Democracy, Oratory, and the Rise of Historiography in Fifth-century Greece

Jonas Grethlein

Historiography did not emerge in Greece until the second half of the fifth century. While the past had been and continued to be the object of epics, elegy, tragedy, and oratory, prose accounts that focused on the human past were a late development. Recently, scholars have challenged Jacoby’s influential thesis that Herodotus was the pater historiarum (Fowler 1996; Porzian 2001), but even if some authors wrote prose accounts before him, his Historiae and Thucydides’ History are the only fully preserved historiographical works from the fifth century and therefore our most important evidence for the rise of Greek historiography. Although neither called himself “historian,” they laid the foundation of the new genre.

Christian Meri: (1880: 360–434; 1887) argued that the rise of historiography was closely linked to the emergence of democracy, not least because both are based on the turn from the “nomistic” to the “cratic” epoch. Brilliant though his argument is, many points should alert us to be very careful with such a sweeping thesis. The very distinction between “nomistic” and “cratic” is vulnerable to objections from many directions. I also doubt that the rise of historiography can be explained sufficiently as a response to the need for orientation that resulted from the recent introduction of a democratic constitution and its profound impact on the polis’ social and political life. It is important to note that Athenian democracy, with all its institutions, established something new but “isonomic” (egalitarian) structures that required citizens to be active and well-informed rather than passive. Concepts such as causal thinking, which Meier halls as an achievement of historiography, can be found much earlier too.

Even so, I still believe that it is fruitful to examine the rise of historiography against the backdrop of democracy. The most obvious approach would be to investigate Herodotus’ and Thucydides’ comments on democratic Athens. In this chapter, I will pursue another path and reconsider the relation between the first historians and democracy by examining their attitudes towards oratory. Oratory forms an interesting link between democracy and historiography. Needless to say, the art of speaking long preceded the fifth century (Kennedy 1963: ch.2), but rhetoric played a crucial role in the world of democracy with its assemblies and law-courts (Lanni, this vol.). At the same time, oratory was the primary genre besides poetry in which the Greeks encountered their past. The funeral orations (epiaphoriai logos) came close to representing something like the “official history” of Athens, and in deliberative speeches past exempla and narratives figured very prominently. Therefore oratory was one of the commemorative genres against which the first historians had to define their new approach to the past. Their stand on oratory, I suggest, reveals an ambiguous relation between historiography and democracy.

I will start, against the chronological order, with Thucydides, since he criticizes oratory both implicitly and explicitly (I.1). Herodotus does not explicitly set himself off against orators, but the Historiae contain an implicit critique of the use of the past in speeches (II). While Thucydides’ and Herodotus’ deconstruction of speeches indicates a critical attitude towards democracy, I will argue that the very form of their criticism has democratic features. An interesting parallel for this tension between content and form is afforded by Plato (III).

In a first step, I will revisit Thucydides’ reflection on method which, I propose, contains a critique of orators (a). I will then show that this polemic is reinforced by an implicit criticism which is illustrated by Pericles’ funeral speech (b).

(a) Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides provides his readers at the beginning of his History with an explicit reflection on his method. In what is often dubbed as “method chapter,” he dissociates his work from the accounts of poets and ionographoi: while he scrutinizes the evidence available and takes pains to find the truth, the poets “adorn” them praise “with exaggerations” and ionographoi present untrustworthy accounts (I.21.1). For a long time, it seemed clear that the polemic against poets was directed at Homer. Newly published fragments from Simonides’ Platea-elegy have prompted Deborah Boederker (1995: 226–9) to argue most convincingly that this criticism also applies to other poetic accounts of the past, such as elegies. But what about ionographoi? Most scholars tended to follow Georg Friedrich Creuzer’s argument (1845; see also Lipius 1886) that ionographoi is a technical term for the pre-Herodotean historians mentioned by the first-century historian and literary critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus (De Nasc. 5). Yet the existence of such historians has been questioned by Felix Jacoby and
others. Moreover, there is no evidence for such a meaning of *lographos*.

The present *communis opinio* therefore assumes that *lographos* means "prose-author" and that Thucydides is taking a stand against Herodotus and other contemporary historians.

