

Author of Illusions

Author of Illusions:
Thucydides' Rewriting of the History
of the Peloponnesian War

By

Robert D. Luginbill

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P U B L I S H I N G

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For Betty and Ramsey

φίλτατοι ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ

καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐρχομένῃ

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FOREWORD

The celebrated Pericles, in compliance with the resentment of a prostitute, at the expense of much of the blood and treasure of his countrymen, attacked, vanquished, and destroyed the city of the Samnians. The same man, stimulated by private pique against the Megarensians, another nation of Greece, or to avoid a prosecution with which he was threatened as an accomplice of a supposed theft of the statuary Phidias, or to get rid of the accusations prepared to be brought against him for dissipating the funds of the state in the purchase of popularity, or from a combination of all these causes, was the primitive author of that famous and fatal war, distinguished in the Grecian annals by the name of the Peloponnesian war; which, after various vicissitudes, intermissions, and renewals, terminated in the ruin of the Athenian commonwealth.

—Federalist Paper no.6

The Peloponnesian War was a strategic blunder of massive proportions that sank the Athenian empire beneath the waves forever. The person wholly responsible for Athens' ill-fated entry into that war and for her subsequent defeat was none other than her most famous son, Pericles. The sad reality that even today, nearly two and a half millennia afterwards, these two statements are not appreciated as absolute historical fact is due entirely to the work of Thucydides. It is because of his influence that even among historians Pericles' culpability and the proposition that the war was avoidable still remain matters of debate. Among the general public, moreover, there is little indication that the ancient alternative perception reflected in Alexander Hamilton's words above has survived to receive any serious consideration at all.

This book does not have as its main goal the objective of arguing for these two propositions, even though making these arguments must necessarily consume much of its time and effort. Rather, its primary task will be to show just *how* it was that Thucydides was able to reinterpret the obvious and substitute his alternative version of events so successfully. For one thing is certainly clear: he managed to do so with such devastating effectiveness that "the obvious" has been turned on its head, and the "clear reality", to use his term of art, of what really happened remains obscure to this day (except in the sober judgment of a handful of skeptical scholars).

Revising history is never a matter of merely recounting it anew. Overturning previously held opinion always requires art as well as skill. To be effective, Thucydides' *History* had to be more than a narrative; it had to be a sophisticated piece of legerdemain—and so it is, carefully leading the reader to unspoken conclusions of Thucydides' choosing. The primary means of misdirection Thucydides employed to rewrite the history of his times was the inclusion in his work of a unique layer of psychological analysis that describes and explores collective national character and individual human nature as these act and react in the crucible of war. The predictions, descriptions, and analyses that Thucydides derives from his system of psychological observations (called herein *logoi*) are so satisfying and marvelously self-fulfilling that they have a tendency to lull even the most critical reader into a trance of egoistic agreement—and little wonder, since our very fascination with these motifs and our attempts to understand their underlying message render us less resistant to their real purpose. Like a good snake charmer, Thucydides lets his hauntingly seductive music do its work, capturing our attention and guiding us to the main thesis of his work so surreptitiously that we imagine the conclusions we draw to be genuinely our own. In the end, it is difficult to make any emotional investment in the delights of Thucydides' great work without also, albeit somewhat unconsciously, accepting his interpretation of events and at the same time coming to admire Pericles—and Thucydides as well.

This book makes no claim to be the first to advance all of the arguments put forward here, but seeks to do so in a systematic way in order to demonstrate just how Thucydides has achieved his purpose of winning over most readers, with even skeptics tending to reserve ultimate judgment. Nor does it seek to diminish the immense value of the *History*. Apart from being an irreplaceable source, it is arguably the greatest work of ancient history and possibly the greatest work of historiography ever written, if not for Thucydides' theory of human nature as it affects the historical process, then at least for the depth of thinking it has always provoked in anyone giving its ideas even slight attention. It truly is a *ktēma es aiei*, a “possession for all time”, but that does not mean that an essential part of Thucydides' objective should be overlooked. The importance of the *History* is all the more reason why Thucydides' essential purpose in writing it ought to be explored.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE IDEAL WAR

In the spring of 404 after nearly three decades, the Peloponnesian War, an off-again, on-again contest of widely varying intensity, finally came to an end.¹ Following her catastrophic defeat in Sicily, Persian intervention, internal strife, and repeated disasters on the battlefield, Athens had finally lost the means to resist any longer. Periclean Athens, past glory and future legend, now found herself completely at the mercy of her foes, bereft of warships, allies, empire, even basic provisions. She was forced to accept terms, and only the intervention of Sparta, the leader of the coalition arrayed against her, saved the city itself from demolition and its citizens from enslavement. In accordance with the terms Athens was forced to accept, the Spartans and their allies demanded the destruction of the bulwark which had been so central to Pericles' putative strategy and so vital to the maintenance of the Athenian empire, namely, the grand long-walls which protected the city itself and secured her lifeline to Piraeus, her port on the Aegean. The Peloponnesians pulled down these walls with great enthusiasm while the flute girls played an accompaniment. All assumed, as Xenophon tells us, that this day marked "the beginning of freedom for Greece" (*Hell.* 2.2.23).

