

THUCYDIDES' ΕΡΓΑ*

Abstract: This paper argues that in order to understand Thucydides 1.22, his well-known chapter on methodology, we need to grasp the central message of 1.20–3. In this passage, unified by the ‘Herodotean’ word ἔργα, which he adapts for his novel purpose, Thucydides claims that he has, through careful and critical research, reproduced precisely in writing the deeds done in ‘his war’. He explicitly does not claim such accuracy for his speeches, nor for his pre-war excursuses, such as the *Archaeology* and the *Pentekontaetia*. His phrase for this kind of rhetorically sophisticated ‘approximation’ of the truth is ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν.

Keywords: Thucydides, τὰ ἔργα, τὸ ἀγώνισμα, εὐρεῖν, γράφειν, absolute mimesis, ‘adequation’

This article centres on Thucydides 1.22, a chapter scholars have examined extensively, or better put, exhaustively. For the most part, however, they have analysed *only* chapter 22, not the chapters immediately preceding and following it, namely, 20, 21, and 23. As a result, they have failed to recognise that the entire passage 20–3 is unified by a seemingly mundane word, and indeed, one nodding to Herodotus—though deliberately altered to allow Thucydides to transform his predecessor’s theme into a remarkable claim for his own work.¹

I propose in this paper an interpretation of 1.20–3 that reveals how Thucydides expects his readers to value the ἔργα of ‘his war’. He claims to have precisely reproduced those ἔργα in writing, in contradistinction not only to the speeches in his work, but to the ἔργα he says he could only approximate in reconstructing earlier Greek history. Confining one’s view to 22, his statement on the methods he used in ‘saying’ the λόγοι and writing the ἔργα,

* I would like to thank my colleague Jeffrey Rusten for making several incisive suggestions that improved the argument in this paper. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my mentor W. Robert Connor for reading an earlier draft and encouraging an important change in scope. All errors herein are mine.

¹ An important exception to the general scholarly failure to appreciate the unity of argument in 1.20–3 is Tsakmakis (1995) 43–54. Tsakmakis notes that the *Archaeology* does not constitute τὰ ἔργα in the Thucydidean sense, but rather a form of rhetoric that embodies the heuristic structure and principles Thucydides designs for a proper interpretation of the past. And Tsakmakis argues, correctly in my view, that in 21.2 and 22, where Thucydides begins to describe the method he employs in writing his own war, he speaks of τὰ ἔργα as ‘factual reality’ (*die Tatsachen*), a completely different form of discourse from the rhetoric employed in the *Archaeology*. I part company with Tsakmakis when he goes on to argue that in 1.22 τὰ ἔργα encompass both the λόγοι and the ἔργα in Thucydides’ work.

leads the reader to miss Thucydides' central point in 20–3: that through painstaking research he has captured the 'actual facts' of the Peloponnesian War and reconstituted them in writing with complete accuracy. He claims no such validity for his accounts of earlier history, including the one just presented in his *Archaeology*, nor for his speeches. Instead, he considered each one of those rhetorically sophisticated passages in his work an ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα ἀκούειν (1.22.4).

Chapter 20, which concludes the *Archaeology*, begins with this sentence:

τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἤρρον, χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι.

I discovered, then, old events to be of such a kind, though it is difficult to trust each and every piece of evidence in turn.

This sentence recapitulates the introduction of the *Archaeology* in 1.1.3:

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

For it was impossible because of the long lapse in time clearly to discover the events before these and the ones still older, but on the basis of the evidence I could trust in conducting the most thorough investigations, I do not believe they were great either in their wars or in other respects.

In these two declarations, Thucydides tells his readers in the first person that it was impossible to 'discover' the distant past 'clearly', and very difficult to 'trust' each piece of evidence in detail, in spite of his most careful study. In 1.21.1, where he calls poets and logographers unreliable chroniclers, he stipulates why the past is so difficult to recover: the events of Greek history are unverifiable (ἀνεξέλεγκτα), and many of them, through the passage of time, have 'won their way through to the status of mythical stories' (τὸ μυθῶδες) and are thus 'not credible' (ἀπίστως). Many readers seem to think Thucydides here asserts that it is the poets and logographers who make Greek understanding of the past so weak, but that is not what he says. Instead, he contends that the events of the past are *intrinsically* unrecoverable in any detail; the poets and logographers only make the situation worse with their exaggerations and their goal of creating pleasure for their readers. Thucydides avers, by contrast, that he has done his best to discover what actually happened, and that his reader, therefore, would not be mistaken 'in believing the events were very roughly what I have gone through': τοιαῦτα ἂν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἂ διήλθον.