This view, however, also has serious flaws. A look at all the uses of *lographos* in fifth- and fourth-century literature reveals that there is not a single passage where *lographos* can be safely assumed to mean "prose-author" (Grethlein 2004). Its conventional meaning is "speech-writer" or "orator." Given that oratory was an important commemorative genre, this meaning makes perfect sense for our passage in Thucydides, and there is no reason whatsoever to insist on a new and unprecedented meaning of the word.

Moreover, the meaning "orator" is supported by the context. Thucydides reproaches the *lographos* for telling stories that are *nepethides*. This word has been widely translated as "romance" or "fairy-tale," but Stewart Flory (1990) argues compellingly that it means "flattering" and that in Thucydides it signifies patriotic stories. Obviously, this criticism cannot be directed at Herodotus, who has a rather pan-Hellenic perspective, but it could very well apply to oratory. In both epideictic and deliberative speeches, the past is tainted by a patriotic slant.

Thucydides' rejection of a "competition prize to be heard only for the moment" (*agōnismos eis to parakrē̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂̂"
Thucydides thereby calls into question an important institution of democratic Athens. As Nicole Loraux has shown (1986), the epiaphisios logos was not only an epideictic genre, but also a crucial medium of defining the identity of the Athenian polis. While the particular occasion and the mourning of the dead are given short shrift, Athens' glorious past and its eternal values figure prominently. Repeated year after year in front of major audiences, the funerary speeches' flattering portrayal of Athens in past and present must have had quite an influence on how the Athenians perceived themselves.

What is more, the very shortcoming of the epiaphisios logos that is unveried by Pecile's introductory reflection and by the juxtaposition with the History plays a crucial role in Athens' downfall. In 2.68, Thucydides points out that under Pecile's guidance Athens fared well, but that his successors brought ruin over it.11 He says of Pecile, that he was influential through both reputation and judgment and notable for being most resistant to bribery, exercised free control over the people and was not led by them instead of leading them, because he did not speak to please in order to acquire power by improper means but, since he had this through his prestige, even contradicted them in their anger. Those who came later, in contrast, since they were more on an equal level with one another and each was striving to become the first, even resorted to handing over affairs to the people's pleasure (2.68–9–10).

The speakers' inclination to meet the expectations of their audience proves most detrimental in the history of Athens. Not only does Thucydides' critique of oratory draw attention to a fundamental flaw of democracy, but the juxtaposition of the epiaphisios logos with the History underscores the political relevance of his own approach. As the digressions on the Sicilian archaeology and the tyrannicide reveal, the solid historical knowledge that Thucydides presents would have prevented Athens from great disasters. Only their ignorance of the Sicilian past and its present condition made the Athenians undertake the Sicilian expedition, and wrong beliefs about the tyrants created the explosive atmosphere of a witch-hunt in 415.12 Thus, besides offering a critique of democratic politics, Thucydides indicates that such politics would benefit from his rigid methodology.

II

As I have pointed out, Thucydides could not rely on an established tradition of genre. Yet he was not the first Greek to write a prose account of the past. A couple of other authors did so at the end of the fifth century, most prominently Herodotus. Thucydides never mentions him by name but the History of the Peloponnesian War seems to have been written with Herodotus's Histories as a backdrop.13 Does Herodotus already juxtapose his work with oratory? Do the Histories have a political tone that is as strong as that of the History?

On first reflection, the answer is no. Herodotus engages in critical discussions of Homer (2.112–20), but he does not explicitly criticize oratory. Because his focus is directed at a more distant past and he is thematically much broader than Thucydides, politics figures less prominently in his work. However, I would like to demonstrate that Herodotus nonetheless also casts a critical eye on speeches, and that, although he does not juxtapose his approach with oratory, his criticism of oratory is linked to democracy and to recent political events. In another paper (Grellmijn 2006), I made a similar argument for the Syracusean embassy scene (7.153–63); here, I will turn to the speech duel between the Tegeans and Athenians at Platea (see Solmsen 1944; Pallantza 2006: 167–8; Boedeker 2012: 18–23).