For the birthplace of tragedy, Athens' fall to earth from such a dizzying height is steeped in irony. Her empire had only recently controlled much of mainland Greece and the Aegean, dominating the coast of Asia Minor and even reaching past the Hellespont and the Bosphorus into the Black Sea in the north and to Corcyra and Italy in the west. What land, what people had not felt her influence, militarily, politically, economically, culturally—indeed, in countless ways? She had been the liberator of Greece, having turned back the Persian invaders at Salamis largely by her own valor, and had next become the *hegemon* of the alliance against the Medes (the genesis of her empire). In this present war too, Athens had not been

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all dates given are B.C.

without signal successes. Even the Spartan hoplites had been bested on Sphacteria in 425, and by 415, Sicily tottered and swayed before her. Only yesterday, the conquest of Carthage, the systematic reduction of all her enemies, and even the control of the entire Mediterranean, once mere dreams, had seemed within reach, dangling tantalizingly just outside her grasp.

But now, like the tragic heroes and heroines of her own dramas, Athens lay prostrate in the dust. Through her prowess, culture and character, she had once been “an education to all of Greece”, as Pericles in the *epitaphios* recorded by Thucydides put it (*Hist.* 2.40.1). Now she was teaching a new lesson, one as old as the tragic theme that “the doer must suffer and learn thereby”.² And it is precisely this aspect of the story that most intrigues us, bidding us to read about the ill-fated Sicilian expedition over and over again, if only somehow the outcome might be different. Like Waterloo or the “high tide” of the Confederacy at Gettysburg and all other such lost causes, we have here a case of a people so intriguing and extraordinary that they have captured our imagination in their success, and we are hard pressed to withhold our pity when they finally meet their match.

Tragic heroes have their flaws, so that the cause of their demise inevitably lies in some defect for which they alone must bear the guilt if not the blame. The Athenians, so talented, so capable, so glorious in the civilization they created and in the empire they fashioned had fallen shockingly far. How could it have happened? This is a question which both haunts and delights, and all who ask it are of necessity also readers of Thucydides’ *History*.

1. Thucydides

Wealthy scion of the Cimonids, son of Olorus, supporter of Pericles despite his clan affiliations, and general of the Athenians, Thucydides was undone by the Spartan commander Brasidas’ bold assault on Amphipolis in the winter of the war’s eighth year, and blamed by his countrymen for the loss of that strategic post. Exiled as a result, though not impoverished, this man of action was left for more than two decades to sit out the war which consumed his native land and eventually destroyed her empire. But

² Aesch., *Agam.* 177, 249-50; cf. Eurip., *Bacc.* 35, 1345. The classic treatment of the tragic motif in Thucydides’ *History* is F.M. Cornford’s (1907). For a survey of more recent references see S. Lattimore’s translation (1998) xvii, n.19.

the end of Thucydides' political career also marked the birth of an exceptional opportunity to focus his considerable drive upon chronicling this momentous war. Indeed, in his preface to the *History* he tells us that he had begun the task of composing his account of the war from its very beginning, perceiving that it would be something truly extraordinary:

Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and Athenians, namely how they made war on one another. He began immediately upon its inception with the expectation that it would be both great and noteworthy to a degree surpassing those which had gone before.³ (1.1)

After Amphipolis, though it may have had been a cruel grace, Thucydides had an ideal opportunity to pursue his historiographical masterpiece. Indeed, the Peloponnesian War was the perfect seascape for his canvas—and not only because of its size, its significance, and the power of its combatants, the Athenian empire versus Sparta and her Peloponnesian League, but also because of the magnitude of the disasters it wrought. Just as it had been Thucydides' own undoing, the war proved to be the quintessential catastrophe for Athens and many other city states as well, as he is quick to point out:

This war was drawn out to great length, and in its course misfortunes befell Greece such as had never before occurred in a like space of time. For never before had there been so many cities captured and depopulated, whether by foreigners, or the warring factions themselves (some even receiving a new set of inhabitants after their capture). Never before had so many been banished, so many slaughtered, whether by war or revolution. (1.23.1-2)

In Thucydides' view, the Peloponnesian War was not simply an important or sizeable conflict. Rather it was the greatest *kinesis* or “disruptive movement” that had yet befallen the Greek world (1.1.2).⁴ For an audience raised on Homer, this was quite an assertion, and Thucydides goes on to defend it at some length immediately after making the claim (1.2 -1.21). According to the persuasive evidence that Thucydides adduces, in terms of the relative power of the two opposing sides, along with the effects and consequences the war produced, nothing that had preceded it was comparable. Thus the Peloponnesian War was in every respect the *ideal*

³ Quotations are from Thucydides' *History*. If not otherwise stated, translations are those of the author.

