

From the vantage point of the westernmost frontier of the New World, there is no compelling reason for privileging the history of the ancient Mediterranean—or even Europe—over, say, that of East Asia or the Pacific Islands. As an example, Hawai‘i presents a microcosm of the complex interplay of cultures in the wake of European colonialism. To assert there the importance of Classics solely on the basis of its canonical place in the Western tradition is to invite the question of why we privilege one culture over another, and elicits responses deriving from still unresolved issues of colonialism and its aftermath. We live—and will for the foreseeable future—in a global environment where the distinctions between centers and peripheries are blurred. In this world, Greece and Rome become just two of many human societies in history. In a globalizing society, it is time to rethink the traditional place that has been granted the history of the ancient Mediterranean.

The challenge for historians of the ancient Mediterranean is to distinguish world history (with a focus on the interaction of cultures separated by distance) from comparative history (the comparison of cultures or periods between which the links of contact were more tenuous). Comparative history is less problematic for the pre-modern world, where sustained intercultural contact and communication over long distances was less extensive compared to developments after AD 1500. An approach which strives takes the “world” as its principal object of analysis, on the other hand, tends to favor history after AD 1500. Although a world historical approach can raise fresh questions for ancient historians regarding trade, travel, communications, and war, nevertheless, the significance of Greece and Rome recedes from the big historical picture because most world history textbooks take contemporary globalization as their frame of reference.

I will argue for the continuing relevance of ancient history to contemporary interest in the effects of intensified cultural contact and exchange, specifically by reading Herodotus through the lens of world history. Herodotus’ *Histories* provides an ancient model for incorporating disparate local histories into a unified yet polycentric narrative, a particular challenge confronting contemporary historians seeking to explain how the global society we live in today came to be. A survey of the treatment of Herodotus and the Persian Wars in world history textbooks will provide a snapshot as to the state of where the ancient Mediterranean is positioned intellectually within a global argument and the degree to which authors of world history texts acknowledge the applicability of the world history approach to the pre-modern world.