

# What Really Happened?: The Severe Limitations of Most Histories!

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There is no modern history -- without its foundation in ancient history. Indeed, there is no ancient history, at all, without the Bible.

Unaided by the historical information contained in the *Holy Bible* (as the infallible because inspired Word of God) -- it is impossible to know in depth what really happened, anywhere, in ancient times. Indeed, without understanding ancient times in depth, one cannot really understand even the present time.

The reason for this, is obvious. In order to get preserved for more than three or four generations (*cf.* Ex. 20:5 & Ps. 78:1-6), the account of "what happened" needs to get written down and transmitted to posterity (*cf.* John 20:30-31 & 21:24-25).

Without such writing down (or 'inscripturation'), the account soon gets forgotten. Alternatively, without inscripturation, all accounts quickly degenerate into monstrous myths -- whether ancient, or modern.

We may well learn something about the structure of 'prehistoric' plants and animals from the fossil records -- as studied by palaeontology. Indeed, we can even learn a little about ancient man by examining his unearthed artifacts -- as studied by archaeology. However, all the study of man's ruined cities and crumbling constructions everywhere in the world (even when all put together) still tell us very little about bygone civilizations (or even about our modern world) -- without accompanying inscriptions.

It is the **writing** on the ancient cuneiform tablets of Sumeria which enables us to understand their significance. It is not the tablets themselves which interpret the writing thereon. It is the **writing** on the 1776 *Declaration of Independence* which puts that history into perspective -- not Philadelphia's Independence Hall where that written proclamation was made.

Sir George Cornwall Lewis is the great authority on early Roman history. As he exhaustively demonstrates, in order to acquire anything like an adequate grasp of ancient human events -- it is quite essential to study written records made at that time, or alternatively at least reliable copies thereof. Indeed, past tradition is not transmitted orally from one generation to the next, with any kind of accuracy ~ for longer than a century.

Only **inspired** writings give us **infallible** information about ancient events. Yet adequate (though non-infallible) information about those ancient events, can be given by non-inspired written records (or reliable copies thereof) -- if inscriptured very soon after those events.

However, the earliest written records of remote history anywhere, have very seldom been preserved. Indeed, there are many occurrences of the widespread destruction of ancient writings (whether by wars, by disuse through updatings, or by natural disasters, *etc.*).

Especially in ancient Greece -- the moist climate there quickly destroyed most records on wax tablets, parchments, or papyri. There, if all the ancient inscriptions still found on stone were now to be written down anew in a book -- it would altogether amount to but a few pages.

Things are slightly better in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, where writing materials have been better preserved in the much drier climate. Yet there too, even the sum total of all inscriptions discovered to date, only gives the most fleeting (and inaccurate) glimpses of Egypt's past. Thus, the 450 B.C. Herodotus uncritically and dramatically endorsed the Egyptians' own claim to a 13000-year antiquity. Later, around 60 B.C., this was expanded to 23000 B.C. Indeed, later still, several thousand extra years were mythically added.

Even in Mesopotamia, only the record of a brief period of later Assyrian history is somewhat comprehensive. On the other hand, the ancient Babylonians numbered the years of their own history in hundreds of thousands. Rightly did the great Cicero, around 70 B.C., express his distinct doubts as to the accuracy of transmitted Babylonian records claiming an antiquity of some 270 thousand years.

What of the rest of the ancient civilizations -- in Persia, India, China and the Americas? There, the totality of the records regarding their alleged ancient histories -- are little more than disconnected scraps or obscure myths.

Thus, in India, one of her *circa* 1000 B.C. ancient books has Brahma -- the Eternal Worker -- making the Earth while looking at his own reflection in the ocean of sweat fallen from his brow. Indeed, the Ancient Hindus believed the World rested on the back of a huge elephant -- itself standing on the back of a tortoise crawling across a boundless sea of milk.

Again, in China, the *circa* 500 B.C. Confucius -- said fire and water pre-existed the commencement of Heaven and Earth some ten thousand years earlier. It was then that the first man is supposed to have been transmuted from the Air and the Light and the Darkness -- after a Tuen' period of 129000 years (itself succeeding at least two other prior Tuen' periods). Indeed, some of the ancient Chinese seem to have claimed that their own history was millions of years old.

Similarly, in the Popol Vuh book of the ancient Mayas -- the myth of multiple successive creations before that of man is maintained. This, and documents of Aztec and Inca myths too -- however ancient -- vastly post-date the Mosaic Cosmogony and World-History. Indeed, they only exist today -- in Post-Columbian reconstructed copies.

