

## THUCYDIDEAN EPISTEMOLOGY: BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY

This essay investigates several aspects of Thucydides' intellectual conception of history in order to further our understanding of its philosophical basis and its essential qualities.<sup>1</sup> I shall look at the following three features of Thucydides' History: his stated preference in major passages for general qualitative analysis; his language of proof, much of it drawn from logical and legal reasoning; his complex conception of "the truth." These three elements

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1) Several scholars have claimed that Thucydides invented a particularly intellectual form of history, though it is important to note that they have somewhat different ideas in mind when they use this or a related term. Romilly, for example, demonstrated that, in Thucydides' work, reasoning controls facts with an almost mathematical rigor. Moved by a strong tendency to seek intellectual unity among discrete events, Thucydides creates historiographical coherence by means of close verbal ties, which Romilly calls "fils conducteurs" and "enchaînements." See Romilly 1956, *passim*, but especially 32–33, 38–39, 46, 48, 52, 81.

Adam Parry (1981, 169) claimed that "... the whole History is in large part concerned with the relation of the intellect to the world." ... "Like Pindar, Thucydides is here concerned not with the details, but with the meaning, of the action of the men he is writing about." Put another way, "... Thucydides is concerned with giving significance to the events which he records: he enforces an intellectual interpretation of what he narrates" (1981, 6–7). Further, "Thucydides' History is a study of man's attempt to master the world by the intellect, as seen in one great action of history, of which Thucydides himself was a witness. The work is thus neither philosophy – for it is much too concerned with what actually happened –, nor history, in the usual sense; but a special sort of intellectual history" (1981, 181). Parry argued that the *λόγος / ἔργον* duality constitutes the wellspring of Thucydides' history.

Loraux spoke of Thucydides' "intellectual authority:" "An intellect which would give itself over to the pure exercise of thought, with no object, but thought oriented primarily towards itself, such is Thucydidean intellectuality ..." (1986, 140, 154).

And Shanske (in: Thucydides and the Philosophical Origins of History) argued that Thucydides created a Wittgensteinian "fly-bottle," a self-contained world of intellectual coherence from which many natural features are rigorously excluded. By formulating general types across specific instances, "... Thucydides is allowing the wise to see kinds in connection with one another, and in so doing is creating a world" (2007, 179).

are fundamental to Thucydides' epistemology, hence to his invention of an intellectualized history.

*Thucydides' predilection for qualitative analysis*

A good means of seeing Thucydides' intellectual inquiry at work is to study his methodological introductions to major analytical passages. In several of these introductions he explicitly prefers qualitative analysis of events to conventional Greek rhetorical and scientific practices. I begin with a well-known example from the opening of the plague passage, 2.48.3:

λεγέτω μὲν οὖν περὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς ἕκαστος γινώσκει καὶ ἰατρὸς καὶ ἰδιώτης, ἀφ' ὅτου εἰκὸς ἦν γενέσθαι αὐτό, καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἄστινας νομίζει τοσαύτης μεταβολῆς ἱκανὰς εἶναι δύναμιν ἐς τὸ μεταστήσασθαι σχεῖν· ἐγὼ δὲ οἶόν τε ἐγένετο λέξω, καὶ ἀφ' ὧν ἂν τις σκοπῶν, εἴ ποτε καὶ αὐθις ἐπιπέσοι, μάλιστα ἂν ἔχοι τι προειδῶς μὴ ἀγνοεῖν, ταῦτα δηλώσω αὐτὸς τε νοσήσας καὶ αὐτὸς ἰδὼν ἄλλους πάσχοντα.

Here Thucydides disdains the common Hippocratic practice of seeking the origins and causes of major diseases.<sup>2</sup> He does so in language that, as we shall see in other cases, is standard in Thucydidean proof-making: he uses the third person imperative to propose a method of examination. "Let each physician and layperson think about (λεγέτω as "consider," "ponder")<sup>3</sup> the plague as he determines: from whatever source it was likely to arise, and the causes that he believes are sufficient to bring about so great a change ..." He then introduces his own method by asserting that he will write a qualitative description of the plague, which, by its nature, will have heuristic value: "I shall point out what kind of thing (οἶον)<sup>4</sup> it was, and the characteristics by which (ἀφ' ὧν ἂν) a future

2) Thomas 2000, especially in chapter 6, "Argument and the language of proof," argues that Herodotus often uses the "proof language" of Ionian science, particularly Hippocratic medicine. Here Thucydides clearly eschews this practice and implies strongly that his own approach is superior.

3) For a useful discussion of this verb's several senses, see Luraghi 2001, 147, particularly n.26. In Herodotus and Thucydides, as Luraghi demonstrates, it often refers to what an historical source (usually a collective source) "holds for true."

4) See Hornblower 1991, 321 for different views of the meaning and significance of οἶον here. Stroud 1987, 379 shows that it means "what kind of thing." Stroud, following Sheppard and Evans, also cites another near-quotation of Thucy-

inquirer, if it should ever befall anyone again, might have a basis for recognizing it, namely, some prior knowledge of it. I shall reveal (δηλώσω) these things on the basis of having suffered the disease myself and of having personally seen others afflicted by it.”<sup>5</sup>

Thucydides claims that his method produces general, replicable information. It is, therefore, epistemologically valuable for those who will want to study his results. Immediately following this introduction in 2.48.3, Thucydides begins his account of the plague. Note that this famous passage begins with a close description of the ‘normal’ course of the physical disease, then moves to its social and moral consequences. There are no proper names, no dates, no individual events. The analysis becomes gradually more abstract as it moves from the physical to the social to the moral domain, and it depends upon general conceptual forms (εἶδος in 50.1, ἐπὶ πᾶν τὴν ιδεάν in 51.1). It explicitly omits specific data that are atypical (πολλὰ καὶ ἄλλα παραλιπόντι ἀτοπίας, ὡς ἐκάστω ἐτύγχανέ τι διαφερόντως ἑτέρῳ πρὸς ἕτερον γινόμενον in 51.1). Thucydides is thus interested in uncovering what O. Lendle has called the “internal regularity” governing the plague.<sup>6</sup> The plague passage eschews individual facts and events (ἕτερα) in favor of general qualitative description (οἶον). It is thus not a purely empirical study of physical events and properties, but a set of qualitative de-

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dides’ words in Procopius, Bell. Pers. 2.22.5. Just as the entire plague passage was clearly well known in antiquity, so was Thucydides’ methodological introduction to it.

5) Cf. Pliny the Elder, Natural History 11.2.8, on Insects: *denique existimatio sua cuique sit, nobis propositum est naturas rerum manifestas indicare, non causas indagare dubias*. “In short, let each person think about this as he wishes; my purpose is to point out the manifest properties of objects, not to search for dubious causes.” Pliny, in a virtual quotation of the Thucydidean passage, uses the same third person singular imperative to set aside the intellectual approaches taken by others, then stipulates that his (more scientific) method is to identify the visible properties of things. He renders the phrases οἶον and ἀφ’ ὧν ἄν with *naturas manifestas rerum*, and δηλώσω with *indicare*. The goal is qualitative description enabling future learning.

6) “. . . die Krankheit einer inneren Gesetzmässigkeit unterworfen ist,” Lendle 1990, 234. Lendle (234 n. 8) argues that Thucydides found this same kind of regularity in the political “symptoms” he detected in the runup to the Peloponnesian War. By identifying such symptoms in these instances, Thucydides believed that his history could be concretely useful in the sense that readers, understanding the patterns he described, could thereby distinguish such sequences of symptoms in diseases and wars of their own day.

scriptions based upon close observation and what we might call social psychological reasoning and analysis.<sup>7</sup> It carries emotional power through its rhetorical intensity, its striking verbs, and its portrayal of widespread suffering.<sup>8</sup> The passage is a conceptual and rhetorical masterpiece, a distillation of thousands of specific events into an intellectual and emotional exposition.

A second example of explicit preference for qualitative analysis over previous Greek practice comes in a speech, Pericles' Funeral Oration. After a traditional opening, a *recusatio* followed by a brief praise of the Athenians' ancestors, Pericles expressly declines to do the next conventional thing in an epitaphios, to recount the battles of the past two generations "by which each possession was acquired:" οἷς ἕκαστα ἐκτήθη (2.36.4). He does not wish to "go on at length in front of those who already know these things." Instead, he reveals (δηλώσας, the same verb as in 2.48.3) the essential nature of Athenian culture.

Οἶος appears, self-consciously, three times in this sentence in consecutive prepositional phrases.<sup>9</sup> The three nouns ἐπιτήδευσις, πολιτεία, and τρόποι, furnish the program for the next five paragraphs of the Funeral Oration. At their conclusion, Pericles summarizes by saying, "The reason for my going on at length about the city is to give a lesson" (διδασκαλία in 2.42.1). It is clear from its introduction and conclusion that this section stands out as a rhetorical innovation: "I will not go on at length about battles . . . I have gone on at length about the essential character of the Athenian polis." Pericles eschews battle narratives in favor of qualitative analysis. As J. Rusten points out, Pericles' Funeral Oration "departs from the traditional pattern of the *epitaphios* to concentrate almost entirely on the glorification of *contemporary* Athens."<sup>10</sup> I would add, based on what we have seen here, that the self-consciously marked departure is the replacement of individual battle narratives with the abstract analysis of Athenian character. This

7) Note that Romilly (1990, 66) emphasizes the general nature of Thucydides' description of the plague.

8) Parry 1969, 106–118.

9) Stroud (1987, 381) notes that 2.48.4 and 2.36.4 are the only two sentences in Thucydides containing this τε . . . καί construction with οἶον. This similarity, in addition to the dismissal of conventional approaches and the repeated use of δηλώω, links these two passages tightly.

10) Rusten 1989, 19.

five-paragraph section gains its fame from its deep and rhetorically powerful dissection of Athenian values and traits.

In the same way, the famous Corinthian portrayal of Athenian character features a οἶος statement (1.69.6–70.1):

καὶ μηδεὶς ὑμῶν ἐπ' ἐχθρὰ τὸ πλεόν ἢ αἰτία νομίση τάδε λέγεσθαι· αἰτία μὲν γὰρ φίλων ἀνδρῶν ἐστὶν ἀμαρτανόντων, κατηγορία δὲ ἐχθρῶν ἀδικησάντων. (1.70.1) καὶ ἅμα, εἴπερ τινὲς καὶ ἄλλοι, ἄξιοι νομίζομεν εἶναι τοῖς πέλας ψόγον ἐπενεγκεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ μεγάλων τῶν διαφερόντων καθεστώτων, περὶ ὧν οὐκ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἡμῖν γε δοκέετε, οὐδ' ἐκλογίσασθαι πάποτε πρὸς οἴους ὑμῖν Ἀθηναίους ὄντας καὶ ὅσον ὑμῶν καὶ ὡς πᾶν διαφέροντας ὁ ἀγὼν ἔσται.

The Corinthians begin with a self-conscious non-apology, then introduce their final argument with καὶ ἅμα.<sup>11</sup> The now-familiar contrast between old and new ways of seeing and thinking follows: “Don’t think we say these things out of enmity. We say them as a remonstrance, which men use for friends who have made errors, not as a criminal accusation, which men use for enemies who have wronged them. But most of all, if anyone can claim the right to protest to you, we can since you Spartans seem to us not to perceive the great differences between the two national characters, nor to reflect upon just what sort (οἶος) of people the Athenians are, how strikingly and completely different they will be as adversaries.” In the next sentence the Corinthians launch into their unforgettable comparison of Athenian and Spartan national characteristics, and conclude it by dropping the Spartans entirely in their intense focus upon Athenian πολυπραγμοσύνη. The final picture of the Athenians (70.9) is memorable: “In summary, if someone said that it is in their nature (πεφυκέναι) to take no rest, and not to allow other human beings to take any, he would be right.” This passage in the Corinthians’ speech provides the reader with a synchronic description of the Athenians’ essential nature. Οἶος introduces the qualitative analysis; πεφυκέναι concludes it. Both words

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11) See Van de Maele 1990, 341–346: when καὶ ἅμα introduces the last in a series of arguments or rationales, it is the most true, and often the most hidden or secret argument. In such cases it heralds the most important and revealing argument in the sequence. This is clearly the case here, where the Corinthians unveil their dramatic and clinching revelation to the Spartans. Note that the Athenians use καὶ ἅμα a couple of pages further along (1.73.1) to the same effect: their third motive for speaking is the most important – see Van de Maele 1990, 343.

signal the essential nature of the Athenians, as conceived by the Corinthians (that is, by Thucydides).

