

History, Myth, and Audience in Thucydides: Harmodius and Aristogeiton

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ABSTRACT

SARAH MILLER: *History, Myth, and Audience in Thucydides: Harmodius and Aristogeiton*
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Thucydides' critique of history's reception in the proem of book 1 is meant to have a rhetorical effect upon his own history's recipients: he aims his proem at a sophisticated and self-interested audience that wants to demonstrate its interest in accurate knowledge, as opposed to flattering τὸ μυθῶδες. Thucydides subsequently employs speeches to dramatize the Athenians' relationship to historical and political knowledge, showing how confusions engendered by the political rhetoric of Pericles' funeral oration climax in the principled self-ignorance displayed in the Herms and Mysteries trials of 415. Through this dramatization of the problems with the Athenians' relationship to knowledge, especially in his double treatment of the politically charged Harmodius and Aristogeiton story, Thucydides moves his readers away from the assumptions that he attributes to them at the start of his composition, and educates them in the significance of the absence of τὸ μυθῶδες from his histories.

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Introduction

Thucydides tells the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton twice (1.20, 6.53-6.59).¹ In the proem to his composition, Thucydides challenges Athenian self-knowledge by criticizing the accuracy of one of Athens' founding myths, the story of the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton (1.20).² At the same time, he invites his reader to eschew the tendentious errors of careless popular tradition in favor of his own carefully researched history (1.21-1.22). In book six, Thucydides returns to the tyrannicides story, claiming that the story itself, as popularly understood, accounts for the Athenians' frame of mind as they respond to the profanation of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms in 415. The approach to history that leads the Athenians to misunderstand the tyrannicides story is then mirrored in their approach to testimony in the trials. In this way, Thucydides uses the affair of the Herms and the Mysteries to illustrate the issues that were under discussion in book one's proem.³

¹ Meyer 2008: 13-15 summarizes the scholarship on the two passages.

² Euben 1997: 67, Ludwig 2002: 159.

³ Meyer 2008 analyzes how the Harmodius and Aristogeiton digression of book six exemplifies the approach to history that Thucydides advocates in the proem of book one, while the narrative

Why do the Athenians misremember and misunderstand history?

Thucydides' methodological digression traces both inadvertent and deliberate sources of corruption within the historical record, but also distinguishes between a desire for a clear knowledge of the things that happened, and a desire for the embellishment and flattery typical of historical myth. In the proem, the distinction between these two kinds of history, and the two kinds of readers that correspond, appears neat. In the narrative that follows, however, this distinction is blurred and confused, as the Athenians appear to want to combine accurate history that can be subjected to analysis and interpreted in relation to real, present events, and myth that can be emulated and understood despite factual inconsistencies, falsehoods, or fabrications. Thucydides' reader is thus led to see the distinctions not simply between history and myth, but between history treated as history, and history received as myth, myth received as myth, and myth treated as history.

of the Herms and Mysteries trials show how badly the Athenians go wrong when they attempt to learn from history's example without first ascertaining what, historically, happened, and what its significance really is (see especially Meyer 2008: 31-32). In Meyer, the lesson for Thucydides' reader is that clarity and precision are integral to the significance of history, and that the reader has a responsibility to apply history's lessons well and not poorly (Meyer 2008: 33-34). Meyer sees the Athenians as sharing Thucydides' approach to history, with the exception of his painstaking methodology; in this view, a disregard for accuracy eventually opens the door to partiality, rather than partiality motivating the first instances of inaccuracy (Meyer 2008: 27-30).

Chapter I. Thucydides' Critique of Hearsay History

Thucydides' critique of history's reception occurs within the methodological digression located within the proem to book 1. This discussion of methodology digresses from the Archeology, Thucydides' brief summary of the early history of Greece, designed to indicate its historical unimportance relative to the Peloponnesian War. Herodotus had already begun his *Histories* with the Persians' demythologized rendition of the stories of Io, Europe, Medea, and Helen.⁴ Thucydides goes farther in the same direction by deromanticizing even the parts of the tradition that remained historically possible. The role of individual human actors is minimized, and the impetus of political allegiance and economic advantage is emphasized, as Thucydides pares down the traditional accounts to meet his standards of plausibility and likelihood.⁵ The

⁴ Dewald 1999: 225-227.

⁵ Hunter 1982: 100-107 discusses the distinctive aspects of Thucydides' approach to early Greek history. Observing that Thucydides, like Herodotus, treats mythical legends as if they had a basis in history, and the characters who appear in myths as if they were real people, she concludes that "one cannot discover in the works of Herodotus and Thucydides a distinction between historical and mythical time" (Hunter 1982: 103). On the contrary, Thucydides' conviction that "the past is similar to the present" leads him to explicate even the mythical past in light of the present, in a reverse of the process which he recommends to his reader in dealing with the future (Hunter 1982: 102-103).

resulting impression of early Greek history is “unheroic.”⁶ The personalities of its actors, their individual experiences, and most of the contingencies of their choices and fortunes are, as far as Thucydides is concerned, lost, along with the precise and accurate records that Thucydides would sooner have preserved.

Thucydides summarizes the Archeology with an acknowledgment that it is difficult to trust each and every bit of evidence concerning the distant past: τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἤϋρον, χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι (1.20.1). If the things that are difficult to believe include parts of Thucydides’ account, the statement functions as a kind of disclaimer for the Archeology, for a reader who doubts its claims. On this reading, Thucydides is anticipating his discussion of the importance of cross-examination, by inviting his reader to share his discomfort with very old traditions. Thucydides introduced the Archeology with a similar disclaimer (1.1.3) and cited Homer only with reservations (1.9.4, 1.10.3), so his reader is prepared for this kind of caveat. If, however, the reader’s reaction to the Archeology is not skepticism over what it contains, but disappointment at what it omits, this statement can also be taken as Thucydides’ explanation for excluding and downplaying the both the mythical and the romantic elements of the traditional stories. Again, the best examples concern the Trojan War: he downplays the oath to defend Helen, emphasizes that only a lack

⁶ Dewald 1999: 236-237, citing Connor 1984: 25-28.

of funds made the war long and difficult, and argues that the expedition represented pressure from powerful Mycenae, not a pan-Hellenic cooperative effort (1.9.1; 1.11.2). To the reader who already regrets the absence of these stories, Thucydides will excuse and defend his own approach.

In the following sentence, Thucydides claims that men take from each other hearsay about things that have happened, even things regarding their own country, without examination: οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι τὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν

προγεγενημένων, καὶ ἣν ἐπιχώρια σφίσιν ἦ, ὁμοίως ἀβασανίστως παρ' ἀλλήλων δέχονται (1.20.1).⁷ The ἦν...ὁμοίως construction expresses

Thucydides' opinion: men should judge the accuracy of things that have happened in their own country, at least. The criticism appears twofold: men should care enough at least about their own country to concern themselves with the accuracy of its history, and second, men in their own country have better access to the evidence against which historical accounts can be checked, and therefore less of an excuse. The conclusion of the passage accordingly focuses on the effort involved in achieving accuracy: οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἐπιτοῖμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται (1.20.3). The prevalence of the inaccuracies that Thucydides has just corrected proves how

⁷ Greek text taken from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* at the University of California, Irving, through subscription provided by University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

careless (ἀταλαίπωρος) is most men's inquiry into truth. Instead, they turn to what is close at hand (τὰ ἐτοῖμα). The reason for the inaccuracies of the popular tradition seems to be a combination of apathy and sloth: hearers are easily contented, and avoid the labor of examining what they are hearing.

The entire digression upon history, its reception, and Thucydides' own methods and goals occurs between Thucydides' two brief summaries of the Persian War (1.23).⁸ Just as Herodotus used a retelling of the Trojan War to situate his histories in relation to Homer, Thucydides uses his retelling of Greek history to situate his composition in relation to Homer and Herodotus.

Thucydides explicitly introduces his account of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton episode as a correction of the story believed by most Athenians on the basis of hearsay (ἀκοή), Herodotus' most frequently cited source.⁹ Whereas Herodotus constructs a large part of his *Histories* by recounting people's stories about their past, Thucydides mentions the Athenian version of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story only to subject it to analysis and refute its errors.¹⁰ The accusation of slipshod research, then, falls off Herodotus' back, insofar as he never treats the stories as precisely accurate historical accounts. Dewald 1999

⁸ Hornblower 1991: 57-58.

⁹ Murray 2001: 16-44.

¹⁰ Dewald 1999: 236; Luraghi 2001: 150.

states it eloquently: “Herodotus [... emphasizes] that it is only on the level of the logos itself that he vouches for the reality of what he conveys—these are, he says, real stories, really told him by others.”¹¹ It is not simply that Herodotus relies on hearsay while Thucydides does not, but that Thucydides is less interested in the significance of oral and popular traditions, and more interested in constructing a single coherent analysis of events which are recent and well-known enough for him to support the claim of factual precision.

Not too surprisingly, then, Herodotus’ account of the myth of the tyrannicides (Hdt. 5.55, 6.121-123) agrees with Thucydides’ account as it is presented here. While Thucydides tells us that Athenians think Hipparchus was the tyrant, Herodotus, like Thucydides, identifies Hipparchus as the brother to the tyrant Hippias (Hdt. 5.55).¹² The Athenians persisted in getting the story wrong despite Herodotus. In Thucydides’ second example of erroneous knowledge of contemporary facts, he appears to be correcting Herodotus when he addresses how many votes are held by the Spartan kings (Hdt. 6.57.5): not two apiece, but one each. Herodotus’ statement, however, is ambiguous: he says that the Spartan kings receive two votes – he may well mean two votes between

¹¹ Dewald 1999: 246

¹² Stanton 1990: 121.

them.¹³ Thucydides would then be criticizing Herodotus more for ambiguity than ignorance.

Thucydides' final example targets Herodotus 9.53.2, where Herodotus refers to the Pitane λόχος of the Lacedaimonian army, which Thucydides here insists does not exist. A modern verdict has not been reached as to which historian is correct; Hornblower 1990, perhaps picking up on the essential character of Thucydides' critique of his predecessor, suggests that, even if Thucydides is correct, Herodotus "may have been speaking loosely."¹⁴ While this may be more than Thucydides would be willing to grant, even by Thucydides' reckoning, Herodotus is not so much poorly researched as frequently loose or ambiguous, and Thucydides' criticisms fall hard upon Herodotus' readers for misunderstanding what they have "heard" from a casual reception of his *Histories*. The criticism of οἱ...ἄνθρωποι (1.20.1) and τοῖς πολλοῖς (1.20.3) is meant to be taken broadly, and includes the recipients (δέχονται, 1.20.1) as well as the sharers of such traditions.¹⁵ Hearers, as well as speakers, are being implicated here.