'Discover' or 'ascertain' is the verb Thucydides uses for his recovery of the past in 1.1.3, 20.1, and 21.1 (*εὐρεῖν* in all three cases). But his findings can be only approximate: *τοιαῦτα* in 20.1 means the events were 'of such a kind', and in 21.1 the phrase is further weakened by *μάλιστα*.²

These expressions indicate general, as opposed to detailed, knowledge. Here, then, is what Thucydides claims for his presentation of the past: with great difficulty, and with much effort, he can give a general picture; it cannot be completely clear or detailed because of insufficient evidence. As a result, 'trust' in even his depiction of those events cannot be firm: he uses *πιστεῦσαι* or cognates four times in these sections to express caution about the credibility of the evidence he had for past events (1.1.3, 20.1, 21.1 *bis*). It is perhaps no accident that in 1.23.3 he uses the phrase *οὐκ ἄπιστα* to characterise the appearance of unusual natural events that occurred in his own war: they happened, there is no reason to doubt the evidence.

With this background as context, we turn to 21.2, where Thucydides shifts attention from the past to 'his war':

καὶ ὁ πόλεμος οὗτος, καίπερ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἂν πολεμῶσι τὸν παρόντα αἰεὶ μέγιστον κρινόντων, παυσασμένων δὲ τὰ ἀρχαῖα μᾶλλον θαυμαζόντων, ἀπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων σκοποῦσι δηλώσει ὅμως μείζων γεγεννημένος αὐτῶν.

And this war [you are reading], although men commonly judge whichever one they might currently be fighting the greatest, but when it is over hold ancient ones in greater awe, will demonstrate to whoever judges on the basis of the facts themselves, that it has nevertheless been greater than those.

What precisely is 'this war', otherwise undefined? Nicole Loraux carefully explicated the phrase in a seminal article on Thucydidean historiography:

La guerre se révélant elle-même, comme si le lieu de cette révélation n'était pas une œuvre écrite. ... Et c'est la guerre elle-même, l'*ἔργον* par excellence, qui révèle son être. Quant aux 'faits eux-mêmes', où les chercher, sinon dans l'œuvre qui s'est assigné pour fonction de les confier à l'écriture? Mais, parce que ce qui est écrit a été éprouvé comme relevant vraiment de l'ordre des *erga*, le lecteur est invité à se convaincre que, dans le texte, il trouve les faits, rien que les faits.³

² See Boegehold (2014) for *μάλιστα*, particularly in Thucydides, as 'mostly', 'roughly'.

³ Loraux (1986) 149.

Lowell Edmunds made a similar point about ‘this war’ in interpreting the deictic pronoun that three times modifies *πόλεμος* in 1.118: the phrase *τοῦδε τοῦ πολέμου* signifies ‘my account of this war. ‘In other words, he is not here coordinating the parts of his work, as he sometimes does by means of a demonstrative pronoun. He can only be pointing to his work as a whole.’⁴ Note that the same phrase occurs in 1.8.1, 13.3, 18.1, 18.3, and 19. This is Thucydidean usage for ‘my account of the war’, ‘my war’.

The war reveals its own meaning to those who examine it on the basis of the *ἔργα* themselves: but, as Loraux insists, ‘this war’ is Thucydides’ written text, those who are examining it are his readers, and the *ἔργα* they are to use as their basis for judgement have been critically selected and ‘guaranteed’ by the same Thucydides before he allows them into that written text (1.22.2). Loraux refers to this reduction of events to writing as an ‘operation’. As Adam Parry well said,⁵

When you can say, ‘so-and-so gave me this account of what happened, and it seems a likely version’, you are objective about your relation to history. But when, without discussing sources, you present everything as *αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα* (1.21.2), the way it really happened, you are forcing the reader to look through your eyes, imposing your own assumptions and interpretations of events.

We should, then, take 1.21.2 as follows: ‘my [account of this] war, for those (readers) who examine it on the basis of the *ἔργα* themselves, will nevertheless (i.e., in spite of the common human tendency following a war to exaggerate previous wars) reveal that it is greater than those [wars].’⁶

Thucydides uses four future tense verbs in chapters 21 and 22 to refer to the (projected) reading of his work: the subject of *δηλώσει* in 21.2 is ‘his war’, the readers are the indirect object (*σκοποῦσι*); in 22.4 the (unexpressed, but understood) readers are the indirect object of *φανέται*; the subject of *βουλήσονται ... σκοπεῖν* is serious readers; and *ἔξει* is to be construed with (serious) readers as follows: ‘it will be good enough if they judge these things (the *ἔργα*) useful’. I leave *ἔργα* untranslated for now because an English ‘equivalent’ will beg several important questions about Thucydides’ meaning. What we can count on is the fact that Thucydides is inviting his readers to

⁴ Edmunds (2009) 103.

⁵ Parry (1972) 48.

