

## REVIEW-DISCUSSION

### AN ANCIENT GREEK HISTORIAN AND HIS CITY

Nanno Marinatos and Robert K. Pitt, edd., *Thucydides the Athenian*. College Year in Athens Papers 1. Athens: ΔΙ.Κ.Ε.ΜΕ.Σ, 2022. Pp. 329. Free online pdf: <https://cyathens.org/publications/>. ISBN 978-960-98908-1-6

‘Thucydides the Athenian’: the phrase not only comprises the opening words of the historian’s text,<sup>1</sup> it also reminds us that Thucydides thought of himself primarily as a citizen of Athens and that it was perhaps only a participant in that political and intellectual environment who could have produced the *History* as we have it. The present edited volume—the proceedings of a conference held in Athens in 2018 and the first in the *College Year in Athens Papers* series—brings together an international group of scholars whose contributions indeed tend to situate the author in his historical context but also highlight some underappreciated aspects of his war narrative and its reception. As often, the writer is sometimes overshadowed by his most famous character, Pericles son of Xanthippus of Cholargus: somewhat tellingly, the editors in their preface state that one purpose of their conference was ‘to discuss Pericles and Thucydides [note the former’s primacy] within their Athenian contexts, hence the chosen title’ (11, and see the contributions of Matthaïou and Anderson). Yet the reader will also find reassessments of Nicias (Nikolaïdis, Marinatos, Kyrtatas), Themistocles (Jaffe), and the Spartan commander Lichas (Cartledge), as well as studies of the historian’s method (Pitt, Scanlon) and of his relationship to the epigraphy and archaeology of the time (the aforementioned Matthaïou and Anderson, plus Tanoulas). Two papers on Thucydides’ reception round out the volume (Konaris, Earley). Conference proceedings can be somewhat scattershot in their topics and cohesion, and this one is no exception; however, the papers are of such consistently solid quality that the book can be read with profit cover to cover by historians of ancient Greece. Or rather, ‘end to end’—there is no

<sup>1</sup> Or rather, ‘Thucydides, *an* Athenian’ (Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος, 1.1)—the historian did not presume to distinguish himself, using the definite article, from any other author named Thucydides but wished to indicate his *patris*.

physical copy of the work complete with a front and back cover, as far as I know, only a pdf. The decision to make the volume digital-only is reflective of a growing trend in academic scholarship the merits of which I cannot discuss here; to make it open access, however (see <https://cyathens.org/publications/>), is very admirable.<sup>2</sup> We can hope that future entries in the *College Year in Athens Papers* series will contain indices. Greater gender diversity among the contributors would also be an improvement.

The opening chapter by S. N. Jaffe, ‘Walls of Wood and Walls of Stone: Themistocles as Architect of Empire’, pursues issues explored in the author’s monograph of 2017, namely the relation of individuals to their respective political regimes and the function of such individuals within Thucydides’ narrative.<sup>3</sup> In the vein of scholars like W. Blösel, acknowledged by the author, Jaffe approaches his title character not as a historical individual but as an avatar of ‘Thucydidean preoccupations’ (21) such as naval power, empire, and Pericles’ Peloponnesian War strategy. There follows a thorough and convincing discussion of Themistocles’ relationship to Pericles and to Thucydides himself, one conclusion of which deserves to be quoted for its truth and felicity of expression: ‘[T]he bright galaxy of Athenian characters in the *History* shed mutual light upon one another. They cannot be studied in isolation’ (42). Here one might add that while they certainly cannot be studied in isolation within the historian’s text, we can also bring the portrayal of these figures in Thucydides into dialogue with portrayals in contemporary authors. Stesimbrotus of Thasos, for example, a portion of whose lost pamphlet was devoted to Themistocles, appears to have echoed Thucydides’ point that Themistocles made the Athenians ‘nautical’ (*thalassios*; cf. *nautikos* at Thuc. 1.93.3) and added that he did so over the objections of Miltiades, the great hoplite general.<sup>4</sup> The other key author ‘thinking with Themistocles’ at the time is Aristophanes, whose *Knights* of 424 frequently compares the hero of Salamis with Cleon, usually in order to find the latter wanting (e.g. ll. 810–19, 884–5, 1040). There seems to have been a debate during the Peloponnesian War over who was the proper inheritor of Themistocles’ mantle, and future studies

<sup>2</sup> Along similar lines see the recent online *Tyche* Supplementband 14: M. Kurpios, *The Reception of Thucydides in the Theory and Practice of Hellenistic Historiography* (Vienna, 2021). ([https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/52892/PUB\\_823\\_Kurpios\\_Reception\\_of\\_Thucydides.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/52892/PUB_823_Kurpios_Reception_of_Thucydides.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)). *Histos* itself has of course been offering free online supplements since 2014.