Before the battle of Platea in 479, Herodotus has the Tegeans and Athenians get into an argument over the battle formation.14 The Spartans, it is agreed, can choose their wing, but both the Athenians and the Tegeans lay claim to the other wing. Instead of simply reporting who prevails, Herodotus lets both parties give speeches.15 I will first outline the speeches and discuss the imminent criticism of their historical arguments (a). I will then argue that this deconstruction applies to essential creeds of democratic Athens (b). Finally, I will point out that events beyond the work's historical framework are evoked in the speeches and their context. Hence Herodotus's critique of how rhetoric utilizes the past also refers to recent or even contemporary politics (c).

(a) The Tegeans argue that they have always enjoyed a privileged position (9.26.2–7). When the sons of Heracles tried to invade the Peloponnesse, the Peloponnesians gathered at the Isthmus to defend their land. Hyllas suggested a duel between himself and the best of the Peloponnesians. In the case of his victory, the Herakleidae would be allowed to settle in the area; was his opponent to win, the Herakleidae would be barred from the Peloponnesse for one hundred years. In the event, the Tegean king Echmenis killed Hyllas and thus the Spartans were unable to settle in the Peloponnesse for one hundred years. From that time, the Tegeans claim, they enjoyed special honors. Echmenis not only serves as evidence for the Tegean's excellence, he also offers a parallel to the present situation. In their attempt to conquer Greece, the Persians resemble the Herakleidae who tried to invade the Peloponnesse. Like the ancient Peloponnesians who faced the sons of Heracles, the present residents of the peninsula gathered at the Isthmus and only hesitantly joined the Athenian forces outside their own land.

In their reply to this speech (9.27), the Athenians first question the whole discussion by pointing out that mere words hardly matter when deeds are required. Nevertheless, they also conjure up an entire catalog of achievements of their own: they defended the Herakleidae against their father's nemesis, Eurytheus, helped the Argives to bury their dead after their disastrous defeat at Thebes, fought off the Amazon's, and outshone everyone at Troy. However, the Athenians add, such ancient events do not count for much—what is strong in the past can now be weak, and vice versa. They therefore refer to their victory at Marathon, a recent
display of virtue. Despite offering such compelling evidence of their excellence, they agree to fight in any position the Spartans may choose for them.

At first glance, the Athenians' rejection of ancient deeds is merely a rhetorical device to highlight their strongest point, Marathon. Yet, despite their criticism, the Athenians do not miss the opportunity to elaborate on a whole series of ancient achievements, and this criticism, even if only used as a rhetorical device, echoes the end of the Historiae' proem and thereby prompts the reader to reflect on the use of mythical exemplos in speeches (1.5.4): "For most of those [i.e., cities] which were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time. Knowing, therefore, that human prosperity never abides long in the same place, I shall pay attention to both alike."

The resonances of this central authorial statement in that of the Athenians gives the latter a weight that goes beyond its rhetorical function within their speech and draws the reader's attention to a general flaw of exemplary uses of the past; such uses presuppose that the present resembles the past, and this assumption does not square with the Historiae's emphasis on change and change. Only in the case of Marathon, a recent exemplum, the past is able to legitimize the present.17

(3) The exemplary use of the past that the speech duel at Plataea implicitly challenges is essential for historical arguments in speeches. Time and again, Greek orators adduce parallels from the past to buttress their present assertions. Yet Herodotus's criticism not only deconstructs rhetorical arguments in general but is also levelled at central creeds of Athenian democracy. As scholars have not failed to note, the Athenian speech emphasizes central topoi of the epitaphoi logoi.18 Assisting the Heracleidae, supporting the Argives, fighting against the Amazons, and defeating the Persians at Marathon: these episodes form the core of the "historical" sections in funeral speeches. The usual order is here changed, giving prominence to the intervention in favor of the Heracleidae which responds directly to the claim the Tegeans derive from Echeinus's victory over the Heracles son Hyllus. While it is true that "praises of Athens must have been made before the formal introduction of a 'funeral speech', and the sorts of praises used here by the Athenians are familiar from some parts of tragedy" (Rower and Marincola 2002: ad 9.27, 1-5), it is striking that the list of deeds follows the catalog of the epitaphoi logoi so closely.19