Note that this οἶος passage recalls and extends the comments the Corinthians made near the beginning of their speech. In 68.2 the Corinthians emphasized that they had often warned the Spartans about Athenian aggression, but “you were not learning on each occasion what we were teaching:” οὐ περὶ ὧν ἐδιδάσκομεν ἐκάστοτε τὴν μάθησιν ἐποιεῖσθε. The word ἐκάστοτε functions here as do its cognates in the passages examined above. It refers to the individual warnings given repeatedly to Sparta in the past. Since those warnings about specific acts of aggression did not succeed in convincing the Spartans to act, the Corinthians decide instead to offer (in chapter 70) a general, synchronic description of Athenian πολυπραγμοσύνη as a means of persuasion. These two passages are linked by διδάσκω and μάθησις in 68.2 and αἰσθάνεσθαι and ἐκλογίσασθαι in 70.1: the Corinthians’ concern is to teach the Spartans, who are, in the Corinthians’ view, slow to learn, and unable to perceive or to reflect. Hence a new method is required, an analytical description of the Athenians’ character rather than specific instruction in the midst of individual episodes of aggression.<sup>12</sup>

The Pentekontaetia furnishes us with another example of the type, different in form because it is explicitly a digression from the main narrative, but with a similar purpose and a self-conscious opening like that of the plague passage. Thucydides begins the Pentekontaetia in 1.89.1: Οἱ γὰρ Ἀθηναῖοι τρόπῳ τοιῷδε ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὰ πράγματα ἐν οἷς ηὔξηθησαν. Τρόπῳ τοιῷδε is the key phrase: “in this sort of way.” At the end of the first segment of the Pentekontaetia, Thucydides sums up the Athenian assumption of hegemony with τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ in 96.1: this is a qualitative expression to introduce the “way in which” Athenian power developed. Τρόπος recurs at the end of 1.97.2, the second and more formal introduction to the Pentekontaetia:

12) Note more Periclean language in 1.68.3: Καὶ εἰ μὲν ἀφανεῖς ποῦ ὄντες ἠδίκουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα, διδασκαλίας ἂν ὡς οὐκ εἰδόσι προσέδει· νῦν δὲ τί δεῖ μακρηγορεῖν . . . ; (cf. 2.36.4 and 42.1). In their exasperation, the Corinthians complain that they would have to offer instruction to unknowing allies if the Athenians were committing aggression in the dark, but ask why they should go on at length now, when Athenian actions have been so blatant and visible to all. Pericles uses many of the same words to make a similar point to his fellow Athenians: since you already know all of this, I have no need to go on at length.

ἔγραψα δὲ αὐτὰ καὶ τὴν ἐκβολὴν τοῦ λόγου ἐποίησάμην διὰ τόδε, ὅτι τοῖς πρὸ ἔμου ἅπασιν ἐκλιπὲς τοῦτο ἦν τὸ χωρίον καὶ ἡ τὰ πρὸ τῶν Μηδικῶν Ἑλληνικὰ ζυνετίθεσαν ἢ αὐτὰ τὰ Μηδικά· τούτων δὲ ὅσπερ καὶ ἦψατο ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ συγγραφῇ Ἑλλάνικος, βραχέως τε καὶ τοῖς χρόνοις οὐκ ἀκριβῶς ἐπεμνήσθη. ἅμα δὲ καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀπόδειξιν ἔχει τῆς τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐν οἴῳ τρόπῳ κατέστη.

Thucydides' rationale for including this excursus is tripartite, expressed in ascending order of significance: previous writers omitted this period of history; the one writer who did treat it was brief and inaccurate in chronology; and, principally, this excursus contains an explanation of the general manner in which (ἐν οἴῳ τρόπῳ) the Athenians acquired their empire. As Van de Maele has demonstrated, Thucydides almost always uses the phrase ἅμα δὲ and its variants to introduce an additional item in a list with the goal of justifying an action or mode of reasoning.<sup>13</sup>

On the usage of ἅμα δὲ καὶ in 1.97.2, Van de Maele says: "Le contexte prouve hors de tout doute que c'était bien la vraie raison de cette narration."<sup>14</sup> Given the need to explain to his readers why he is going on at such length with this digression, Thucydides excuses himself with two 'external' rationales, then presents the primary purpose of the digression within his own work: it constitutes a demonstration of the way in which the Athenians developed their empire. L. Edmunds takes our understanding of this passage further: "There are two references to Thucydides' writing here. The first uses the aorist tense ('I wrote'). Thucydides thus seems to be speaking of his work, in an important procedural passage, in the past tense and in the first person singular. But note the second reference. Here he uses the present tense ('these things provide'). He conceives of the Pentekontaetia as a presentation. (Note also the unexpected Herodotean ἀπόδειξις, too.) The proposed excursus is thus brought into a temporal foreground . . . The actions of writing and of making an excursus designated by the secondary tenses in the first sentence thus become operations that are subsumed in the gesture of presentation or display. 'I wrote it and here it is.'"<sup>15</sup> Just

13) Van de Maele 1990, 342: "Dans presque tous ces cas, il y a un élément qui ajoute quelque chose dans le but de justifier une action ou un raisonnement, ou bien de présenter un argument plus important, mais tenu secret."

14) Van de Maele 1990, 344.

15) Edmunds 1993, 839, referring to 1.97. It is instructive to compare a similarly self-conscious passage in Herodotus that also announces inquiry into "the way

as in the plague passage Thucydides explicitly tells the reader that “I shall point out what sort of thing (οἶον) it was,” so here he self-consciously announces to the reader that he will present the general manner in which (ἐν οἴῳ τρόπῳ) the Athenians developed their empire.

But in this case Thucydides uses a diachronic narrative of Athenian military actions to furnish a qualitative portrayal of Athenian character and energy. The narrative serves as a demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) by means of rigorous distillation. Thucydides tells us that he will include specific historical material directly relevant to his primary point (1.97.1): “... they (sc. the Athenians) went through the following actions (τοσάδε ἐπῆλθον) in war and in the administration of affairs between this war and the Persian Wars, actions against the barbarian and against their own allies in revolt, and against those of the Peloponnesians who repeatedly (αἰεΐ) came into contact with them in each instance (ἐν ἐκάστῳ).” This is not general qualitative description, like the passages above, but narration of selected individual events over time. The Athenians aggressively used the new league to further their ambitions, striking everywhere in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean and eventually overreaching in Egypt. Thucydides designs the Pentekontaetia not as a full account of the years 480 to 431, but as a demonstration of the nature of Athenian imperialism, just as the

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in which” an empire was achieved. In 1.95.1, Herodotus says: “My logos now inquires additionally into Cyrus, who it was who brought down the empire of Croesus, and into the Persians, in what way they gained control over Asia. As those of the Persians report who do not wish to exaggerate their account of Cyrus, but rather to tell the truth, in this way I shall write it, although I know how to tell three other variants of the story.” Note the resemblances to Thucydides’ introduction of the Pentekontaetia: authorial interruption to introduce the causative history of empire-building, “in what way” it happened; mention of earlier, inferior versions; emphasis upon the superior accuracy of his own version; self-conscious use of the noun λόγος and the verb γράφω. Fornara finds the Herodotean passage fundamentally significant for Greek historiography: the “truly historical principle” contained in the phrase “the means by which the Persians took control of Asia (I.95)” is a new discovery. “... Herodotus’ *Persica* implies the utilization of a thematic conception of history. The material which is the subject of narration is coerced into an historical pattern ... This is a new element in ‘historical’ writing of decisive importance to the development of that genre” (Fornara 1971, 26). It is my argument that Thucydides “coerced” the events between 480 and 431 into just such an historical pattern, that the Pentekontaetia is, in Fornara’s terms, “teleological, not antiquarian in focus.”



Corinthians depicted it in a synchronic description. This digression, then, is highly selective, and employs a few discrete events to paint a general picture of Athenian energy and aggressiveness.<sup>16</sup>

We have reviewed four well-known passages in Thucydides and found that they betray a common pattern. Thucydides and his speakers reject a traditional way of observing and interpreting events in favor of an explicitly new means of analysis, one that depends upon the distillation of individual events or characteristics into general types. These general types have epistemological value for those future readers who want to learn important lessons from the past. That is why Pericles calls his five-paragraph section on Athenian traits a *διδασκαλία*; it is why the Corinthians candidly tell the Spartans they are lecturing them about how different the Athenian character is from their own; it is why Thucydides explicitly claims to be improving upon Hellanicus and other predecessors in introducing the *Pentekontaetia*; and it is why he claims paradigmatic value for his description of the plague. The word *οἶος* is chosen in each case to introduce these passages. It announces the qualitative value of these expositions. In each example, Thucydides (or his speakers) expressly breaks the narrative to introduce a passage that explains the nature of a set of events or a people.<sup>17</sup>

Thucydides uses the same intellectual technique, without a *οἶος* introduction, in other well-known passages, particularly his account of stasis and his “Archaeology.” After narrating the events of the Corcyrean civil war in 3.70–81, Thucydides dilates on the nature of stasis itself in chapters 82 through [84]. Again the method is qualitative and the findings are abstract and generalized. Thucydides introduces this section with another claim to qualitative and permanent understanding (3.82.2):

καὶ ἐπέπεσε πολλὰ καὶ χαλεπὰ κατὰ στάσιν ταῖς πόλεσι, γιγνόμενα μὲν καὶ αἰεὶ ἐσόμενα, ἕως ἂν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ᾖ, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἡσυχαιότερα καὶ τοῖς εἶδεσι διηλλαγμένα, ὡς ἂν ἕκασται αἰ μεταβολαὶ τῶν ζυνηχιῶν ἐφιστῶνται.

16) Rawlings 1981, 86–87; Connor 1984, 42, with n. 48; Stadter 1993, 35–72.

17) For more remarks about Thucydides’ tendency to resort to general analysis, see Romilly 1990, chapter 2, “La montée par l’abstrait: Les réflexions générales,” 61–104. She notes, for example, his frequent use of *τοιούτους* to introduce generalizing passages.

Note εἶδος in 82.2, and πᾶσα . . . ἰδέα in 81.5, where Thucydides first begins to generalize, and πᾶσα ἰδέα again in 83.1. As in the plague passage, Thucydides emphasizes the form of civil war, not the individual details, which he specifically eschews: μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἡσυχαιότερα καὶ τοῖς εἶδεσι διηλλαγμένα, ὡς ἂν ἕκασται αἱ μεταβολαὶ τῶν ζυνοτυχιῶν ἐφιστῶνται. This disclosure of the nature of stasis is the reason why the passage has had such an impact upon generations of readers. Again the passage increases in abstraction as it proceeds from semantic to political to moral analysis: each domain undergoes degradation, inversion, and eventual corruption, just as did the physical, social and moral regimes in the plague. The power of the stasis passage stems from the depth of its intellectual analysis, the distillation of the essence of stasis from its multiple occurrences in the Greek world (ὑστερόν γε καὶ πᾶν ὡς εἰπεῖν τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐκινήθη in 82.1).

The most historiographically sophisticated example of this type is Thucydides' Archaeology, a reconstruction of the distant Greek past by "pure reasoning."<sup>18</sup> Using only a few pieces of information transmitted by oral tradition, he paints a general picture of Greek history that readers can rely upon, even if he cannot get every detail right because the available evidence does not allow that level of accuracy (Τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἡῶρον, χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι in 1.20.1). Here again Thucydides is proud of his method, which he claims enables enormous improvement over the findings of his predecessors, the poets and logographers who sacrifice accuracy for entertainment. Chapters 20 and 21 are a polemic against the common Greek method of recovering history through oral transmission, and a boast that his own approach is vastly superior. Rather than tell amusing stories or exaggerate past military feats, Thucydides has found a way to disclose and elucidate what he considers the principal pattern underlying Greek history, namely, the rise of walled cities with navies, and their fundamental role in developing true power. This paradigm owes its salience and indeed its creation to the contemporary Athenian Empire: the present shapes the past. Thucydides' Archaeology is a reasoning backwards, an intellectual construct, a theory designed to provide coherence to the few data provided by the record. It answers the questions: were early Greek cities as

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18) Romilly 1956, 297.

powerful as Athens and Sparta now are? why were they weak? what was the nature of their power? As Romilly said, in this opening section Thucydides founded a critical method. The historian will use the same techniques in other sections of his work, but this one is the most “pure” example of the method because historical evidence is so scant that he must find a coherent pattern by reasoning from a minimum of “facts.”<sup>19</sup>

The method we have been describing, that of abstracting essential properties from sensory data, somewhat resembles the one Plato stipulates, for example, in the *Phaedrus* (249B): δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναιρούμενον. “One must understand what is said according to the form, going from many sense perceptions to one coherent unity formed by reasoning.” In Plato it is a matter of remembering the Ideas; in Thucydides, it is a matter of seeing (or creating) patterns or paradigms in history. In both cases, the results are general and permanent, though Thucydides issues a qualification: “as long as the nature of man remains the same.”<sup>20</sup>

Thucydides has a strong tendency to see unity, coherence, pattern under the surface of history. It is, in his view, paradigms that make learning from history possible. In these same passages, Thucydides openly disavows any search for contingent or individual facts. In describing the plague, he explicitly leaves aside many outlying cases, as they affected each individual (2.51.1: ὡς ἐκάστῳ ἐτύχχανέ τι διαφερόντως ἕτέρῳ πρὸς ἕτερον γιγνόμενον). In the

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19) Romilly 1956, 245. See also Finley 1971, 19: the Archaeology is “a general sociological theory, a theory about power and progress, applied retrospectively to the past, and applied, one must add, with caution and hesitation, for, as Thucydides explains at the outset, one cannot achieve certainty about ancient times, one can merely say that this is what all the ‘signs’ point to.” Note Nicolai 2001, 276–277, who emphasizes that “... the Archaeology is not modern objective reconstruction but is selective and biased.” It proceeds by identifying “archetypes,” “typologies of events,” “the importance and paradigmatic value of the most outstanding events of the past with respect to those of the present.” See also J. Marincola 1997, 119: Thucydides “had ‘tamed’ myth in the Archaeology.” Connor 1984, 21–32, emphasizes the multiple purposes of the Archaeology.