⁴ Luginbill (1999) 3-5, hereafter cited as *TWNC*.

war for someone who wished to explore the baneful effects of mass conflict on states, institutions, and civilizations. A universal theory of history and historical action needs a fitting laboratory in which to put it to the test, and for Thucydides this contemporary, “greatest” of all wars would seem to have provided the perfect paradigm indeed.

Thucydides’ reputation as the thinking man’s historian is both well-known and well-deserved. The *History* is replete with trenchant and thoughtful critiques of human nature and human psychology operating under the pressures that war produces. These observations come in the form not only of the historian’s own voice, but are ubiquitous in the speeches as well, and even occur in the private thoughts of the *History*’s actors. One needs only to read any one of the many analytical passages or any single pair of speeches to understand that separating the *History* from Thucydides’ views is no easy task.⁵ Discerning what Thucydides really thought about the reason or reasons for Athens’ defeat is therefore more than a matter of mere curiosity for all who want to know the “clear truth”, as he puts it, about the war (*to saphes*, 1.22.4; literally, “the clear thing”).⁶ For inasmuch as it is Thucydides who has framed all the questions in the first place, his own answers to them are far from irrelevant to inquiries about the causes, course, and blame for the war. Clearly, there exists at least a reasonable possibility that his opinions may have affected his treatment of the evidence he adduces to address these issues. In the absence of any other major independent source for the period, we need to be alert to such a possibility in any case;⁷ and vigilance is all the more necessary when the writer has a personal psychological stake in the outcome of the war to the degree that Thucydides did.

It would not be overreaching to say that the *opinio communis* tends to see Thucydides as taking an Olympian view of the war after his exile. However, such a theory makes Thucydides into something super-human, and, more to the point, immune to the very forces of human nature he so carefully chronicles in his work. Given his status as a highly-interested

⁵ Cf. respectively Thucydides’ treatment of the *stasis* or political upheaval on Corcyra (3.84), and the Cleon-Diodotus antilogy of the Mytilenaeon debate (3.37-48), on which see Luginbill (2006).

⁶ Or as Fornara (1983) 106 puts it: “‘to contemplate the clear actuality’ of the Peloponnesian War”.

⁷ For an important reassessment of the value of Diodorus Siculus as a source for this period, see Green (2006), 1-47.

party, it is hard to accept that a man of his talents who felt strongly enough to write about it from its inception could now divorce himself from personal motivations and prior points of view. To some degree at least, everything is personal, and Thucydides surely had more reason than most to have strong views of these events. We would be mistaken to think that these had little or no bearing upon what he has written.

As with most other important questions which may be posed about the Peloponnesian War, the problem of ultimate blame is one that cannot easily be separated from Thucydides' work: the great preponderance of evidence, information, and first hand analysis we possess about the Peloponnesian War comes to us directly from his *History*.⁸ That Thucydides was a supporter of Pericles and of his party, his work and his position as an Athenian *strategos* is not in serious dispute. Curiously, however, the degree to which he supported Athenian imperial policy or believed in the war is a matter of some scholarly debate.⁹ One would imagine that divorcing oneself from Pericles' policies and their results but not from Pericles himself would be a practical impossibility, even if latitude is conceded to Thucydides on account of the development of his thinking as a result of the passage of time and on account of his "objective" historical method. When one considers his distinctive historical methodology in light of the general malleability of human opinion over a lifetime, it is not surprising that so many have been left with the impression that perhaps Thucydides' support of Pericles and the Athenian empire came to be qualified at least to some degree.¹⁰ Whether through historical perspective, realization of the pointlessness of human planning, or simple regret over the tragedy that befell him and his city, Thucydides may well have had reason to re-think his commitment to Pericles and the empire. But did he?

Few scholars today endorse Schwartz's view that Thucydides' praise of Pericles at 2.65 of the *History* was a later addition designed to counter criticism of the great man after the war had been lost; most now choose instead to find a unity of form and substance in Thucydides' work, which would seem of necessity to negate major shifts in plan in the course of this

⁸ The most comprehensive compendium of other sources remains Busolt (1904) v. 3.2, 45-212. See also now Hose (2006) 669-692.

⁹ Compare De Romilly's comments (1963) 357-358 and those of Cawkwell (1997) 4-5.

¹⁰ Most recently Foster (2010). For the extreme position see Strasburger (1958).

history composed “from the inception of the war”.¹¹ Although the *History* itself has largely ceased to be viewed as a set of jig-saw puzzle pieces needing to be sorted out by historians, the sorting out of Thucydides’ method, purpose, and even his understanding of events has continued to be a fruitful field for scholarship, and De Romilly’s comments at the end of the second edition of her pivotal treatment of Athenian imperialism demonstrate just how thoroughly Thucydides’ motives and true opinions are interlaced with the substance of his work.¹² If, like the supposed compositional strata of the *History*, the junctions of these various layers of Thucydides’ thinking are, in the end, also impossible to distinguish, then the grinding is likely to continue endlessly on the thematic front as well. But it is at least worth asking, inasmuch as it was the recognition of thematic unity that propelled Thucydidean studies beyond the question of compositional strata in the first place, whether there might not be a unifying purpose behind the *History* which unites all themes. For just as the composition question could never really be answered through an endless sorting through of the pieces, endless exposition and analysis of themes, while equally entertaining, is also unlikely ever to complete the puzzle. Ultimately, then, it is by no means pointless to pose the question: why did Thucydides write this history? It is likely that in answering this question about Thucydides’ purpose and motivation, we will also gain much in the way of understanding his particular and peculiar approach and methodology.