⁶ Gomme (1945) *ad loc.* notes the link between *ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων* in 21.2 and the methodology that follows in 22. For a similar expression in a programmatic passage, this one with Thucydides’ readers as the subject (*tis* in the previous sentence), cf. 5.26.2: *τοῖς τε γὰρ ἔργοις ὡς διήρηται ἀθρεῖτω, καὶ εὐρήσει ...* ‘for let [the reader] examine the *ἔργα*, as they have been distributed, and he will discover ...’

compare his war with previous ones, using the ἔργα in his war as the measure of greatness.

For this same measure, note 1.11.2, a few chapters earlier, where Thucydides says the Trojan War *δηλοῦται τοῖς ἔργοις* 'is revealed by its ἔργα' to be inferior to its reputation and to the account of it that now holds sway because of the poets. (He has just concluded that the essential fact about the Trojan War is that lack of resources prevented the Greeks from prosecuting a 'continuous' war with a fully marshalled force of men.) For the moment we pass over 22.1, the 'notorious' sentence on Thucydides' speeches, and move to 22.2, which resumes the path we have been following, beginning in 20.1, and continuing in 21.1 and 2. Scholars have been so focused on the strong contrasts between 22.1 and 22.2, *λόγοι* and *ἔργα*, respectively, that they have ignored Thucydides' persistent attention throughout 20–2 to *ἔργα*, first to the *ἔργα* of earlier history, then to those of his own war. *That* is the primary opposition he sets up in 20–2.

Here is 22.2:

τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος ἠξίωσα γράφειν, οὐδ' ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει, ἀλλ' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβείᾳ περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξελθών.

The passage begins with a careful statement about *ἔργα*. He assures his readers that in order to consider any *ἔργα* 'of the ones effected in this war' (explicated below) worthy of writing down, he did not trust his own impressions or those of others, but instead went through all individual *ἔργα* to the extent possible with an eye towards exactness. *ἀκριβείᾳ* is a very strong 'truth word' that suggests reproduction of actual reality. The next sentences take the argument further:

ἐπιπόνως δὲ ἠύρισκετο, διότι οἱ παρόντες τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκάστοις οὐ ταῦτ' ἀποκρίνεται περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔλεγον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκατέρων τις εὐνοίας ἢ μνήμης ἔχοι. καὶ ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται· ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἔξει. κτήμ' αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται.

The subject of *ἠύρισκετο* is the *ἔργα* of his war, just as past events were the object of Thucydides' 'discovery' in 1.1.3, 20.1, and 21.1, but this time the result is superior knowledge. Thucydides can use his own observation, cross-examine witnesses, compare accounts, and overcome weak memory and bias in

informants in order to ascertain each single ἔργον: note that he twice uses ἕκαστα to modify the ἔργα. In consequence, his ἔργα (the antecedent of αὐτῶν) will *not* be general or mythodic in character, they will, in each case, be trustworthy. Therefore, for as many (readers) as will want to examine the clear truth of what happened, and will happen again in similar and parallel form, to judge these ἔργα (antecedent again of αὐτῶν) useful, will be quite sufficient.

Many readers of this seminal chapter have presumed that the antecedent of the two pronouns in 22.4 is Thucydides' work as a whole, his 'history.' This is an incorrect assumption. The ἔργα are the close and natural antecedent in both cases, and they are the constant focus of Thucydides' attention throughout this passage, with the exception of 22.1. They are the subject of the passive verb of discovery in 22.3, and it is their non-mythodic character that will [perhaps] appear somewhat unappealing for reading (aloud). We see here the same repetition of the pronoun αὐτά Rusten noted in a similarly programmatic passage in 1.97.2:⁷

Despite their variety of reference, it is surprising to find that the statements are grammatically unified by a single pronoun, the initial αὐτά derived from the emphatic τοσάδε of 97.1: the object of ἔγραψα, it is restated in τοῦτο τὸ χωρίον, the antecedent of τούτων, and the subject of τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀπόδειξιν ἔχει. Each of the diverse statements is made about the same narrative, reflecting its variety of significant properties in itself (a neglected gap in the story, a chronological sequence) and its relation to the entire history (a different plan, a documentation of the brutal character of empire).

Similarly, Thucydides starts with the noun τὰ ἔργα in 1.22.2, continues with successive uses of the pronoun αὐτά in 22.3 and 4, and finally concludes with an understood αὐτά as the subject of ξύγκειται in 22.4. In 1.22 and 1.97 Thucydides addresses his readers in the first-person and employs the key verb γράφειν to explain why he chose the events he did and how he wrote about them. He uses, step by step, the same method of explanation in the two cases. In the first one he underlines his attention to detailed knowledge and his complete accuracy in composing the ἔργα; in the second, he emphasises his reasons for changing his plan and writing his account of 'this topic' (τοῦτο τὸ χωρίον).