<sup>3</sup> S. N. Jaffe, *Thucydides and the Outbreak of the War: Character and Contest* (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> *BNJ* 107 F 2. See further F. Pownall, ‘Politics and the Pamphlet of Stesimbrotus of Thasos’, *Mouseion* 17 Supplement 1 (2020) 125–49. For a critical assessment of the relationship between the ‘nautical’ Athenians and their democratic empire one thinks also of the Old Oligarch.

might build on Jaffe's Thucydidean insights by exploring the image of Themistocles in other sources.

Angelos P. Matthaiou ('Pericles: The Direct and Indirect Fifth-Century Epigraphical Evidence') begins and ends with reminders that Pericles features very little in the extant epigraphic record and that, absent Thucydides and Plutarch's descriptions of his leadership, we would have a very different picture of his role in fifth-century Athens. Still, one wonders if the two authors did not put too much weight on his *prostasia*, an overemphasis that leads us today to echo Thucydides' famous statement about a nominal democracy headed in fact by one man (2.65.9). In the present case, for example, the 'indirect epigraphic evidence' for Pericles becomes many of the famous Attic 'historical inscriptions' of the later fifth century, including the Callias decrees (OR 144), the first-fruits decree (OR 141), and the decrees for Methone (OR 150), none of which mentions Pericles. For the author, it is enough that during this period Pericles 'was the leading figure in Athens' (50), but I am not sure we should assume that all of the decrees discussed represented Pericles' personal policy. It is true that Plutarch says Pericles did much of his political business through subordinates (*Mor.* 812d), but we should perhaps grant, e.g., the seer Lampon (in OR 141, discussed by Matthaiou at 55–6) a bit more independence from Pericles than Plutarch would have us believe. Matthaiou concludes with a discussion of the skyphos found at Kifisia in Attica in 2009, to be discussed at greater length below. Overall, the chapter and accompanying bibliography serve as an excellent introduction to Matthaiou's numerous contributions to fifth-century Attic epigraphy, many of them published quite recently and in primarily Greek-language journals like *HOPOΣ* and *Γραμματεῖον*. His meticulous study of these documents has often produced convincing new readings entailing changes to our understanding of Athenian history.

The chapter of A. Sebastian Anderson ('Party Politics: Thucydides, the *Hetaireia*, and the Cup of Pericles') has many virtues, not the least of which is a thorough discussion of the 'Pericles Cup' found at Kifisia (see above), an astounding object that has not yet received much scholarly attention in English.<sup>5</sup> Anderson's initial focus on the *hetaireiai* of Classical Athens convincingly argues that the term, the usual one for a partisan grouping helping members with elections and lawsuits, is neutral in meaning and might, in

<sup>5</sup> See G. Daskalaki, 'Ἐνεπίγραφος σκύφος ἀπό τὴν Κηφισιά', *HOPOΣ* 22–5 (2010–13) 179–86; A. P. Matthaiou, 'Ὁ ἐνεπίγραφος σκύφος τῆς Κηφισιάς', *Γραμματεῖον* 5 (2016) 53–65, and the volume under review, 65–7. I briefly discussed the cup in a review essay on 'Periclean Athens', where I should have said the rescue excavation took place in 2009 rather than 2008: M. Simonton, 'Who Made Athens Great? Three Recent Books on Pericles and Athenian Politics', *Polis* 35 (2018) 220–35, at 220–1. I have lectured on the cup twice for the Archaeological Institute of America, in 2017 and 2020.