Since Thucydides’ praise of Pericles is seemingly straightforward (and we can include here not only 2.65, but the funeral oration and the picture of Pericles in the *History* generally), and since Thucydides had, at least initially, tied his career to Pericles and the empire of which he was the chief architect, the assumption that the *History* was written as a defense of Pericles and the empire enjoys at least a *prima facie* basis. The fact that Pericles survived the war’s commencement by only two and a half years and that his successors are found wanting are not arguments against but rather in favor of this hypothesis. That is because failures in the later conduct of the war or in subsequent imperial policy can for that very reason not be laid as easily at Pericles’ feet (assuming an effective prior defense of the Periclean system and the decision for war). It is a further virtue of this theory that in vindicating Pericles and his conduct of affairs, Thucydides also goes a far way towards vindicating himself: had Pericles

¹¹ (1929) 133. See especially Finley (1967) 20-21 and De Romilly (1963) 5-10.

¹² (1963) 369-379.

survived or had his advice been followed, the overall military and political situation which led to the disaster in Thrace, which was Thucydides' personal downfall, might never have occurred. Schwartz had seen Thucydides' praise of Pericles as anachronistic, but this would be a valid observation *only* if Thucydides had not had the same high opinion of Pericles and the Athenian empire from the beginning of the war, from the time he began to compose his *History*. Thucydides was a partisan of the Periclean system, and one who had already bought into it irretrievably at that point. While it certainly would have been possible for Thucydides to experience "buyer's regret" at a later time, it is also equally possible that much to the contrary his views were confirmed by the course of the war.

Thucydides may not have set out to write a tragic account, for he could not have foreseen the death of Pericles and the alleged defacement of his policies, but the transition from encomium to tragedy was natural and easy enough. Because of the nature of the history that Thucydides chose to write, even the defeat of Athens and in particular the manner of her defeat could be made to serve his overall thesis, the same thesis he had in mind when he began to write "from the beginning of the war", namely, the war's inevitability and Pericles' commendable foresight towards it in every respect. In truth, the Peloponnesian War is Thucydides' ideal war by definition, and the theory of history he unfolds in his treatment of it merely proves that point.

In Thucydides' interpretation of history, natural imperfections in human planning, the vagaries of human motivation, and inconsistency in human leadership make any war a gamble, even when embarked upon with superior advantages. But in his view Athens possessed the model leader. Pericles, faced with the unavoidable necessity of waging the Peloponnesian War, had forged the perfect plan consistent with Athenian resources, one which could have, one which should have, and one which surely would have brought victory, had he only survived to see it through, or had his successors kept to it after his demise. In the absence of their model leader, the forces of history and of human nature whence history flows began to take control, until Athens, despite so many initial advantages, was finally sucked into the vortex of the quintessential disaster. This, at any rate, is the thesis presented in the *History*, and to accept that thesis is to exonerate not only Pericles, but also Thucydides; virtually all of the misfortunes which fell upon Athens after Pericles' death are to be imputed *not* to the commanders in the field, whatever their mistakes and deficiencies, but to

the policy makers at home who for any number of selfish reasons had abandoned the ideal plan.

But Pericles' successors, being on more of an equal footing towards each other while yet each lusted to be first, altered [his policies] according to public whim, even to the point of surrendering the affairs of state [to the popular mood]. As a result, many serious errors were made, as one might well expect in a state of this magnitude possessing an empire, chief among which was the Sicilian expedition. This campaign was not so much an error to be charged to the commanders who made the attack, but rather to the politicians who sent them.¹³ For they did not recognize what was necessary [for the success] of those who went [and actually conducted the campaign]. Instead, by giving their attention to their own designs on the leadership of the *demos* at home, they weakened the position of the army abroad, and [thus brought it about that] the state itself began its descent into chaos. (2.65.10-11)

2. Pericles

The Peloponnesian War began in the spring of 431 with the Theban assault on Athens' ally Plataea. It ended in the spring of 404 with the capitulation that followed the complete defeat of the Athenian navy at Aegospotami the year before. This war was the closest thing to a "World War" that the Greeks had ever experienced, eclipsing the Trojan and Persian wars in scale and duration, so that Thucydides, as noted above, can call it the greatest *kinesis* or earthshaking, historically "disruptive movement" that Greece had ever seen. It is most ironic that the man who made such a war possible and possibly inevitable was largely absent from the stage while the conflict played out. Pericles died less than three full years into the war in the fall of 429, possibly as a result of the second outbreak of the great plague. Thucydides ignores this irony entirely. To do otherwise would have been to invite one of the primary questions he meant to put to rest, namely, "Who was to blame?"