¹³ Hornblower 1991: 57.

¹⁴ Hornblower 1990: 57-58.

¹⁵ Plant 1999: 70-71.

False stories about the past are perpetuated when audiences are careless and easy to please, but the question remains of how such false stories begin. Thucydides' second criticism of historical recollection as it functions in Athens is a criticism of those who deliberately corrupt the tradition: poets adorn the past to make it greater, and logographers are concerned with what is pleasing upon being heard rather than with what is true: ὡς ποιηταὶ ὑμνήκασι περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες [...] ὡς λογογράφοι ξυνέθεσαν ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῆ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον (1.21.1). Accordingly, Thucydides has not trusted these sources at their word, but has relied upon the plainest evidence (τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων σημείων, 1.21.1) instead. The ἐπὶ τὸ phrases are revealing: the corruptions introduced by poets and logographers stem from what they are trying to accomplish by recounting the past. That is, the embellishments of the poets produce exaggeration (ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον, 1.21.1), presumably to lend importance to their themes,¹⁶ and the errors of the logographers stem from a desire to influence their audience (ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον, 1.21.1).¹⁷ Whereas at 1.20, it was apathy and lack of effort that perpetuated inaccurate historical traditions, here a positive origin of corruption is identified: some purveyors of the historical tradition have little to gain from accuracy, and much to gain from

¹⁶ Thucydides earlier uses the same words in the Archeology to qualify his reliance on Homer in particular (ἦν εἰκὸς ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον μὲν ποιητὴν ὄντα κοσμήσαι, 1.10.3).

¹⁷ Actual competition for prizes may be what is meant here; cf. the ἀγώνισμα at 1.22.3.

impressing or pleasing audiences at accuracy's expense. It is not only that hearers do not bother to check their facts and believe whatever is ready at hand; there is something else they want to hear more than they want to hear the facts, and poets and logographers are happy to provide it.¹⁸

Perpetuators of the historical tradition like poets and logographers introduce some inaccuracies, but others exist at its origin in firsthand experience. Thucydides acknowledges two separate sources of misinformation from eyewitnesses: partisanship and failures of memory: οἱ παρόντες τοῖς ἔργοις ἑκάστοις οὐ ταῦτα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔλεγον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἑκατέρων τις εὐνοίας ἢ μνήμης ἔχοι (1.22.3). This acknowledgment of the limitations of memory adds another dimension to the critique of hearsay at 1.21. Eyewitnesses are unable to remember their own experiences with precision and accuracy; even memories of firsthand experience require evidence, let alone secondhand reports. The role of partisanship in shaping eyewitness accounts reflects the shaping effect of poetry and logography, but it also reflects the willingness of audiences to receive a pleasing account. The limitations of memory leave room for even eyewitnesses later to accept falsified accounts of their own experiences. Forgetfulness, bias, poetic exaggeration, and rhetorical flattery are all sources of falsity in the

¹⁸ The "hearing" (τῇ ἀκροάσει) echoes the "hearsay" at the beginning of the passage. See Woodman 1988: 7-8 on Thucydides' use of ring composition.

historical record, and they are perpetuated by men's carelessness with regard to accuracy, and men's appetite for grandeur (in poetry), gratification (in speeches), and affirmation (in partisanship).¹⁹

These criticisms of history's tellers and hearers are meant to have a rhetorical effect upon Thucydides' own audience as well. The rhetoric of Thucydides' proem appeals to someone who wants to know what really happened, in contradistinction to the ignorant and indiscriminate crowd (Ἀθηναίων πλῆθος, 1.20.2; τοῖς πολλοῖς, 1.20.3) who turn to whatever is at hand (τὰ ἐτοιμα, 1.20.3). Shorey 1893 observes the importance that Thucydides' (especially non-Spartan) Greeks place upon being considered intelligent and knowledgeable in areas relevant to their own interests.²⁰ This is most apparent in the persuasive speeches, where appeals to intelligence and knowledge frequently replace other aspects of an ethical argument,²¹ and where rhetorical consideration

¹⁹ Flory 1990 observes that an "element of praise, self-praise, or flattery is present or strongly implied whenever Thucydides mentions pleasure in words" (Flory 1990: 198), as opposed to the gratification of curiosity or mere entertainment.

²⁰ Shorey 1893: 75-80. Shorey quotes especially the excursus on stasis at 3.82.8: ὅαον δ' οἱ πολλοὶ κακοῦργοι ὄντες δεξιῶν κέκληνται ἢ ἀμαθεῖς ἀγαθοί, καὶ τῶ μὲν αἰσχύνονται, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶ ἀγάλλονται. Shorey wants to implicate Thucydides in a comparable disdain, as, for example, in his treatment of Nicias, Shorey 1893: 87). But it is possible to take a similarly skeptical stance towards Thucydides' praise of the characters, "Archidamus, Themistocles, Theseus, Pericles, Hermocrates, and Phrynichus," who, unlike Nicias, are described as οὐκ ἀξύνετος (Shorey 1893: 76).

²¹ E.g., the first speech at 1.140-145, where, despite frequent self-person reference, Pericles appeals to his policy and judgment, not (or not explicitly) his person. The speeches of Cleon and Diodotus at 3.37-49 (discussed in Chapter 2) address directly the issues of flattery and displays of

of the audience frequently takes the form of acknowledging (or challenging) their existing knowledge and understanding.²² Pericles' speeches in particular mirror aspects of Thucydides' own narrative voice,²³ while appealing to an audience that respects intellectual abstraction and desires knowledge as an aid to self-sufficiency.²⁴ Connor 1984 describes Thucydides' rhetoric in similar terms: "Thucydides' history is unquestionably aimed at an audience that values cleverness, sophistication, intellect, and self-interest."²⁵

The reader who is seeking τὸ μυθῶδες may be disappointed (καὶ ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτεροπέστερον φανεῖται, 1.22.4), but Thucydides can do without him. Thucydides does not, of course, really want the reader primarily interested in τὸ μυθῶδες to put down the scroll. The rhetorical effect is to challenge the reader to be or become the reader Thucydides hopes for, the reader who will want to see a clear account of things: ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν (1.22.4). Thucydides, then, aims his proem

intelligence in oratory. The speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades at 6.9-19 both rely heavily upon the ethical argument, but with oblique logic respectively characteristic of each.

²² The Lacedaimonians take pains to explicitly compliment the knowledge and intelligence of their Athenian audience at 4.17.3. Alcibiades alternates between defending his character and asserting his knowledge in his speech to the Lacedaimonians at 6.89-92.

²³ Dewald 1999: "Pericles is assigned the only focalized voice within the narrative that in force and scope resembles that of the Thucydides-narrator himself" (Dewald 1999: 243).

²⁴ See especially Pericles on Athenian and Spartan education (2.37.3, 2.39.1).

²⁵ Connor 1984: 15. Connor continues, importantly, "but it does not simply affirm and reinforce those values."

at a sophisticated and self-interested audience that will want to except itself from his generalizations by demonstrating an interest in accurate knowledge – an interest readily demonstrable by reading the remainder of Thucydides’ work. The rhetorical effect of Thucydides’ criticisms of history’s “hearers” is to influence his own audience to disassociate themselves from the ignorant, the gullible, and the misinformed.

At 1.21, Thucydides describes how poetry and logography detract from the memory of past when he speaks of the latter winning its way into myth (ὄντα ἀνεξέλεγκτα καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ χρόνου αὐτῶν ἀπίστως ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες ἐκνενηκότηα, 1.21.1). Flory 1990 provides an account of Thucydides’ use of ἐκνενηκότηα at 1.21.1 as a parallel to ἐκνηκῆσαι at 1.3.2, where the name “Hellene” conquers (ἐκνηκῆσαι) its contenders for the name of all the Greeks.²⁶ The implication is that these stories likewise “won” their way into myth by vanquishing alternative accounts. This interpretation explains some part of Thucydides’ adamancy despite the fact that he never “banishes the poets.” The problem arises when mythologized legend competes with accurate historical record. Thucydides’ division of his internal audience into the seekers of τὸ μυθῶδες and the seekers τὸ σαφές (1.22.4) underscores his consistent treatment of these desiderata as separate and distinct.

²⁶ Flory 1990: 200.

Thucydides returns to the concept of τὸ μυθῶδες at 1.22.4, where he comments on the absence of τὸ μυθῶδες from his own work. The omission of direct divine involvement, fantastic elements, and legendary inventions from historical narratives is already unsurprising in a historical writer; either Thucydides is contending that his composition should be preferred to poetry, or τὸ μυθῶδες refers to something that would be unsurprising in a historian. Stewart Flory has argued that τὸ μυθῶδες, the sort of stories produced by poetic exaggeration and logography, are best understood to be “patriotic stories in particular and sentimental chauvinism in general.”²⁷ This explains the relation between the deliberate omission of τὸ μυθῶδες (1.22.4), Thucydides’ own painstaking methodology (1.21-1.22), and his criticisms of those whose patriotism or sentimentality results in the loss of factually precise historical traditions. A careless reliance on hearsay allows falsehoods to be perpetuated even in contradiction to evidence that is being ignored. But the falsehoods themselves arise not only from mistakes and poor memory, but also from partisans, poets, and logographers, and from the audiences who desire these partisan, exaggerated, and flattering accounts. Understanding τὸ μυθῶδες in this

²⁷ Flory 1990: 194. Flory concludes that Thucydides is concerned about the influence of pleasure-oriented stories on their hearers: “As we might expect of a soldier educated by the sophists, the only kind of dangerous pleasure of which Thucydides takes account, using *τέρψις*, *ἡδύς*, and related language, is pleasure in the rhetoric of speeches that prove politically or militarily damaging” (Flory 1990: 198).

sense, the fact takes on greater significance that, as an example of a historical account corrupted through hearsay, Thucydides chooses the patriotic and sentimental story of the tyrannicides.