20) Edmunds 1975, 160: “In all the places just cited Thucydides rejects perspectival limitation (ὡς), the individual (ἐκάστος), the discrete (τις, τι), the contingent (τυγχάνω, etc.) ... Thucydides wishes to pass from ‘the changes of the contingent’ (αἱ μεταβολαὶ τῶν ξυντυχιῶν 3.82.2) to the *idea* (2.51.1). A comparison with Plato suggests itself ...” Note also the useful chart of methodological passages in Edmunds, 159.

Funeral Oration, Pericles declines to address how “each possession was acquired” (2.36.4: οἷς ἕκαστα ἐκτήθη). In their speech in Book I, the Corinthians complain that the Spartans failed to learn from them each time (ἐκάστοτε) they gave them a lesson. In the stasis passage, Thucydides says that the sufferings caused by civil war occur in milder or more severe form, depending upon individual circumstances (ὡς ἂν ἕκασται αἱ μεταβολαί in 3.82.2). And in his summary of the Archaeology, Thucydides says that his account of early history is approximately right, though it is difficult to trust every single piece of evidence (1.20.1: παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ). Ἐκάστος and its cognates denote in each case the incidental, individual facts that are not the principal object of inquiry in the οἶος passage.<sup>21</sup> In these important, indeed famous chapters of his history, Thucydides specifically denies interest in individual cases. His focus is entirely on disclosing general patterns.<sup>22</sup>

*Thucydides’ proof language: instructing readers in intellectual method*

When we turn to another aspect of Thucydidean epistemology, that exhibited in his standard language of proof, we find what initially appears to be a different Thucydides, one who is interested in discovering specific details, in achieving historical precision.

Most of these passages have two markers of method: τις to refer to the “ideal reader” of Thucydides’ work,<sup>23</sup> and the third person imperative to propose or reject a method of inquiry. In 5.20, Thucydides insists upon precision in dating historical events. He does so in what we will find to be formulaic proof language (5.20.2–3):

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21) Edmunds 1975, 160 commented upon the idiom ὡς ἕκαστος in Thucydides: “Thucydides often uses this idiom to express the ‘changes of the contingent’ as opposed to what was generally the case.”

22) This kind of “disclosure” is what Shanske, following Wittgenstein, calls “aspect seeing”: “... aspect seeing tends to be an experience of seeing objects as wholes, that is, as the kinds of things that they are” (2007, 179).

23) See Loraux 1986, 157, 159; and 1985, 18–19. Loraux argues that Thucydides, by covertly asserting his authority as author, compels this reader, whom she calls the “ideal reader” (as seen from Thucydides’ point of view), to “assent” to his narrative, to his version of history (1986, 150).

σκοπεῖτω δέ τις κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους καὶ μὴ τῶν ἑκασταχοῦ ἢ ἀρχόντων ἢ ἀπὸ τιμῆς τινὸς ἐς τὰ προγεγενημένα σημαινόντων τὴν ἀπαριθμήσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων πιστεύσας μᾶλλον. οὐ γὰρ ἀκριβές ἐστιν, οἷς καὶ ἀρχομένοις καὶ μεσοῦσι καὶ ὅπως ἔτυχέ τῳ ἐπεγένετο τι. κατὰ θέρη δὲ καὶ χειμῶνας ἀριθμῶν, ὥσπερ γέγραπται, εὐρήσει, ἐξ ἡμισείας ἑκατέρου τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ τὴν δύναμιν ἔχοντος, δέκα μὲν θέρη, ἴσους δὲ χειμῶνας τῷ πρώτῳ πολέμῳ τῷδε γεγενημένους.<sup>24</sup>

The third person imperative stipulates the method: “one (the reader) must examine by seasons, and not trust in the enumeration of archons or public officials . . . For that is not precise, since events happen at the beginning or in the middle or at any time in their tenure. But counting by summers and winters, just as [this] has been written, with each having the value of half a year, he will discover . . .” Here Thucydides criticizes those who date by archon years and other such offices, and points out the benefits of his seasonal methodology. This passage argues for chronological precision (ἀκριβές) and seeks specificity (ἑκατέρου). The goal, then, is the opposite of the goal of those passages we examined above, where specificity was expressly eschewed in favor of general type or form. Note that σκοπεῖτω is intransitive and refers more to an intellectual than to a sensory process: “to consider,” “to examine.” It is reiterated by ἀριθμῶν, “to count”: these two verbs are followed by nearly identical prepositional phrases and refer to similar processes of calculation and ratiocination.<sup>25</sup>

At the beginning of Book VI, the historian dismisses legendary accounts of the early inhabitants of Sicily (6.2.1):

παλαιάτατοι μὲν λέγονται ἐν μέρει τινὶ τῆς χώρας Κύκλωπες καὶ Λαιστρυγόνες οἰκῆσαι, ὧν ἐγὼ οὔτε γένος ἔχω εἰπεῖν οὔτε ὁπόθεν

24) This sentence presents notorious difficulties in syntax and ordering (Hornblower 1996, 490–493). Lendle’s (1960) attempt to resolve these problems by means of two conjectures is clever, and it results in additional emphasis upon Hellenicus as the target of Thucydides’ methodological strictures. Lendle argues for the following text: σκοπεῖτω δέ τις κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους καὶ μὴ τῶν ἑκασταχοῦ ἢ ἀρχόντων ἢ ἀπὸ τιμῆς τινὸς τῆ ἀπαριθμήσει τῶν ὀνόματα ἐς τὰ προγεγενημένα σημαινόντων πιστεύσας μᾶλλον.

25) Loraux 1986, 154 emphasizes Thucydides’ use of intransitive σκοπεῖν to indicate the capacity of the intellect to have “no other object than itself”: “. . . la visée de l’intellect pourrait bien être de n’avoir pas d’autre objet que soi. Si l’acte d’écriture se veut tout entier transitif, voici que la réflexion qui le précède et le produit est pure intransitivité, pure visée de son propre fonctionnement – et il faut peut-être ajouter: pure exaltation de son propre pouvoir.”

ἐσῆλθον ἢ ὅποι ἀπεχώρησαν· ἀρκείτω δὲ ὡς ποιηταῖς τε εἴρηται καὶ ὡς ἕκαστός πη γινώσκει περὶ αὐτῶν. Σικανοὶ δὲ μετ' αὐτοὺς πρώτοι φαίνονται ἐνοικισάμενοι, ὡς μὲν αὐτοὶ φασι, καὶ πρότεροι διὰ τὸ αὐτόχθονες εἶναι, ὡς δὲ ἡ ἀλήθεια εὐρίσκεται, ἴβηρες ὄντες . . .

Thucydides strongly implies the superiority of his own account to those of the poets and of any other credulous Greeks: his approach is more accurate and reliable. Rather than pass on legendary stories, Thucydides begins his account of Sicilian history with what he considers to be the first solid information obtainable. This passage at the beginning of Book VI bears a close resemblance to the introduction to the plague: third person imperative followed by ὡς clauses, the subjects of which are poets and ἕκαστός πη γινώσκει in the former, and ἕκαστος γινώσκει καὶ ἰατρὸς καὶ ἰδιώτης in the latter.

In 5.26, his so-called “second introduction,” Thucydides uses another third person imperative to prove his case that the Peloponnesian War was a single 27-year-long war, not two distinct wars separated by a seven-year peace (5.26.1–3):

Γέγραφε δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ὁ αὐτὸς Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ἐξῆς, ὡς ἕκαστα ἐγένετο, κατὰ θέρη καὶ χειμῶνας, μέχρι οὗ τὴν τε ἀρχὴν κατέπευσαν τῶν Ἀθηναίων Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι, καὶ τὰ μακρὰ τεῖχη καὶ τὸν Πειραιᾶ κατέλαβον. ἔτη δὲ ἐς τοῦτο τὰ ξύμματα ἐγένετο τῷ πολέμῳ ἑπτὰ καὶ εἴκοσι. καὶ τὴν διὰ μέσου ξύμβασιν εἴ τις μὴ ἀξιῶσει πόλεμον νομίζειν, οὐκ ὀρθῶς δικαιοῦσιν. τοῖς [τε] γὰρ ἔργοις ὡς διήρηται ἀθρεῖται, καὶ εὐρήσει οὐκ εἰκὸς ὄν εἰρήνην αὐτὴν κριθῆναι, ἐν ἣ οὔτε ἀπέδωσαν πάντα οὔτ' ἀπεδέξαντο ἃ ζυθένετο, ἕξω τε τούτων πρὸς τὸν Μαντινικὸν καὶ Ἐπιδαύριον πόλεμον καὶ ἐς ἄλλα ἀμφοτέροις ἀμαρτήματα ἐγένοντο καὶ οἱ ἐπὶ Θράκης ξύμμαχοι οὐδὲν ἦσαν πολέμιοι ἦσαν Βοιωτοὶ τε ἐκεχειρίαν δεχήμερον ἦγον. ὥστε ζὺν τῷ πρώτῳ πολέμῳ τῷ δεκέτῃ καὶ τῇ μετ' αὐτὸν ὑπόπτῳ ἀνοκαῶῃ καὶ τῷ ὕστερον ἐξ αὐτῆς πολέμῳ εὐρήσει τις τοσαῦτα ἔτη, λογιζόμενος κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους, καὶ ἡμέρας οὐ πολλὰς παρενεγκούσας, καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ χρησμῶν τι ἰσχυρισάμενοις μόνον δὴ τοῦτο ἐχυρῶς ζυμβάν.

This is a more elaborate proof than the earlier passages because it is, for Thucydides, one of the most significant contentions of his entire work that “his war” lasted thrice nine years, as oracles had predicted, and that it contained two “Homeric wars.”<sup>26</sup> Thucydides goes to some length to make his case, and he uses many of the key “proof words” at his disposal. Again the third person impera-

26) See Rawlings 1981, 8–13.

tive, probably referring to the reader, marks the proof in the same way as before.

This kind of proof is drawn from Attic dialectical and legal reasoning, not from Ionian science or medicine. It depends upon “looking at” the facts from a particular viewpoint, assessing them critically, and using probability to draw conclusions.<sup>27</sup> Thucydides highlights the mistaken methods employed by others through his use of “elaborate negatives,” and emphasizes the need to think through the intellectual thicket by his use of “six different verbs for mental sifting.”<sup>28</sup> This passage does not, strictly speaking, aim at precision or accuracy. Its goal is to establish proper (to Thucydides) definitions and an overall point of view. It is a polemic, an argument for looking at the Peloponnesian War in a particular way. It is no more “accurate” than other methods of evaluating and dividing this period of history. Some in antiquity and in modern times refer to a “First Peloponnesian War” in the 440’s. Some argue that what we now call the Peloponnesian War began with the conflict at Corcyra in 433. Or that it ended with the Peace of Nicias in 421.<sup>29</sup> All are reasonable ways to divide and label historical events. For reasons of his own, Thucydides conceives of “his war” as a single conflict with two periods of “continuous war” and a middle period of “uneasy truce” marked by suspicion, failure to fulfill agreements, temporary armistices, open hostility, and even conflict by some combatants. The longer and more elaborate this passage becomes, the more apparent are its polemical nature and its special pleading. The careful reader has the distinct impression that Thucydides here arranges the chronological facts in order to suit his purposes.<sup>30</sup>

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27) The *Tetralogies* of Antiphon furnish us with the best example of such reasoning because they constitute exercises designed to demonstrate how one can take either side of a case by using arguments based upon a priori probabilities. Note in particular Tetralogy A, 2 for ingenious uses of arguments from probability. The (hypothetical) facts matter little; it is the demonstration of clever logic and design of proofs that made the Tetralogies potentially valuable to Athenians seeking help in the courtroom. See Plant 1999, 62–73. Note also Loraux 1985, 15 n. 32, and 17 n. 40.

28) See Cook 1988, 48.

29) See Marincola 1997, 134 n. 25: “Thucydides is emphatic because his notion went against the general consensus of his time, which saw the Archidamian War as distinct: see G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (1972) 294–5.”

