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Introduction

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Introduction

Thucydides was born when Aeschylus dominated the tragic scene, young Sophocles had for the first time defeated him and Pericles was starting his political career; he was about twenty years younger than Euripides, Herodotus, and Protagoras, and a contemporary of Socrates, Democritus, and Hippocrates.

He was born in Athens – the “school of Greece”, as he let his Pericles assert in his *Funeral Oration*, but he was forced to abandon his city during the war and established himself in Thrace (now Macedonia, in Northern Greece), place of his origin from the maternal side. Thus, he could observe the war from an external perspective, based outside Athens, and communicating with both sides, collecting information for his oeuvre, but also, no doubt, becoming aware of the intellectual enquiries conducted all over Greece.

The Athenian historian belonged to a world which left the most permanent imprint on the western mind. He was a man of action –he served as an Athenian general– and a man of theory, he wrote a work which was regarded by posterity as the foundation of the genre of political-military historiography. If one property can be regarded as a common denominator of all the major thinkers and authors of classical Greece –roughly Thucydides’ contemporaries–, this is critical thinking. The essays that appear in this volume all illuminate aspects of Thucydides’ enlightened insights into reality, with special emphasis to his critical approach to inherited beliefs about the Gods and mankind, to practices and ways of life, to the principles governing the interpretation of the world – nature, society, the human mind and human behavior.

In his contribution Panos Christodoulou regards Thucydides’ exile as a condition that enabled his transition from an active life to a contemplative life, and associates this event in the historian’s biography to a motif which becomes increasingly present in 4th century thought, especially in the self-representation of thinkers who devoted themselves to the pursuit of *sophia* and claimed for themselves the predicate of a *philosophos*. The paper focuses on the critical element entailed in Thucydides’ passage from the active life of a public figure involved in political life to a life characterized by *hesychia*, tranquility, which enabled him not only to overcome practical obstacles and move freely in space as a man who was not physically and psychologically constrained within the boundaries of one city, but also to contemplate on the theoretical problems related to the historical events he narrates.

Antonis Tsakmakis places Thucydides' work in the context of current discussions about education, and relates both Thucydides' authorial comments and the representation of historical figures in his work (both through speeches and narrative) to a new concept of learning which was advertised by sophists; Thucydides endorses the traditional association of age and wisdom, but he more articulately depends wisdom on experience. On the other hand, his work forms part of a new self-conscious trend to communicate knowledge through education –in the broadest sense; the work contains collected experience and reflection on an event which he witnessed, and which could be variously exploited by his future readers, presumably young members of the elites in Greek communities. At the same time, however, the historian warns against uncritical views and misunderstandings, which made progress automatically result from age, experience or even knowledge.

One of the passages in Thucydides' work where the tone of writing is more deeply critical about human behavior in general, is his description of the consequence of civil war (in Corcyra, 3.82-83). This passage is interpreted by Dino Piovan with the aim to establish the way war is conceived as –in Thucydides' words– “a violent teacher”. From a close reading of the passage which interprets all notions and ideas in the context of their occurrence in the whole work of Thucydides he concludes that war forces the human nature into “a state of necessity which is opposite to the rational will”. A process that is examined in relation to its dependence on external forces and internal determination is the state referred to as autonomy, which is scrutinized by Maria Gerolemou. According to her analysis, autonomy is not equivalent to freedom as it is not “a result of human agency, but it is rather a behavioral habit”. Thus, it not only means the lack of external control, but also implicates a condition which is natural and consists in automatic reactions to various conditions.

The dialectics of time inform the research underlying Carlo Marcaccini's study, which applies to Thucydides' narrative the concept of finiteness which is later systematically discussed by Augustinus. This approach enables the reader perceive narratives as complete mental constructs and relate their parts not only by means of temporal succession, but also in terms of organic interdependence within processes. This form on intentionality is for the first time attested in narratives and comments about the physical process of maladies in Hippocratic writings –a possible source of influence on Thucydides.

Laura Sancho Rocher' essay deals with Thucydides' digressions on the past, where the historian shows not only his vision of human nature, but also the complexity of social and political dynamics observed during the war, which provide the key to understanding the whole work. The article by Annalisa Paradiso is concerned with the interpretation of a specific historical incident referred to by Thucydides, namely the elimination of 2000 helots by the

Spartans in 424. Against the background of a long-standing scholarly debate, she argues that Thucydides' report is a construction as a massacre of such a great number of persons is unlikely to have happened under the conditions reported by the historian; a slaughter of various groups of helots may have been carried out in different chasms in Laconia, rather than in the Kaiadas.

Carlo Marcaccini

Antonis Tsakmakis