Even in Europe, ancient conceptions were not very much better. Thus, Greek mythology has the human giant Atlas carrying the World on his shoulders. Before the 450 B.C. Herodotus, there is no consecutive history of Greece. After Herodotus, however, there was and is no lack of extant (or at least partly extant) Greek historical records.

As regards ancient Rome, even archeologists have hardly been able to throw light on the time prior to the banishment of the kings -- around 500 B.C. Indeed, there were no contemporary extant historians in Rome -- before about 300 B.C. Even Polybius, who died in 120 B.C., has left us only an extant 5% of his originally 40-volume *World History*. Only after him -- do we have an unbroken series of Roman chroniclers.

Yet only a tiny fraction of the above -- written and transmitted on perishable and perishing materials -- has come down to us. Papyri and parchments, on the average, lasted for but a century. Hence, unless recopied -- and accurately so -- their contents perished with them.

In the later Roman age, 'anthologies' or graphic summaries were made from earlier compilations. Thus, around 210 A.D., Athenaeus composed his (not quite totally preserved)

*Feast of the Learned* -- as dinner talk. There, he briefly mentions some 800 ancient authors -- about 700 of whom are totally unknown from elsewhere.

Again, *circa* 450 A.D., Stobaeus compiled extracts from all the then-extant Greek writings known to him. Of the 500 there named, most would otherwise be quite unknown to us. Then, around 880 A.D., also Photius collected excerpts -- from some 280 ancient writers.

Except for an additional few Byzantine compilations (such as *The Greek Anthology*), and the encyclopaedias of the *circa* 950 A.D. Constantine Porphyrogenitus -- as well as for biographies of workers like the 950 A.D. Suidas and assorted other fragments -- we would have no idea that so many ancient writings had ever been inscripturated during the classical period. For only a fraction of those mentioned, have come down to us in their entirety.

Before the invention of printing, it took long to make even one copy of a book. Consequently, many books were never duplicated, and thus perished. Others again only enjoyed a very limited circulation, so that some of them perished too.

Copies of yet others were erased -- so as to 're-use' the writing tablets or parchments as 'palimpsests' in order to record yet other works. In this way, all Greek histories before 450 B.C. were 'scrubbed' from such manuscripts -- in order to re-use them as palimpsests for the popular history of Herodotus. Obviously, this elevated the latter more than he deserved -- by 'liquidating' his less dramatic rivals.

In this way, only a handful of classical writers have now come down to us in multiple manuscript copies. Such include the historians: Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plutarch, Strabo, Pausanius, Arrian, and Livy.

Livy's work is entirely preserved as regards its earlier books -- which dramatically treat of the mythical period of Roman development. However, the latter parts of it -- much more valuable and (it may be supposed) much more accurately treating of later Roman history -- are almost entirely lost.

Indeed, most of the other great historians of ancient Rome -- Tacitus, Dionysius, Dion Cassius, and Polybius -- all fared even worse than Livy. Only briefer works -- like Sallust's two histories and Caesar's *Gallic Wars* and the biographies of Suetonius and Cornelius Nepos -- managed to survive in their entirety: until the invention of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century A.D.

Thus the massive *History of the World* -- written by the 5 A.D. Trogus Pompeius -- was never preserved. All we have of it, is a brief epitome made by the third century A.D.'s Justin. Indeed, even Justin's epitome -- though preserved as to its main structure in several manuscripts -- is not extant in its entirety.

Even the valuable (because extant) ancient histories of Herodotus, Xenophon and Livy -- all have severe shortcomings. The *circa* 450 B.C. Herodotus -- though quite comprehensive -- became popular because he was simply a good story-teller (with no dominant 'philosophy of history.' The 390 B.C. Xenophon's *Anabasis* -- though detailing only the story of Cyrus the Younger -- is chiefly a biased if attractive eulogy. And, once again, the 9 B.C. *History of Rome* by Livy -- though certainly entertaining reading -- is neither a World History nor (for the greater part) even an accurate account of Roman history.

The 411 B.C. *History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides is in an entirely different category. While covering only that struggle, it gives accurate details -- and probes deeply into motives. Indeed, it does offer us a 'philosophy of history' as such. Thucydides' laudible method was followed by the *circa* 200-120 B.C. Polybius in his *Universal History* (of which

only the first five of forty volumes are extant) -- and also in the various (not all complete) works of the 55f A.D. Tacitus (*Agricola; Germania; Histories; Annals; Dialogue; etc.*).