30) This impression is fortified by Thucydides’ unusual mention of an oracle that is consistent with his interpretation (notably introduced by “I myself have of-

In other sections on method, Thucydides also uses τις constructions. In 6.55.1, his lengthy polemical argument that Hippias was the oldest of the sons of Peisistratus, he begins his proof this way: “I insist that, as the oldest, Hippias held the rule; I know a more accurate oral tradition than others do, and one (τις) would also know it from the following.” Rather than employ the third person imperative here, Thucydides uses a strong verb, *ισχυρίζομαι*, to underline his conviction. In 7.44.1, the beginning of Thucydides’ description of the night battle at Syracuse, he pauses to contrast what can be learned about battles by day, where information is “clearer” (*σαφέστερα*), but still difficult to ascertain, with what one can learn about a battle at night: *πῶς ἄν τις σαφῶς τι ἦδει*; “how could anyone learn anything clearly?” In this passage, the rhetorical question conveys the author’s intensity. Thucydides has a strong predilection for “τις constructions” whenever he addresses his reader on the subject of method, particularly when information is scarce and unreliable,

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ten recalled from the beginning of the war to its conclusion ...”). Even though Thucydides in this passage casts aspersions upon “those who make arguments on the basis of oracular pronouncements,” he avers that “this one alone was securely in agreement with the facts.” See Thorburn 1999, 439–444 for a detailed scrutiny of this passage. Thorburn argues that Thucydides regards the consistency between his interpretation and the oracular one as “sheer coincidence” since those who put their trust in oracles are clearly using an inferior method of determining the facts, but one wonders why Thucydides mentions this oracle at all. He uses a particularly strong adverb here and emphasizes the uniqueness of oracular accuracy in this case. This passage reminds me of 1.23, where Thucydides appends to the catalogue of human misery in the Peloponnesian War a list of extraordinary physical phenomena that occurred during its course (*ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα μετὰ τοῦδε τοῦ πολέμου ἅμα ξυνεπέθετο* in 23.3). Both passages begin with *γάρ*, and *ἅμα ξυνεπέθετο* has a similar force to *ἐχρῶς ξυμβάν*. Though Thucydides does not claim that natural phenomena are causally linked to the war, he clearly wants the reader to be impressed by the coincidence. I suspect that both passages have this rhetorical purpose. The oracle, then, helps to bolster Thucydides’ case, which he well knew had detractors. See Marincola 1997, 134 n. 25: “The argument of the length of the war (v. 26.2–3) leads to the evidence of the oracle (26.3 *ad fin.*), which is then validated by the historian’s recollection (*αἰεὶ γὰρ ἔγωγε μέμνημαι* 26.4), and the fact that he lived through it all (26.5).” See also Keyser 2006, 323–351, for Thucydides’ tendency to artificially synchronize natural events for rhetorical effect. Note in particular (page 345): “... what matters is Thucydides’ manner of work and outlook. Numbers more often serve as descriptive, evaluative, or even evocative adjectives, much like those of color or size. Thucydides characteristically omits figures required for analysis, but provides those which serve to express the extraordinary or unexpected.”



or when he is engaging in polemics against other interpretations of the evidence.

We find this same *τις* used in multiple “proofs” in the Archaeology. In 1.6.6 Thucydides says “someone (*τις*) might point out (*ἀποδείξειε*) many other respects in which ancient Greek customs were similar in nature to contemporary barbarian customs.” In 1.10.1 he claims that “... one (*τις*) would be using an inaccurate indicator (*οὐκ ἀκριβεί ... σημείω*) if he doubted that the expedition was as great as the poets have said and as the tradition maintains.” In 1.10.5 *τις* is implied in the participle of *σκοπεῖν*: “for one who examines (*σκοποῦντι*) the mean between the greatest and smallest ships, those who came will appear few in number, given that they were sent out from all of Greece in a common enterprise.”

In 1.21.2, we find a similar construction employed in a polemic: *ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων σκοποῦσι δηλώσει ὁμοῦ μείζων γεγενημένος αὐτῶν*: “for those readers who examine on the basis of the facts themselves, [this war] will reveal that it was greater than those [earlier ones].” Thucydides’ war is the subject of the sentence; the readers who study Thucydides’ war are the indirect object of the war’s demonstration. It will be important to recall this use of *σκοπεῖν* when we look at the force of that verb when it recurs in 1.22.4, where it again refers to the “studying” performed by Thucydides’ readers.

The reason *τις* can be implied here is that the argument goes back to 1.21.1, where Thucydides began this final section of the Archaeology with another *τις*: “the reader who believes that ancient events were roughly (*μάλιστα*) of such a kind (*τοιαῦτα*, resuming *Τὰ μὲν ... παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα* of 1.20.1) as I described would not be mistaken ...” Note that *τοιαῦτα* in these instances, particularly as modified by *μάλιστα*, denotes the same kind of approximation signified by *χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίω* in 1.20.1. Thucydides does not vouch for each piece of information in the Archaeology, but rather acknowledges approximation and a general kind of accuracy. As an historical reconstruction based primarily upon reasoning from a few pieces of evidence, the Archaeology requires many arguments that make use of logical constructs: probability, analogy, extension, conjecture, verisimilitude. Hence the frequent use of “*τις* proofs,” which Thucydides calls into play when evidence is lacking or weak. As Edmunds notes: “The Archaeology, a display of reasoning from evidence and probability, rejects not

only the poets' account but also their traditional authority, namely, memory."<sup>31</sup> In place of memory, which passively accepts and transmits stories, Thucydides substitutes logical reasoning.

A most revealing use of this Thucydidean practice occurs at the end of the method section, 1.23.5.

διότι δ' ἔλυσαν, τὰς αἰτίας προύγραψα πρῶτον καὶ τὰς διαφοράς, τοῦ μὴ τινα ζητήσαι ποτε ἐξ ὅτου τοσοῦτος πόλεμος τοῖς Ἑλλήσι κατέστη.

The word *τινα* here refers once more to the reader, but in this case Thucydides does not tell the reader what to do, but rather what he should never do, namely, seek the causes of Thucydides' war. Why? Because Thucydides has already found them. Loraux has emphasized the arrogance and finality of this claim: "En un mot, l'histoire de la guerre est faite, et il n'y a plus à s'interroger il est même interdit de rouvrir la recherche après Thucydide." Noting the odd redundancy of *προύγραψα πρῶτον*, she gives a strong sense to the verb: "J'ai pris les devants pour écrire, j'ai écrit le premier. J'ai pris les devants ... pour que personne n'aille remonter du récit de la guerre à la recherche de ses causes."<sup>32</sup> Whether or not one accepts this interpretation of the verb as "preempted," Thucydides firmly states in 1.23.5: "I have correctly identified the causes of my war, and I present them here, so that no reader will ever have to seek them again." This is a bold claim of authority, one that looks particularly hollow now that so many books have been written disputing Thucydides' analysis of the causes of the Peloponnesian War.

Another telling case of Thucydidean reader-instruction arises when the historian must deal with the secrecy practiced by the Spartan state. In 5.68, Thucydides explains in now-familiar language the difficulties one confronts in determining the size of the forces arrayed at the Battle of Mantinea. It is a memorable demonstration of methodology (5.68.1–2):

Τάξις μὲν ἦδε καὶ παρασκευὴ ἀμφοτέρων ἦν, τὸ δὲ στρατόπεδον τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων μείζον ἐφάνη. ἀριθμὸν δὲ γράψαι ἢ καθ' ἑκάστους ἑκατέρων ἢ ξύμπαντας οὐκ ἂν ἐδυνάμην ἀκριβῶς· τὸ μὲν γὰρ Λακεδαιμονίων πλῆθος διὰ τῆς πολιτείας τὸ κρυπτόν ἠγνοεῖτο, τῶν δ' αὖ διὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπειον κομπῶδες ἐς τὰ οἰκεία πλήθη ἠπιστεῖτο. ἐκ μέντοι τοιοῦδε λογισμοῦ ἐξεστὶ τῷ σκοπεῖν τὸ Λακεδαιμονίων τότε παραγενόμενον πλῆθος.

31) Edmunds 1993, 851.

32) Loraux 1986, 159.

Although strict accuracy is out of the question, it is possible for someone to use reasoning to investigate (σκοπεῖν, here transitive) the size of that Lakedaimonian force. Thucydides demonstrates to the reader the method to be employed: he lists the components of the Spartan army and the approximate numbers in each component. The reader is supposed to do the multiplication; Thucydides will not do it for him. Why not? It is probably impossible to know, but this is exactly the method pursued in 1.10, where Thucydides gives the reader a means of estimating the size of the Greek force at Troy by postulating that Homer's poetry allows one to discover an average-sized contingent for each ship. But as in 5.68, Thucydides does not carry out the multiplication. The result in both cases is endless debate among scholars today about the proper results of these calculations, with widely varying answers. Romilly correctly concludes, "... la méthode est ici plus originale que son résultat," and Hornblower calls this an "over-rational argument," a judgment that applies equally well to several of the other proof passages we have just reviewed.<sup>33</sup> In most of these passages Thucydides uses what he considers to be logical reasoning to arrive at approximations of the truth, not at specific answers. He clearly places more emphasis upon the intellectual method itself than he does upon the results gained therefrom. The careful reader gains the impression that Thucydides is not so much interested in historical precision as he is in fulfilling two rhetorical purposes: making a strong case for his own point of view, and demonstrating the superiority of his historiographical method.

In this regard, note also the "averaging method" Thucydides describes in 3.20.2–4:

ἐς δὲ ἄνδρας διακοσίους καὶ εἴκοσι μάλιστα ἐνέμειναν τῇ ἐξόδῳ ἐνελεονταὶ τὸν τρόπον τοιῶδε. κλίμακας ἐποίησαντο ἴσας τῷ τείχει τῶν πολεμίων· ζυγεμετρήσαντο δὲ ταῖς ἐπιβολαῖς τῶν πλίνθων, ἢ ἔτυχε πρὸς σφᾶς οὐκ ἐξαλημιμένον τὸ τεῖχος αὐτῶν. ἠριθμοῦντο δὲ πολλοὶ ἅμα τὰς ἐπιβολάς, καὶ ἔμελλον οἱ μὲν τινες ἀμαρτήσεσθαι οἱ δὲ πλείους τεύξεσθαι τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λογισμοῦ, ἄλλως τε καὶ πολλὰκις ἀριθμοῦντες καὶ ἅμα οὐ πολλὰ ἀπέχοντες, ἀλλὰ ῥαδίως καθορισμένου ἐς ὃ ἐβούλοντο τοῦ τείχους. τὴν μὲν οὖν ζυγεμετρησιν τῶν κλιμάκων οὕτως ἔλαβον, ἐκ τοῦ πάχους τῆς πλίνθου εἰκάσαντες τὸ μέτρον.

Thucydides never tells us how high the wall was. Rather, he evinces intense interest in the methods employed successfully by

33) Romilly 1956, 248; Hornblower 1991, 35.

the Plataeans to overcome individual error and to arrive at a calculation of the wall's actual height. Note his emphasis upon the counts carried out by a number of different Plataeans; his mention of the multiple counts conducted by each Plataean; his use of ἐμελλον with future infinitives to indicate the probable nature of the exercise; and his use of εικάσαντες in section 4 to describe the Plataeans' estimation of the thickness of each brick. All of these clauses highlight method, not results.<sup>34</sup>

The proof passages we have reviewed demonstrate Thucydides' characteristic pride in the originality of his method of discovery, a method based upon logical reasoning, Romilly's "la raison", as distinguished from "l'intelligence."<sup>35</sup> Keep in mind that, in general, these passages do not attempt to discover specific facts or to produce precision, and they are not "objective." They seek approximation or rational coherence or artificial unity or general perspective, and they are polemical in tone, arguments for a particular point of view. They instruct the reader in intellectual method, or, as Loraux puts it, they are "quelque chose comme l'instruction d'un procès, menée par un juge que nous devons bien supposer intègre et qui, après coup et une fois pour toutes, révèle les grandes lignes de sa méthode, dans une langue où le vocabulaire judiciaire est recurrent."<sup>36</sup> We are certainly in a rhetorical / judicial setting, and Thucydides has positioned himself as judge, but he is in reality an advocate at the bar of history with a case to plead. His case is that he has discovered new means of recovering and reporting the past, and that these new methods enable intellectually superior results to those obtained by poets, logographers, and the Greek oral tradition in general. Objectivity, a desirable characteristic in modern, professional historiography, is not the aim of these passages. Their goal is persuasion.<sup>37</sup>

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34) See Edmunds 1975, 162–163. Since accuracy is in this case crucial, approximation must be close, not rough.

35) Romilly 1956, 52. Note on page 244 her emphatic statement on the degree to which Thucydides employed such "reasoning:" "Les procédés par lesquels Thucydide entend établir la vérité impliquent, à tous les degrés, l'activité de la raison. Et cela est si évident, si constant, si fortement traduit dans l'expression elle-même, qu'à certains égards le texte éclate ... comme un véritable manifeste."

36) Loraux 1986, 152 with n. 22.

