



Historically Speaking

Volume 5, Number 5, May 2026

This Challenge of Historical Fiction

I will be a presenter to the Historical Novel Society in September on the subject of historical research for my novels. I will be mentioning this newsletter as a product of that research.

To the right is a screen capture of part of that first newsletter, wherein I explained the purpose of the newsletter.

As I read it now, I believe I have succeeded in the original intent most of the time. I am in the fifth year of producing it monthly, having only mis-sed on month (September of last year.)
(cont. on next page)

This monthly newsletter will give me a chance to share the background of my research and writing as I progress with novels based in the ancient Mediterranean (primarily Greece, Egypt and Nubia (Kush)). I have found so much interesting information and most of it doesn't fit into the novels.

I have been posting a daily blog for months now, and some of the discussions found there will be addressed here as well. I will try not to duplicate too much, but this newsletter will let me cover more than I can fit into the blogs.

One friend asked about whether this newsletter would be appropriate for her ten year old daughter, who loves mythology. I informed her that it might not be. The ancient Greeks were an earthy people and the mythology of their imagination reflects that. If you sanitize it (as is too often done), it loses the meaning behind the myth. That will be the subject of a future newsletter.

When I was teaching mythology, the meaning behind the myths was a central focus. The stories are rich and the Greek mythology in particular, is more advanced and immense in content than any other mythology (in my opinion), and that is remarkable in that much of it has been lost to time. The Greeks carried it as a purely oral tradition for centuries. When it moved from oral to written language, it ceased to evolve and much of it was simply never committed to written language.

The bards of the oral tradition would sing the stories, usually accompanied by a lyre or other stringed instrument. They would include local heroes, politicians and patrons, dependent on where they were performing. They would do this for hours at a time, constructing it as they went, most often in dactylic pentameter.



What's happening?

I spent the last three days (April 9, 10, and 11) at the Washington Education Association Representative Assembly, as a representative for WEA Retired members. It is an annual assembly to tend to the governance of the Association. On Saturday we go until the business items are all completed. Sometimes that has taken until 3:00 am. Sunday morning. This time we finished at midnight. I have missed the last three years because of surgeries, so it was nice to get back to it, though I am truly exhausted today and will take it easy to get rested before getting

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The challenges of the research and writing process are significant, yet interesting. The purpose of doing the research is to lend a sense of historical accuracy to the books I write. I would suggest that is the intent of most, if not all, writers of historical fiction.

My first historical novels based in ancient Greece around 600 BCE, had only one real historical person - Sappho, the poet, philosopher, and early feminist from the island of Lesbos. All of the rest of the characters in those books were fictional. What made the books historical fiction, was not so much that one real person. It was the attention to details related to culture, geographic representation, maritime practice, rituals and religious practice, and more.

The novel I am working on now (tentatively entitled 'Amon') involves a large cast of real people from the history of ancient Egypt during the Armana Period (around 1350 BCE.) There are fewer fictional characters than true historical individuals in this new novel. I don't know at this point if it will be a single book, or a series. Time will tell on that matter.

Because I taught Greek Mythology over a four decade period, the research I did for that series was focused on details, particularly, whatever I could find about the maritime trade practices and the merchant ships of that period. I also had to take creative license on several things. such as the use of money (coins.) I wrote the use of coins as much more prevalent than it actually was at that specific time period. Except for the time period, the rest

of the use of coins in the books was hopefully accurate. I also made the ships bigger than most of the merchant marine ships were in order to provide for more crew members to appear in the storyline.

Getting back to the challenges of research for these novels, the biggest challenge involves deciding how much factual information is enough. There needs to be enough to build a realistic environment for the reader, without resorting to an info-dump. I continue to struggle with that.

The covers of *Sinon of Kirra* and *Mentu the Nubian* have been changed by Kristi Stalder of Stalder Books and Publishing to tie the series together with a common cover appearance. The forthcoming novella, *Marcion*, will also be created to resemble the others in the series. The covers of the first four books are shown below.