Chapter II. Myth and Speeches in Wartime Athens

Thucydides' proem recommends his composition as useful to the reader who wants to consider the things that really happened and are likely to recur in a similar fashion (1.22.4). At the same time, the proem rhetorically appeals to readers who are eager to appear sophisticated, intelligent, knowledgeable, and self-reliant, in part by implicitly demeaning readers who prefer to be flattered and entertained. The reader projected by the rhetoric of the proem believes that the first two categories are the same, and that they are together exclusive of the third category. That is, the projected reader believes that he is the same as the reader who is interested in what really happened, and that he has nothing in common with the rejected reader who is only interested in τὸ μυθῶδες. These neat divisions break down as Thucydides develops his portrayal of Athenian public discourse during the time of the Peloponnesian War. As politics and speech affect one another in turn during this politically challenging period in Athenian history, it becomes apparent that Thucydides recounts the Harmodius and Aristogeiton myth in his proem not only because it is patriotic and sentimental, but because it is a foundation myth for the Athenian democracy in particular. Through the persuasive speeches, understood in context, and the

dramatization of how the Athenians of his narrative relate to knowledge, Thucydides will later move his own readers away from the assumptions that he here attributes to them in the proem, towards a view that is more consistent with his description of the ideal reader at 1.22.4.

Marathon and Salamis

Besides the Harmodius and Aristogeiton stories themselves, these developments in Athenian democracy and rhetoric appear chiefly in Thucydides' speeches. Thucydides has already called attention to these speeches in the middle of the proem's methodological digression, possibly signaling their special importance in addition to explaining them on a methodological level (1.22.1). Dewald 1999 shows that Thucydides, who elsewhere typically maintains a single, coherent narrative voice, locates independent voices in the speeches.²⁸ The speeches thus frequently approach history from a different perspective than Thucydides' own. The speeches also interrelate to one another, and often to the proem of book 1 as well.²⁹ Thucydides allows these alternative perspectives to

²⁸ Dewald 1999: 240-246.

²⁹ In Macleod's analysis (Macleod 1983: 385-386), of Thucydides' speeches as having a rhetorical, a dramatic, and a historical aspect, this would be the historical. Stahl, in the 2003 English translation of his 1966 book, speaks of "speech complexes" (Stahl 2003: 122). Morrison 2006: 14-15 describes the experience of reading the speeches in relation to one another.

compete with one another by letting the speeches, as if inadvertently on the part of the speaker, echo and distort one another throughout his work.

The first speech that Thucydides gives to the Athenians contains the prime example of recent history that had nevertheless won its way into τὸ μυθῶδες: the battles of Marathon and Salamis. Already in Herodotus, appeals to the battle of Marathon supercede previous historical events in Athens' international relations (Hdt. 9.27.5). In the Athenian speech provided by Thucydides, the Athenians filter the historical battles through a partisan lens, revealing a perspective on history quite different from Thucydides'. At 1.73, an Athenian embassy to Lacedaimon overhears the Corinthians pressuring Lacedaimon to invade Attica. The Athenians want to indicate the power of Athens, to remind (ὑπόμνησιν ποιήσασθαι) the elders of things they know, and inform the younger men of things they do not know. Their goal is to make the Lacedaimonians think twice about invading Attica, and to move them in the direction of peace (1.73.1). The things known to the elders and not experienced by the young men turn out to be the battles of the Persian Wars (1.73.4). The Athenians denigrate hearsay and ill-preserved history of the distant past in favor of the memory of eyewitnesses, much as Thucydides does at 1.21. But where Thucydides is interested in the testimony of eyewitnesses as one approach to τὸ

σαφές, the Athenians use the appeal rhetorically, to insinuate that the legends should not even need to be repeated (1.73.2):

Καὶ τὰ μὲν πάνυ παλαιὰ τί δεῖ λέγειν, ὧν ἀκοαὶ μᾶλλον λόγων
μάρτυρες ἢ ὄψεις τῶν ἀκουσομένων; τὰ δὲ Μηδικὰ καὶ ὅσα αὐτοὶ
ξύνιστε,
εἰ καὶ δι' ὄχλου μᾶλλον ἔσται αἰεὶ προβαλλομένοις, ἀνάγκη λέγειν.

It is, in fact, necessary to speak to an audience of events it itself experienced, if you are rewriting those events as national legend.

The tendentiousness of the Athenian account is not subtle (1.73.4): φημὲν γὰρ Μαραθῶνί τε μόνοι προκινδυνεῦσαι τῷ βαρβάρῳ. The claim that the Athenians alone fought at Marathon is false,³⁰ but flattering: it contributes to the Athenians' view of their threefold importance: they had the largest number of ships, the most intelligent general, and the most unwavering zeal (1.74.1). Orwin 1988 contrasts the Athenians' intention as Thucydides states it (to make a demonstration of Athenian power) with the Athenians' intention as they announce it in their speech (to justify Athenian empire). The justification itself, Orwin suggests, can be read as a display of boldness and power. The falsehood itself is a show of strength, and is understood as such. This is rhetoric reshaping events, not recounting them. Similarly, the excuse that the Athenians give themselves at 1.73.2 (εἰ καὶ δι' ὄχλου μᾶλλον ἔσται αἰεὶ προβαλλομένοις),

³⁰ Hornblower 1990: 118 cites K. R. Walters, "We Fought Alone at Marathon': Historical Falsification in the Attic Funeral Speech'. *Rh. Mus.* 124: 204ff.

which seems to acknowledge that appeals to Marathon and Salamis are beginning to wear thin, can be interpreted as a statement of confidence that wherever the rhetoric is weak, force makes up for the difference.

The double purpose of demonstrating Athenian power and justifying Athenian empire can be located within the mythologized versions of the stories of Marathon and Salamis as well, insofar as they function as foundation narratives for Athenian imperial identity. Exaggerating Athens' victory contributes to Athenian confidence against foreign enemies. The story of Athens saving Greece from the Persians justifies the Athenian empire by the argument that the Athenian empire, in acting for its own good, benefits all Greece. In this way, the Athenian victories in the Persian Wars serve as foundation myths for Athenian imperialism, exemplifying both its character and role.³¹³²

Harmodius and Aristogeiton

Just as the popular versions of the battles of Marathon and Salamis served as foundation myth for the Athenian empire, a version of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story served as a foundation myth for democratic Athens. In the

³¹ De Romilly 1979: 244-248 contrasts the appeals to history, traditional rhetoric, and relatively modest claims of this Athenian assembly with Euphemus' defense of Athenian imperialism at 6.1.82-6.1.86.

³² Orwin 1988: 74.

simplest and most mythologized version of the story, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, motivated by offense at a personal insult,³³ killed the reigning tyrant Hipparchus and thereby restored the democracy.³⁴ The general impression that Harmodius and Aristogeiton restored democracy by ending tyranny is supported by popular, oral tradition, lending a more technical connotation to the ἀκοή of Thucydides' proem.

Among our most noteworthy sources are four verse scolia.³⁵ Three of the songs state that Harmodius and Aristogeiton slew the tyrant, identify the tyrant as Hipparchus, and credit the tyrant slayers with making Athens isonomous (ἰσονόμους τ' Ἀθήνας ἐποιησάτην).³⁶ The fourth consigns the heroes to the Blessed Isles. In the *Lysistrata*, the men suspect that the women are being used in a plot to reinstate tyranny in Athens, and respond with bravado explicitly imitative of the tyrannicides, including the singing of a similar song (*Lysistrata*

³³ Thucydides himself is our first written source for Harmodius and Aristogeiton's motivation. The motivation for the murder seems overdetermined in Thucydides' account (Harmodius and Aristogeiton are insulted when Hipparchus twice propositions Harmodius, and then Harmodius is again offended when his sister is dishonored by exclusion from a festival); this suggests that he is drawing from preexisting traditions.

³⁴ Anderson 2003: 204-206 prefers *restored* to *founded*: "[a]ccording to the prevailing logic, because the tyrants had only to be removed for the normal course of Athenian constitutional history to be resumed, Harmodius and Aristogeiton were themselves directly responsible for the recent political change" (Anderson 2003: 205-206).

³⁵ Taylor 1981 cites D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* 1962: 474-475, nos. 893-896, Oxford), discussed in Taylor 1981: 22 and Raaflaub 2003: 65.

³⁶ Translation Taylor 1981: 22.

618-635).³⁷ Monoson 2000 discusses references to the tyrannicides in Aeschines' *Against Timarchus* and Plato's *Symposium*, both of which reflect popular emphasis on the idea that Harmodius and Aristogeiton saved Athens and ended the tyrant's reign, while focusing on the erotic relationship between the two heroes.³⁸

In Thucydides' day, the tyrannicides were officially commemorated by a hero cult and by a statue group positioned prominently within the agora.³⁹ Descendants of their families were honored by *sitesis* (the decree granting this right may have been passed by Pericles).⁴⁰ The popular tradition is well summarized by an epigram believed to have been inscribed upon base of the statue group:

ἦ μέγ' Ἀθηναίοισι φόως γένεθ', ἦνικ' Ἀριστο-
γείτων Ἴππαρχον κτεῖνε καὶ Ἀρμόδιος.⁴¹

³⁷ Later, Lysistrata, ignoring the popular tyrannicide myth, reminds the Athenians of the historical fact that the Lacedaimonians deposed Athens' tyrants, in order to reconcile the Athenians with the Spartans, on the basis of this past favor (Lysisistra 1149-1161). Aristophanes is apparently making a joke that hinges on the two versions of the tyrannicide story: the elite, civilized, accurate historical account that serves diplomacy (however twisted Lysistrata's interpretation of the account may be), and the vulgar myth that serves as a nominally violent rallying cry for drunk troublemakers.

³⁸ Monoson 2000: 37-38.

³⁹ Taylor 1981, *passim*. Monoson 2000: 24-27, 32-33 summarizes the sources.

⁴⁰ Loraux 2006: 57.

⁴¹ A fragment of the statue base of the Kritios and Nesiotes group erected in the Athenian agora matches this epigram attributed to Simonides (B. D. Meritt 1936: *Hesperia* 5, 358, discussed in Taylor 1981: 32).

Hipparchus' death at the hands of the tyrant slayers is described as a new dawn for the Athenians. What did this dawning light reveal? Monoson 2000, Wohl 2002, and Ludwig 2002 have recently examined the function of this story as a foundation myth. First and foremost, by falsely identifying the Hipparchus as the tyrant, this story exaggerated the effectiveness of Harmodius and Aristogeiton's deed and imagined that the power to defend democracy lay in the hands of individual Athenian citizens.⁴² At the same time, it provided an abstract enemy ("tyrants") against which Athens could continue to define itself.⁴³ While Harmodius and Aristogeiton's motivations were private, their action served the public good; thus, "the story [...] placed before the Athenians a model of benefaction that resolved the potential for conflict between a citizen's public and private loyalties."⁴⁴

Monoson 1994 makes the argument that the recognition of the private, erotic motivation of Harmodius and Aristogeiton's action is not absent from the popular account. She describes the democratic ideology associated with

⁴² McGlew 1993: 155-156.