37) Nicolai 2001, 282–283, makes similar points about the method Thucydides employs in reconstructing the tyrannicide in 6.54–60: "The forensic nature of

We have now examined two kinds of passages that Thucydides introduces as original and superior to conventional approaches: those containing deep and lengthy qualitative analysis, often introduced with οἶος statements; and those exhibiting strong proof language, drawn from Attic dialectical reasoning. Both types of passage are heavily “marked:” they promise improvement over prior methods employed by doctors, earlier orators (in Pericles’ case), poets, logographers, including Hellanicus explicitly, and Herodotus implicitly, and indeed by most Greeks making use of oral evidence.<sup>38</sup> The alleged improvement is both substantive and procedural, that is, it produces better results by using better method. Thucydides insists repeatedly that his method is intellectually superior. As Loraux emphasized, Thucydides’ aim is to convince his readers that they can and should rely upon his account of the war, that he is an absolute authority. They will never be able to produce a better history of the Peloponnesian War because he has attained the greatest accuracy possible: it is his war.<sup>39</sup> Edmunds, who cites Loraux’s article as an inspiration for his own, speaks of “the assertion of the historian’s (sc. Thucydides’) authority and the effacement of the historian in his work,” and argues that Thucydides uses as his principal strategy for asserting that authority what Edmunds calls “veridicality:” “According to Thucydides, he presents the truth.” Furthermore, Thucydides believes that, in reproducing the war in book form, he has achieved “absolute mimesis.”<sup>40</sup>

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this section – so to speak – is confirmed by the use of inscriptions as evidence (6.54.6–55.2) and by the hypothetical *argumentatio* set out in 6.54.3.” “Thucydides behaves like an orator at a trial: he collects evidence and develops his arguments with the subtle dialectic characteristic of judicial oratory.”

38) See Marincola 1997, 21 n.100: “Thucydides in 1.20.3–21.1 is clearly attacking Herodotus . . . , other prose writers . . . , encomiastic orators . . . , and poets writing historical epics, such as Simonides . . .”

39) Loraux 1986, 140–141, 147, 149–150, and especially 159. See also Edmunds 1993, 831–852.

40) Edmunds 1993, 842, 846, 841 respectively.

*Thucydides' conception of "the truth"*

If Loraux and Edmunds are correct in their strong interpretation of Thucydides' truth claims, and I believe they are, we confront these questions: What is Thucydides' understanding of historical truth? What kind of truth does he seek? What does he mean by "the truth?" How, and how much, can one learn about history? These questions are historiographical and epistemological, and an effort to answer them requires examination of several other key passages, in particular, Thucydides' much-studied methodology.

The best way to understand and appreciate the case made in 1.20–22 is to see it for what it is: a unit, a single statement of methodology, going back, via ring composition,<sup>41</sup> to the introduction of the Archaeology, with the same structure and vocabulary Thucydides employed in the methodological passages we examined above. Like those passages, it contains τις constructions, ἕκαστα statements, "discovery" (εὐρίσκω) language, and a οἶος claim. In order to follow the logic of this argument closely and without interruption, I shall remove from the text any examples Thucydides includes, as well as his remarks about speeches. There are good reasons to (temporarily) remove these sections of text and to place the resulting passages together in a sequence: chapter 1.20 resumes precisely where 1.1.3 left off; the δέ in chapter 1.21.1 is correlative with the μέν in 1.20.1; and, as we shall see, 1.22.1, the section on speeches, while not exactly parenthetical, intrudes into a tightly logical argument.<sup>42</sup> Here is the resulting continuous argument (1.1.3; 1.20.1, first sentence; 1.21; 1.22.2–4):

τὰ γὰρ πρὸ αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἔτι παλαιότερα σαφῶς μὲν εὐρεῖν διὰ χρόνου  
πληθὸς ἀδύνατα ἦν, ἐκ δὲ τεκμηρίων ὧν ἐπὶ μακρότατον σκοποῦντί μοι  
πιστεῦσαι ξυμβαίνει οὐ μεγάλα νομίζω γενέσθαι οὔτε κατὰ τοὺς  
πολέμους οὔτε ἐς τὰ ἄλλα.

41) Connor 1984, 30 n. 29.

42) Lendle 1990, 232 with nn. 4 and 5 demonstrates that τὰ ἔργα in 1.22.2 (rather than the work as a whole, including both narrative and speeches) continues to be the controlling subject in 22.3 and 4, and is thus the object of Thucydides' attention in his remarks on methodology. Thucydides' comments in 1.22.1 on how he composed the speeches are, then, secondary in this passage, and do not contribute to the argument he makes about the value of his work to readers. That value depends upon the fact that events in the future will follow the patterns he identifies in the events of the Peloponnesian War.

Τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἡῶρον, χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεύσαι.

ἐκ δὲ τῶν εἰρημένων τεκμηρίων ὅμως τοιαῦτα ἂν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἂ διήλθον οὐχ ἀμαρτάνοι, καὶ οὔτε ὡς ποιηταὶ ὑμνήκασι περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες μᾶλλον πιστεύων, οὔτε ὡς λογογράφοι ζυνέθεσαν ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῆ ἀκρόασει ἢ ἀληθέστερον, ὄντα ἀνεξέλεγκτα καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ χρόνου αὐτῶν ἀπίστως ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες ἐκνευκτικότερα, ἠὲρῆσθαι δὲ ἠγησάμενος ἐκ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων σημείων ὡς παλαιὰ εἶναι ἀποχρώντως, καὶ ὁ πόλεμος οὗτος, καίπερ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἂν πολεμῶσι τὸν παρόντα αἰεὶ μέγιστον κρινόντων, πυνθασμένων δὲ τὰ ἀρχαῖα μᾶλλον θυμαζόντων, ἀπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων σκοποῦσι δηλώσει ὅμως μείζων γεγενημένος αὐτῶν.

τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶνπραχθέντων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος ἤξιωσα γράφειν, οὐδ' ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει, ἀλλ' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν καὶ (τὰ) παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβείᾳ περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξεληθόν. ἐπιπόνως δὲ ἠύρισκετο, διότι οἱ παρόντες τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκάστοις οὐ ταῦτα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔλεγον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἑκατέρων τις εὐνοίας ἢ μνήμης ἔχοι. καὶ ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται· ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ ἀνθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίον ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκοῦντως ἔξει. κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγόνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρημα ἀκούειν ζύγκεται.<sup>43</sup>

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43) I offer a literal translation of this passage because of its significance for my argument and its many controversial elements. I take the phrase ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος adverbially, and ἀκριβεία as the subject of ἠύρισκετο, following Egermann 1972 and 1983, whose interpretation of the entire passage on speeches and narrative has much to recommend it. See Erbse 1989, particularly 132–134. I also accept Ullrich's conjecture of (τὰ) before παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων.

For it was impossible because of the passage of so much time to discover with certainty the events before this and the ones still more ancient. But based upon the evidence I could trust after the deepest investigation, I do not believe they were great either in war or in other domains.

I discovered ancient events to have been along these lines, though it is difficult to trust each piece of evidence in sequence.

On the basis of the stated evidence, the reader who believes that events were along the lines I have described would not be mistaken; he should not trust what the poets sang about them, embellishing them with exaggerations, nor what the logographers stitched together, attending more to what is pleasing to the ear than to its truthfulness; the events of the past cannot be critically tested, and many of them have won their way to the untrustworthy status of legend because of their age. The reader should regard my discoveries, made on the basis of the most conspicuous evidence, as sufficient, given the age of the events. And although men tend to judge whatever war they are currently fighting to be in each case the greatest, but when it is over to revere more the old wars, this war will reveal itself nonetheless as greater than those, based upon an examination of the facts themselves.

Thucydides believed that he could learn something about the history of Greece before his own time, but not enough for an account accurate in its details. He introduces the Archaeology in 1.1.3 by saying “it was impossible because of the passage of so much time to discover with certainty the events before this (sc. the Peloponnesian War) and the ones still more ancient. But based upon the evidence I could trust after the deepest investigation . . .” This sentence has caused embarrassment to commentators. Gomme, for example, says “there is a difficulty here well discussed by Steup. . . . It could not be said of the period from 510 to 435 B. C. that it σαφῶς μὲν εὐρεῖν διὰ χρόνου πλῆθος ἀδύνατα ἦν, nor does Thucydides in his excursus on the *Pentekontaetia* (i.89–118; esp. 97.2) suggest that it was. . . and there is therefore much to be said for Steup’s suggestion that a clause, saying something about the period 510–435, has dropped out after τὰ γὰρ πρὸ αὐτῶν.”<sup>44</sup> Gomme engages in more textual speculation of this sort in his commentary on 1.20.1, where he is again bothered by the fact that τὰ παλαιά seems to include the Persian Wars and the *Pentekontaetia*.<sup>45</sup>

But before we insert arbitrary clauses into the text, we should first take the manuscript reading seriously. Thucydides is emphasizing that one cannot recover history before one’s own time, even recent history, “clearly,” that is, with certainty. As we shall see, the adverb σαφῶς and the noun σαφές carry great epistemological weight for Thucydides: they designate information that can be known with complete confidence, such confidence that it can serve not only to recover the past, but to detect patterns that help expli-

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I did not think it right to base my account of the actual events of this war upon the things I learned by chance, nor even upon how they appeared to me. Instead, I went through the evidence for each event as carefully as possible for accuracy, for both those events at which I was myself present, and those I heard about from others. Accuracy was achieved laboriously, since those present at each event did not give the same reports about them, but each reported as his bias or memory determined. For listeners (readers), perhaps the dearth of legendary stories in my account will appear rather unappealing. But it will be sufficient for my purposes if whoever will want in the future to examine the clear and certain truth of what happened, and will happen again, given the human condition, in similar and related ways, judges my account useful. It is composed as a book for many readings rather than as a competition-piece for immediate listening pleasure.’

44) Gomme 1959, 91, 92.

45) Gomme 1959, 135–136.



cate the future. J. Marincola has this right: “I think Thucydides wants to say that it was difficult to ‘know precisely’, not merely ‘know’, the events of the past. What he means by ‘precisely’ is clear from 1.22.4, where τὸ σαφέζ means the way *he* has been able to write a contemporary history. In other words, it is impossible to write of ancient events a history of the sort he will write for the Peloponnesian War.”<sup>46</sup> And again with respect to Thucydides’ remark on evidence in 1.20.1, Marincola says: “In Thucydides 1.20.1, τὰ παλαιά refers to what occurred before the Peloponnesian War, including the Persian Wars, as his mention of them in the preceding chapter shows.”<sup>47</sup>

Thucydides introduces the Archaeology, then, by stipulating that the history of all events before one’s own time cannot be fully and reliably recovered. He next presents what he considers to be a superior interpretation of Greek history down to his own times, based, as we have seen, upon careful reasoning from the fragmentary evidence, mostly poetic, that has survived. At the end of this historical reconstruction, he again issues a disclaimer: it is difficult to trust every piece of evidence he has adduced, and even his discoveries have limitations.<sup>48</sup>

As noted earlier, it is important to see that the δέ in 21.1 responds to the μέν of 20.1. These two sentences are correlative, a fact nearly hidden by Thucydides’ lengthy examples in 20.1–3. But we should read 21.1 directly after we read 20.1 in order to understand

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46) Marincola 1997, 96 n. 166. See also Parmeggiani 2003, 235–283, particularly pages 268–272. Parmeggiani shows that Thucydides believed that it was possible to reconstruct the history of early Greece, but not “clearly,” that is, by means of critical research of the kind he could employ in composing contemporary history.

47) Marincola 1997, 70 n. 33. Patzer 1968, 101–102 first demonstrated this case in 1940 by showing that Thucydides’ polemic in 1.21.1 is just as strong against the logographers writing about the fifth century as it is against the poets singing of the ancient past; in fact, the polemic holds even for contemporary history, as Thucydides makes clear in 1.20.3 (Patzer 1968, 103). The dividing line between “the events before this” and “the still earlier events” is the Trojan War and its aftermath. Note also Erbse 1970, 48.

48) Some have seen a discrepancy between Thucydides’ claims in 1.1.3 and 1.20.1: impossible in the former, merely difficult in the latter (Marincola 1997, 96–97; Connor 1984, 27). But the referents are different in the two cases: discovering earlier events with certainty is impossible; trusting every single piece of evidence is difficult. In other words, some bits of evidence are trustworthy; but even with those in hand, finding and reconstructing the events with perfect clarity is impossible.

precisely the argument Thucydides is making: he asserts that his version of Greek history is more reliable than those of the poets and logographers, but acknowledges that it is still imperfect. It is essentially a theory constructed from the most conspicuous evidence transmitted through oral memory (παντί ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι in 20.1; ἐκ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων σημείων in 21.1). It is only roughly accurate (τοιαῦτα in 20.1, τοιαῦτα ... μάλιστα in 21.1). Thucydides identifies in 21.1 the problems that prevent solid recovery of historical events: they cannot be critically tested (ὄντα ἀνεξέλεγκτα), and many have “won their way to the untrustworthy status of legend because of their age” (τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ χρόνου αὐτῶν ἀπίστως ἐπὶ τὸ μυθώδες ἐκνενηκικότα). Translators and commentators often take these clauses with only the preceding clauses on the poets and logographers, as though these comments apply only to their accounts of history, but that interpretation misconstrues the sentence. These strictures must apply as well to the earlier clauses describing Thucydides’ own account: τοιαῦτα ἄν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἃ διήλθον. It is the events themselves that are untestable and, for the most part, unrecoverable, not the (poets’ and logographers’) accounts of the events.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout chapters 20 and 21, Thucydides directly addresses the reader, the “ideal reader” we have seen before: chapter 20 explains to this reader the flagrant mistakes made by misuse of the Greek oral tradition, even in the transmission of current practices; it is the same reader who is to “consider” the facts Thucydides has “gone through” as generally accurate (21.1); and it is this reader again who “studies” (σκοποῦσι) Thucydides’ war by means of the facts themselves (21.2). Thucydides is not like “the many,” who turn to what is at hand and take no trouble in their search for the truth (20.3). He does not, like the poets, exaggerate, nor, like the logographers, give higher priority to listening pleasure than to the truth.<sup>50</sup>

49) Meyer 2008, 27: “In 1.21 and 1.22, Thucydides tells his readers that they should believe what he has told them ... about ancient times from the proofs he has given ... – that he has proceeded ‘from the most apparent signs’ ..., even though so much of what he has shown is in a past so distant that it has been transformed into stories, ἐπὶ τὸ μυθώδες (1.21.1).”

