.		Wrote about the Peloponnesian War because he had lived through it.
Written to be read aloud, for hearing.		Written for re-reading and studying
Homeric style – still essentially part of the oral tradition		Forensic in style.
Written to retell and record stories and traditions.		Written to be a possession for all time, to be appreciated fully only outside the context of a live recitation.
	However, BOTH were dependent on the oral as their primary source of evidence...	
H. covered broad bands of time space, Greek and non-Greek affairs.		...therefore, T. limited himself to contemporary history, that which he'd seen/heard for himself – or at most, first hand interviews with reliable witnesses.

Summary:

- *"....Our modern notion of history as a critical, disinterested enquiry into the significant facts of the past and a rational, objective exploration of them, is thus a legacy of Herodotus and Thucydides"*

Writing:

- The main point to remember about the Greeks, was that theirs was an **ORAL** culture.
- The Greek for 'to read' means literally, 'to recognize again.' Things were written down secondarily – the emphasis was on their being heard and familiar through hearing, first of all.
- The Greek alphabet is the direct or indirect ancestor of all European alphabets.
- The early Greek alphabet was written from right to left, but by 500 BC, all strains were written from left to right – the alphabet became uniform throughout the Greek world.
- Greek alphabet consists of 24 letters (capitals) including 7 vowels.
- Written Greek in its oldest form is known as **Linear B**, and dates from around 1400 to 1200 BC. This was deciphered by **Michael Ventris** in 1952.
- **Linear B** derives from **Linear A** – an ancient language from Crete and some Aegean islands, from approx. 1850 BC to 1400 BC.
- Linear B texts are very important to Greek linguists – elements of the Ancient Greek dialect have survived in Homer's language, as a result of the long oral tradition of epic poetry.

Greek Literature: Different forms of writing:

- **ENORMOUS** influence of Greek writing on the West.
- 4 major periods of Greek literature: a) **preclassical**, b) **classical**, c) **Hellenistic-Roman**, and d) **Byzantine**. Of these, the most significant works were produced during the preclassical and classical eras.

1) **Epic Tradition:** *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Based on ancient legends.

2) **Lyric Poetry:** From as early as 700 BC – a type of poetry sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. [See Sappho (610 – 580 BC), Pindar (b.510 BC)]

- 3) **Tragedy:** Greeks invented drama. Hundreds of dramas written and performed during the classical age. [Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides.]
- 4) **Comedy:**
- 5) **History:** (see above).
- 6) **Philosophy:** [Socrates, Plato, Aristotle]. With the death of Aristotle in 322 BC, the classical era of Greek literature drew to a close.

Recording:

- There is ample documentation of business, financial and legal transactions.
- Formal documents recording religious administration and ritual and liturgical instructions.
- Epitaphs and tomb inscriptions.