⁴³ Monoson 2000: 29, Wohl 2002: 224. Additionally, the heroes themselves lacked political ambition and could never be suspected of tyrannical inclinations of their own (Monoson 2000: 29).

⁴⁴ Monoson 2000: 37. Monoson cites as evidence Aeschines' defense of pederasty (*Against Timarchus* 132), and Pausanias' defense of pederasty in Plato's *Symposium* (182c). Both texts postdate Thucydides, but Stewart 1997: 73 describes the homoerotic content already present in the statuary (Wohl 2002: 5, Monoson 2000: 38).

pederastic *eros*: the lover is “active, manly, self-controlled and vigorous,”⁴⁵ the *eromenos* is “active, demanding, and self-controlled,” and their relationship is described by “mutuality and reciprocity between nonequals.”⁴⁶ The tyrant’s *eros*, by contrast, is imagined to be transgressive and insatiable.⁴⁷ In terms of dramatic roles, the tyrant is the figure who comes between the citizen and what he wants, and the tyrannicide is the man who defends his desire in the best interests of the state.⁴⁸ Monoson’s association of pederasty and democratic ideals is based primarily on the speeches given to Pericles by Thucydides. Pericles’ political rhetoric is remarkable in combining both aristocratic and democratic strains. Insofar as the Harmodius and Aristogeiton myth combines a formalized aristocratic tradition of controlled pederasty with democratic ideology, it does the same.

Pericles

In the proem to book 1, Thucydides criticizes the flattering, pleasure-oriented and partisan historical accounts prevalent among the careless and

⁴⁵ Monoson 1994: 260. Monoson is discussing Pericles’ metaphor of the citizenry as *erastes*, and the city as *eromenos*, but her general observations apply (Monoson 1994: 257, 260-261).

⁴⁶ Monoson 1994: 263.

⁴⁷ Wohl 2002: 153-154; 226-267.

⁴⁸ Wohl 2002: 9; Ludwig 2002: 161.

ignorant, such as the democratic foundation myth of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. At the same time, he describes his own composition in terms designed to appeal to an audience that considers itself intellectual and self-interested. Pericles' funeral oration is addressed to this same self-interested, intellectually engaged, skeptical, and knowledge-hungry audience. Pericles' language in describing Athens' greatness recalls Thucydides' methodological discussion in book 1, and he seems to be expressing the same sentiments. Athens' reputation is supported by the facts themselves, just as the facts themselves indicate that the Peloponnesian War is greatest (1.21.2). Pericles criticizes poets for the same defects that Thucydides criticizes in them, and he appeals instead to evidence: in place of poetry, Athens has great signs (μεγάλων δὲ σημείων) and "not unwitnessed" power, and has everywhere left eternal monuments (μνημεῖα... αἰδία), whether of good or of bad (2.41.4). According to the proem, consulting local monuments to confirm or critique hearsay history is just what Thucydides would have Athenians do.

While Pericles predicates self-interest, intellectualism, and skepticism of his audience, he further identifies these qualities as specifically Athenian and originating in the democratic Athenian constitution and the opportunities afforded by empire (2.37-40, 2.42.1). Csapo and Miller 1998 distinguish an aristocratic view of time, which focuses on foundation myths, ancestors, and

heroes of the past, from a democratic view of time, which is linear, rational, and future oriented.⁴⁹ Pericles' oration represents an extreme of democratic imagination: he scarcely addresses the past (e.g., he passes over the Athenian ancestors in a few lines, 2.36), is most interested in relatively timeless rational abstractions (e.g., his stated topic at 2.36.4), and moves quickly and readily from the concrete present to the future (e.g., his eulogy of the deceased at 2.42-2.43). The funeral oration establishes the connection between the projected audience of Thucydides' proem and the narrative strand concerning political discourse that runs through his composition. The Athenian embassy defended the Athenian empire on the basis of universal human character (1.75.5; 1.76.2-3); Pericles defends the empire on the basis of this unique Athenian character, which entitles them to an empire that others do not deserve. As Pericles would have it, the projected reader of Thucydides' proem is a democratic Athenian.

Mytilenian debate

Pericles' funeral oration creates an idealized Athenian who is self-interested, intellectual, and sophisticated, just like the projected reader of Thucydides' proem. Cleon's speech in the Mytilenian debate criticizes the post-Periclean democratic audience in terms that recall the proem's criticisms of

⁴⁹ Csapo and Miller 1998: 90-104.

history's corrupters. Whereas the proem opposes the self-interested, intellectual reader who will find Thucydides' work useful to the pleasure-oriented, ignorant, and careless reader who will find it dull, Cleon's speech makes the argument that self-interest and a desire to be intellectual can also produce a pleasure-oriented, ignorant, and careless audience. Cleon and Diodotus' debate thus complicates the proem's opposition between the careless, short-sighted, and pleasure-oriented, and the examined, time-tested, and useful, while more explicitly associating characteristics of the Athenians' relationship to knowledge with their democratic experience and identity. At the same time, Thucydides raises the standards for his reader, by clarifying the potential problems with these Periclean tendencies when it comes to the reception of *logoi*.

Thucydides' proem associates a pleasure-seeking approach to history with the exaggeration of poets and the flattery of logographers. Cleon takes a different view: on his account, it is the Athenians' desire to seem intellectual and self-interested that orients them toward pleasure at the expense of truth. Cleon berates the Athenians for possessing similar qualities as the audience to which Thucydides' own rhetoric appeals: a desire to be better informed and cleverer in areas of interest than those who buy into common knowledge. At 3.37.4-3.37.5, Cleon berates those Athenians characterized by cleverness and not knowing their place (*δεξιότης μετὰ ἀκολασίας*, 3.37.3) for competing with the law and with

public speakers, treating the public form as a place to show off their thought (δηλώσαντες τὴν γνώμην, 3.37.4). He summarizes the criticism with his admonition that the Athenians should not be excited by their own shrewdness and by a contest of wit (μὴ δεινότητι καὶ ξυνέσεως ἀγῶνι ἐπαιρομένους, 3.37.5). His argument is that the slow-witted man, the weaker contestant, is actually more valuable to the state (3.37.4). Cleon picks up the same theme again at 3.38.3-3.38.7, where he goes so far as to state plainly that the objectionable Athenians are despisers of familiar, customary things (ὑπερόπται δὲ τῶν εἰωθότων, 3.38.5), while reiterating his criticism of their competitive stance toward speeches (3.38.6-3.38.7).

At the same time, Cleon's criticism of the Athenians echoes certain elements of Thucydides' proem. According to Cleon, the Athenians relate to speeches like spectators, and relate to deeds like an audience, putting more trust in an appealing speech than in their own first hand experience, and simply failing to test speeches against real things, in favor of testing them against other speeches (3.38.4). Similarly, in the proem to book one, the Athenians accept historical accounts casually on the basis of hearsay, without examination (as opposed to Thucydides' own commitment to eyewitness accounts and tests of veracity, 1.22.2). The Athenians' susceptibility to fine and "spectacular" speeches likewise recalls Thucydides' criticism of history that has been altered to suit the

rhetorical purposes of the logographer and the poet. However compromised Cleon is as a speaker by the deceptive qualities of his own rhetoric, Cleon's speech first extends the possibility that the projected reader of the proem to book one is not the same as the ideal reader of 1.22.4, and even that he may not be better off than the reader who preferred stories (except insofar as he is still reading Thucydides). His criticisms also put Pericles' speeches in a different light. If the Athenians love to be treated as intellectual and self-interested, insofar as Pericles predicates these qualities of the Athenians, the charge of flattery can be leveled against him.

In response to Cleon's speech, Diodotus defends speeches and debate in general, and arguments based on self-interest in particular. He reserves his criticism for those who suspect public speakers of having ulterior motives. Cleon has preemptively accused any opposing speaker of sophistry and probable bribetaking. Diodotus attacks this suggestion as fear-mongering, and insists that the best argument should win, without negative repercussions for either the successful or the unsuccessful orator. This assertion, however, turns out to be ideal rather than prescriptive, as Diodotus then admits that the Athenians do the opposite (*ὧν ἡμεῖς τὰναντία δοῶμεν*, 3.43.1). His stated conclusion is not that the Athenians should change (though his rhetorical goal is certainly to counter any suspicion engendered by Cleon's accusation), but that any orator addressing

Athenians is compelled to lie even in promotion of beneficial and sincere advice, if he wishes to be trusted and believed (3.43.2-3.43.3). Diodotus disagrees with Cleon that the Athenians go astray by posturing as intellectual and self-interested. Instead, as he would have it, competitive jealousy and suspicion drive the Athenians to reject better advice in favor of worse. This criticism of the Athenians looks backward to 2.37, where Pericles denied that the Athenians were suspicious, and forward to the trials of the desecration of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms.

A further complication, however, arises when Diodotus' assertion of the necessity of falsehood is applied back to his own speech. While the focalization is ambiguous, the surrounding narrative invites the reader to think of the execution of the Mytilenians as both cruel and unjust. Diodotus' speech (and, as far as the *Peloponnesian War* is concerned, Diodotus himself) serves only one purpose in the narrative of events: it persuades a majority of Athenians to vote against the previous decree. If Diodotus' true motivation to spare the Mytilenians was the same as the motivation of the men who convened the assembly, then his appeals to self-interest constitute the lie and the disguise, and he may not disagree as strongly with Cleon's depiction of the Athenian audience as he makes it seem.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The argument for this reading of Diodotus is given at Orwin 1985: 146-154 and restated more strongly at Monoson and Loraux 1998: 292.

The Athenians, then, come off as badly as possible as an audience of this debate, and the effectiveness of each speaker's rhetoric is reflected in the vote, which is nearly split. There is no other indication of how the Athenians received the claim that lies are necessary to speak to them; we are left with Diodotus' grim view of the complete breakdown of the free and open honesty that Pericles had insisted characterized Athenian public life.

