Introduction

Fourth-century historiography has often been overlooked and undervalued because much of it exists only in a fragmentary state and that which does survive is considered biased, inaccurate, and prone to moralizing. Unlike Thucydides, whose moralizing is implicit, Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus make the presentation of moral exempla explicit and the primary focus of their histories. Clearly they were less influenced by Thucydides (even though Xenophon and Theopompus both wrote continuations of his *History*) than by other intellectual forces of their day to make the moral exemplum of more importance than the accurate reporting of events in their historical works. The aim of this book is not to whitewash their lack of concern for preserving an accurate account of the past as to reclaim their place in the development of Greek historiography. The interpretation of the past as a series of moral paradigms by these fourth-century historians represents a step of major importance in historiography, for it becomes the model for subsequent Greek and Roman historians, resulting in the development of the "scientific" history only in modern times.

In order to understand how and why this preoccupation with moral exempla arose in Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus, it is necessary to begin with an examination of the intellectual context of the late fifth

century (chap. 1). The development of professional rhetoric and the questioning of traditional morality by the sophists prompted responses from certain Athenian intellectuals. The most prominent of these were Socrates and Isocrates, whose concern for a moral basis of public life was highly influential upon many of the important literary and political figures of the fourth century. It is certainly no coincidence that Xenophon and Plato were among the crowd of aristocratic young Athenians closely associated with Socrates, and that ancient tradition held both Ephorus and Theopompus to have been students of the school of Isocrates. For that reason, chapters 2 and 3 will be devoted to Plato and Xenophon, and chapters 4 and 5 to Ephorus and Theopompus.

In the *Menexenus,* Plato criticizes the immoral use of the past in contemporary political rhetoric. One of the ways that the Athenian orators flattered their audiences was to use examples from the past, not just to espouse democratic ideology, but to create the mainstream democratic view of history. In chapter 2, I examine what sorts of misleading or false information the orators provide, followed by an examination of the historical survey contained in the *Menexenus,* the clearest example of Plato's use of the past for a moral purpose. It may seem odd at first sight that Plato's *Menexenus* should appear alongside the historical works of Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus, but it has been included in this group for three reasons. First of all, if we attribute much of Xenophon's concern for moral exempla to Socrates, then it is useful to compare the use of the past for moral instruction by Xenophon in his *Hellenica* with that offered by Plato, the other of Socrates' associates whose works are extant. Second, the funeral oration contained in the *Menexenus* is mainly devoted to a historical survey, where Plato deliberately misrepresents the past in order to expose and ridicule the flattery of political rhetoric. In this way, Plato can also be shown to have manipulated the past in order to provide moral instruction. Third, like the fourth-century historians, Plato directed his writings toward those who were not part of the political mainstream and were very likely opposed to democracy and democratic ideology.

In subsequent chapters, I turn to the historical works of Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus. I should note here that for Xenophon I discuss only the *Hellenica;* although he wrote other works with historical content, it is the only one presented as preserving a factual record of the past, as opposed to personal memoirs or a fictional or idealized reconstruction. For each historian, I examine first the specific moral virtues with which he is particularly concerned, then the techniques he uses to instruct

the reader in these virtues, and finally the ways in which and the reasons for which the desire for moral instruction leads him astray from an accurate interpretation of the past.

Despite their differences, as members of the elite, writing for the elite, these fourth-century historians composed their histories in such a way as to promote aristocratic virtues. By the beginning of the fourth century, there was a receptive audience among the elite for works with this sort of agenda. After the failure of the oligarchic experiments of the late fifth century, those who were disaffected with the radical democracy in Athens turned to words rather than action.[1] This was only natural, for, as recent scholarship has shown, ancient literacy was in fact very restricted,[2] and the ability to read a text with comprehension was, by the early fourth century, confined mostly to upper-class males.[3] Moreover, as Deborah Tarn Steiner has demonstrated, because prowess in public speech was associated with the democracy, oligarchs and those opposed to the democracy privilege written texts instead.[4] Kevin Robb has recently argued that literacy and *paideia* fully cohere only around the middle of the fourth century, when Plato and the Academy replace the *mimesis* of the poets with text-dependent education.[5] I would suggest that Plato was the best-known, and perhaps the most successful, representative of a movement by a number of fourth-century prose writers, including Isocrates and our historians, toward the use of the written text as an instrument of *paideia*. Thus, these fourth-century historians take on a larger role than has previously been recognized in the replacement

1. On the withdrawal from politics of the "quietists" or *apragmones,* see W. Robert Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971; reprint, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 175–98; and L. B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

2. Following the seminal work of Eric A. Havelock (beginning with *Preface to Plato* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963], and reprised in other works, including his final book, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986]), see William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens,* Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 1–94; and *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

3. Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

4. "If speech is the hallmark of the democratic city, then writing is associated with those out of sympathy with its radical politics" (Deborah Tarn Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994], 7); see also 186–241.

5. Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece.*

by prose texts of Homer and the poets in the moral education of the elite. The particular responsibility of the historians in this nexus, as we shall see, was to create an alternative aristocratic version of the past, in opposition in particular to the democratic version of the oratorical tradition. Thus, despite their exclusion from Josiah Ober's important study,[6] the fourth-century historians do form part of the literary resistance to Athenian democratic ideology, providing more proof—as if any more were needed—that it is impossible to separate the moral from the political in the Greek mindset.

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6. Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Ober does not believe that historians after Thucydides number among the literary resistance to popular rule (121).