actual practice, be formed by democrats no less than oligarchs; it was mainly during times of suspicion and *stasis* that the phenomenon *per se* came under suspicion. The author's exploration of the cup aims to show how Pericles himself belonged to such an association as a young man. The cup, a simple black-slip skyphos dated to the second quarter of the fifth century, features the names of six men in the genitive case within a quadrilateral boundary. The cup was turned over to provide stability and the names were inscribed, in the Attic alphabet, in several hands. They are, in order: Aristides, Diodotus, Daisimus, Ariphron, Pericles, and Eucritus. On the bottom of the cup is a seventh noun, this time in the nominative case and the Ionian alphabet: *drapētēs* (the usual term for a runaway slave). As Anderson notes, the same term has been found on the bottom of a lamp from the agora (*Agora XXI F 93*). Upon its discovery, the cup was touted as a kind of holy grail of Pericles, since the presence of his brother's rare name Ariphron (also the name of their paternal grandfather) seems to ensure that it is Pericles the son of Xanthippus we are dealing with here. The Aristides has been plausibly identified as the famous one, 'the Just', while Diodotus might just be Cleon's opponent from the Mytilinean Debate (Thuc. 3.41). As Anderson points out, this group likely constitutes a *hetaireia*, convened for a typically convivial setting. He speculates further that the *drapētēs* on the cup's bottom is not a person (*pace* Matthaïou) but the way the cup advertises itself as a so-called speaking object: 'I am the runaway of Aristides, Daisimus', etc.; the label would be made more appropriate by the fact that the object has been 'tattooed' via inscription and recaptured slaves were often *estigmenoi*, tattooed. While ingenious, this interpretation seems to run up against the fact that, at least according to my impression (which could of course be wrong), the inscription from the agora lamp and the inscription on the Pericles Cup are by the same hand. This suggests to me a historical individual and, thus, an ownership mark. Matthaïou's interpretation that this was perhaps a tavern-keeper of low social status, who kept the cup as a souvenir, remains the more convincing one, to my mind. Much more persuasive is Anderson's suggestion that we are looking at a 'parody of ostracism' (101), a hypothesis strengthened by the fact that the inscription on the cup is quasi-stoichedon and the stoichedon style is unknown in graffiti with the important exception of ostraca. Finally, I would point out that the presence of Pericles in a sympotic setting with Aristides, when we know from Plutarch that the former abjured all drinking parties once he became heavily involved in politics (*Per.* 7.5), jibes with Plutarch's prior remark that Pericles did not enter political life until after Aristides had died (7.3).

A. G. Nikolaidis' contribution, 'Revisiting the Pylos Episode and Thucydides' "Bias" Against Kleon', has now been published as an article elsewhere in

slightly modified form.<sup>6</sup> The author revisits the assembly scene at Thuc. 4.27–8, in which Nicias hands over his generalship to Cleon, and the scholarly position, at least as old as George Grote, that the attitude of the ‘prudent’ (*sōphrōn*) men towards the whole affair, viz. that they would consider it a good thing if the Pylos mission failed and Cleon were killed, constitutes a scandal. Nikolaidis notes that ‘[Cleon’s supporters]’ own responsibility and share in the decision taken [to send Cleon in Nicias’ place] is not criticized by denouncers of the [*sōphrones*]’ (121), but it is unclear why anyone should criticise them, since they hoped the campaign would succeed—the decision to send Cleon is not the detestable thing, but rather the *sōphrones*’ hope that he dies. Nikolaidis further observes that ‘there is nothing in Thucydides suggesting that the conduct of Nicias and his oligarchic supporters, the *sōphrones* of our passage, is unpardonably disgraceful’—as well might there not be, if Thucydides agreed with them that Cleon’s death would be a good thing! On the other hand, I think the author must be right that Thucydides numbered himself among these *sōphrones* and that the word has oligarchic connotations (126; cf. the *φρονοῦντές* men at Athens noted by Alcibiades at Thuc. 6.89.6, among whom he includes himself). Different readers will assess Nikolaidis’ arguments differently, but I note that he does not discuss Thucydides’ imputation of cowardly motives to Cleon at 5.10.9, called by Simon Hornblower in his commentary *ad loc.* ‘the most famous and extreme instance of a discreditable motive attributed on the evidence of overt action’.<sup>7</sup> In my opinion, Thucydides’ bias remains very much a live issue.

In ‘Games of Chess: Thucydides and Brasidas, Nicias and Gylippus’, Nanno Marinatos directs our attention again to Thucydides’ biography, specifically his experience as one of Athens’ generals, in order to illuminate the author’s method of writing battlefield narrative. Thucydides’ bad luck in failing to beat Brasidas to Amphipolis taught him the importance of chance in human affairs but also of the need on the part of strategists to try to anticipate as many contingencies as possible. Dimitris J. Kyrtatas revisits the eclipse of the moon and Nicias’ delaying response at Thuc. 7.50 (‘The Eclipse of the Moon, the General and the *Manteis*’), arguing that modern scholars’ difficulty in inhabiting the religious mindset of the ancient Greeks often leads us to criticise Nicias too harshly on this point. The claim that ‘[t]aking the eclipse seriously does not necessarily imply superstition’ (169), however, remains somewhat subjective. If one defines ‘superstition’ as, in part, explaining phenomena by recourse to magical or otherworldly theories of causation—a rather value-neutral definition, in my view—then most ancient Greeks (and

<sup>6</sup> *C&M* 69 (2021) 121–50.