The 135f A.D. works of Arrian, however -- his *Anabasis* and his *Indica* -- superseded and eliminated all earlier histories of Alexander the Great (*circa* 330f B.C.). Once again, only the work of the good 'story-teller' survived.

With few exceptions, not until the 1776f six-volume *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon -- do we find that dedication to accurate historical detail which we have now learned to expect in good historiography. Thereafter the 1845f three-volume *History of Rome* and the four-volume 1871f *Roman Law* of Theodor Mommsen -- were indeed exceptional works.

Only still more recently do we find accurate histories recording 'more and more' -- though written about 'less and less' *etc.* Here one thinks of Thomas Macauley's 1849f five-volume *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (1685-1702) -- and of Thomas Carlyle's 1852f six-volume work on *Frederick the Great* (1712-86).

However, once again, even such specialized studies lack world-historical perspective (if not also a philosophy of history). Hence the need for comprehensive World Histories -- perhaps synthesized from the various specialized studies -- still remains pressing.

The oldest (extra-biblical) World History -- and indeed one which seems to have borrowed at least its beginnings from the Holy Bible -- is the *circa* 60 B.C. *Historical Library* of Diodorus Siculus. His was also by far the most important (extra-biblical) World History ever produced in ancient times.

Of his originally forty volumes, only fifteen are extant. These include the first five (covering the period from the origin of man down to the *circa* 1200 B.C. Trojan Wars). They also include volumes 11-20. The latter cover the period from the *circa* 480 B.C. invasion of Greece by Xerxes, to the *circa* 150f B.C. subjugation of the Greeks by the Romans.

Diodorus commences: "Of the origin therefore of men, there are two opinions amongst the most famous and authentic naturalists and historians. Some of these are of opinion that the World had neither beginning nor ever shall have end, and likewise say that mankind was from eternity, and there never was a time when he first began to be." Here, Diodorus seems to be referring to the historical theories (and the philosophy of history) of the 550f B.C. Ionian materialists.

However, he then also goes on to state: "Others, on the contrary, conceive both the World to be made, and to be corruptible, and that there was a certain time when men had first a being. For, whereas all things at the first were jumbled together, heaven and earth were in one mass ....

"But afterward, they say when corporeal beings appeared one after another, the World at length presented itself in the order [or *kosmos*] we now see.... Those beasts that were naturally watery and moist, called fishes, presently hastened to the place natural to them.... It came to pass that...various living creatures proceeded from the Earth."

Diodorus Siculus only starts his *Historical Library* in earnest -- with chronological material covering the events after the *circa* 1200 B.C. Trojan War. Consequently, perhaps he derived the above-mentioned 'creationist' account -- from the Phoenician sage Sanchuniathon, who is said to have lived just before that War (about whom, and his sources, later below).

“We have accounted,” writes the 60 B.C. Diodorus, “fourscore years from the [1198 B.C.] Trojan War to the return of Heraclides” [in 1118 B.C.]. “From thence, [we have accounted] to the first [790 B.C.] Olympiad, 328 years.” Then, “from the first Olympiad, to the [60 B.C.] beginning of the Gallic War (where our history ends), are 730 years.” Consequently, “our whole work (comprehended in forty books) is a history which takes in the affairs of 1138 years -- besides those times that preceded the Trojan War.”

Now here, immediately below, is the beginning of the ‘Cosmogony’ of the Phoenicians -- transmitted to us (and to the 60 B.C. Diodorus?) by the alleged historian Sanchoniathon (before the 1198 B.C. Trojan War): “At the beginning of all things, was a dark and windy air or a breeze of thick air and a turbid chaos.... When this wind became enamoured of its own first principles (the chaos)...., this was the beginning of the creation of all things.”

It certainly seems likely that the 60 B.C. Diodorus received his ‘creationist’ cosmogony from the *circa* 1200 B.C. Phoenician Sanchoniathon. However, it also seems highly likely that Sanchoniathon in turn, while recasting the format somewhat, had himself derived much of it from the Mosaic Genesis (1:1-2f). For that document had already been brought close to Phoenicia and into the neighbouring Palestine by Joshua -- around 1400 B.C.

Apart from the above-mentioned 60 B.C. Diodorus, it is impossible to speak of any other extra-biblical World Historians of antiquity -- with any degree of certainty. We do know of small segments of the work of the 260 B.C. World Historian Timaeus. Indeed, the 200-120 B.C. Polybius also knew of (the *circa* 400 B.C.) World Historian Aphorus before him. For the rest, we only have the merest fragments of Aphorus -- and of his mentor the *circa* 410f B.C. World Historian Theopompus.