The origins of the cataclysm that was the Peloponnesian War have been much debated and were so even in antiquity.¹⁴ Beyond the circumstances that paved the way for the conflict between Athens and Sparta, the single

¹³ For an explanation of this translation, see Luginbill (1997) 127-132.

¹⁴ For the ancient sources, see Lewis (1992) 370-371. The most exhaustive modern treatment will be found in de Ste. Croix (1972). See also Badian (1993) 125-162 and Hanson (2005) 3-31.

figure at greatest risk of being cast in the role of responsible party is Pericles, general, leading statesman, and for all intents and purposes “ruler” of Athens for the decade preceding the war.¹⁵ Had there been no Peloponnesian War, Pericles’ current reputation might well be even more impressive. Athens, after all, remains even today in many respects a monument to his efforts, a fulfillment in our own time of Thucydides’ prophetic observation:

For if the city of the Lacedaemonians should be deserted, and nothing should be left of it but its temples and the foundations of its other buildings, posterity would, I think, after a long lapse of time, be very loath to believe that their power was as great as their renown. (And yet they occupy two-fifths of the Peloponnesus and have the hegemony of the whole, as well as of their many allies outside; but still, as Sparta is not compactly built as a city and has not provided itself with costly temples and other edifices, but is inhabited village-fashion in the old Hellenic style, its power would appear less than it is). Whereas, if Athens should suffer the same fate, its power would, I think, from what appeared of the city’s ruins, be conjectured double what it is.¹⁶ (1.10.2)

While Augustus is said to have boasted that he had found Rome a city of brick and transformed it into a city of marble,¹⁷ Plutarch says of Pericles, “he made the city, great as it was when he took it, the greatest and richest of all cities”.¹⁸ Pericles’ rhetorical ability was also exemplary, his intellect extraordinary, and even his personal life legendary (as his liaison with the infamous courtesan Aspasia attests). He was the builder if not also the architect of an empire and an imperial system whose revenues cannot be separated from the cultural renaissance that was 5th century Athens.¹⁹ In the absence of the war, Pericles would almost certainly have left his beloved city in an enviable position, both in economic and political terms. He was not, however, what we would call a “people person”. Pericles had an “Olympian quality” which Plutarch attempts to excuse,²⁰ but which

¹⁵ Compare Plutarch’s observation in *Alc.* 14:2: “And Hellenes everywhere said that it was Pericles who had plunged them into war.” (Perrin’s translation)

¹⁶ The translation is Smith’s (1919).

¹⁷ Suetonius, *Augustus* 28.3.

¹⁸ 14.5. The translation is Perrin’s (1984).

¹⁹ Pericles was the natural heir to Themistocles’ imperial ambitions: Podlecki (1998) 156-157. Wade-Gery (1932) 247 sees him as the “first man” in Athens by the time of Cimon’s exile in 460.

²⁰ *Pericles* 7.5.

Aristophanes makes the target of jest.²¹ The ambivalent relationship he had with the Athenian people is well illustrated by the fact that, though he was fined and prosecuted by the people on more than one occasion, he quickly found himself back in popular favor as the one indispensable statesman whom Athens possessed. This was especially true during the difficult days of the war's early years, when Athens had been wracked by the plague and the invading Peloponnesian army had devastated her private and public lands:

The people as a whole did not, however, cease from their rage against [Pericles] before they had levied a fine upon him. But not long afterwards, just as the crowd is wont to do, they again elected him general and entrusted all the affairs of their state into his hands.²² (2.65.3-4)

Thucydides sums up Pericles' control of the Athenian government as being essentially a case of one-man rule (a characterization common in old comedy as well, where Pericles is sometimes described as a sort of "Zeus").²³

And so, [because of Pericles' skillful manipulation of the people,] while Athens was ostensibly functioning as a democracy, in reality it came to be a monarchy under the control of her first citizen. (2.65.9)

All this makes the relative absence of any discussion in the *History* of Pericles' role in either the development of the empire or in the direction of events preceding the war (until the very last hour) most peculiar indeed. Without a large empire and an imperial system to protect (one which paid the wages and produced the prosperity of a large majority of her citizens), it is doubtful that Athens would have fallen afoul of Sparta to the degree that she did, so that the war and the empire cannot easily be unlinked. In terms of inevitability, it is unarguably the case that the creation and expansion of the Athenian empire was the root cause of the war—this Thucydides himself admits (1.23.6). To effectively disavow by omission Pericles' role in its creation and growth is to detach Pericles from the causal chain of blame. War may have been inevitable, but that had nothing to do with Pericles, at least to hear Thucydides tell it (or, more accurately, *not* tell it).

²¹ *Acharnians* 496-556; *Pax* 603-618.

²² Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 515e.