50) Lendle 1990, 233 n. 6, believes that in referencing “the poets” and “the logographers” in 1.21.1, Thucydides in fact has only Homer and Herodotus, respectively, in mind. In this entire section, 1.20–23, Thucydides’ primary target is

Thucydides has used the best evidence, and where the data were scant and unreliable, he has built the best case he could by constructing a theory using analogy, logical extension, probability, and verisimilitude. These are all methods used in the Attic lawcourts. They are difficult and painstaking, but they are the most one can do with earlier history.<sup>51</sup> Following this explanation of his reconstruction of the past, Thucydides turns to the present war. In 21.2, his ring composition requires him to cap the argument he began in 1.1.2–3, the lead-in to the Archaeology: this war was the biggest κίνησις in Greek, even human history. But before Thucydides completes this argument, which resumes in chapter 23, he inserts more remarks about methodology in 22. The first two sentences of this chapter (22.1 and 2) concern the practices he followed in composing the speeches and narrative of “his war.” Rather than becoming embroiled in the controversies about the precise meaning of these sentences, particularly of the remarks on speeches, let us note that they are nearly mirror images. These two sections are neatly self-contained and parallel to each other, as many commentators have noted. Every phrase in 22.2 has a counterpart in 22.1. The contrasts

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Herodotus. At the end of 20.3, after detailing Herodotus’ two mistakes, Thucydides emphasizes that misusers of oral stories “turn to what is easily at hand” (ἐπὶ τὰ ἐτοῖμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται). He gives his own method of using oral evidence in 22.2: “I thought it appropriate to write the events of the war not by hearing them randomly . . .” (οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος). This last is another dig at Herodotus, as Gomme (1959, 141) hesitantly noted. But there is no need for hesitancy: the parallelism between ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος and ἐπὶ τὰ ἐτοῖμα makes the point clear. Thucydides condemns Herodotus as an exemplar of most men’s carelessness in using oral evidence, and emphasizes that the superiority of his own approach results from its critical treatment of multiple sources. Hornblower is right to say “It remains true that Th.’s polemic is harsh and bad-tempered; but that was a usual feature of intellectual debate at this time . . .” (1991, 58). Note that Thucydides again has Herodotus specifically in mind a few lines later in 1.22.4 when he opposes his own permanent work to a “competition piece intended for an immediate audience of listeners,” a reference to Herodotus’ Histories. Fornara 1971, 60 makes this point absolutely clear, as does Lendle 1990, 231 (citing A. Lesky). Finally, in 1.23.1, Thucydides dismisses Herodotus’ war with a snarl: it comprised only two battles by sea and two by land.

51) Marincola 1997, 97: “The method in the Archaeology relies on legal and logical terminology, impersonally presented: probability (εἰκός); evidence (σημεῖον, μαρτύριον); reasoning (εἰκάζειν); and examination (σκοπεῖν).” Note also Nicolai 2001, 271 n. 18: “. . . Thucydides’ position is, however, more complex, as in many cases a poetic text is only a starting-point for his own reasoning.” See also Romilly 1956, chapter 4 on the Archaeology, and Connor 1984, 28.

in historiographical aims could not be sharper. Thucydides' goal in constructing speeches is to express each speaker's political views as Thucydides believes they might have been applied to given situations.<sup>52</sup> His goal in composing the narrative of events is accuracy in each instance (ἀκριβεία περὶ ἐκάστου), which can only be attained by critical research (πυνθανόμενος ἡξίωσα γράφειν, ἐπεξελθών). The words πυνθανόμενος ἡξίωσα γράφειν refer to Thucydides' research and judgment about which events to include; ἐπεξελθών refers to his pursuit of evidence: ἐπεξέρχομαι is a term used in Attic lawcourts to describe the role of prosecutors.<sup>53</sup>

With this understanding of 22.1 and 2, we can turn to 22.3–4, which Thucydides makes neatly parallel to chapters 20 and 21. Note the correspondences:

1. οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος / ἐπιπόνως
2. τις / ὅσοι These are, as we have seen, standard Thucydidean terms for his readers.
3. ἠύρησθαι / ἠύρισκετο
4. τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῇ ἀκρόασει / ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ... ἀτερπέστερον
5. ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες / τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες
6. ὄντα ἀνεξέλεγκτα καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ χρόνου αὐτῶν ἀπίστως ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες ἐκνευκτικότερα / τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφές
7. σκοποῦσι / σκοπεῖν
8. τοιαῦτα ἄν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἂ διήλθον οὐχ ἄμαρτάνοι / ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν
9. ὡς παλαιὰ εἶναι ἀποχρόντως / ἀρκούντως ἔξει
10. ξυνέθεσαν / ξύγκειται

Thucydides' use of τις and ὅσοι reminds us of the other methodological passages in his work that we have already reviewed: in all

52) See Egermann 1972, 577–582, Erbse 1989, 132–133. Thucydides' approach to constructing speeches bears some resemblance to his approach to reconstructing early Greek history. For the latter, he acknowledges that he has achieved only approximation: τοιαῦτα (20.1) and τοιαῦτα ἄν τις νομίζων μάλιστα (21.1). For the speeches, Thucydides cites approximation as his goal: ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ζυμπάσης γνώμης “in 22.1; note also” χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι in 20.1 and χαλεπὸν τὴν ἀκριβείαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων διαμνημονεῦσαι in 22.1.

53) See Antiphon 1.1 and 1.6. Cf. Connor 1984, 27–28 with n. 23, and Plant 1999, 70 with n. 42.

of them, Thucydides tells his readers how they are to “look at” his work. It is clear from the long list of verbal correspondences between 1.20–21 and 1.22.3–4 that Thucydides is drawing his readers’ attention to major contrasts between the past and “his war.” The most telling points are the following: While even I, with my painstaking effort and superior method, could gain only a general picture of earlier times, I have been able to compose a detailed and reliable account of the Peloponnesian War; whereas poets and logographers have aimed at oral entertainment and immediate pleasure and prizes, I have sought permanent usefulness in a written work that has no alluring or unreliable stories; my book is for those few readers who will want to study a completely intelligible account of the Peloponnesian War and to compare it with what are bound to be, given the human condition, similar and parallel events in their own times. Epistemologically, Thucydides claims that far greater accuracy is possible for contemporary history than for the history of any earlier period. Methodologically, he claims that he is much more rigorous and critical in collecting, evaluating, and selecting evidence than the poets and logographers, particularly Herodotus. Philosophically, he claims to approach history with greater seriousness of purpose than do his rivals: he has aimed at, and produced, the clear truth for readers who will actively study his text. Such study will enable his readers to make comparisons between the events of Thucydides’ war and the events of their own time.<sup>54</sup>

But what is the “clear truth” to Thucydides? Is it the specific facts he has painstakingly unearthed from his critical weighing of empirical evidence? Is he, in other words, an historian in the modern sense? That appears to be the kind of claim he makes, particularly in 1.22.2–3, with its emphasis upon strict accuracy in discovering the details of history. But we should be cautious about such a conclusion. Chapter 1.22 is a “proof passage” containing the same terms and claims as other such passages in Thucydides. As we have seen, these passages are polemical in tone and seek rational coherence or unity rather than specificity and precision. They instruct the reader in intellectual method, using, as Loraux put it, “judicial vocabulary.”

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54) See Parmeggiani 2003, 272–277.

Book I, chapters 20–23 constitutes a major polemic that begins with criticism of everyone else’s (οἱ ἄνθρωποι in 20.1, τοῖς πολλοῖς in 20.3) misuse of oral tradition and ends with the assertion that Thucydides’ war is vastly more significant than that of Herodotus, which concluded after a mere four battles. Thucydides claims to have produced “the clear truth” (τὸ σαφές), and he wants readers who will “study” it (σκοπεῖν). What precisely do these terms mean? The best passages for understanding the force of τὸ σαφές in authors before and contemporary with Thucydides are Xenophanes fragment 34 DK, and On Ancient Medicine 119.<sup>55</sup> We begin with the former:

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφές οὐτίς ἀνὴρ ἴδεν οὐδέ τις ἔσται  
εἰδώς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων·  
εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπόν,  
αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.

Here is Leshner’s translation of τὸ σαφές in line 1 of the fragment: “... I would argue that ‘the certain truth’ or ‘the clear and certain truth’ is the best choice here in fragment 34.”<sup>56</sup> It is likely that the original force of the term was “reliable” or “sure” information. Over time, it came also to denote information that was “accurate,” “clear.”<sup>57</sup> There is much disagreement on the philosophical interpretation of fragment 34, some of it, of course, related to the meaning of τὸ σαφές. Indeed, Leshner reviews six philosophical approaches to the fragment. His conclusion is helpful: “The thesis presented in lines 1 and 2 is, therefore, best taken to mean that *statements concerning the non-evident realm of the divine as well as the far-reaching generalizations of natural sciences* cannot be known as *to saphes*; that is, they cannot be directly observed or confirmed as true, hence they cannot be reliably known or known with certainty (see note 2 above on *to saphes*).”<sup>58</sup> In this important usage, the term conveys the idea of clear, confirmed truth.

55) On the former, see Leshner 1992, 155–169 and Heitsch 1983; on the latter, Schiefsky 2005, 139–143.

56) Leshner 1992, 156 n. 2.

57) For this kind of development in “truth” terms, see Cole 1983, 7–28.

58) Leshner 1992, 168. See also Heitsch 1983, 173–176, who translates τὸ σαφές as “genaues” or “sicheres Wissen.”

On Ancient Medicine 119, lines 7–11 provide more evidence for the precise meaning of τὸ σαφές:

ἂν εἴ τις λέγοι καὶ γινώσκοι ὡς ἔχει, οὔτ' ἂν αὐτῷ τῷ λέγοντι οὔτε τοῖσιν ἀκούουσι δῆλα ἂν εἴη, εἴτε ἀληθεῖα ἐστὶν εἴτε μή· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ πρὸς ὅ τι κρῆ ἔπανενέγκαντα εἰδέναι τὸ σαφές.

In his commentary on this passage, Schiefsky refers to fragment 34 of Xenophanes as a means of understanding τὸ σαφές here. He translates the passage this way: “If anyone should recognize and state how these things are, it would be clear neither to the speaker himself nor to his listeners whether what he says is true or not, for there is nothing by referring to which one would necessarily attain clear knowledge.”<sup>59</sup> Clear knowledge requires criteria upon which to base one’s understanding, as the participle ἔπανενέγκαντα indicates. Such knowledge can be gained only by an appeal to evidence.

Given this important background, it is no surprise that Thucydides, after making proud claims in 1.22 about his critically superior handling of evidence, refers to his account of the Peloponnesian War as τὸ σαφές, “the clear and certain truth.” His work is not the result of speculation or hypothesis; it depends upon critical examination of evidence, and is therefore reliable and accurate. But we can go further in understanding the full meaning of τὸ σαφές in this passage by examining it in conjunction with the verb σκοπεῖν, of which it is the object. A number of scholars have advanced our understanding of the meaning of these words in 1.22, and a loose scholarly consensus has begun to emerge, though it has not generally been noted by the scholars themselves. Serious analysis of 1.22.4 started with H. Patzer in 1937. Patzer first demonstrated that “Σκοπεῖν hat, soweit ich sehe, im Griechischen überhaupt weniger den Sinn des zerlegenden, vereinzeln, Einblick suchenden Ins-Auge-fassens, als den des umfassenden Überschauens.”<sup>60</sup> “Das Wort σκοπεῖν bezeichnet bei Thukydides sonst nirgends die Prüfung der Tatsachen auf ihre Gewähr hin, hingegen hat es bei ihm, gerade in methodologischem Zusammenhang, die feste Bedeutung: Beziehungen herstellendes Zusammenschauen, für das die Tatsachen nur Grundlage sind.”<sup>61</sup> Σκοπεῖν then, means

59) Schiefsky 2005, 75.

60) Patzer 1937, 76 n. 173.

61) Patzer 1937, 74.