<sup>7</sup> S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides: Volume II: Books IV–V.24* (Oxford, 1996).

many modern people) will certainly have been superstitious, but we need not judge them for it—the point is to understand why they held superstitious beliefs.

Robert K. Pitt ('Naming Strategies in the Sicilian Expedition: Characters under the Spotlight and Actors in the Wings') studies 'the naming and non-naming of actors in the text and how this is employed to focus the reader's attention onto certain characters and away from others' (175), with 'actors' deliberately chosen so as to highlight Thucydides' techniques of dramatic narration. Thucydides might decline to name individuals out of contempt, as in the case of the envoys from Eggesta, or in order to shine the spotlight more exclusively on a protagonist like Nicias. Pitt observes that the names of minor 'demagogues' like Demonstratus and Androcles are often suppressed (compare Thuc. 6.25.1 with Plut. *Nic.* 12.6 and Thuc. 6.28 with 8.65.2, respectively). We might note that his refusal to name these figures contrasts strongly with, for example, Xenophon's account of the Arginusae trial, where the otherwise unknown speakers Timocrates, Lyciscus, and Meneclous appear in quick succession and contribute to the generals' condemnation (*Hell.* 1.7.3, 13, 34). Xenophon's 'naming strategy' here arguably gives us a more accurate picture of the workings of the Athenian democracy, where multiple demagogues vied constantly for the citizenry's approval in a kind of 'arms race', than that of Thucydides, where one man (Cleon, Alcibiades) tends to enjoy popular favour at any given time. On the other hand, Thucydides' constant 'training of the camera' on Nicias, so to speak, which Pitt convincingly likens to a focus on a 'tragic hero' (199), does capture something crucial about people power at Athens: this patriot and cultivator of virtue (7.86.5) might be undone at any time, not only by an enemy in the field like Gylippus, but also, in perhaps an even likelier scenario, by naysayers on the home front. His impetus for writing a letter to the Athenians arises from his suspicion that a messenger will refuse to explain the truth of the situation in order to 'please the mob' (7.8.2), while later he fears 'the slanders of *some* clever speaker' before the Athenian assembly (*τις εὖ λέγων διαβάλλου*, 7.48.3), backed by the accusations of the majority of the fickle soldiery (48.4). Whether or not Nicias' suspicions were well placed in these instances, they point to the capacity of the anonymous and obscure *boulomenos* at Athens to bring down the community's most prominent elites.

Paul Cartledge next provides an informative and entertaining overview of the life of the Spartan statesman Lichas, known from Thucydides and other texts ('Lichas: A Mini-Biography'). After noting Lichas' likely descent from the *agathoergos* mentioned by Herodotus (1.67–8), his family's probable ties with the Battiad kingdom of Cyrene, and his spectacular horse-rearing (praised by the Athenian oligarch Critias), Cartledge traces his political career, including his ill treatment at the hands of the *hellenodikai* of Elis at the Olympic games of 420.

This is a fine treatment of a non-Athenian subject whose complexity and mention by multiple ancient sources knows few parallels beyond, say, Dorieus of Rhodes or Hermocrates of Syracuse. The author clearly finds Lichas an intriguing and perhaps sympathetic figure—much more so, anyway, than the bloodthirsty Lysander, for whom Plutarch composed a biography.<sup>8</sup> Those approaching T. F. Scanlon’s contribution, ‘Body Language and Personal Character in Thucydides’, expecting a Lateiner-like exploration of comportment and gesture in Thucydides will be disappointed; however, the chapter does contain a valuable discussion of the language of *sōma* and *psychē* in the historian, showing how it sets him apart from predecessors and from contemporary athletic language. In ‘New Evidence about Building on the Acropolis in Light of Thucydides’ History’, Tasos Tanoulas provides a useful overview of discoveries of the last four decades, several of which have not been properly registered in the standard treatments.<sup>9</sup> To what extent these discoveries make sense ‘in light of Thucydides’ history’, however, is not so clear. The author claims that Pericles names the Propylaia alone in his discussion of Athenian buildings (247, citing Thuc. 2.13.3; cf. 261), thus perhaps highlighting its prominence, but the passage in question records Thucydides’ summary of the situation, not Pericles’ *ipsissima verba*; it could be that on that occasion Pericles enumerated further structures, which Thucydides declines to name. Furthermore, the mention of the Propylaia comes not, as claimed (247, 261), during the *epitaphios logos* (a placing which, if true, might imbue the Propylaia with particular significance) but in Pericles’ inventory of Athens’ resources early in the war. The twelve images and charts accompanying the chapter are excellent.

