The most important Greco-Roman writers on history who remain in dialogue with modern archaeology

[Translation is crucial; a good, contemporary translation will reproduce the delight; a bad translation makes for a dull read.]

**Homer** (8C BCE), *The Iliad*. The first and most important account of men at war, essential to understanding the Mycenaeans, more important than any other book in shaping the expression of male competitive values in Western Civilization ever since. *The Odyssey*. This greatest story every told, allegorical of every variety of human relationship, defining forever the Hero’s Journey narrative archetype.

Good prose translations by E. V. Rieu, W.H.D. Rouse, or Walter Shewring. Best translations in verse are by Robert Fitzgerald and Robert Fagles. The most accessible introduction to Homer for Americans is the new translation by Stanley Lombardo.

**Hecataeus of Miletus** (c. 550 ~ c. 476 BCE). The real father of history, as he pioneered skepticism of oral history and the distinction of allegorical history (myth) from actual past events. Only fragments remain of his accounts of Europe and Asia.

**Herodotus** (ca. 484 ~ 425 BCE). The father of history according to Cicero, has interesting things to say about events and cultures across the Mediterranean, some of it true, all of it engaging. Translations by Robin Waterfield (Oxford Classics) is modern and readable, De Sélincourt (Penguin) is also clear and perhaps more elegant.

**Thucydides** (450 ~ 400 BCE). *The Peloponnesian War*. The magnificent unsurpassed standard for history writing. An Athenian general himself, he understood the tactics, interviewed the participants to get the facts right, and is endlessly wise about human motivation. The Rex Warner translation is a good one.

**Polybius** (ca. 200 ~ ca.120 BCE). Greek historian of the rise of the Roman Empire.

**Apollodorus of Athens** (ca.180 ~ after 120 BCE). Greek scholar and grammarian, writer of a history in verse from the fall of Troy (12th century BCE) through ca. 109 BCE), in part based on previous works by Eratosthenes of Cyrene.
Cicero (106 – 43 BCE). Roman philosopher, politician, lawyer, orator, political theorist, constitutionalist, and most astute commentator on the events and values of his times. Necessary to every library.

Gaius Julius Caesar (103 – 44 BCE). General, statesman, and historian, whose career was the most legendary of Roman history and whose account of his own triumphs is still standard reading.

Diodorus Siculus (ca. 90 – 21 BCE). Born in Agyrium, Sicily, he was an historian of world history up to Julius Caesar. Parts remain of his huge work, Bibliotheca Historica (Historical Library). Unreliable but essential. Expensive in print, he is cheap on Kindle.

Sallust (Gaius Sallustius Crispus, 86 – ca. 35 BCE). Historian of the Roman Republic and a corrupt politician, credited with broadening history to explain the connection and meaning of events.

Virgil (70 – 19 BCE), Æneid. His great achievement--more valued than true history--is to ground the Roman people in a mythic past, giving them a sense of grandeur and mission. English cannot capture his noble ringing Latin style: Mandelbaum translation is direct and simple, Fagles a bit less graceful, but perhaps more exciting. Fitzgerald also. C. Day Lewis is clean and delicate. Avoid Lonsdale.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60 – after 7 BCE), Greek historian and teacher of rhetoric in Augustan Age, whose history of early Rome sought to reconcile his fellow Greeks with Roman rule.

Strabo (ca. 66 BCE – 24 CE). Greek geographer, philosopher and historian who wrote for a Roman readership. His 17-volume Geographica is a descriptive history of the peoples and regions of the world known to the Roman Augustan age (which includes an insightful look at fossil formation).

Livy (Titus Livius, ca. 59 BCE – ca. 17 CE). Roman historian with a monumental history of Rome and the Roman people, from the earliest legends of Rome through the reign of Augustus in Livy's own time.

Trogus (Gnaeus Pompēius Trōgus, or Pompey Trogue, 1st-century CE). Historian from the Celtic tribe of the Vocontii whose Historiae Philippicae in 44 books covered the histories of Philip of Macedon, Alexander, and their successors.

Velleius (Marcus Velleius Paternculus, ca. 19 BCE – ca. 31 CE). Roman historian of the period from the end of the Trojan War to the death of Livia in 29 CE.

Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, 23 – 79 CE). Roman author, naturalist, and natural philosopher, as well as military commander and personal friend of the emperor Vespasian. His Naturalis Historia is a model for all other encyclopedias.

Curtius (Quintus Curtius Rufus, 1st century CE). Roman historian of Historiae Alexandri Magni, is a biography of Alexander the Great in Latin in ten books.
Lucan (Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39–65 CE)). One of the most admired poets, a friend then victim of Nero, and historian of the Roman Civil Wars.

Josephus (Titus Flavius Josephus, born 39 ~ c. 100 CE). A Jewish general and historian, best known for The Jewish War (75 ~ 79 CE), often has important things to say on historical backgrounds in the eastern Mediterranean.

Seutonius (Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, c. 69 ~ after 122 CE). Roman historian and cultural writer, most famous for his The Twelve Caesars, a set of biographies of Roman rulers from Julius Caesar to Domitian. From him we get most of the famous scandals of the Julio-Claudian emperors, from Nero’s fiddling to Caligula’s grotesqueries.

Plutarch (45 ~ 120 CE). Parallel Lives, a comparison of great Greeks & great Romans for moral instruction. The most important ancient historian for the modern reader. Several modern translations possible. Engaging accounts of all the major players of Greek and Roman history are there. Penguin Classics do a three-part paperback series of some of the most important lives: The Rise and Fall of Athens, The Fall of the Roman Republic, and Makers of Rome.

Tacitus (Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus, ca. 56 ~ after 117 CE). Senator and the most important historian of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. His Annals and Histories span Roman history from the death of Augustus in 14 CE to the First Jewish–Roman War in 70 CE.

Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, 61 ~ c. 113 CE). Pliny the Elder's nephew and adopted son. Lawyer, author, and magistrate of Imperial Rome. Hundreds of his letters survive, of great historical value.

Philo of Byblos (or Herennius Philon; c. 64 ~ 141 CE). A writer in Greek, chiefly known for his Phoenician history (translations of lost writings by Sanchuniathon).

Polyaenus (2nd Century CE). His Stratagems in War is an exercise in military analysis.

Pausanias (2nd Century CE). Greek traveler/tourist in the Roman Empire, who wrote the first and still most important travel book. A massively important source for ancient sites across the Mediterranean. Expensive in print, he is cheap on Kindle.

Justin (Marcus Junianius (or Junianus) Justinus, 2nd Century CE). Author of Historiarum Philippicarum libri XLIV, a collection passages from Trogus (see above), now otherwise lost.

Cassius Dio (Lucius, or Claudius, Cassius Dio, 155 – 235 CE), senator & consul under Severan Dynasty, wrote in Greek, the entire history of Rome from Aeneas to his own time in 80 volumes, much of which still survives.