Perhaps we could also mention the *circa* 20 A.D. Greek Historian and Geographer Strabo. On cosmogony, he makes “a few remarks on the operations...of Providence.... It has exercised a will, is disposed to variety, and is the artificer of innumerable works. In the first rank...is the generation of animals...and man, for whose sake the rest were formed.... There is also a variety in the quality of water.... To men, Providence assigned the Earth.... Geometry and astronomy, as we before remarked, seem absolutely indispensable.... The Earth is spheroidal.”

No Roman at any time and no Greek after the 60 B.C. Diodorus ever produced a World History like his -- apart from world-historical epitomes chronicled by several later Byzantine writers. Even the *circa* 324 A.D. *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, is the merest epitome of a World History.

More important -- in terms of a philosophy of history -- is, of course, Augustine' s 413-426 A.D. *City of God*. King Alfred of England, around 870 A.D., translated into Anglo-Saxon the 415 A.D. *World History* of the Spanish Christian Orosius. For the rest, it is perhaps worth noting that the otherwise valuable encyclopaedic history of the 950 A.D. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, is only extant in a much mutilated condition.

Only late in the sixteenth century A.D., do we come to Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* (in five volumes). This work covers the world-historical periods: I, from the Creation to Abraham; II, from Abraham to the Babylonian captivity; III, from the Babylonian Captivity to Philip of Macedon; IV from Philip of Macedon to Antigonus; and V, from Antigonus until the Roman Conquests. Sir Walter's enormous 800 quarto pages far exceed the bulk of what is extant between Diodorus -- and himself, some sixteen centuries later.

After Raleigh, there has especially since 1730 been a whole spate of World Histories. In England, there was the multi-volumed work of Bower, Campbell, Guthrie, Salmanazar, Sale and Winton. Tobias Smollett later updated it, with a supplement on English History. Then came Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon.

From 1824 onward, Germany took over from England the hegemony in the field of World History. In rapid succession, there appeared the works of Schlosser, Rotteck, the Oncken series, Bekker, Ranke, Weiss, and Weber (the modern 'Diodorus'). The Oncken series is based on the 1830f work of the Englishman Dr. Lardner. Buckle followed. An endless host of further German works then ensued.

Finally, in 1908, there appeared the great 25-volume international *Historians' History of the World* (published in London by 'The Times' in 1908). This contained chapters: from America (by Hart, Jones, MacLaughlin, and Shotwell); from Austria (by Kroner and Mueller); from Britain (by Barwick, Browning, Cheyne, Chisholm, Gairdner, Garnett, Oman, Pelham and Tout); from France (by Halevy and Rambaud); from Germany (by Erman, Harnack, Hirschfeld, Meyer, Noeldeke and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff); from Hungary (by Goldziher and Vambery); and from Russia (by Rappoport). Indeed, it appeared completely furnished with contributions also from a whole host of other (Hebrew and Italian and Spanish *etc.*) collaborators.

Let it not be thought that most of the claims (made earlier above), as to the limitations of **historiography** -- are just the blusterings of the one and only Bible-believing 'bigot' now writing this present article! Nor are they the claims of many Bible-thumping 'bigots.' Instead, the above claims are all taken from that just-mentioned world-famous 17000-page epic to evolutionism known as *The Historians' History of the World*. Indeed, these claims are all made in its Introduction (on 'History, Historians, and the Writing of Histories' and on 'A Glimpse into the Prehistoric Period').

The anti-biblical bias especially of many modern historians is well shown by the following excerpt from Creswicke's eight-volume history *South Africa and the Transvaal War 1899-1902* (London: Caxton, VI, p. 124). There, discussing the great Calvinistic Christian and last President of the South African Republic Paul Kruger, Louis Creswicke alleges:

'Mr. Kruger slunk from South Africa .... When he departed, his money-bags were full.... The romantics were even wont to look on him as another Cromwell.... But gradually, the massive peasant became transformed into the pinchbeck potentate, a despot with never an inkling of statesmanship to redeem the unctious sophistries and hypocritical cant with which he attempted to blind the world and himself.'

Interestingly, Kruger is still fondly remembered in South Africa. But his contemporary, the English 'Historian' Louis Creswicke -- is now all but unknown, even in England itself!