It may seem odd that Thucydides privileges his claim for permanent value to one constituent of his work rather than to the whole, but we see the reason for this stipulation stated in 22.1, his programme for speeches: there he candidly, self-consciously, acknowledges that neither he nor his informants

⁷ Rusten (2020) 247.

could remember the ἀκρίβεια of the things said before or during the war. He uses ἕκαστοι to refer first to the individual speakers whose words he could *not* remember, secondly to his practice of making each speaker say roughly (μάλιστ') what *he thought* was demanded of him on each occasion. The sentence 22.1 is a *foil* for 22.2, which concerns the ἔργα of Thucydides' war: the speeches do not have the same truth value as the ἔργα, a distinction Thucydides wants his readers to hold in mind. He highlights the difference by using the very same words in the two sections to indicate opposing practices and results. In fact, 22.1 and 22.2 exhibit chiasmus in every phrase and clause, as Maurer noted: 'the famous chiasmus at 1.22.1–3, contrasting speeches with actions, has never to this day been understood in all six of its parts, though this affects the meaning.'⁸ Thucydides tells his readers that his practices in forming λόγοι and ἔργα are opposite to each other in every respect.

Among the multiple oppositions in 1.22.1 vs 22.2 is this: in 22.1 Thucydides says 'it was difficult for me and my informants to recall the exact wording of the things each speaker said *before and during this war*.' In 22.2 he says 'I did not deem it fit to write the ἔργα of *the things done in this war* by learning them from random sources ...'. Christopher Pelling emphasises Thucydides' contrast between speeches and actions 'with careful verbal antitheses' in 22.1–2, then adds in a note:⁹

Including, interestingly, a contrast between the speeches 'either before the war or after its outbreak' and the actions 'done in the war': he does not seem to be extending the same principles to the actions he has collected in Book I (particularly, I suppose, the *Pentekontaetia*). It is uncertain how much we should make of this.

Given the other direct oppositions between 22.1 and 2, and the parallel phrases τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων and τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων, we can, I believe, respond to Pelling's acute observation by suggesting that we should take this contrast as significant. If we consider Thucydides to be as careful and precise as we have found him in this passage, the distinction between 'speeches before and during the war' and ἔργα done in the war is intentional. It signals that Thucydides does *not* claim complete accuracy for the ἔργα done before the war, such as the *Archaeology*, which appears just before this statement, and, as Pelling surmised, the *Pentekontaetia*. Thucydides' speeches and pre-war excursuses belong, then, in the same category: approximations rather than reproductions.

⁸ Maurer (1995) 121 n. 34.

⁹ Pelling (2009) 182 with n. 14.

There are four important phrases in 1.22 of the same syntactical shape and with related semantic values:

1. τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων
2. τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων
3. τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων
4. τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφές καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ... ἔσεσθαι

What do these four expressions mean, and how do they relate to each other? The third one has always seemed idiosyncratic and obscure, awkward or even redundant, so it has been hard to interpret. Comparison with the others should help. In the first case Thucydides says it was difficult for him and his informants to recall the 'precise truth itself of the things said'. The second refers to the 'overall sense of the things actually said', or to the 'general policy of the things actually said'. The third has τῶν πραχθέντων ('of the things done') in parallel to τῶν λεχθέντων, and goes on to say that he *did* pursue ἀκρίβεια in this case, as he expressly did not in the first. In the fourth he says that for those who will wish to examine the 'clear truth' of both the things that happened (τῶν τε γενομένων) and are going to happen again in similar form, it will be good enough if they judge these (ἔργα) useful. Some scholars think 'the things that happened' include the speeches, hence referring to Thucydides' history as a whole, not solely to the ἔργα. But in a similarly programmatic passage, 6.54.1, where the historian introduces his account of the tyrannicide, he uses almost the same expression to refer to that ἔργον:

τὸ γὰρ Ἀριστογείτονος καὶ Ἄρμοδίου τόλμημα δι' ἐρωτικὴν ξυντυχίαν ἐπεχειρήθη, ἣν ἐγὼ ἐπὶ πλέον διηγησάμενος ἀποφανῶ οὔτε τοὺς ἄλλους οὔτε αὐτοὺς Ἀθηναίους περὶ τῶν σφετέρων τυράννων οὐδὲ περὶ τοῦ γενομένου ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν λέγοντας.