²³ For references, see Podlecki (1998) 169-176 and Gribble (2006) 452 n.27.

Readers are given little reason even to consider, let alone to question, Pericles' level of involvement in the development of the Athenian imperial system and Athens' international posture which, by Thucydides' own estimate, led directly to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (1.23.6, 1.88, 1.118.2). Indeed, prior to the cycle of diplomacy immediately preceding the war, Pericles is mentioned on only three occasions, each time in the context of military operations, none of which gives us any indication that he had any larger political role in the state.²⁴ Were we ignorant of the name "Pericles" before beginning the *History*, we should have no idea that Athens' imperial system had anything at all to do with him, or that he might possibly bear any responsibility for the circumstances that led to war. It is true that even today readers with only rudimentary knowledge of ancient history are aware that Pericles' influence did not begin with the war, and it is also true that this would have required even less explanation in antiquity. Nonetheless, we are still left to wonder at the oddity of Thucydides' omission, especially given the voluminous detail he provides about so many other events that framed the background of the war, especially in his digression on the "fifty years" preceding the war, the so-called Pentecontaetia.

In this digression, Themistocles' earlier role in providing, maintaining, and restoring the two essential elements upon which the empire and the strategy for war were built, namely, Athens' fleet and fortifications respectively, receives significantly more attention than does Pericles' part in expanding the one and developing the other.²⁵ Nor is his virtual exclusion of Pericles' political activities in the pre-war years in keeping with other treatments. Plutarch devotes approximately two-thirds of his life of Pericles to events before the war, and even Aristotle's relatively succinct *Constitution of the Athenians* has more on Pericles' role in this regard than is to be found in Thucydides' entire *History* (para. 26-27).²⁶ Finally, it must also be remarked that Thucydides' picture is internally inconsistent. For while Pericles is invisible until just before the commencement of hostilities, he is the central actor on the Athenian side

²⁴ These are 1) his defeat of the Sicyonians ca. 454 (1.111); 2) operations in Euboea during the so-called "First Peloponnesian War"; and 3) his victory over the Samians in 440 (116-117).

²⁵ Cf. 1.14.3; 1.74.1; 1.9-93; 1.135-138.

²⁶ As Tracy (2009) 33 points out, Pericles was no doubt responsible for what was perhaps the key event in transforming Athens' naval league into an empire, namely, the moving of its treasury from Delos to Athens.

immediately thereafter and remains so until his death.²⁷ What better way could there be to solidify Pericles' reputation while at the same time deflecting attention and criticism from him than to show him at once in command of the ship of state when the storm begins, while at the same time removing from the reader's judgment the consideration of its previous condition or course? All we can see from the *History* is Pericles' sagacious and prescient analysis of events and his masterful handling of the crisis once in play, but we are invited to ignore his involvement in building the empire and setting the policies which led to this disastrous war in the first place (except that we are explicitly given to understand that his foresight in all these things was superb: 2.65).

One incident in particular which had serious consequences for the development of the empire, yet is entirely omitted by Thucydides and may thus serve as an example of his approach and its consequences, involves the so-called Congress Decree.²⁸ According to Plutarch, our sole source, this was an invitation at Pericles' behest to "all the Hellenes" to send deputations to a general council at Athens. The expressed intentions of this congress were first and foremost religious: the reconstruction of the temples destroyed by the Persians and the fulfillment of other vows made at that time. But the true motives behind this council were clearly more grandiose as can be seen from the final part of the proposal preserved by Plutarch: "and concerning the sea, that all might sail it without fear and that they might preserve the peace"²⁹. These two elements are intrinsically related. The peace referred to here is most likely the Peace of Callias which solidified the status quo with Persia in the wake of the First Peloponnesian War.³⁰ But whether one accepts this (or even the historicity of the Peace of Callias), "preserving the peace", in the context of resolving common issues relating to the defeat of the Persians and in combination with the concern for the safety of *collective* navigation, clearly must mean keeping Persia from further meddling in Greek waters. The platform of this

²⁷ Most evident in the speeches given to Pericles (1.140-144; 2.35-46; 2.60-64), and in Thucydides' extensive critique of his wartime leadership (2.65).

²⁸ For a somewhat more idealistic evaluation of Pericles' motives in proposing the congress than is presented here, see McGregor (1987) 71-74. Considering Thucydides' eclectic methodology in the *Pentecontaetia*, there is no reason, as Stadter points out (1993) 66 n.109, for us to doubt the authenticity of the congress solely on the basis of his silence. Stadter (1989) 202 gives 449 as a *terminus ante quem*.

²⁹ *Per.* 17.1-2.

³⁰ As Stadter suggests (1989) 202. See also Walsh (1981) 31-63.

congress, therefore, is essentially identical to that upon which the Athenian confederation in Ionia was originally based, namely, the establishment of a united military front against Persia (*Hist.* 1.95-97). And it is of no small moment that, in Ionia, a similarly voluntary confederacy had developed rather rapidly into a compulsory empire (*Hist.* 1.97.2; 1.98.4ff.).