The final two chapters explore the reception of Thucydides in nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. Michael D. Konaris (‘Thucydides and the Causes of the Peloponnesian War in Nineteenth-Century Historiography: The Case of Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos versus George Grote and Ernst Curtius’) introduces the reader to Paparrigopoulos, the author of a multi-volume *History of the Greek Nation* (*Ιστορία του ελληνικού έθνους*), the first part of which appeared in 1853. In a fascinating exploration proving Croce’s dictum that all true history is contemporary history, Konaris shows how the Greek scholar took issue with Grote and Curtius’ exonerating portrayal of Periclean Athens when it came to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Lysander ... has had his biographical due, perhaps more than his due, in modern scholarship’ (214 n. 16).

<sup>9</sup> The author notes that T. Leslie Shear, Jr., *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periclean Athens* (Princeton, 2016), at 281 n. 29, misinterprets some of his findings. See also Tanoulas’ note at 255 n. 30.

Paparrigopoulos censured Pericles on nationalist and elitist grounds for precipitating war too hastily and indulging the whims of Athens' 'naval mob', which had supposedly come to dominate (and devalue) Athenian policy. Grote and Curtius, by contrast, praised the Athenian democracy and defended its solid 'bourgeois' credentials, respectively. Konaris mentions de Ste. Croix's Grote-esque defence of Athens from one hundred years later, in *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1972), but does not discuss the latter's Marxist historical project, which goes some way towards explaining his defence of Athens' purportedly democratic empire.<sup>10</sup> On a personal note, I can confirm that these debates remain relevant for a new generation of history readers: in 2012 I lectured on de Ste. Croix and his critics at the Niebyl-Proctor Marxist Library in Oakland, California, to an attentive audience, who were intrigued by the dynamics of class conflict within Athens' *archē*. I note also a recent conference at Oxford in 2022, organised by Nino Luraghi, marking the fiftieth anniversary of de Ste. Croix's *Origins*, the proceedings of which will appear in a special issue of *Polis* journal later this year. We can have every expectation that arguments around Athens' culpability will continue, so long as historians differ politically and methodologically.

Finally, Benjamin Earley, exploiting a 1936 speech unearthed from the Churchill College, Cambridge, archives, describes the effects of World War I on a young Enoch Powell's understanding of Thucydides ('Enoch Powell: Trauma and Thucydides. A Perspective from the 1930s'). According to Earley, Powell and a new generation of historians scarred by the events of the Great War felt themselves in a better position to understand Thucydides' unromantic worldview, especially when compared with the relative naïfs of the Victorian era. Earley has already written extensively on the reception of Thucydides in his first book, the sixth chapter of which forms the basis for the present contribution.<sup>11</sup> Neither in the book nor in the chapter does Earley pursue the point, but it is worth noting that Powell is likely to be known to ancient historians not simply as a Thucydides scholar but also (perhaps primarily) as the author of the infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech of 1968, calling for a

<sup>10</sup> From the other end of the political spectrum, Loren J. Samons, Jr., has lamented the growth of democracy in Athens and contemporary America on conservative grounds: *What's Wrong with Democracy? From Athenian Practice to American Worship* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> B. Earley, *The Thucydidean Turn: (Re)Interpreting Thucydides' Political Thought Before, During and After the Great War* (London and New York, 2020). See the review in these pages by T. Rood, 'Reading Thucydides in the Early Twentieth Century', *Histos* 14 (2020) 136–57. Some of Rood's critical observations—for example, that Powell submitted an essay to the British Academy to be considered for the Cromer Prize in a single action, not two separate submissions (155)—hold good for the present chapter, as well.



curtailment of immigration to the United Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Earley observes that Powell appreciated Thucydides' selective comments on *to anthrōpinon*, which suggested to him a 'political thinker' attuned to human nature, and Powell stated in his own words that, in Thucydides' estimation, 'The forces of human nature which built an empire would also ... destroy it'.<sup>13</sup> Now, the 'Rivers of Blood' speech begins: 'The supreme function of statesmanship is to provide against preventable evils. In seeking to do so, it encounters obstacles which are deeply rooted in human nature.'<sup>14</sup> Did Powell's own understanding of *to anthrōpinon*, inspired by his personal reading of Thucydides, encourage him to make his racist intervention? The possible connection might be worth pursuing further.

The pdf is easy to navigate, and I noticed few errors.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Powell is also one of the few Classicists mentioned in a pop song: John Cale, 'Graham Greene', from *Paris 1919* (Reprise Records, 1973).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Earley at 318.

<sup>14</sup> Accessed online at [https://anth1001.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/enoch-powell\\_speech.pdf](https://anth1001.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/enoch-powell_speech.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> On 166 for 'Teissamenos' read 'Teisamenos'.