Here περὶ τοῦ γενομένου ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν expresses the negative of τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφές. Furthermore, the latter phrase has a second dependent genitive, τῶν μελλόντων, which refers to future events. Those events do not include speeches because the resulting claim would be preposterous: Thucydides is surely not claiming that future speeches will resemble those given in the Peloponnesian War! Krueger explained the genitive plural in τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων as partitive, so that one should understand the phrase this way: 'von dem was in dem Kriege ausgeführt und betrieben oder verhandelt wurde habe ich die eigentlichen Thaten u.s.w.'¹⁰ Thucydides' ἔργα are, then, the 'actual facts' extracted from all the events that occurred in the

¹⁰ Krueger (1851) 215.

war. Like the parallel substantives ἡ ἀκρίβεια and τὸ σαφές in 1.22, τὰ ἔργα designate 'the truth', 'actual facts', 'reality'. Hence the expression τὰ ἔργα conveys the strong epistemological force of Thucydides' *exact reproduction in writing* of the events of his war. Edmunds calls this effect 'adequation', words equalling actions.¹¹ τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων are then 'the actual facts I deemed fit to write down' (ἡξίωσα γράφειν). What this sequence of noun phrases makes clear is that Thucydides is at pains in 1.22 to tell his readers that the two parts of his work under discussion stand in opposition to each other: the ἔργα are painstakingly and scrupulously and fully ascertained and reproduced, the speeches are not. The ἔργα will recur in history, the speeches will not.

The final sentence of 22.4 clinches that argument: my work has been composed as a (written) possession to be heard/read repeatedly more than as a competitive performance to be heard/read just once on the spot.¹² Once again, I will argue below, Thucydides is contrasting the two major components of his work.

We see a parallel to this dichotomous relationship between truth claims for the λόγοι vs the ἔργα in a central passage in the Funeral Oration, 2.41.2 and 4. In the former sentence, Pericles/Thucydides contrasts the λόγων ἐν τῷ παρόντι κόμπος with the ἔργων ἀλήθεια; in the latter, the opposition is between ἔπεσι μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα and τῶν δ' ἔργων ... ἡ ἀλήθεια, which will harm the 'intended meaning' (τὴν ὑπόνοιαν) of the words.¹³ Thucydides here uses the same chiasmus as in 1.22 to emphasise the crucial difference between the ephemeral words in a speech or epic and the enduring truth of deeds *that have been guaranteed*. 'Pericles' claims that Athenians' deeds are verified by (41.2) the δύναμις of the city that makes them known (σημαίνει), and (41.4) by μεγάλων δὲ σημείων and the μνημεῖα αἶδια that the Athenians have planted everywhere. κτῆμά ἐς αἰεὶ and ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα in 1.22.4 are virtual synonyms for μνημεῖα αἶδια and λόγων ἐν τῷ παρόντι κόμπος/ἔπεσι τὸ αὐτίκα respectively. Thucydides gives to Pericles the same chiasmus he uses himself in passages contrasting the truth value of validated ἔργα vs that of approximated λόγοι.

In 1.22, Thucydides similarly 'guarantees' the ἔργα in his work by saying that he has produced ἀκριβεία through his painstaking research. Nicole Loraux acutely analyses the nature of Thucydides' claim that he has reproduced the war in writing:¹⁴

¹¹ Edmunds (2009) 844.

¹² See Rawlings (2016).

¹³ Rusten (1989) 161.

¹⁴ Loraux (1986) 148.

Ainsi, à côté du composé *syngraphô*, qui désigne l'écrire à l'œuvre dans sa fonction totalisante, *graphô* dit l'écriture en son essence, et la valeur éminente de l'activité d'historien. Ne retenir pour en faire de l'écrit que ce qui a subi l'épreuve d'un jugement—ce qui a été estimé fiable, sûr, en un mot ce qui constitue vraiment un fait—c'est une nouvelle fois apparier l'une à l'autre la valeur du sujet et celle de l'objet. ... Ecrire, donc, ne se réduit jamais à transcrire parce qu'à tout *graphein* préside une axiomatique.

Loraux emphasises Thucydides' insistence upon rigorously testing the *ἔργα* before considering them worthy of inclusion in his written text (*ἡξίωσα γράφειν*), and his proud claim that, once they have reached that stage, (it is axiomatic that) his written *ἔργα* are actual facts, reliable and certain and real. In Edmunds' interpretation, Thucydides wants his readers 'to take the writing as the equivalent of the war', in other words, as 'absolute mimesis', and 'Thucydides' work permits the reader to see the deeds themselves (I.2I.2).¹⁵ Mabel Lang came to a similar conclusion:¹⁶

... but it is with first-person references (I.2I–2) that he sets the stage for his account of the war, describing what he (necessarily in the first person) will do to make that account a true reflection of the war itself (I.22), not merely his version. This, he seems to say, is his guarantee that the account both is incontrovertible and will prove to be a useful exemplification of human conflicts.

How can we be sure that Thucydides places such superior long-term value on his *ἔργα*, as opposed to his rhetorically sophisticated speeches? Fortunately, we can corroborate his statement of method with attestation from his practice: Thucydides distinguishes between the words he uses for summarising his *ἔργα* and those he employs for introducing and concluding speeches. For the former, cf. 2.7.1: *γεγενημένου δὲ τοῦ ἐν Πλαταιαῖς ἔργου καὶ λελυμένων λαμπρῶς τῶν σπονδῶν*: 'the *ἔργον* in Plataea having occurred and the peace having *manifestly* been broken'—definite action, definite result. And compare 2.54.5: *ταῦτα μὲν τὰ κατὰ τὴν νόσον γενόμενα*: 'these were the things that happened in the course of the plague'. The same kinds of definite words and phrases conclude narrative passages in 3.50.3, 68.5, 114.4, 116.3; 4.41.4; 7.87.6.