“to look at comprehensively,” “to view broadly,” “to contemplate,” “to consider.”<sup>62</sup>

Patzer bolsters this interpretation by noting that Thucydides uses σκοπεῖν or another similar verb in other methodological passages in this same sense: see particularly 1.21.2 and 5.20.2. In the former, Thucydides’ readers, by “reflecting” on the facts themselves, will conclude that his war is greater than any of its predecessors. In the latter, as we have already seen, readers are to “look at” historical time by seasons, not by magistracy years. In 5.26.2, we have the same idea, this time with a synonymous verb: readers are to “look at” or “consider” (ἀθρεῖτω) the facts themselves as they are separately defined, and come to Thucydides’ conclusion regarding what constitutes war or peace. Patzer calls this “ein Tatsachen übergreifendes Verstehen geschichtlicher Epochen.”<sup>63</sup> Note also 2.48.3, where the reader is to “look at” Thucydides’ description of the nature of the plague and be able to recognize it if it should strike again, and 5.68.2, where Thucydides claims that it is possible through reasoning for someone to “calculate” the number of Lakedaimonians present. These are all passages we have reviewed earlier in this article as crucial to grasping Thucydides’ method. In them, σκοπεῖν is the verb Thucydides applies to his readers’ intellectual consideration of historiographical questions or problems: which war is greatest? how should one divide an historical period chronologically? how should one define war and peace? what is the nature of the plague, and how can one understand it in the future? how should one calculate an unknown number of troops? In Patzer’s formulation, σκοπεῖν often has an element of “comparison” inherent in it: “Beziehungen herstellendes Zusammenschauen,” “comparisons that produce relationships.” Note that in 1.21.2 the reader is comparing Thucydides’ war to its predecessors; in 5.20.2–3 the reader is comparing different ways of dividing time; in 5.26.2 the reader is considering different ways of dividing historical periods; in 2.48, the reader is

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62) Edmunds appears to be the only scholar to take note of Patzer’s contribution: “This conclusion is corroborated by the meaning of σκοπεῖν, which refers not to the perception of individual facts but to a purview: Patzer, *Das Problem*, pp. 74–76 and n. 173” (Edmunds 1975, 158 n. 20).

63) Patzer 1937, 75.



to compare Thucydides' plague with ones that occur in his own time.<sup>64</sup>

On this basis, Patzer concludes that strict factual accuracy (ἡ ἀκρίβεια) is not the final goal of Thucydides' methodology;<sup>65</sup> ἡ ἀκρίβεια is the means of obtaining τὸ σαφές, but not τὸ σαφές itself. "Damit ändert sich mit einem Schlage das, was Sinnerkenntnis der Vergangenheit (τῶν γενομένων τὸ σαφές σκοπεῖν) bedeuten soll: die Vergangenheit stellt sich dem Blick, der die verworrene Vielfalt der kritisch gesicherten ἔργα zu überschauen sucht, in ihrer Sinneinheit dar, indem sie sich ihm in ihrer Wiederholbarkeit im Zukünftigen darstellt."<sup>66</sup> Τὸ σαφές is not, then, "correspondence truth," that is, a replica of the sheer facts, but an intellectual or "coherence truth" that has been formed by a mind seeking and seeing structure in history, the patterns to be found in sequences of events considered comprehensively.<sup>67</sup> Such pattern-forming does not viti-

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64) From a different starting point, Loraux has come to a similar conclusion about Thucydides' use of σκοπεῖν to refer to a process of ratiocination. See Loraux 1986, 154, where she shows that in Thucydides, intransitive σκοπεῖν indicates the capacity of the intellect to have "no other object than itself." "The reflection which precedes writing and its product is pure intransitivity." "In its most marked uses, σκοπεῖν in Thucydides has no object." For a similar use of this verb in contemporary Greek literature, note Sophocles, OT 68: πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις, / ἦν δ' εὖ σκοπῶν ἠύρισκον ἴασιν μόνην, / ταύτην ἔπραξα. "reviewing (comparing) carefully all these paths of thought, I could discover only one cure, and I took this one." Here, as in Thucydides, σκοπεῖν clearly means "conducting an overview," "looking comprehensively," "comparing."

65) Patzer 1937, 77–78: "Aus all dem ergibt sich, dass der Schwerpunkt des Methodenkapitels nicht in der Tatsachenkritik zu suchen ist, sondern in dem besonderen Ziel, das der noch näher zu interpretierende §4 umschreibt. Dieses Ziel dürfte das eigentlich Bestimmende sein, zu dem die Ermittlung der reinen Tatsächlichkeit nur Voraussetzung ist."

66) Patzer 1937, 90. I give a rendering of this important, but difficult German: "... to an eye seeking an overview of the confused multiplicity of critically ascertained ἔργα, the past is revealed in its intellectual unity by being revealed to it in its future reproducibility."

67) Edmunds 1975, 155, 158 (drawing upon Patzer): "It is obvious from Thucydides' statements that he wished to secure factual accuracy. But this factual accuracy is not the sufficient condition for history in the Thucydidean sense but only the necessary condition for τὸ σαφές, with which Thucydides associates the immortality of his work. Τὸ σαφές emerges from the facts, the contingent particulars ..." "This contrast between ἀκρίβεια and τὸ σαφές, and the transcendence of the former by the latter, is at the heart of Thucydides' method. This contrast appears in all of Thucydides' methodological statements in language so similar in each place, in some respects, that it could almost be called formulaic. These similarities make

ate the accuracy of Thucydides' account. The historian was, in general, painstaking in his search for the facts, as many scholars have noted, and he was careful in his presentation of them. He also frequently provides us with details that allow us to question his own judgments, as commentators have also pointed out. There is no necessary contradiction between a focus upon the particular and a tendency to delineate general paradigms or types. One can achieve accuracy in detail and still compose general propositions.<sup>68</sup> But I do agree with Edmunds that, for Thucydides, accuracy (ἡ ἀκρίβεια) was in the service of and subordinated to "the clear and certain truth" (τὸ σαφές).<sup>69</sup>

In summary, Thucydides has an explicitly complex view of historical "truth," and a hierarchy of terms with which to define it.

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it clear that Thucydides' purpose was to liberate himself from the individual perspective and from the particular facts."

68) Several scholars have emphasized Thucydides' remarkable joining of the particular and the general. Thibaudet maintained that "L'histoire telle que la propose Thucydide, unit et fait servir l'un à l'autre deux caractères qui, semble-t-il, s'excluent: la plus grande exactitude matérielle et la plus grande généralité. D'ailleurs, quand on croit qu'elles s'excluent, c'est qu'on ne pense pas à l'art, qui les implique au contraire toutes deux et emploie l'une à la perfection de l'autre" (1922, 49). Gomme 1954, 138–140 quotes this passage of Thibaudet approvingly, and makes similar points. Cook 1988, chapter 3, "Particular and General in Thucydides," arrives at the same conclusion. Note, for example (page 49): "In the case of Thucydides, these details sometimes stun through similarity; particulars worked on by a coordinating intellection evolve into generality."

69) Thomas Scanlon has come to a similar conclusion (apparently without knowledge of Patzer's or Edmunds' work): "τὸ σαφές . . . is an expression of a reliably clear certainty about human actions based on a careful analysis of particular events but offering general paradigms of use for the future." (Scanlon 2002, 131). Note also page 147: "Ἀκρίβεια is then the tool by which the author arrives at the product of τὸ σαφές." "Τὸ σαφές is not simply another synonym for precision or accuracy. This phrase and other terms in its semantic sphere are concerned with but not restricted to specific data; they also concern a more abstract, general, and yet certain truth with relevance for the future." We should also note Romilly 1956, 52: "Cette vérité signifiante est à la fois vérité et clarté: elle est ce que Thucydide appelle τὸ σαφές. Ce 'clair' est le fruit d'une intelligence active et perspicace. . . . La voie que suit Thucydide est tout autre: ce n'est pas tellement celle de l'intelligence, que celle de la raison." The contrast Patzer and Romilly and Edmunds and Scanlon draw is between specific observation and abstract reasoning, between the collection and critique of data on the one hand, and the ordering of them into patterns by means of logical reasoning. The latter is what gives Thucydides' text its coherence and meaning (Romilly 1956, 46): "Cette tendance à l'unité est évidemment ce que confère au récit de Thucydide son caractère d'intelligibilité."

His method of discovering the truth is, above all, an intellectual one. He hears reports from others, and witnesses some events himself. He subjects the information thus obtained to critical testing in order to attain accuracy. On that basis he deems some information worth committing to writing. Much of that information is then organized into patterns designed by logical reasoning. For early history, Thucydides has limited means: he scrutinizes the scant and untrustworthy evidence available and arrives at broad conclusions, conclusions based upon a theory of sea power that is, in turn, based heavily upon the model of the contemporary Athenian Empire. Such “discoveries” are only broadly credible for ancient history, but that is sufficient for his purpose: to prove that his war is the greatest in history. Contemporary history has been “discovered” painstakingly, with critical standards applied to oral evidence because of its vulnerability to poor memory and bias (1.22.3). Thucydides emphasizes his personal involvement in, and commitment to, collecting and analyzing evidence with great care: ταῦτα δηλώσω αὐτός τε νοσήσας καὶ αὐτὸς ἰδὼν ἄλλους πάσχοντας in the case of the Plague; and in the “Second Introduction”: ἐπεβίων δὲ διὰ παντὸς αὐτοῦ αἰσθανόμενός τε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ καὶ προσέχων τὴν γνώμην, ὅπως ἀκριβές τι εἶσομαι καὶ ξυνέβη μοι φεύγειν τὴν ἑμαυτοῦ ἔτη εἴκοσι μετὰ τὴν ἐς Ἀμφίπολιν στρατηγίαν, καὶ γενομένῳ παρ’ ἀμοτέρους τοῖς πράγμασι, καὶ οὐχ ἦσσαν τοῖς Πελοποννησίων διὰ τὴν φυγὴν, καθ’ ἡσυχίαν τι αὐτῶν μᾶλλον αἰσθέσθαι (5.26.5). In this self-conscious passage, Thucydides emphasizes his ability to observe events dispassionately, and the application of his own mind to the understanding of those events. The account of the war produced by these methods is completely accurate and “true,” and therefore generalizable. Thucydides’ “clear and certain truth” is, in great part, a human construct, formed by both inductive and deductive methods.<sup>70</sup>

Phormio’s sea battles (2.83–92) furnish a good example of the kind of truth Thucydides created by these methods. The first speech in this episode (2.87) is said to be delivered by “Cnemus and

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70) Scanlon 2002, 139: “... I will simply state that, in my view, Thucydides combines aspects of the inductive method with broader philosophical constructions of the human condition; his text weaves together both the empirical or specific and the philosophical or universal in ways which elude tracing a primary intellectual debt definitely to one genre or discipline or another.”

Brasidas and the other generals of the Peloponnesians;” it is clearly an amalgamation of onshore exhortations given separately to contingents of troops small enough to hear a general’s voice. But this is only the first of several examples in this passage of Thucydides’ eschewing of verisimilitude. The “speech” in 2.87 is a highly abstract argument about the comparative value of bravery and experience in battle, with the admixture of considerable psychologizing. It is not the kind of language likely to have been used to inspire troops before a battle, particularly in its emphasis upon negative points such as the Peloponnesians’ recent naval defeat and their inexperience at sea. Even more strikingly, each argument is rebutted, and in the same terms, by Phormio in his address to the Athenians across the Gulf in 2.89. Phormio manages to turn the abstract reasonings of the Lakedaimonian commanders on their heads in an even more abstract and sophisticated lesson on psychology.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, as Romilly has demonstrated,<sup>72</sup> the naval battle that follows the speeches bears out in exquisite detail the verbal dialectic that precedes it in Thucydides’ text. Romilly has characterized the entire passage 2.85–92 as “une théorie,” “un système raisonné.”<sup>73</sup> Her analysis reveals how Thucydides turned this episode of the Peloponnesian War into an historical paradigm, primarily by constructing a “duel dialectique”<sup>74</sup> that would enable the reader to comprehend the events of the actual physical battle as they transpired in Thucydides’ narrative. The passage constitutes a sophisticated demonstration of the nature of Athenian naval τέχνη and of its superiority to Peloponnesian naval practice. In this regard, note the Spartans’ bafflement at their first defeat in 2.85.2 (παράλογος), and the immediate suicide of one of their commanders in response to the shocking second defeat in 2.92.3. Thucydides’ Spartans are

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71) Hornblower 1991, 368 calls Phormio’s speech “a notably implausible set of responses.” Note in this regard Erbse’s fine remarks (1989, 133) on the nature of historical reality conveyed by Thucydides’ speeches: “Die Reden gehören einer idealen Wirklichkeit an, nämlich dem vom Historiker konstruierten Wirkungszusammenhang. Damit ist die Deutung der Geschehnisse durch den Darstellenden gemeint. Diese seine Interpretation kann dem, was wirklich geschah, nie genau entsprechen, sondern sie kann dieses nur mit Hilfe der Sprache in einer ganz bestimmten Hinsicht abbilden.”

72) Romilly 1956, 139–149.

73) Romilly 1956, 144, 148.

