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history

- **Webster**: "the branch of knowledge that deals systematically with the past"
- **Henry Ford**: "more or less bunk"
- **anonymous student**: "one damn thing after another"
- **Simon Schauma**: "the study of the past in all its splendid messiness"
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historiography

• “the study of historical methods”
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historia

• the ancient Greek word for “questioning”
• i.e. research (into the past)
• a term coined by Herodotus
• part of the Ionian Revolution
• which embraced a search for the “elements” which underlay all being
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Historians

- are like scientists
- dig for new data in mounds or libraries
- but cannot repeat an experiment
- in that regard, historians are more like detectives than scientists
- they look for “evidence”
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evidence

• is the basis of all historical study
• must be put into context, especially when the data are conflicting
• thus, historians are less like scientists or detectives than lawyers arguing a case
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**primary evidence**

- the principal type of historical evidence
- in its most basic form, the contemporaneous accounts of eyewitnesses to some historical event
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**secondary evidence**

- second-hand accounts gleaned from others’ recollections of past events
- considered a lesser form of data
- the distinction between primary and secondary evidence lies at the heart of many historical controversies
- e.g. *Antigone* 905-915
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inference

• “connecting the dots”
• allows the creation of a larger picture from a small body of data
• but also admits bias and distortion
• relies on what is compelling or cogent to the historian’s readership
• can turn historical scholarship into a “popularity contest”
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tripartition

- the Indo-European proclivity for seeing triads or “threes”
  - “Ready, Set, Go!”
  - the story of the Three Bears
  - “Three strikes, you’re out!”

- to us, when someone produces three examples, that confirms a case

- an example of Indo-European bias
Battle of Thermopylae

- a battle in the Second Persian War (481-479 BCE)
- a few Greeks hold off the whole Persian army for several days but in the end they all die
- Herodotus in *The Histories* pitches this as a moral victory
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Ibn Khaldun

- an Islamic historian and philosopher who outlines seven fallacies of history
  - partisanship to a creed or opinion
  - overconfidence in one’s source
  - failure to understand the intention of a source
  - mistaken belief in the truth of a source
  - failure to place an event in context
  - desire to gain the favor of superiors
  - ignorance of the laws governing society
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the worst of history

• but to what extent can a historian make things up entirely?
• historians are bound by the data and any eye-witnesses to the event
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the best of history

• thus to some extent, history must encompass the truth

• and *good* history encompasses more truth than bad history does

• and all good history involves the *pursuit of truth*
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**theatre**

- **S. Johnson**: “an echo of the public’s voice”
- **Shakespeare**: “a mirror”
- **Giraudoux**: “a trial”
- **Farquhar**: “a banquet”

Like hungry guests, a sitting audience looks:
Plays are like suppers; poets are the cooks:
The founder’s you: the table is this place:
The carver’s we: the prologue is the grace.
Each act a course, each scene a different dish . . .
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*theatron*

- in ancient Greek literally, “an instrument for viewing”
- i.e. the seats
- not the stage or orchestra or *parodoi!*
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theatre

- John Cage: “theatre takes place all the time wherever one goes”
- Bernard Beckerman: theatre happens whenever “one of more human beings, isolated in time and/or space, present themselves to another or others”
- Patti Gillespie: “performances by living actors that take place in the presence of living audiences”
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Institution

- according to Oscar Brockett, theatre is an “autonomous activity”
- versus what is merely “theatrical”
- but who’s to differentiate between theatre and the theatrical?
- especially in a foreign or past culture!
- what are the “elements” of theatre?
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elements of theatre

• **language**: versus movement in dance, song in opera
• **impersonation**: versus rules in a game, teaching in a classroom
• **audience**: or, better, “viewers”
  – n.b. there is a theatre for the deaf, but no theatre for the blind
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theatre history

• the “inquiry” into “instruments for viewing”?  
• the fatal allure of **positivism**  
• is there measurable “**progress**” over time?  
• are we as a species ascending from a **primitive** state to modern enlightenment?  
• cf. **E.K. Chambers** and the “progress” of medieval drama
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chorus

• cf. the use of the chorus in later Greek tragedy: tedious archaism or tonic bringing new and constant joy?

• is the Greek chorus a “primitive” element in classical tragedy?

• we must look for “evolution,” as opposed to “progress”!