Chapter III. Hearsay History vs. Thucydides' Corrected Account

The simplest and most mythologized version of the tyrannicide story, in which Harmodius and Aristogeiton save Athenian democracy, is never explicitly acknowledged by Thucydides.⁵¹ His treatment of the story tacitly corrects the popular myth believed on the basis of artifacts and civil customs, but it explicitly corrects the historicized account prevalent among his own cultivated elite audience. The corruptions introduced by hearsay into the Athenian historicized account are misidentification of the slain man as the tyrant (1.20.2, 6.54.2), misunderstanding of the character of the tyranny (6.54.5-55.4), and, implicitly, misevaluation of Harmodius and Aristogeiton's response (1.20.2, 6.56.3, 57.2-3). Thucydides provides the corrected historicized account, in which the slain man is the tyrant's brother, the tyrant rules well until his brother is killed, and Harmodius and especially Aristogeiton act irrationally and against everyone's best interests. The Athenian account's corruptions are significant, as they

⁵¹ Thucydides leaves the story of the tyrannicides (along with all other individual historical figures) out of his history of early Athens (1.2-19), stating plainly that it was the Lacedaimonians who deposed Athens' tyrants (1.18.1). When he introduces the story of the tyrannicides as an example of the Athenians' casual historical errors at 1.20.1, it looks as though he is going to assert the failure of Harmodius and Aristogeiton's deed to overthrow the tyranny (as Herodotus does at Hdt. 5.55). Instead, Thucydides grants the Athenians the knowledge that the Lacedaimonians were the real tyrant-deposers (6.53.3).

harmonize a historicized account with the presupposition of the mythologized story. Tyrants compete with and intrude upon citizens' desires; since Harmodius and Aristogeiton were defending themselves from tyrannical desire, therefore the man they killed had to be the tyrant. The Athenians' apparent insistence upon retaining these elements of the democratic foundation myth reveals their investment in the identity it provides.

The Athenian account described by Thucydides (both at 1.20 and in book 6) acknowledges that the Lacedaimonians were responsible for the expulsion of the tyrants, though this is the element of the story left out in popular expressions like the song of the tyrannicides. The Athenians are as well aware of this fact as they are of the tyranny's harshness (6.53.3):

ἐπιστάμενος γὰρ ὁ δῆμος ἀκοῆ τὴν Πεισιστράτου καὶ τῶν παίδων
τυραννίδα χαλεπὴν τελευτῶσαν γενομένην καὶ προσέτι οὐδ' ὑφ'
ἑαυτῶν καὶ Ἀρμόδιου καταλυθεῖσαν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων,
ἐφοβεῖτο αἰεὶ καὶ πάντα ὑπόπτως ἐλάμβανεν.

The chief difference between the Athenians' and Thucydides' account with regard to these details (and the chief corruption introduced by hearsay) appears to lie in the Athenians' assumptions about the character of the tyranny.

Thucydides, following Herodotus,⁵² asserts that the tyrants ruled well until Hipparchus was killed, and the harshness of the last years of Hippias' rule was a

⁵² Herodotus 5.55; discussed at Stanton 1990: 121.

reaction to that event.⁵³ Thucydides claims that the Athenians' inaccurate beliefs about the tyrannicide led to the paranoia with which they prosecuted suspects in the case of the Herm mutilations and the profanation of the Mysteries (6.60.1). This inference of the Athenians suggests that they retained an assumption that the Peisistratid tyranny was unbearable even prior to Hipparchus' death, and that Harmodius and Aristogeiton were responding to this harshness of the tyranny. In Stahl's words, "the Athenians have interpreted the causality erroneously,"⁵⁴ by interpreting the harshness of the Peisistratid tyranny as a cause of Harmodius and Aristogeiton's act, rather than a result. By reversing the causality, the Athenians resist the notion that the tyranny may have been basically good.

This assumption leads to the Athenian's second error: the misidentification of the tyrant (1.20.2, 6.54.2). If Hipparchus was the one who offended the heroes, their reasoning seems to go, Hipparchus must have been the tyrant, because the foundation myth had figured tyrants as the ones whose overarching desires trespass the possessions of the citizen.⁵⁵ There is also another

⁵³ Connor 1984: 177, n. 47, "Although Thucydides' account corrects Herodotus in some respects [...] it emphasizes that it was the revised or more accurate version of the Peisistratid story that in 415 led to the exaggerated fear of renewed tyranny."

⁵⁴ Stahl 2003 (1966): 8.

⁵⁵ Wohl 2002: 217-218.

argument behind the identification of Hipparchus as the tyrant, which rests on the Athenians' investment in the foundation myth's coincidence of public and private good. If Hipparchus was primary target of the heroes, Hipparchus must have been the tyrant; otherwise, Harmodius and Aristogeiton's act does not resound to the public benefit, and the Athenians would have to reconsider to what extent their own desires coincide with those of the city. The beginning of the Sicilian expedition, however, is not a time at which the Athenians are open to reexamining their private desires.⁵⁶

Thucydides knows how important it is to the Athenians that their tyrannicides have slain a tyrant. Determined to convince this audience, he goes so far as to cite his evidence (inscriptions, 6.54.7-55.2) and explicitly repeat his argument (6.55.3), both interruptions absent from typical Thucydidean narrative.⁵⁷ Meyer 2008 interprets Thucydides' appeal to evidence as providing an example of the approach to history that he advocated in the proem to book 1: he does not take hearsay at face value, but compares it to better (especially visible) sources of information, such as historical inscriptions.⁵⁸ The oddity is that the inscriptions are not conclusive; Aristotle moderates Thucydides' view,

⁵⁶ Wohl 2002: 193-195. The ἔργος, πόθος, and ἐπιθυμία fueling the Sicilian expedition are described by Thucydides at 6.24.3-4.

⁵⁷ Woodman 1988: 16.

⁵⁸ Meyer 2008: 29, 31.

concluding that Hippias was in charge, but that both brothers shared the rule.⁵⁹ Thucydides' adamancy appears to be partly rhetorical: thinking that Hipparchus was a co-regnant may not be sheer folly, but thinking that Hipparchus is tyrant simply because he was killed is so foolish that it must be countered in every way possible. On the other hand, the corrected version of the H&A story contains more detail than Thucydides' method can support, and many details seem difficult to explain except as attempts to incorporate elements of the Athenian account. For example, Aristogeiton and Harmodius are each doubly motivated, and no explanation is given why Aristogeiton should plot against Hippias and the tyranny simply because he is angry with Hipparchus. The impression is that Thucydides is granting his audience everything he considers it possible to grant – and then making the story still appear absurd.

To evaluate the difference between the Athenians' and Thucydides' account of Harmodius' and Aristogeiton' motives, it is necessary to look more closely at Thucydides' narrative of the supposed tyrannicide. The handsome young Harmodius is in a relationship with the older and less noble Aristogeiton when Hipparchus (the younger brother of the tyrant Hippias) propositions him. When Harmodius relates the fact of this unwelcome advance to Aristogeiton, the latter responds with grief and fear: ὁ δὲ ἐρωτικῶς περιαλήσας καὶ φοβηθεὶς

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 17.3.18.1.

τὴν Ἰππάρχου δύναμιν μὴ βία προσαγάγηται αὐτόν, ἐπιβουλεύει εὐθὺς ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπαρχούσης ἀξιώσεως κατάλυσιν τῆ τυραννίδι (6.54.3). There is no indication why Aristogeiton targets Hippias as well as Hipparchus; the overthrow of the tyranny seems to be a means to the end of decreasing Hipparchus' personal power. At the same time, there is an impression that Aristogeiton, like the later Athenians, is conflating the two brothers.

There is likewise no stated explanation for Aristogeiton's fear. Meyer 2008 shows that Thucydides' language consistently suggests that Aristogeiton and even Hipparchus are reacting out of proportion.⁶⁰ Thucydides goes on to characterize the Peisistratid reign as, for the most part, good and intelligent (ἀρετὴν καὶ ξύνεσιν, 6.54.5), and neither financially nor otherwise oppressive (ἐπαχθῆς, 6.54.5). Aristogeiton, however, is anachronistically characterized as possessed of the same assumptions as those that corrupt the Athenians' account of the story.⁶¹ Aristogeiton cannot believe that if Hipparchus wants something that does not belong to him, he will not abuse his power to take it. Thucydides, on the other hand, specifically tells us that Hipparchus does not want to do anything forceful: βίαιον μὲν οὐδὲν ἐβούλετο (6.54.4). Instead, he and Hippias

⁶⁰ Meyer 2008: 13-19 especially points out καταγορεύει (6.54.3), δι' ὀργῆς...ἐρωτικῆς (6.57.3), παροξύνω (6.56.1-2), ἀπεροσκέπτως (6.57.3), and ἀλόγιστος τόλμα (6.54.1; 6.59.1).

⁶¹ Wohl 2002: 266.

insult Harmodius' family by a slight whose severity is debated.⁶² Even this event occurs after Aristogeiton has already instigated the conspiratorial plan to overthrow the tyranny, so that it adds little but passion to the cause (6.56.2).

Aristogeiton misunderstands the nature of the Peisistratid tyranny, and this is the reason he responds the way he does. Thucydides makes this point clearer in his narrative of the murder itself. When Aristogeiton and Harmodius witness one of the conspirators chatting with Hippias, they believe they have been betrayed, and panic. Thucydides' explanation of the witnessed conversation has a different tone (6.57.2): ἦν δὲ πᾶσιν εὐπρόσοδος ὁ Ἱππίας, Hippias was approachable to everyone. Aristogeiton and Harmodius seem to assume that the tyrant would not be conversing with someone outside of his circle without a good reason, but Thucydides again contradicts their assumption. Having conceived of this conspiracy on the basis of a misunderstanding about Hipparchus' designs on Harmodius, they now abandon it when they (very probably) misunderstand Hippias' conversation with their associate. Instead,

⁶² Lavelle 1986: 320 argues that when Hipparchus and Hippias dangled the honor of basket-bearing before Harmodius' sister, only to snatch it away again, they insinuated not that her family was too insignificant (her family's rank had not changed), but that she was not of good moral character; i.e., that her virginity was doubted. He further argues that this necessitated the degree of Harmodius' response (Lavelle 1986: 325), although admitting that the author of the later dialogue *Hipparchus* finds this insult to the sister an insufficient motivation for the deed (Lavelle 1986: 330). Meyer 2008: 17 summarizes the insult's effects more moderately: "Harmodius is humiliated but neither directly harmed nor taken by force; Hipparchus' own sense of shame is relieved, his δύναμις demonstrated."

they decide impulsively that they should at least have revenge upon Hipparchus, who was, after all, the cause of their immediate peril (6.57.3). So it is that Thucydides can say, τὸ γὰρ Ἀριστογείτονος καὶ Ἄρμοδίου τόλμημα δι' ἐρωτικὴν ξυντυχίαν ἐπεχειρήθη (54.1): their first motivation (to have vengeance on Hipparchus) becomes their last, when they have given up on the political conspiracy.