Indeed, even the rest of the above-mentioned fallible historians (and also most of their fallible written histories) have now withered and wilted away. For it is only the Spirit-inspired and therefore infallible inscripturation of past events in the **enduring Holy Bible**, which makes the writing of true history anywhere -- possible at all.

It is true, of course, that Biblical history is a special history *sui generis*. It is also true that the focus of the Bible is largely on Palestine, and chiefly from 1400 B.C. till 70 A.D. It is further true that it is not an exhaustive history, even of ancient Israel. Indeed, it is certainly by and large the sacred history -- of God's revelation to man.

However, it is also true that Biblical History starts (as does no other) around 4004 B.C. It stretches prophetically down past our own age (1988f A.D.), till the very end of still-future World History. It is absolutely and uniquely infallible in its teaching, also as regards matters historical. Indeed, it provides the only world-historical framework available anywhere -- both chronologically and demographically.

According to the infallibly-inscripturated *Holy Bible*, man first appeared on this planet by direct creation of the Triune God around 4004 B.C. See [at website <http://www.dr-fnlee.org>] the update of my 1974 book *Origin and Destiny of Man* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co.). The first historical record of this, was probably inscripturated at that very time. For "this is **the book** of the generations of Adam in the day that God created man." Genesis 5:1.

Some 1656 years later, that providentially-transmitted record was probably added to the probably then inscripturated account of the *circa* 2350 B.C. Noachic flood chronology. Genesis 7:11 to 8:14. About another nine centuries later, the again-providentially-transmitted record, as inspiredly augmented, was definitively inscripturated by Moses around 1440-1400 B.C. Cf. Matthew 19:4-8 & Mark 10:3-8.

Over the next millennium till Malachi, the expanding and still- providentially-transmitted record was definitively inscripturated as the Old Testament. This gives us the only extant and infallible account of Ancient World History -- from about 4004 B.C. till *circa* 400 B.C. (alias the time of the Greek Herodotus or misnamed 'Father of History'). Cf.: Genesis 3:15f; Luke 16:29-31 & 24:27,44; John 5:45-47 & 10:35; Acts 26:22 & 28:23; Romans 3:1-2, 5:14,15:4-8f & 16:20-26; Second Timothy 3:15-17; and First Peter 1:18-25.

Finally, over a period of probably less than fifty years, in the documents from 'Matthew' to 'Revelation' now contained in the New Testament, the above was augmented and again declared to be authentic history. That was inscripturated probably around 70 A.D. Luke 1:1-4; First Timothy 5:18; Second Peter 1:16-21; and Revelation 1:1-3,19f & 19:9-10 & 22:16-19.

In spite of the wearing out of the original autograph manuscripts, and even of subsequent reliable copies thereof -- we still have thousands of extant ancient copies of parts and of the whole of all of the original Hebrew and Greek documents in the Bible. These thousands of ancient documents include both previously jettisoned copies with misspellings *etc.* -- as well as carefully preserved copies of the received text, devoid of all substantial error.

Indeed, from all of these many ancient manuscripts still extant, it is even today still possible to reconstruct the original New Testament (with some 99.94% accuracy) -- and the original Old Testament (with some 99.98% accuracy) -- as regards all substantial readings. Thus the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, in their book *The Infallible Word* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian Pub. Co., 1948).

Just think of it! Respectively 99.94 and 99.98 percent certainty -- regarding the accuracy of every 'jot and tittle' and every dotted 'i' and crossed 't' -- in good modern reprints of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the New and the Old Testaments. 99.94 and 99.98% of the 100% in the original autographs themselves. 99.94 and 99.98 -- still in, and 'not out' on their way toward a century. Pretty good 'batting averages' for any cricketer anywhere!

Even if all those thousands of extant Hebrew and Greek ancient manuscripts were to be destroyed -- together with every single copy of all translations of the Bible ever (thus far) made into all of the thousands of foreign languages and dialects -- the substance of the *Holy Bible*

would still not be lost. For, simply from its citations in the extant writings of the Early Church Fathers -- it would still be possible to reconstruct the entire Bible except for just 11 verses.

The Bible is thus quite unique. For the above facts are true of no other ancient book, law code, or religious document.

“O Lord..., all who forsake You shall become ashamed, and...shall be written in the Earth -- because they have forsaken the Lord, the Fountain of living waters!” Jeremiah 17:13. For “all flesh is like grass.... The grass withers; and the flower fades -- because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it. Surely, the people are like grass. The grass withers; the flower fades -- but the Word of our God shall keep on standing forever!” Isaiah 40:6-8.

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