Moreover, the question arises of how relevant some of these exemplos are for the Athenians' case. The Heracleidae story counters the Tegean exemplos, and the attack of the Amazons may prefigure the Persian invasion,20 but there is no particular reason why the support of the Argives should be mentioned here. Like that of the Heracleidae, this myth not only propagated another poleis' obligation towards Athens but helped disguise an aggressive foreign policy as selfless help to others (Neumann 1995: 149-67). Thus it does not really fit into an argument made by Athenians who have no claim to hegemony yet. Of course, the story of the Argives could serve here merely to reflect Athenian boasting, and I would not go so far as to call it anachronistic in this context, but one has the impression of a slight displacement, and this reinforces the reference to the tradition of funeral speeches.21 There is no doubt that the Athenian speech would have reminded Herodotus's readers of the epitaphoi logoi.

Hence, although at the level of the action Herodotus's statement may be no more than a rhetorical device, its substantive potential arguably reaches quite far: it challenges not only the exemplary use of the past that is so prominent in Athenian speeches throughout but also affects the genre that helped "invent" Athens (Loraux 1986). In understating the relevance of topoi that were central in the funeral speeches, the Athenians' own words question an institution that played an important role in defining their political identity.

(4) Herodotus's implicit critique of historical arguments gains a further dimension by foreshadowing the future history of Athens. In the Syracusan embassy scene the main characters' use of the past is questionable precisely because their claims to leadership that are supported by the invocation of a heroic past point forward to the later intra-Hellenic fights for hegemony (Greetham 2006). Similar anticipation of the future can be found in the debate between the Tegeans and Athenians. As we have seen, the catalogue of deeds familiar from the epitaphoi logoi and bearing the imprint of Athenian imperialism joins the readers to think of a later time when Athens had to justify its aggressive foreign policy. Moreover, the controversy between Athenians and Tegeans centers on terms such as hystagain and staids that gained special force in the later fifth century, and thus auguries the conflicts to come.22 For now, the Athenians yield to the Spartans and engage only in a verbal contest with the Tegeans, but we may imagine that they will develop claims that will lead to serious tensions and battles (Iat. 8.3). The term othanismus ("thrusting, pushing") that Herodotus associates with the verbal duel is more than a metaphor; playing a role in hostile poleis towards future mortal encounters.

The significance of the speech duel is further reinforced by the situation in the subsequent battle at Plataea. For the Tegeans, who excelled beyond others in that battle, the duel prompts Herodotus to speak about that abducted and hidden Helen, her threatened to destroy everything, or some other Deceleans, Attica's fate, revealed the Spartans' fear, revealed the Spartans' fear, revealed to them.

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The significance of the speech duel is further reinforced by a dense net of anticipations in the subsequent battle at Plataea. For example, Sophanes, the Athenian who excelled beyond others in that battle (9.73), came from Decela, which prompts Herodotus to speak about that place’s mythic past. After Theseus had abducted and hidden Helen, her brothers, the Tyndarids, invaded Attica and threatened to destroy everything they encountered in their search for her. Decelus or some other Decelians, angered by Theseus’s hybris and concerned about Attica’s fate, revealed that Helen was in Aphidna. “In return for this service, Sparta has ever since given the Decelians the freedom of their city and special seats at public functions – so that during the war, many years after these events between Athens and Sparta, the Spartans in their raids on Attica always left Decela unharmed.”

In a zigzag course, the local affiliation of Sophanes, who excelled at Plataea, prompts Herodotus to turn to myth and then to bounce right back to the recent past. A far-reaching flashback leads to a foreshadowing of events close to the narrator’s present. Since the Decelian origin of Sophanes is irrelevant in its context, the historian arguably introduced it there precisely for the purpose of establishing via myth a link with the Peloponnesian War.