Thucydides describes the state of mind in which they attack and kill Hipparchus: they act at once, irrationally (εὐθὺς ἀπερισκέπτως), Aristogeiton moved by erotic rage (δι' ὀργῆς ὁ μὲν ἐρωτικῆς), Harmodius moved by how violently he has been insulted (ὁ δὲ ὑβρισμένος). Falling upon (περιέτυχον) Hipparchus, they strike at him until he is dead (ἔτυπτον καὶ ἀποκτείνουσιν αὐτόν). This image of the tyrannicides' deed should be contrasted with the portrayal of the tyrannicides most familiar to Thucydides and the Athenians, the statue group in the agora: "The figures 'stride forward boldly.' Every gesture suggests self-possession. The facial expressions connote nobility and dedication."⁶³ The image "engages the viewer in imagining the strength that comes from uniting youthful vigor and boldness with mature, considerate

⁶³ Monoson 2000: 31, citing Castriota, "Democracy and Art in Late Sixth- and Fifth-Century B.C. Athens" in I. Morris and K. A. Raaflaub (eds.) *Democracy 2500? Questions and Challenges*. Dubuque, Iowa: 203.

deliberation.”⁶⁴ Thucydides deliberately divests the scene of its iconographical associations with virtue and nobility. Even the unity with which the statue figures proceed⁶⁵ is only outwardly mirrored by Thucydides’ description; the lovers’ internal motivations are only contingently related, now that the common purpose of overthrowing the tyranny has been abandoned.

As for the conspiracy, as a security measure it was small, but Harmodius and Aristogeiton had hoped that the many men armed for the festival would join them when they witnessed the attempt. Thucydides, however, informs us that few men did (6.66.3):

ἤλπιζον γὰρ καὶ τοὺς μὴ προειδότας, εἰ καὶ ὅποσοιοῦν τολμήσειαν, ἐκ τοῦ παραχρημα ἔχοντάς γε ὄπλα ἐθέλησειν σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ξυνελευθεροῦν.

Harmodius and Aristogeiton thought that the overthrow of the tyranny would be widely supported by their fellow Athenians, but again, they were mistaken. It is the Athenians of 415 who feel themselves innately opposed to tyrants, not the contemporaries of the tyrannicides. Two of Harmodius and Aristogeiton’s mistakes arise from an ideologically democratic perspective on the nature of tyranny: they misunderstand Hipparchus’ intentions and misinterpret the

⁶⁴ Monoson 2000: 31.

⁶⁵ Monoson 2000: 31: “their postures are similar, and the composition employs a large number of parallel axes, giving the impression that their movements are choreographed: they are depicted acting in concert, as a unity.”

conversation between Hippias and their associate. Their third mistake, misunderstanding the desires of their fellow Athenians, arises from an anachronistic perspective on the character of Athenians as tyrant-haters. Thucydides makes Harmodius and Aristogeiton share the assumptions of the Athenians who misremember their story.⁶⁶ He grants to the heroes the ideology that legend had derived from them, but in his account, that ideology functions only as blindness. The Peisistratid tyrants are, on the whole, neither arrogant nor unjust; apart from their own paranoia, Harmodius and Aristogeiton have suffered nothing that could not have occurred within a democracy. It is only when their rash deed engenders reciprocal paranoia on the part of Hippias that the tyranny takes on the violent and unjust characteristics they had presumed of it.

The one difference in the Athenian and the Thucydidean characterization of the tyrannicides is the difference necessitated by identifying Hipparchus as the tyrant's younger brother. Even though Thucydides allows that Harmodius and Aristogeiton planned to kill Hippias (and this intention is quite undermotivated apart from the noted anachronism), they panic and resort to an impulsive back-up plan that results in their targeting Hipparchus alone. As Harmodius and

⁶⁶ This is true, at least, of Aristogeiton. Harmodius' perspective is less clear from Thucydides' account.

Aristogeiton abandon the political conspiracy in favor of personal vengeance, Thucydides “[tears] apart the pleasant illusion of an easy congruence of public and private goods.”⁶⁷ The violent and impassioned way in which they carry out the crime strengthens the association between their paranoid and extreme act of vengeance and the subsequent paranoid and vengeful character of Hippias’ tyranny.

Whereas the popular and traditional version of the tyrannicide myth celebrated the ability of the Athenian people, represented by heroes such as Harmodius and Aristogeiton, to overthrow tyrannical rule, the historicized version of the myth has undercut Athenian confidence in their ability to maintain and restore democracy. The hearsay account on which they rely has not, however, preserved the fact that the democracy did not really need restoring at the time of the supposed tyrannicide. Continuing to assume that Harmodius and Aristogeiton did the right thing in attempting to overthrow a tyrant, they are now frightened by the knowledge that the tyranny was not successfully overthrown. They respond by anxiously trying harder to prevent a tyrant from appearing again.⁶⁸ The Athenians thus prosecute the mutilators of the Herms and

⁶⁷ Monoson 2000: 43.

⁶⁸ Orwin 1994: 125-126.

the profaners of the Mysteries in an attempt to succeed where Harmodius and Aristogeiton failed.

Chapter IV. Myth, Hearsay History, and the Affair of the Herms and the Mysteries

Thucydides' account of the prosecutions mirrors the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story, as paranoia again leads to misunderstandings and mistakes. In the Athenians' case, however, Thucydides reveals a level of self-awareness that is absent from his characterization of the tyrannicides (Aristogeiton is sufficiently caricatured that he never seems to consider the possibility that he may be mistaken). While the Athenians' misunderstanding of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story accounts for their increased fear of tyrants, the careless attitude towards history that occasioned this misunderstanding is paralleled by their careless attitude towards truth during the prosecutions.

Thucydides' sole interest in the Herms and the Mysteries is the Athenian response. He emphasizes that the timing of the Herm mutilation contributed to its perceived significance, because it seemed to be an omen against the expedition, and the action of a conspiracy against the democracy (6.27.1, 6.27.3).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Wohl 2002: 205, "If Athens' imperial *eros* is, as Nicias implies, a sickness, the mutilation of the Herms is its most urgent symptom." Wohl reads the Herms as symbols of "masculine hardness, the autonomy and freedom of a civic *soma autarkes*, presence and being" (Wohl 2002: 206), and interprets their castration as a symbol of "the futility of that longing" (Wohl 2002: 207), and thus a bad omen for the expedition. While we know of the "castration" of the Herms from other sources,

The affair of the Mysteries comes up only when the Athenians vote to solicit information to see whether any other impieties (ἀσέβημα) have been committed (6.27.2). This roundabout manner of investigating the matter of the Herms is met with an equally roundabout response: no one knows anything about the Herms, but metics and attendants report that drunken young men have vandalized some other statues, and the Mysteries are being privately mocked (ἐν οἰκίαις ἐφ' ὕβρει, 6.28.1) by Alcibiades.⁷⁰ Thucydides makes no connection between these incidents and gives no reason to believe there was one, but the ill-defined investigation latches onto this new report.

It is at this point, after showing the fearful and suspicious approach the Athenians are already taking towards addressing this crisis, that Thucydides

Thucydides does not tell us this detail. If we read the mutilation of the Herms the way the Athenians did – a deed related in kind to the profanation of the Mysteries and Alcibiades' anti-democratic profligacy – the incident seems more reflective of the Sicilian expedition than opposed to it, insofar as Athenian imperialism has been characterized as impious (see Forde 1986: 444, Ahrens Dorf 1997: 260 on the Melian debates) and motivated by *eros* not dissimilar to Alcibiades'.

⁷⁰ Monoson 2000: 44.45 discusses Thucydides' interest in the role of class within the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story (signaled by his specification at 6.54.2 that Aristogeiton was not from a distinguished family). There, the ruling family slights the prominent and thus fragile family of Harmodius' and offends his sensitive middle-class lover, Aristogeiton, and is assassinated in recompense. Class plays a related role in the framing story: citizens, foreigners, and slaves are all invited to testify against suspected perpetrators of sacrilege, without fear of recrimination (6.27.2). The testimony received from metics and servants is that the Mysteries have been parodied in private by some of the most prominent men in the city: Alcibiades and his friends (6.28.1). Meyer 2008 writes that the Athenians "think their willingness to overlook class distinctions in informants constitutes 'investigating the matter'" (Meyer 2008: 29). Thucydides, however, is presenting the willingness to overlook class distinctions as detracting from, rather than contributing, to the fairness of the investigation.

introduces Alcibiades' opponents (6.28.2). These men resent Alcibiades as a political obstacle because they themselves have ambitions of being first within the city (τοῦ δήμου...προεστάναι, 6.28.2). Towards the removal of this obstacle, they make a big deal (ἐμεγάλυνον, 6.28.2) out of these accusations, connecting the Herms and the Mysteries on the grounds that both offenses signify the dissolution of the democracy (ἐπὶ δήμου καταλύσει, 6.28.2). Their evidence for Alcibiades' involvement in an antidemocratic conspiracy is the undemocratic extravagance of his affairs (οὐ δημοτικὴν παρανομίαν, 6.28.2).⁷¹ As stated, this argument borrows its plausibility from the general Athenian opposition of unrestrained tyrannical *eros* to the self-controlled, publicly beneficent *eros* that characterizes a democratic citizen.⁷² Alcibiades' trial, however, is delayed on account of Athens' own imperial and thus tyrannical *eros* (or *duseros*, as Nicias would have it), the Sicilian expedition (6.29.1).⁷³

The prosecutions continue in Alcibiades' absence. The passage that frames the Harmodius and Aristogeiton digression (6.53.2-3) echoes the vocabulary and concepts of 1.20.⁷⁴ The Athenians continue not distinguishing between (οὐ

⁷¹ Wohl 2002: 141.

⁷² Wohl 2002: 129-130.

⁷³ Thucydides 6.13.3, discussed at Wohl 2002: 171-172; see also Wohl 2002: 188-196.

⁷⁴ Meyer 2008: 26-30.

δοκιμάζοντες) informants, but take (ἀποδεχόμενοι) everything suspiciously when it comes to the accused. They are willing to arrest good men lest bad men escape, so that they might examine the matter and find out what they want to know (βασανίσαι τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ εὐρεῖν, 6.53.2). The same words that Thucydides uses of examining hearsay and discovering knowledge (ἀβασανίστως, 1.21.1; ἠύρισκετο 1.22.3) are used here of examining the matter of the Herms and finding the perpetrators. The informants whom Thucydides would be examining (by implication from his criticism of those who examine sources ἀβασανίστως, 1.21.1 – literally, “without torture”), the Athenians do not even evaluate (δοκιμάζοντες, 6.53.2). Just as with the hearsay of history, the Athenians take what they are told (δέχονται, 1.21.1; ἀποδεχόμενοι, 6.53.2), and here it is specified that it is a state of mind that moves them to do so (ὑπόπτως, 6.53.2). It is this state of affairs that Thucydides attributes to their misunderstanding of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story; on another level, it is their casual and pleasure-oriented approach to the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story which leads them to approach other events (τὰ γινόμενα), such as the mutilation of the Herms, in such an irrational and self-deceptive way.