In these cases and more, Thucydides uses the demonstratives *οὗτος* and *οὕτως* to conclude his narrative episode in definite fashion: *these* things happened, or the event ended *thus*. Note that he uses the same practice in

¹⁵ Edmunds (2009) 841, 846.

¹⁶ Lang (2011) 139.

introducing and concluding the texts of treaties, truces, and the like, in other words, of written documents: cf. 4.117.3, 119.3; 5.17.2, 20.1, 22.3, 24.2, 46.5, 48.1.

His manner of introducing and concluding speeches is quite different: here he almost invariably says *τοιούτος* or *τοσοῦτος* or *τοιάδε* to indicate that the speech is presented only approximately as it was delivered. E. Harrison first called attention to this practice in a brief note entitled 'Thucydides' Mode of Presenting his Speeches'. Harrison found *τοιαῦτα* following speeches 30 times, *τοσαῦτα* 16 times, *τοιάδε* once. Similarly, in introducing speeches, he found *τοιάδε* 42 times, *τοσοῦτους λόγους* once, *τοσόνδε* once, *τάδε* three times, *ᾧδε* twice. Harrison concluded:¹⁷

Unlike Herodotus or Xenophon, Th. is scrupulous, in the setting of his speeches, to use words which suggest that the speeches are not verbatim reports. By the regular use of *τοιάδε* or *τοιαῦτα* (or *τοσαῦτα*) he gives us from time to time a neat and unobtrusive reminder of his general remarks (i 22) on his treatment of ὅσα μὲν λόγῳ εἶπον ἕκαστοι.

It is instructive to compare Sallust's method of introducing reconstructed speeches. A careful reader and imitator of Thucydides, the Roman historian uses the phrase *huiusmodi* to introduce and to summarise some speeches: cf. *Bellum Catilinae* 20.2, *orationem huiusmodi habuit*; 32.3, *mittit cum mandatis huiusmodi*; 50.5, *huiusmodi uerba locutus est*; 52.1, *huiusmodi orationem habuit*. Sallust can also employ *hoc modo locutum*, as in *Bellum Iugurthinum*, 13.9, and *hoc modo disseruit* in 84.5.¹⁸ These expressions convey the same message as those used by Thucydides to introduce and to conclude his speeches: 'this is my rendition of a speech delivered in the war; it is not an exact copy of that speech, it is, in part, my own rhetorical invention.'

We can see Thucydides, in practice, 'scrupulously' carrying out the programme he announced in 1.22 for the ἔργα and λόγοι. Scholars have noted¹⁹ the significance of his 'vague' words for characterising the speeches as approximations, but they have not commented upon the definite pronouns and adverbs Thucydides uses in concluding his ἔργα.

We are now in position to analyse more closely the phrase ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν in 22.4. It is to be set against his achievement in 'discovering' in detail the ἔργα of the war. Here are the words Thucydides uses

¹⁷ Harrison (1908) 11. And see Gomme (1945) 144, contrasting Thucydides' practice in introducing and concluding speeches with that of Herodotus, who frequently uses *ταῦτα* and *τάδε*, as though his speeches are verbatim.

¹⁸ Thanks to Josiah Osgood for this observation about Sallustian practice.

¹⁹ See Vischer (1877); Jebb (1907).

with ἔργα: ταῦτα, ἕκαστα, ἀκριβεία, τὸ σαφές, τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες, ἠύρισκετο, ἐπεξελεθῶν, γράφειν, ὠφέλιμα. The ἔργα in Thucydides' work are specific, definite, clear, *not* mythodic, discovered with effort, *not* based on what 'seemed true to him', tested in research, transferred to writing as replicas of reality, and presented as useful to readers. They can and should be read multiple times for knowledge and understanding. On the other side, λόγος is characterised as τοιοῦτος, οὐκ ἀκριβεία, too difficult to remember what ἕκαστοι said, as what *seemed* to him speakers would have said in each circumstance, as τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης, and it has been 'spoken' (εἴρηται). A Thucydidean speech is 'of such a kind', not a replica of the original speech, but rather a creation based upon Thucydides' view of what was called for in the circumstances. A λόγος is an ἀγώνισμα, a rhetorical display intended for an on-the-spot, live performance in front of an audience, designed to impress and to entertain. The oppositions we have just drawn help to elucidate the complex chiasmus that Maurer said had never been fully appreciated.²⁰

Most scholars have taken the phrase ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν to refer not to any components of Thucydides' work, but to the 'inferior' productions of others, such as sophists, or Herodotus, who probably gave recitations of his history. Hornblower points out, however, that 'This famous announcement does not quite exclude ... the possibility that parts at least of Th.'s own work were recited: he wants it to be thought of as a possession for ever *rather than* a prize recitation piece.'²¹ The point is strengthened if we take μᾶλλον ἢ as 'more than' instead of as 'rather than'. The phrase often carries in Thucydides the former meaning, in which the second element in the comparison is not excluded, but rather subordinated to the first: see 1.13.1; 2.62.3, 87.2; 3.11.3; 7.57.1 for examples.