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Flower and Marincola even suggest that the story of Theseus offers not only an explanation for the saving of Decelea but, more broadly, serves as a mirror for the Peloponnesian War as a whole:

The hybris of Theseus here in provoking a Spartan invasion may allude to Athens' (or Pericles') role in the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Decelea, we are next told, revealed Helen's whereabouts because 'he feared for the whole land of Attica'. In Alcman's version of this myth (Paus. 1.41.4–DMG 21) the Dioscuri actually captured Athens; by not accepting that version H. is perhaps providing contemporary Athenians with a mythic paradigm for preserving their city in the current war; by following the example of Decelea and coming to terms with Sparta, they could still save themselves from destruction.39

The nod to the Peloponnesian War reinforces the foreshadowing of later intra-Hellenic conflicts in the speech duel between the Athenians and Tegeans. The arguments of the Athenians at Plataea that now figure in a quarrel over positions in a battle formation were to become important tools in later and fiercer fights for hegemony. At the end of the Histories, a net of allusions to the future suggests that Athens will follow Persia in the cycle of empires that rise and then fall due to their rulers' hybris.40 The deconstruction of historical arguments is thus closely linked to a critique of the aggressive policy that Athens was to pursue after the Persian Wars.

It is worth noting that an imperialistic foreign policy was ranking high on the agenda of "radical" democrats, while "conservative" forces would have preferred a more cautious course.

Perhaps Herodotus's critique even derives particular significance from being linked to Plataea. The foreshadowing points to a time when the battle of Plataea had itself acquired high symbolic capital. As, for example, the Plataean Debate in Thucydides reveals (Greethin 2012), the heritage of Plataea was fiercely contested. This gives Herodotus's speech duel at Plataea an additional twist: the use of the past for legitimizing purposes is questioned in the context of an event that itself served to buttress claims in Herodotus's time. In a way, therefore, the battle of Plataea entails in name the history of its own reception.

III

While both Herodotus and Thucydides betray a critical attitude toward speeches, it is important not to overlook two crucial differences. Thucydides' deconstruction of speeches complements an explicit polemic against oratory. In Herodotus, on the other hand, such critique is only implicit. Moreover, Thucydides alerts his readers to the detrimental impact of rhetoric on decision-making, while Herodotus questions the rhetorical use of historical arguments in order to criticize Athens' foreign policy. And yet, despite the differences in explicitness and purpose, in both cases the deconstruction of speeches reveals a critique of Athens' democracy.
various perspectives (Meier 1993; Boedeker and Raatlaub 2005). Tragedy provides few answers but rather creates tensions and raises questions.

This perspective highlights in Herodotus and Thucydides a discrepancy between form and content. Their critical view of democracy is expressed in a discourse that has at least some affinity with democracy. Of course, this thesis leaves aside important aspects and dangerously simplifies complex matters. Particularly in Herodotus there are passages that yield a more positive idea of democracy, while in assessing Thucydides’ narrative we need to take into account that it is presented by a rather strong narrator. Yet the discrepancy between form and content for which I have argued can be supported by examining a parallel that I find rather striking: the Platonic dialogues.

Plato not only ranks prominently among the “enemies of the open society” (Popper 1945) but he resembles especially Thucydides in his critique of rhetoric in democracy (Younis 1996; Ober 1998). This parallel can be extended even further. I have argued that speeches are embedded in the History as a foil to the historian’s approach to the past. A very similar case has been made for Plato. In her book “Genres in Dialogue” (1995), Andrea Nightingale demonstrates that Plato integrates other genres into his dialogues in order to define his own work. One of these genres is oratory. Particularly praise speeches figure in the dialogues as foils. Of course, there are differences between what Thucydides and Plato set against rhetoric — for example, the philosopher’s concept of truth differs greatly from the historian’s claim to veracity — but it is striking that two new genres try to establish a place for themselves by criticizing rhetoric both explicitly and implicitly.

The integration of other genres illustrates the polyphony of the Platonic dialogue. Even more than in the History and Histories, the readers of the dialogues are confronted with ambiguities and forced to construct meaning themselves. In some of Plato’s works, it is easy to see in Socrates an authoritative figure that leads the reader; here, the conversation merely seems to serve the purpose of bringing the interlocutors to accept Socrates’ own view. Yet things are often more complex than this, and other dialogues leave no doubt about the openness of the issues at stake.