The self-deception involved in the Athenians’ abuse of justice is most plainly seen in the resolution of the investigation. A prisoner is persuaded by a fellow prisoner to confess to mutilating the Herms, whether or not he actually

had done so.⁷⁵ This way, he will benefit the city by halting the arrests, and benefit himself with the immunity granted to him for confessing (6.60.3). (Subsequent proceedings vindicate the prisoners' doubt that innocence would protect him in a trial.) When this prisoner both confesses and informs against a list of other men, the Athenians receive this information gladly (ἄσμενος), thinking that they have arrived at τὸ σαφές, a clear understanding of the actual facts (6.60.4). They free the informant and every suspect that he has not accused; they condemn to death every man who appears on the informant's list (6.60.4). Thucydides has already told us, however, that no one, either then or afterward, had clear knowledge (τὸ σαφές) of the deed (6.60.2). His conclusion makes clear that the confession has been received in the same spirit in which it was given: κὰν τούτῳ οἱ μὲν παθόντες ἄδηλον ἦν εἰ ἀδίκως ἐτετιμώρηντο, ἢ μέντοι ἄλλη πόλις ἐν τῷ παρόντι περιφανῶς ὠφέλητο (6.60.5), even if these men were punished unjustly, it was plain that the city was benefited for the moment.

The concepts and vocabulary in this passage again recall the language of book one's proem: the Athenians believe they have obtained from their dubious informant the same τὸ σαφές which Thucydides hopes his own composition will reveal to the right kind of reader (1.21.4). While the informant's list of names

⁷⁵ Thucydides specifies that it was not the confessor's own idea, muddling the information's origins with yet another degree of separation.

successfully ended the witch-hunt and benefited Athens at the time (ἐν τῷ παρόντι, 6.60.5), Thucydides' work is not intended for a momentary reception (ἐς τὸ παραχρηῖμα ἀκούειν, 1.21.4). The Athenians would rather pretend to have a clear understanding (τὸ σαφές) than examine their informants and discover a truth that may leave them with no scapegoat for their anxieties about the expedition and their imperialistic desires.

The Athenians quickly suppressed their awareness of how irresponsibly they trusted the testimony of one man to such an extent that no one he accused was pardoned. Thucydides tells us that it was because the Athenians believed themselves to possess a clear understanding of the Herms (ἐπειδὴ τὸ τῶν Ἑρμῶν ᾧοντο σαφές ἔχειν, 6.61.1) that they were finally convinced that Alcibiades had profaned the Mysteries as a conspiratorial act against the democracy (6.61). The logic is difficult to follow. On one level, the Athenians are confident as a result of the Herms trials. Having found some, they feel that it is possible (contrary to their previous fears, 6.60.4) to discover the rest of the oligarchic and tyrannical conspirators. The historicized account of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story shattered the Athenians' confidence in themselves as tyrannicides, but by resurrecting their carelessness towards facts, they create a new falsehood to restore their confidence again. A substantial connection may also be implied: because the mutilation of the Herms was an

anti-democratic act after all, the profanation of the Mysteries looks more political as well.

Finally, having already employed questionable testimony as sufficient to determine guilt, the Athenians are ready to condemn Alcibiades on equally questionable grounds. In this way, the procedure they had followed for the public benefit in the matter of the Herms (arbitrarily trusting questionable evidence to reach illusory certainty), is sidetracked to serve a private cause (the private interests of Alcibiades' enemies). This deflection is comparable to the chance whereby Harmodius and Aristogeiton end up abandoning the political coup to avenge the original personal grievance: the Athenians are trying to compensate for the frightening ending of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story by acting out the mythologized version, but they are actually reenacting Thucydides' historical account. The Athenians had once based their confidence on a tyrannicide myth; now they need to restore their confidence by making a show of succeeding where Harmodius and Aristogeiton had failed. But just as Harmodius and Aristogeiton not only failed to end the tyranny but actually contributed to its harshness, the Athenians are unwittingly playing into the hands of men who desire oligarchic preeminence over the people (6.28.2), even as they suppose themselves to be weeding out would-be oligarchs and tyrants.

One final misunderstanding contributes to the Athenians' decision to bring Alcibiades to trial. A small Lacedaimonian force approaches the isthmus, having something to do with the Boiotians (6.61.2). This is interpreted as evidence that Alcibiades had made arrangements with the Lacedaimonians, with the implication that, having once deposed an Athenian tyrant, the Lacedaimonians were now going to instate one (6.61.2). The recent arrests are credited with the salvation of the city (6.61.2). Thucydides makes these conclusions appear absurd, and attributes them to the machinations of Alcibiades' enemies, but the Athenians act on them. The arrests and executions which, though they may not have been just, plainly served the best interests of the city for the time (τῷ παρόντι περιφανεῶς, 6.60.5) lead to a decision that is not in Athens' best interest at all: the loss and alienation of the commander whose leadership was needed for the Sicilian expedition (6.15.3-5).⁷⁶ Once again, the Athenians bring about the thing that they fear in their attempts to evade it: in attempting to quell plots against the democracy, they fall into the hands of would-be oligarchs, and while their belief that Alcibiades conspired with the Spartans is false, once driven from Athens he conspires with the Spartans. Athens is ultimately harmed by the self-deception involved in the Herms trial. If the Harmodius and Aristogeiton digression "comment[s] on the dangers

⁷⁶ Ahrens Dorf 1997: 256-257.

inherent in historical knowledge,⁷⁷ the knowledge involved is qualified by the degree to which the Athenians resist details of the historicized account that contradict democratic ideology. The real danger is in the Athenians thinking they have historical knowledge that they actually lack.

Likewise, the story of the persecutions that frames the digression illustrates the dangers inherent in all knowledge that is pretended, unsubstantiated, and false, but still received as τὸ σαφές. Thucydides invited the ideal reader of 1.22.4 to employ his composition in comparing past with future events, on the reasoning that things of the same sort or similar will happen again, according to human nature (κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, 1.22.4). The entire affair of the Herms and Mysteries serves as a cautionary tale not simply for fact-checking, but for an approach to history that filters the past through political or ideological screens, and subsequently blurs the clarity (τὸ σαφές) of what really happened.

The trouble in the affair of the Herms and the Mysteries is that the Athenians, having heard but not understood the historical account of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story, could no longer base their confidence on a tyrannicide myth, but needed to restore their confidence by making a show of succeeding where Harmodius and Aristogeiton had failed. Elsewhere in Thucydides, mythical versions of history remain unchallenged and continue to

⁷⁷ Connor 1984: 177, n. 47; Stahl 2003: 10.

function normally as foundations of political identity. After the Spartan general Brasidas has successfully protected Amphipolis from the Athenians, the Amphipolitans violently erase their own history in order to recreate their city as founded by Brasidas (5.11).⁷⁸ They do this not only to honor Brasidas (for whom they have initiated a hero cult), but also to align their patriotic legends with their foreign alliances.

The point of the myth is clearly not that it be true or false, but that it express and reinforce what the Amphipolitans want to say about themselves. The Athenians are clearly thinking differently from the Amphipolitans when they respond with fear to the historicized version of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story. The Amphipolitans know that they were really founded by Hagnon, not Brasidas; that is why they want to create a myth. Recalling Flory's observation that the phrase ἐπὶ τὸ μῦθῳ δὲς ἐκνευικηκότα at 1.21.1 implies that stories compete to win the status of myth,⁷⁹ we see that the fabricated legend that Amphipolis was founded by Brasidas is "conquering" the story of Hagnon, because the Brasidas story serves the needs of the moment.

The Athenians, by contrast, have come to expect that their myths should be true. In year 415, they are distraught about the historical fact that Harmodius

⁷⁸ McGlew 1993: 153-154.

⁷⁹ Flory 1990: 200, and see discussion above.

and Aristogeiton failed to overthrow the tyranny, and they are in danger of losing the confidence and sense of identity that the myth had provided. If they were treating history as history, and myth as myth, they would not allow the historical fact to interfere with the significance of the myth, just as the Amphipolitans adopt the Brasidas myth because of its significance, not its historical veracity.

Chapter V. Supplanting Myth and History: Pericles

A second look at Pericles' funeral oration helps account for the Athenians' confusion of foundation myth and historical record. Again, the parallels between Pericles and Thucydides both conceal and illuminate the difference between the two. Pericles asserts that Athens needs no Homer, the meaning of whose praise is harmed by the truth of deeds (τῶν δ' ἔργων τὴν ὑπόνοιαν ἢ ἀλήθεια βλάψει, 2.41.4). They have no need of exaggerations; they are served just as well by the way things are. Thucydides likewise criticized the exaggerations of poetry, and argued that the facts themselves prove the greatness of the Peloponnesian War, not any rhetoric of his own. Although funeral orations were typically an occasion for the recitation of patriotic legends and foundation myths relevant to war, Pericles deliberately passes these over, and calls attention to the omission (2.36.4): ὦν ἐγὼ τὰ μὲν κατὰ πολέμους ἔργα, οἷς ἕκαστα ἐκτίθη [...] μακρογορεῖν ἐν εἰδόσιν οὐ βουλόμενος ἐάσω.⁸⁰ Thucydides similarly excised the mythical and patriotic elements from traditional history in his *Archeology*.

⁸⁰ Thomas 1989: 197-200; Loraux 2000: 92.

It has already been shown, however, how Pericles revives the mythical and patriotic elements in a new, abstract form. For example, if Harmodius and Aristogeiton's mutual devotion is exemplary for Athens' citizens, Pericles outdoes the traditional myth by making democratic citizens lovers of the city itself. Even when he is promoting roughly the same ideology as the myth, the effect of Pericles' abstractions is to remove all lingering sense of historic contingency. Pericles' lack of interest in contingency is explicit at 1.140.1, where he provides a significantly counterintuitive argument against abandoning rational calculation in the face of τὰς ξυμφορὰς (ἐνδέχεται γὰρ τὰς ξυμφορὰς τῶν πραγμάτων οὐχ ἦσσον ἀμαθῶς χωρῆσαι ἢ καὶ τὰς διανοίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, 1.140.1).⁸¹ Just because contingent chance can thwart your plans, does not mean that your plans were bad ones – indeed, this is why, when things go wrong, we (correctly) blame chance (δι' ὅπερ καὶ τὴν τύχην, ὅσα ἂν παρὰ λόγον ξυμβῆ, εἰώθαμεν αἰτιᾶσθαι, 1.140.1). Pericles overstates his argument that the Athenians should not be dissuaded from the original strategy, and the result is a disconnect between rational plan (Pericles uses the words γνώμη, ξυμβουλευτέα, τοῖς κοινῇ δόξασιν, τὰς διανοίας) and contingent event.