I believe that Thucydides considered his speeches and certain historical narratives to be *exempla*, what Tsakmakis, in interpreting δέοντα in 1.22.1, calls 'a rhetorical ideal'.²² It is no accident that Thucydides concludes the *Archaeology* in 1.20.1 with τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἦϋρον, not with ταῦτα ἦϋρον: he uses the same pronoun he uses for concluding speeches. We find τοιαῦτα in 21.1, this time weakened by μάλιστα, as noted above, to characterise the historical account he presents in the *Archaeology*.²³ Thucydides evinces a remarkable consistency in the claims he makes for accuracy in the different components

²⁰ See above, n. 8.

²¹ Hornblower (1991–2008) I.61.

²² Tsakmakis (2017) 273.

²³ Loraux (1986) 156 distinguishes between Thucydides' 'self-revealing' narrative of the *erga* of the present, which constitute 'the facts themselves', and the presentation of the past, whose uncertain status requires authorial reasoning from inferior sources.

of his history: total for the ἔργα of his war, partial for his speeches and historical excursuses.

Hornblower suggests that major passages in Thucydides that are *not* speeches, but that exhibit rhetorical power, could be considered candidates for ἀγώνισματα: for example, he references ἀγώνισμα in 1.22.4 in commenting on the striking passage on the civil war at Corcyra:²⁴

It remains true that the thought in these chapters [3.82–3] is for some of the time a display of generalising fireworks (I suggested at *Thucydides* 29 that despite the disclaimers at 1.22.4 about ‘prize compositions’, some parts of his own work, the Corcyra *stasis* in particular, could have been read out for the applause of *symposia* or drinking and dining clubs).

As an example, it is quite clear from Plato's *Menexenus* that Thucydides' Funeral Oration, as his quintessential ἀγώνισμα, drew plenty of attention (and competition) from its hearers/readers.²⁵

It is intriguing to note that, in his *Life* of Thucydides, Marcellinus says that ‘in fact he named his own composition an ἀγώνισμα’: καὶ γὰρ ὠνόμασεν ἀγώνισμα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ συγγραφὴν (48). This remark is generally taken as an obvious error, since Marcellinus seems not to have quoted 1.22.4 as a whole, but only a fragment.²⁶ Maitland also notes, however, that Marcellinus seems here to draw from a new source that he has compressed, but one that knows Thucydides' text and discusses his treatment of μῦθοι quite differently from his predecessors. The passage (48–9) goes on to approve of Thucydides' approach, and mentions three excursuses in Thucydides: Tereus, Cyclops, and Alcmeon. The text of Marcellinus is probably corrupt here, but it seems likely that he is epitomising a source that discussed different components of Thucydides' work, including historical excursuses. That source apparently made the point that Thucydides called (parts of?) his work an ἀγώνισμα.

We should pause to return briefly to 1.21–2. In 21.1 Thucydides used the verbs ὑμνήκασι and ξυνέθεσαν for, respectively, the productions of the poets and logographers. He uses the latter verb as well in 1.97.2 to refer to ‘all those before me’ who ‘composed’ (ξυνετίθεσαν) Greek history before the Persian Wars and the Persian Wars themselves.²⁷

As far as his speeches go, Thucydides says in 1.22.1 that ‘they have been spoken in this way’: οὕτως εἴρηται. But to describe his historiographical

²⁴ Hornblower (1991–2008) I.478.

²⁵ For Plato's use of Thucydides' Funeral Oration, see D.H. *Dem.* 23: Plato composed the *Menexenus* ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, Θουκυδίδην παραμιμούμενος. And cf. Kahn (1963).

²⁶ See Maitland (1996) 545.

²⁷ Cf. Hornblower (1991–2008) II.19–20.

practice as a whole, he uses *γράφειν* and *ξυγγράφειν*: cf. 1.1.1, 22.2, 97.2; 5.20.3, 26.1, and all the year-ending sentences, e.g., 4.135.2. It appears that Thucydides generally characterised his predecessors as composers and presenters of works put together for oral performance. Hellanicus, a contemporary, is portrayed differently: Thucydides refers to his work as an *Ἀττικῆ ξυγγραφή* (1.97.2), which seems appropriate for a written chronicle. If the arguments in this paper are correct, Thucydides thinks of his own history as primarily a written work for serious readers because it precisely reproduces the events of the Peloponnesian War that can serve as templates for later history; *but*, he adds, his work also contains speeches and certain historical reconstructions that are aimed more at group reading/listening on one occasion.