It is therefore very difficult to see this invitation to a Pan-Hellenic congress of the mainland Greek states as anything other than an attempt to achieve an Athenian hegemony by political and initially voluntary means, extending the model that had been so successful in Ionia. The potential for Athenian dominance in any such confederate arrangement would certainly not have been lost upon Sparta and her allies. Notwithstanding any potential upside from the possibility of becoming directly involved in the fruits as well as the responsibilities of Athens' empire, it should surprise no one that the Peloponnesians refused to participate. We should not imagine that Pericles was surprised either, for his plan would seem to have been predicated upon just such a refusal, the better to isolate the Peloponnesian League from the rest of Greece. In the event, the congress came to nothing. Plutarch ascribes the failure to Spartan opposition, but we may well imagine that suspicions about Athens' true intentions ran high elsewhere as well.

What the Congress Decree does show is Pericles' obvious commitment to making Athens supreme in Greece, and the extent to which he was involved in forming and directing the strategies to achieve this goal from the earliest days of his career. Since Athenian activity was expansive and imperialistic from the inception of her naval confederacy, and since Pericles was a (if not *the*) dominant force in Athens right from the beginning of his involvement in politics, how could we imagine anything less? And yet, as readers of the *History*, we do separate Pericles from the growth and pre-war strategy of Athenian imperialism. We do so because Thucydides maintains a hermetic seal around Pericles when it comes to any responsibility for that growth or for that pre-war strategy. Conservatively put, there was much that Thucydides could have said about the politico-strategic role played by Pericles in the three decades or so before the war which would have made his relationship with the direction of the empire crystal clear. But instead, all information that would have illuminated or would even have *suggested* that role is omitted. As a result, we are invited to construct in our thinking an imperial Athens on a collision course with Sparta and her allies, an Athens initially led by an

That from every eye in Hellas
 everywhere the tears it drew
 – Aristophanes, *Peace*, 605-611³³

In the recapitulation of any drama, one wants to know about the hero and the villain. Without Thucydides' *History*, Pericles would have been an obvious candidate for either role in the tragedy of Athens' defeat, and perhaps for both. To draw an analogy, Thucydides' careful treatment of Pericles has an effect on readers that is similar to Caesar's use of the third person: in spite of knowing full well that Caesar is the author, the impersonal tone has a powerful rhetorical and psychological effect, producing a far more favorable overall view than might otherwise be the case, and generating the feeling that one has been given something like the objective truth (so that the impression must really be entirely one's own). But while Caesar's involvement and technique are conspicuous, Thucydides' motives and methods are much more opaque. Not only is the degree to which Thucydides was writing on Pericles' behalf, and therefore in his own interest, generally underappreciated, but also the manner in which his methodology achieves the purpose of this *apologia* or defense is uncharted territory (beyond Badian's recognition of certain omissions). Historians have been willing to accept or at least to discuss bias on Thucydides' part, but his obvious motive and his more subtle method have not yet been fully explored, critical issues though they are for the proper evaluation of any source. Podlecki's remarks are representative of the line past which most have been unwilling to venture far:

I am prepared, however, to accept one implication of Badian's argument, that Thucydides has re-cast some of his material *ad maiorem Periclis gloriam*.³⁴

The degree to which this is an understatement will be, it is hoped, demonstrated in the pages below.³⁵ There is much light in the *History*, not

³³ The translation is Roger's (1924). Cf. also Cratinus, *Dionysalexandros* test. 1: "Pericles is made fun of quite persuasively in the play via innuendo for having brought the war on the Athenians", trans. Olson (2007) 425.

³⁴ (1998) 135.

³⁵ Many have recognized Thucydides' bias towards Pericles, e.g., de Romilly (1963) 375-376 and Connor (1984) 47. The point being made here is that the entire construction of the *History* and the theory of history included therein are intrinsically and deliberately interconnected with this thesis. Only with such an

only in terms of the events it chronicles, but also in its explication of the role individual and national psychology plays in the historical process. But there is also shadow. As in any work of art, it is the interplay between the two that brings out shape and texture, but this is always the result of the artist's choices and therefore represents the artist's interpretation. In a similar way, Thucydides uses shadow as much as light to articulate his subject so that the reader may see "the clear truth" (i.e., *to saphes*, 1.22.4), and, given the quality and the beauty of his work, we may take him at his word that we have the truth as he saw it. But neither the motive nor the method is transparent. This history is translucent, and all too perfect.

3. *Logos and Logoi*

Even when embarked upon by necessity, war is a tiger few leaders can ride without being devoured in the process, and, of those who do survive it, luck often has more to do with it than skill. In the pages of his *History*, Thucydides invites us to see Pericles as that exceptional sort of leader whose abilities do indeed promise a successful ride. Though Thucydides saw Pericles' untimely death as ultimately dooming Athens' chances for winning the war, it did present him with a unique, twofold opportunity. Pericles might be gone, but, in theory, the strategic course upon which he had set the Athenian ship of state might endure and yet lead to victory.

