Some feminists might, with a certain degree of justification, seek to recast the term ‘history’ as ‘her-story’, for until recently half of the human race seems have been largely absented from the historiographical record. Be that as it may, the most important part of the word is not the first syllable but the last two - ‘story’ - and this eminently readable historiographical survey seeks to elucidate what informs the stories that historians tell. The book begins - appropriately enough - at the beginning, with a review of the work of the Greek historians Herodotus (c 484–425 BCE) and Thucydides (c 460–400 BCE) the two great founding figures of the western historical tradition. For all his antiquity, in Herodotus’ *The Histories* (of the Greek and Persian war), the authors find a remarkably modern historian: “cosmopolitan, internationalist and transnational” (p 14). Although very much concerned with ‘the truth of the matter’, Herodotus did admit that some of his stories were simply unverifiable, but by including them he developed and sustained a great richness of narrative and, more importantly, as the authors point out:

> What characterises *The Histories* … and so what launches Western historical writing is its doubleness: the concern for history as a field, a discipline, an enquiry with associated research protocols combined with an interest in storytelling (p 30).

By contrast to Herodotus’ heterogenic account(s), Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* is straightforward political and military history, drawn not from a plethora of narratives and genres, but from events at which Thucydides was himself present or from eye-witness accounts which he had checked “with as much thoroughness as possible” (p. 48). Thus Thucydides anticipates the 18th and 19th century Whig interpretation of history—that of great men and events—whereas Herodotus anticipates the later, more culturally inclusive history. Curthoys and Docker point to the doubleness in both of these foundation texts: the search for historical truth combined with search for the appropriate literary expression for that truth and it is this doubleness of history that Curthoys and Docker seek to explore in their book.

Fast-forward more than two thousand years to Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), the Prussian Royal Historiographer regarded as the father of modern scientific history. While studying at Frankfurt in the 1820s, Ranke had read Sir Walter Scott’s historical novel *Quentin Durward*...
(1823) and was so offended by Scott’s romantic liberties with the facts that in the preface to his first book, Ranke famously wrote that his history ‘seeks only to show what happened [wie es eigentlich gewesen]’. As a writer of historical novels, Scott was at liberty to engage the whole range of generic elements that were seen in Herodotus, whereas Ranke—who was enamoured of eye-witness accounts, particularly ambassadorial reports—is posited as continuing the tradition of Thucydides. Herein lies one weakness in the authors’ argument, for although the historians Herodotus and Thucydides may be differentiated stylistically, the same differentiation does not hold true for Scott and Ranke, for however much they represent those stylistic differences, the intentions of both were different. As a novelist, Scott was not claiming to be an historian and Ranke certainly never claimed to be a novelist. Over the next hundred years, Ranke’s programmatic statement was to become transvalued into an historiographical imperative and his privileging of archival data, his introduction of the seminar method and above all his ‘colourless’ objectivity established history, in the minds of many that followed him, as a science. Indeed J.B. Bury (1861–1927), the Regius professor of history at Cambridge, dismissed all literary pretensions of history and proclaimed it to be “enthroned and ensphered amongst the sciences” (p. 82). Bury regarded Thucydides as a model of the dispassionate, scientific historian and dismissed Herodotus as a “naïve, uncritical storyteller”.

At this point Curthoys and Docker spend a few chapters tracing the historiographical record in terms of history’s function rather than its form. They record the challenges to Rankean, ‘objective’ history by various interwar historians in response to the crisis of modernity engendered by the First World War. They make special note of the influence of Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) who, though retaining a Hegelian idea of historical progress, rejected the determinism inherent in scientific history. They also claim that the argument that would dominate much of mid-twentieth century historiography was not between scientific and literary history, but between two objectivist schools: the Marxists and the empiricists. Yet, as the authors concede, both schools (the latter being represented by the French Annales) in fact shared similar teleological perceptions of a longue durée and both reached towards the construction of a ‘total history’. These struggles to arrive at a philosophy of history and its inherent doubleness is perhaps best exemplified in a cited passage by E.H. Carr (1892–1982) whereby any historian finds themselves:
...navigating delicately between the Scylla of an untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts...and the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian... (p. 133)

The account of feminist historians is perhaps the most disappointing chapter of this book. Concerned only with women historians of women, it fails to offer any insight of women’s contribution to history qua historians and ends on a discussion of gender theory exemplified by the view that feminist consciousness is “multiply organized across positions on several axes of difference and across discourses and practices that may be, and often are, mutually contradictory”. (p. 177) Whatever this means, it seems to have little to do with history but it does, according to the authors, shed a “more clearly gendered light” (p. 179) on the traditions of Herodotus and Thucydides. The quotation does however usefully segue into a discussion of postmodernism and particularly of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) in whose work history’s doubleness, the authors cogently argue, is expressed by his call for a multi-genre, Herodotean mode, while he wrote in a monologic, Thucydidean one. This leads inevitably into the authors’ discussions of anti-postmodernism and Holocaust denial, and the other holocausts that became the subject of dispute in the recent ‘history wars’ which occurred within the framework of nationalist histories of the US, Japan and Australia.

This book is a patchwork of epigraphs, huddled together in more or less coherent chapters, some of which work extremely well and some less so. The complex of dichotomies that the authors outline so well in their opening chapter is not always fully sustained, and between Thucydides and Ranke there seem to have been no historians at all! Nonetheless, the work will enlighten any educated reader and should certainly be included on the bookshelf of any student of history.

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