Here is the train of Thucydides' thought in 1.20–3: I have just completed a reconstruction of early Greek history, meant to prove that my war is superior to all previous ones. My research enabled me to produce a picture of early Greece that is useful for comparative purposes, but only credible in broad outline because the evidence allows no more. Poets and logographers have not achieved my level of accuracy because they are entertainers, not historians. The actual facts provided in my account of 'this war' will demonstrate to my readers how much greater it is than earlier Greek conflicts, particularly the Trojan and Persian Wars. In composing speeches, my informants and I could not recall the exact words spoken, and I have taken some liberties in constructing them. But I can assure readers that the *ἔργα* I have allowed into my war are completely accurate and certain, and will stand as exemplars of the *ἔργα* that will transpire under similar conditions in the future. My goal is more to compose a written text for repeated serious reading than a competitive display for momentary listening (such as the Archaeology you just read/heard).

Thucydides knew, I believe, that his speeches and historical excursuses would powerfully impress his readers. He lavished time and attention upon them. They are masterpieces of rhetoric and analysis. But Thucydides also knew that they were not accurate renditions of what had, in fact, been spoken, or had transpired in prior history. His novel and crowning achievement, he believed, was his recording in written form the actual facts, the true reality of a contemporary war, told as though it unfolded on its own accord, with no author intruding into the narrative. That 'adequation'²⁸ constitutes, according to Thucydides, the superiority of his work over those of Homer and Herodotus, who had not even aspired to such accuracy. They had instead entertained their listeners with *τὸ μυθῶδες*, told in *ἀγώνισματα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν*, highly popular narratives meant for large audiences. Thucydides wrote, instead, for a smaller, élite audience of readers who would benefit from carefully reading his rendition of the war between Athens and Sparta.

²⁸ To use again the term of Edmunds (2009) 844.

As Immerwahr noted,²⁹ Thucydides transformed the ἔργα of Herodotus, which were predominantly physical monuments and 'deeds', into facts, actions, indications of *power*, not of aesthetic and martial grandeur. Herodotus announced his theme in his proem:

Of the research of Herodotus of Halicarnassus [or Thuri], this is the (oral) publication, that neither the things done by mankind fade away, nor the great and marvelous ἔργα, some produced by Greeks, others by barbarians, lose their fame, and in addition, for what reason they made war upon each other.

For confirmation that such ἔργα constitute the major theme of his work, note 2.35.1, where Herodotus acknowledges that he keeps on extending his account of Egypt because it offers the most marvels, and ἔργα greater than description, compared to any other land.

We can now see that, early in his history, Thucydides signals to his readers that he will transform his predecessor's ἔργα and thus his major theme into something new and different. He begins the lesson in 1.10:

That Mycenae was small, or if any town of the ones from that time does not now appear noteworthy, the reader (τις) would be using an inaccurate proof if he distrusted that the expedition was as great as the poets have said and the tradition holds It is not right to distrust, nor to examine the appearances of cities rather than their powers

Hornblower observes: 'Th. reacts strongly against Hdt.' in this passage because the latter had focused his attention so much upon the physical appearance of ἔργα, a subject Thucydides almost completely ignored.³⁰

Then, as we have noted, Thucydides redefines the concept of ἔργα in chapters 20–2, and trumpets it as his major innovation in writing history. Immediately following that claim, Thucydides proclaims (23.1): 'Of prior ἔργα, the Persian War was the greatest, and this nevertheless had a swift decision in two sea battles and two battles on land.' Such is, without doubt, an absurd way to evaluate the scope and significance of Herodotus' war, an absurdity that gives away Thucydides' game: he calls the Persian War of 480/79 a single ἔργον, a brief event that could not stand comparison to his own war, which he goes on to say was immensely long and destructive. Coming, as it does, directly after Thucydides' redefinition of ἔργα in 1.22, this boast cannot help but point to Herodotus as the author of the term that is being redefined. Thucydides

²⁹ See Immerwahr (1960).

³⁰ Hornblower (1991–2008) I.33–4.

completes the circle: measured by his standard, that of ‘examining on the basis of the facts themselves’, ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων σκοποῦσιν (1.21.2), Herodotus’ war is brief and inconsequential.

A close appraisal of 1.20–3 reveals the full depth of Thucydides’ claim that his work is novel and superior to those of his predecessors, notably Homer and Herodotus. He can emulate their rhetorical achievements by constructing speeches and reconstructing episodes of the past, but that is not what constitutes the permanent value of his work. Unlike Homer and Herodotus, he has captured the truth of history, he has committed reality to writing.

Cornell University

HUNTER R. RAWLINGS III
hrr6@cornell.edu

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