74) Romilly 1956, 139.

intellectually confounded by their early naval reverses. Thucydides' readers, on the other hand, have been given the analytical tools for understanding the precise nature of the Spartans' problem at sea. In this extended passage, Thucydides subordinated correspondence truth and sacrificed verisimilitude to achieve a conceptual portrait of Athenian naval skill. The drive for intellectual coherence governs such passages in Thucydides' text.<sup>75</sup>

*What kind of reader does Thucydides expect?*

Thucydides consciously arranged empirically-derived evidence into carefully conceived and wrought patterns and paradigms. His tendency towards the general, the universal, was unusually strong: "Aussi n'est-on pas surpris de [les réflexions générales] retrouver, en très grand nombre ..., dans l'œuvre de Thucydide ... Ils impliquent qu'à tout moment il cherche à décrire les événements particuliers du passé sous la forme la plus universelle possible."<sup>76</sup> What, then, is the reader to do with Thucydides' account? He is to study its truth with great care: κτῆμα ... ἐς αἰεὶ emphasizes the permanence of Thucydides' written text, and ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφές σκοπεῖν expresses the need for close reading of that text. By studying τὸ σαφές, readers will be able to recognize "the truth" in the events of their own time, that is, the underlying structure and meaning of those events. Thucydides has provided many clues to help the reader "see" the general patterns of history, as Romilly, in particular, demonstrated by revealing the

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75) To enumerate or study such passages is beyond the scope of this paper, but I should mention two other instances in which this kind of intellectual (and moral) analysis takes over Thucydides' presentation of events: the Melian Dialogue, a set piece introduced with conspicuous self-consciousness (cf. Hornblower 2008, 219) and conducted at an unrealistically abstract level; and the tyrannicide digression in 6.54–61, a demonstration of how one should study history. In the latter, Thucydides goes so far as to draw the comparison between past model (the tyrannicide and its aftermath) and present event (the prosecution of Alcibiades and investigation of the Herms and the Mysteries) himself, rather than leaving it for his readers to make (Meyer 2008, 19–26). Furthermore, he shows how the Athenian demos blundered when they extracted precisely the wrong conclusions from their misreading of history (6.53.3, 6.60.1, 6.61.1). The digression thus serves as a working model for Thucydides' readers.

76) Romilly 1990, 65.

“*films conducteurs*” in the narrative. And we have noted in this paper numerous passages in which Thucydides gives the reader an intellectual method for conducting the kind of logical reasoning he has carried out in his historiographical work. Furthermore, through Thucydides’ remarkable rhetorical skills the reader is invited to enter into the drama, the moral dilemmas, the political decisions of the War, and to learn from this kind of reading, as Connor has so ably revealed in his book *Thucydides*.<sup>77</sup>

In all these respects, Thucydides is a great teacher of his readers. On the other hand, the reader is not invited to question or to doubt Thucydides’ picture of the Peloponnesian War. It is the clear and certain truth. Its authority is unchallengeable, its judgment final. Thucydides provides almost no sources for the reader to consult, no alternative viewpoints or interpretations for the reader to consider, no questionable facts for the reader to query. The account proceeds without interruption or doubt, the author disappears from view at the outset, the reader must accept and submit to the work. As Loraux puts it, “pour lire Thucydide, il faut d’abord adhérer.”<sup>78</sup> Connor agrees that the text of Thucydides constitutes a formidable authority, but he suggests that Thucydides may have expected the astute reader to critique his account: “His work commands assent. As we investigate the relation between author and reader, however, his authority comes to seem less intimidating. This is not to say that he is to be dismissed as partisan or self-seeking but simply to remember that he demands a reader of independent judgment. We can even suspect that Thucydides was sometimes inviting challenge and reassessment, a historical rereading of his text in which details and reactions postponed or minimized in his narrative are given a second look and then seen in a new relationship, with a new weighting.”<sup>79</sup> This last “suspicion” does not seem likely to me: I think Loraux and Edmunds have it right when they emphasize the imperious finality of Thucydides’ text and its

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77) And see Meyer 2008, 34, note 100: “So the most ‘useful’ thing Thucydides could do was lay out τὸ σαφέες for that reader; the reader would then have to discover ἀλήθεια for him- or herself, even if Thucydides already knew what it was.” The past, rightly understood, furnishes a model for understanding the present. For useful remarks on how Thucydides wanted his speeches to be read, see Yunis 2003, especially 200–204.

78) Loraux 1986, 157.

79) Connor 1984, 233.

refusal to allow, much less to invite alternative readings. As Charles Fornara has well stated: “Thinking of future generations more than of his immediate audience, his task as he defined it was to create a history of the Peloponnesian War that would be self-explanatory; no special knowledge beyond his own history would be required to secure perfect comprehension of the important and relevant issues.”<sup>80</sup>

It is possible that, for Thucydides, ἡ ἀλήθεια is yet a third dimension of “the truth,” in addition to those represented by ἡ ἀκρίβεια and τὸ σαφές.<sup>81</sup> It is difficult to be certain about such distinctions, given the relatively small number of occurrences of truth terms in Thucydides, but I cannot find telling evidence that Thucydides meant by ἡ ἀλήθεια anything different from what he meant by τὸ σαφές. The much-discussed passage in Book VII describing Nicias’ letter to the Athenians suggests otherwise.<sup>82</sup> It also offers several clues to Thucydides’ view of what one should do when he is presented with an opportunity to plan on the basis of “the truth.”

Four times in seven paragraphs Thucydides has Nicias say essentially the same thing to the Athenians about the need to make their plans on the basis of his disclosure of the true situation the army confronts at Syracuse:

- 7.8.2: μαθόντας τοὺς Ἀθηναίους βουλευσασθαι περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας  
 7.11.1: νῦν δὲ καιρὸς οὐχ ἦσσαν μαθόντας ὑμᾶς ἐν ᾧ ἐσμέν  
 βουλευσασθαι  
 7.14.4: εἰ δεῖ σαφῶς εἰδόντας τὰ ἐνθάδε βουλευσασθαι  
 7.14.4: ἀσφαλέστερον ἡγησάμην τὸ ἀληθές δηλώσαι

In these closely aligned clauses, Nicias (Thucydides) clearly seems to use τῆς ἀληθείας, ἐν ᾧ ἐσμέν, σαφῶς εἰδόντας, and τὸ ἀληθές as synonyms. It would, I think, be perverse to argue otherwise. In each case, Nicias tells the Athenians that, having

80) Fornara 1971, 59.

81) Allison 1997, 207–237.

82) So do other passages such as 6.60.2, where Thucydides appears to use τὸ σαφές and τὰ ὄντα synonymously. Allison (1997, 210) and Scanlon (2002, 145–146) attempt to distinguish between these two terms, but have a difficult time doing so. One problem among several is that τὸ σαφές can be used in a narrow sense to emphasize the certainty of knowledge, or in a broader sense to emphasize its certainty and its accuracy, as Scanlon himself recognizes (page 141): he distinguishes between uses of τὸ σαφές for “very specific situations” and those for “general historical truths.”

learned the truth about the current situation in Sicily from him, they should make their military plans. They should put what is “useful” above what is “pleasant,” even though they are prone by nature to prefer to hear what is “most pleasant.” These clauses remind us inevitably of Thucydides’ methodological passage in Book I, especially when we remember that he places great weight upon the written nature of his own History and of Nicias’ advice. In 1.22.4, κτῆμα . . . ἐξ αἰεί clearly refers to and underlines the permanent, written form of Thucydides’ text, and in 7.8.2, Thucydides strongly emphasizes the significance of a written document (ἔγραψεν ἐπιστολήν).<sup>83</sup>

The import of the two passages is the same: it is essential to consider / plan upon the basis of the clear and certain truth; that truth may not be pleasant or attractive, but it is potentially useful, especially if composed in writing, through which it can be conveyed reliably and considered carefully over time; if the reader / hearer reflects upon it intelligently, he can learn and possibly make good decisions. That “if” is of course a large one: the Athenians do not make the best use of Nicias’ “clear truth,” any more than they did early in Book VI when they ignored Nicias’ accurate picture of the Athenians’ enemies in Greece, the Sicilian Greeks’ untrustworthiness as allies, and their potentially formidable military power. Nicias does not convince the Athenians in either case, but his description of the situation faced by Athens is in each case correct. Thucydides implies in both 6.8–26 and 7.8–16 that Nicias gave an accurate account of the dangers confronting the Athenians in Sicily. The fact that Nicias is, as usual, unpersuasive does not negate this point, nor does the fact that the Athenians, as often in Thucydides, failed to “plan well” upon the advice, and therefore made bad decisions.<sup>84</sup>

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83) See Dover’s note and his translation “he composed a message in writing” (1970, 385), and note also Allison 1997, 226–227. A number of scholars have suggested that Thucydides consciously exploited the special opportunities offered by a written text: Cole 1983, 27 n. 49; Loraux 1986, *passim*; Connor 1984, particularly 11–19; Edmunds 1993, 846–852. As Shanske 2007, 15–18, emphasizes, Thucydides invites readers to cross reference his text, a point already suggested by Romilly’s analysis of “files conducteurs” in the text (1956, *passim*).

84) See Parry 1969, 109: “Nicias . . . assumes that the clear knowledge, the unvarnished picture, he is communicating to the Athenians will lead to good planning. . . . But Nicias in Thucydides’ account is a prime example of a leader as incapable of



There is a closely parallel use of τὸ σαφές (*bis*) in 3.29.2, one that confirms the equivalence between that phrase and ἡ ἀλήθεια. This passage also solidifies the case that, for Thucydides, clear and certain knowledge does not necessarily lead to good planning. The Peloponnesian fleet under Alcidas, having heard for the first time of the capture of Mytilene, and “wishing to know the certain truth” (βουλόμενοι δὲ τὸ σαφές εἰδέναι), sails to Embaton. There, “having learned the certain truth, they began their deliberations based upon the current situation” (πυθόμενοι δὲ τὸ σαφές ἐβουλεύοντο ἐκ τῶν παρόντων). Just as Nicias wanted the Athenians to base their planning upon the actual situation in Sicily, the Peloponnesians begin to deliberate once they have established the certain truth of the capture of Mytilene. Clearly τὸ σαφές in the latter passage is synonymous with the phrases used by Nicias in the former passage. Thucydides goes to some length, including ridicule, in the passage in Book III to emphasize that the deliberators failed to form good plans based upon their “certain knowledge” of the situation. In a council Thucydides describes in some detail, not only does Alcidas reject the advice of Teutiplus, who urges an immediate attack upon the Athenians at Mytilene, but he also ignores the suggestions of some Ionians and Lesbians who advise him, “since he is afraid of this risk,” to occupy a base along the coast of Ionia where he can do serious harm to Athenian control over the area. Alcidas “did not even take this advice,” but rather “focused his attention primarily on getting back as fast as possible to the Peloponnese, since he was too late to save Mytilene.” He then arrests and puts to death innocent Greeks who in ignorance approach his fleet along the coast, until some Samians come to him and say he is not freeing Greece very well by putting to death men who have not raised a finger against him, and who have been forced to become allies of the Athenians. If he does not stop doing this, they say, he will make few friends, but rather many enemies of those who should be friends. This is one of the few passages in his History where Thucydides allows himself not simply irony, but deep sarcasm. Armed with a full understanding of the truth, and offered advice

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good planning himself as he is of inducing it in others.” Parry is, in my view, right on both counts. Even a person with “clear knowledge” may not plan well, according to Thucydides’ reasoning.

by several wise advisors, Thucydides' Alcidas evinces remarkably bad judgment and is guilty of a coward's brutality.

Thucydides says in 1.22.4 that his audience will comprise "those who will want to study the clear and certain truth" of the events described in his History. Reading his text will be an intellectual experience. In fact, he suggests, his work will attract only those readers desirous of studying, and capable of apprehending, its paradigms. A deep knowledge of those patterns in history will, in turn, enable a better comprehension of each reader's own time. This understanding will be intellectual and perhaps moral. It is not meant, in my view, to be practical in the sense that it will teach political lessons to aspiring leaders.<sup>85</sup> Thucydides' History contains far more human error and tragedy than positive models. His audience, he knew, would be smaller than those of the poets and logographers, but it would be select: like Plato, he believed that only the few could truly understand.<sup>86</sup>

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85) For the contrary view, see, for example, Erbse 1989, 134–177, originally published in *Gymnasium* 76 (1969) 393–416.

86) Cf. Lendle 1990, 235: "Der Nutzen aber, den sein Werk stiftet, ist dauerhaft. Er vermittelt Erkenntnisse, die ein Leben lang zur Verfügung stehen als ein geistiger Schatz von Gesichtspunkten, mit deren Hilfe der Leser das Herannahen und den Ablauf eines Krieges, in den er vielleicht noch einmal verwickelt werden wird, schon vorab analysieren kann." Note also 235 n. 9: "Der Begriff κτήμα kann nicht auf die undifferenzierte Masse der Menschheit als solche, sondern nur auf Einzelpersonen bezogen werden, wobei zusätzlich der Gesichtspunkt des aktiven Erwerbs der in Besitz übergehenden Sache durch den jeweiligen Besitzer eine Rolle spielt."

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