This is the standard to which Thucydides holds Athens along with those she selected to succeed Pericles. With a careful telling of this story, not only could his deceased patron be shielded from culpability for the missteps which were sure to come, but the ghost of Pericles would be free to haunt all future Athenian leaders. Every new plan could now be measured against the legendary leader and his master strategy, with successes which followed Pericles' lead attributable to that lead, and failures which departed from it attributable to that departure. Even successes which violated Pericles' strategic strictures could be put down to luck (as at Pylos). With the war properly told, the only way that his patron's intelligence and foresight might have been repudiated and culpability lodged firmly against him would have been for Athens to have suffered the scale of defeat she suffered after having *followed* Pericles' strategy religiously. From the standpoint of vindication, therefore, fairly or

overarching plan could Finley's unity have been achieved "from the very outset of the war" (*Hist.*1.1.1), (1967) 118-169.

unfairly, Thucydides sought to stack the deck ineluctably in Pericles' favor, and therefore in his own.

As suggested above, history shows that Thucydides did in fact achieve this underlying objective of vindicating Pericles and himself, and that beyond expectation. Thucydides' essential strategy for his *apologia* (which forms the underlying purpose of the *History*) is to hide this larger thesis (or *logos*) behind a series of more subtle arguments (or *logoi*). Taken as a whole, these *logoi* constitute Thucydides' theory of human nature and historical process, namely, they embody that aspect of the *History* which has engaged readers for centuries and which makes it unique among historical works. Yet Thucydides' theoretical system of historical behavior, while impossible to overlook, is yet difficult to comprehend. The relationships he posits between reason and emotion, between the desire for freedom and the will to rule, between chance and necessity, between hope and fear, between human nature and national character are not easily discerned. The exact manner in which they come together to produce and direct the historical process, moreover, is even less easily discovered. So much is this the case that the question of whether Thucydides pessimistically despaired of the possibility of affecting the historical process for good, or wrote in the hope of conveying the deeper truths he had perceived, is still a matter of vigorous scholarly debate.³⁶

This difficulty of coming to terms with the precise meaning and intended application of these *logoi* is not an accidental one. By focusing our attention on an attempt to grasp his *logoi*, Thucydides enlists us unawares in the process of constructing his *logos*. That is so because the former lead inexorably to the latter: the natural acquisitiveness and protectiveness of human nature feed directly into the theory of the Peloponnesian War's inevitability; the specific manifestations of human nature in the Athenian and Spartan national characters underpin the notion that Pericles' plan was a work of genius, perfectly crafted in regard to the combatants and their respective strengths and weaknesses; and the general inability of all but exceptional military and political leaders to anticipate future events or form successful policies based upon a correct evaluation of present circumstances supports the conclusion that Pericles' leadership was exceptional (and that his successors' deficiencies are what really cost

³⁶ See L. Edmunds (1975) 212-213. Stahl (Munich 1966) and de Ste. Croix (London 1972) are notable examples of pessimistic and optimistic interpretations respectively.

Athens the war). In each and every case, the system of historical insights (or *logoi*) embedded in Thucydides' work lead directly if unobtrusively to the set of conclusions he wishes the reader to make (i.e., the understated *logos* that Pericles was right). In showing us *how* history works through the *logoi*, Thucydides influences us to draw the larger conclusion about *why* the Peloponnesian War turned out as it did: i.e., the failure of Pericles' successors to honor his plan for victory, the one hope Athens had of triumphing. And in forcing us to expend intellectual effort to achieve this knowledge, Thucydides makes us stakeholders in the broader conclusions to which our newfound wisdom has been preordained to point. The overall effect of accepting the truth of the *logoi* is that the reader not only constructs the desired *logos*, but even feels he has done this for himself without any overt guidance, and his conviction of its truth is all the more certain thereby.

The Peloponnesian War serves as the *exemplum* wherein we may observe the "true reality" of that process through attention to the principles of collective human behavior Thucydides has distilled for us (i.e., his *logoi*). However, the general *logos* of history we are promised is not really the only *logos* to which we are led. For in addition to whatever deeper insights into the general course of human events we may feel the *History* has bequeathed us, to the degree that we accept its theories in general terms, to that same extent we are likely to accept its unmistakable conclusion in regard to the *exemplum* itself. The utility Thucydides claims for his *History* is intimately connected with the likelihood of the *logoi* to repeat, but these *logoi* are not deployed in a vacuum. We must accept the manner in which they influence events in the test case of the Peloponnesian War in particular if we wish to credit them with any predictive or analytical power in general, and that acceptance leads inescapably to a concomitant acquiescence in the *logos* Thucydides desired us to construct regarding that particular war.

The word *logos* has, of course, a storied history. For Heraclitus, *logos* represented what was properly to be studied and understood within the process of continual physical change ("everything is in flux": Diels, *Vorsokr.* 12, B), though in his experience this knowledge was difficult to obtain.