Pericles' rhetorical preference for the abstract pervades his oration. When speaking of the history of Athens, he summarizes each generation's

⁸¹ Flory 1988: 49, 55 cited in Morrison 2006: 6.

achievements in terms of their contributions first to the city, and then to the empire (2.36). After declining to recount the Athenians' legendary achievements, Pericles does not turn with Thucydides to more recent, better substantiated history, but instead he turns to questions which could be addressed through history, but which Pericles will address only from the point of view of the present: ἀπὸ δὲ οἴας τε ἐπιτηδεύσεως ἤλθομεν ἐπ' αὐτὰ καὶ μεθ' οἴας πολιτείας καὶ τρόπων ἐξ οἴων μεγάλα ἐγένετο (2.36.4). Pericles, in his apparent regard for accuracy, may come closer to Thucydides than do Athenian patriotic myths, but the myths come closer to Thucydides in their at least partial regard for history.

The same transformation of Athens' mythical identity from the legendary to the abstracted can be seen in Pericles' eulogy of the Athenian dead at 2.43. Pericles will not stop at speaking of the real, historical inscription that was raised for these casualties, but insists on speaking of an unwritten memory dwelling not in some monument, but in the minds of their survivors (ἀγραφοῦς μνήμη παρ' ἑκάστῳ τῆς γνώμης μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ ἔργου ἐνδιδαιτᾶται, 2.43.3). Pericles' assertion that the entire world is the tomb of illustrious men (2.43.3) alludes to Marathon, where, contrary to custom, the casualties were interred on the

battlefield.⁸² But instead of explicitly recalling the already legendary battle and allowing its glory to subsume these men's, Pericles holds forth these men as a model for emulation (2.43.4): οὐς νῦν ὑμεῖς ζηλώσαντες καὶ τὸ εὐδαιμον τὸ ἐλεύθερον, τὸ δ' ἐλεύθερον τὸ εὐψυχον κρίναντες μὴ περιορᾶσθε τοὺς πολεμικοὺς κινδύνους. The incomparable greatness of the Peloponnesian War notwithstanding, the story of these men's death is in no way legendary; Pericles refocuses his audience on their abstract virtues and ideals instead. Again, Pericles' approach appears comparable to Thucydides', insofar as Thucydides' composition explores motivation, reason, and rationale,⁸³ and the things that happen κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον. But the funeral oration's omission of any historical event or any individual historical person indicates that Pericles is not interested in the things that happen (τὰ γινόμενα), but only in the abstract ideals themselves.⁸⁴

Pericles' model describes the Athenians' relationship to knowledge. They are free from suspicion of one another and from fear of foreigners (2.37). They are capable of responding courageously to dangers without being compelled by

⁸² Herodotus 9.85.2. The cult of Harmodius and Aristogeiton was associated with the heroes of Marathon and the casualties of the Persian War in general (Loraux 2000: 73).

⁸³ Hunter 1971: 19.

⁸⁴ Loraux 2000: 51 observes that Thucydides never acknowledges the lists of the names of the dead that formed an important part of the remembrance of war casualties in Athens.

harsh training (2.39). Similarly, they love wisdom without softness (2.40.1), and calculation only contributes to their daring (2.40.3). Pericles builds up an image of Athenians as men who face life with their eyes open: of all men, in the most varied circumstances, Athenians are able to rely on themselves (6.41.1). It seems consistent then, that Pericles should not speak to please, as Thucydides tells us (2.65.8); his Athenian audience should be able to respond correctly to facts. But when Thucydides elaborates, the picture changes (2.65.9):

οὐκ ἔστι γοῦν αἴσθητό τι αὐτοὺς παρὰ καιρὸν ὑβρεῖ θαρσοῦντας,
λέγων κατέπλησεν ἐπὶ τὸ φοβείσθαι, καὶ δεδιότας αὖ ἀλόγως
ἀντικαθίστη πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ θαρσεῖν.

Pericles does not speak openly to the Athenians; instead, he compensates for their irrational responses. The Athenians do not live up to the model described in the funeral oration. Pericles knows this, as the first words of his plague speech indicate (2.60.1):

καὶ προσδεχομένω μοι τὰ τῆς ὀργῆς ὑμῶν ἕς με γεγένηται
(αἰσθάνομαι γὰρ τὰς αἰτίας) καὶ ἐκκλησίαν τούτου ἔνεκα ξυνήγαγον

Pericles knew the Athenians would be angry, and perceived the cause. The purpose of the speech underway is to address and alter their reaction.⁸⁵ Pericles'

⁸⁵ Cf. also 1.140.1, where Pericles accuses the Athenians of inconstancy.

speeches are designed to meet the needs of the moment. He can predict the Athenians' responses insofar as they are instinctual and unconsidered.

Pericles appeals to the Athenians' abstract reason, but he does not rely on them to act rationally as a result. His words plant in the Athenians a desire to be knowledgeable and rational, but the shepherding function of his speeches reinforces their habitual illogical responses. They do not need to be knowledgeable and rational so long as he is personally checking their mistakes, as Thucydides describes him doing at 2.65.9. In historical terms, Pericles makes the Athenians want to rely on themselves and their own present and future actions rather than looking back to their civic heroes, but fails to supplant their habit of deriving confidence and a sense of political identity from stories. Thucydides' conclusion is that this spokesman of democracy was actually the rule of the first man (2.65.9). In this way, Pericles himself represents a deceptive mix of the aristocratic and democratic.

The effects of these Periclean ideals can be observed in the affair of the Herms and the Mysteries. The Athenians treat the founding myth of Athenian democracy, the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, as something between myth and history when they spread their frightening hearsay account. They respond with actions that are similarly situated between pretense and actuality: they pretend an act of tyrant-prevention so that they will have a historical basis

for the ideals that the Harmodius and Aristogeiton myth once provided. In terms of Csapo and Miller's thesis distinguishing aristocratic and democratic accounts of time, the Athenians act aristocratically (and, as it happens, in the interests of would-be oligarchs) in emulating Harmodius and Aristogeiton in the affair of the Herms and Mysteries, even while they are prosecuting the enemies of the democracy.

Chapter VI. Resisting Myth: Thucydides

Thucydides is interested in an accurate knowledge of contingent events. The Athenians attempt to treat history like myth when they receive the historicized hearsay account of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story in accord with the ideological assumptions that the Harmodius and Aristogeiton myth had always reinforced. Thucydides corrects the hearsay version of the story, and tries rhetorically to prevent its reformulation by presenting his evidence (6.54.7-55.2). Varying versions of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton myth are already prevalent, so Thucydides does not risk engendering an alternate account by revealing his evidence to his readership and thereby allowing them access to his critical process.

Elsewhere, however, Thucydides does not typically show his cards. His style is designed to convey a sense of certitude about the factual verity of the claims made, and no information is provided which might easily suggest alternate accounts. In the words of Kosso's analysis: "Virtually all internal features of the text that are epistemologically significant are eliminative, that is,

useful in helping us decide what not to believe."⁸⁶ Wallace 1964 summarizes the effect of Thucydides' rhetoric as a whole:

"Mme de Romilly, and Professor Bodin, with whom she worked, have analysed the inevitability of Thucydides' narrative, the impossibility of interpreting the war in any other way than his, and have shown that 'one is with him closer to rhetoric than to logic,' that in a sense persuasion here takes precedence of truth."⁸⁷

Wallace concludes that Thucydides is more of a political scientist than a historian.⁸⁸ Woodman 1988 concludes more drastically that Thucydides' style is an effect of sophistic priorities: he is more interested in communicating language than actual events.⁸⁹

These readings, however, conflate Thucydides with Pericles, and give the former little credit for his interest in an accurate record of contingent events. Thucydides is far from a sophist, if a sophist communicates languages rather than actual events. His authoritative rhetoric is not designed to stand between his reader and what happened, but functions to prevent readers from sourcing

⁸⁶ Kosso 1993: 11-12.

⁸⁷ Wallace 1964: 260.

⁸⁸ Wallace 1964: 261.

⁸⁹ Woodman 1984: 14, 17, 25-26.

myths in Thucydides' own accounts.⁹⁰ Dewald 1999 summarizes the impression given in the proem to book 1:

“At the end of chapter 23 the stage is almost as bare of human beings and their voices as it was at the outset. Herodotus and some shadowy Athenians have been briefly conjured up as potential additional and alternative narrators but have then been allowed to vanish; the only voice remaining is Thucydides' own.”⁹¹

Thucydides' critique of Herodotus in the proem appeared to hone in on his ambiguity. Thucydides' narrative voice shuns factual ambiguity and leaves as little room as possible for misreading, especially of the tendentiously mythologizing sort. Thucydides' univocal narrative voice gives him maximal control over the shape his history takes, but also nearly excludes partisan appropriation of his history's events.

⁹⁰ One of the most radical features of Thucydides' composition is the explicitly methodological character of the proem itself. This revelation of method balances the methodological opacity of Thucydides' main narrative.

⁹¹ Dewald 1999: 240.

Chapter VII. Conclusions

The projected reader of the proem, like a certain sort of fifth-century Athenian, is pleased by the absence of τὸ μυθῶδες from Thucydides' composition, because flattering, patriotic stories are obvious, vulgar, useless, and wrong, and the very antithesis of the subtle, sophisticated, self-interested, and informed qualities he is pleased to possess. Cleon's accusatory assessment of his Athenian audience successfully illustrates that self-interest, intelligence, and sophistication need not imply an interest in things that actually happened. In Pericles' funeral oration, vulgar foundation myth is replaced with intellectual, sophisticated foundation myth, and the result is that the sophisticated, self-interested Athenians, inebriate on myths they are able to believe, no longer recognize τὸ μυθῶδες as obvious, vulgar, and false (let alone false, meaningful, and useful, an attitude the Amphipolitans exemplify). The disastrous Herms and Mysteries trials result from the Athenians' new sophisticated naïvety, and serve as a lesson to the reader in the separation of history and political myth.

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