In a “provocative essay” (Barber 1996: 361), Peter Euben argues for parallels between the dialectic in Plato’s dialogue and in democracy (1996; see also Monson 1994; Saxonhouse 1996: 87–114). There are clearly limits to this comparison — in his response to Euben, Barber (1996) contrasts Plato’s foundationalist philosophy to the anti-foundationalist politics of democracy — and Euben’s attempt to transform Plato into a democratic thinker may not be convincing in the end, but he does point out an affinity between the Platonic dialogue and democratic discourse. If, while following this argument, we do not neglect Plato’s explicit criticism of democracy, a discrepancy between form and content comes to the fore, and it is very similar to that which we have detected in Herodotus and Thucydides. Historiography and philosophical dialogue not only emerged in democracy as new critical prose genres, but democracy itself provided them with the discursive means needed for criticism of itself. There is, however,

other — rather bold — view of viewing this constellation: not even the “enemies” of democracy were able to evade its influence; even the critique of democracy was steeped in democratic discourse.

Bakhtin and his circle suggest interpreting genres not only as forms, but rather as forms of knowledge (1981: 3–40, 259–432). According to this view, the form and content of genres determine one another. Historiography and Platonic dialog afford two very interesting cases for a Bakhtinian approach. Both can be analyzed fruitfully against the backdrop of contemporary intellectual and political history.

Yet, their relation to democracy is rather complex and built on a discrepancy between form and content: while engaging in critical discussions with democratic views, their form of expressing such criticism taps into resources that are essentially democratic.

**Abbreviations**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>GBRS</td>
<td>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</td>
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**Notes**

1. All dates are BCE. The translations of Herodotus and Thucydides are based on de Stilinacourt and Marincola 2003 and Lattimore 1998. The conference at which this chapter was presented took place in 2006. In the meantime, I have used some of its material in Gschosn 2010, 2011.

2. See, for example, the criticism in Bleeck 1995: 540–52. Meier’s distinction is based on the shift in constitutional terminology from words based on nomos (order) to those based on kratos or arkh (power, rule); see Meier 1990: ch. 7.

3. Morris 1996 (see 2000: pt. 3); Raaflaub and Wallace 2007 strongly emphasize the archaic roots of classical democracy; early democracies outside of Athens, see Robinson 1997. Accordingly, political reflections can be found in earlier texts: Raaflaub 2000, Hamner 2002, for example, demonstrates the political implications of the Homeric epics.

4. It may suffice here to mention the beginning of the *Iliad* with its long chain of causes responsible for the wrath of Achilles.

5. On Herodotus and Athens, see Mole 2002; on Thucydides and Athens, Raaflaub 2006.


8. See LJS i.e. *vita* III. 4. In the *History*, see Cicero’s critique of political oratory as agonistic in 3.38.3–4.
Scholarship on the speeches found in Thucydides’ History has focused either on the question of their authenticity or on their relation to the narrative. For the first, see Hornblower 1987: 45-72 and Garth 1998 with further literature; for the second, see de Romilly 1956; Hunter 1973; Sahl 2003. See also the articles in Stadler, 1973. In this chapter, I outline another approach that can be dubbed “metapoetic” because, in reading speeches as foils to the History, I interpret them as a commentary on the work itself.

For a more detailed interpretation, see Grethlein 2005, 2010: 221-8. Pericles’ Funeral Oration has been interpreted in many different ways. The traditional reading sees it as a eulogy of Athens (see Landmann 1974 and the literature in Gaier 1975: 19 n.10). On the other hand, Flashar 1969 elaborates on the tensions between Athens as presented in this speech and the History’s narrative. Sicking 1995 and Bowkorth 2000 try to interpret the speech in its historical context.


For the Sicilian expedition, see Thuc. 6.1.1 with Stahl 2003: 8; Keller 2006; for the digression on the tyrannicide, see Thuc. 6.60.1 with Ober 1998: 105-6; Keller 2001: 31; Grethlein 2010: 214-20. For discussion of Thucydides’ claim of Athenian ignorance of Sicily, which the historian exaggerates greatly, see Ober 1998; Smith 2004.


This conflict contrasts with the role of Chalcis, a Tegeum, who no much earlier had convinced the Spartans to answer the Athenians’ request for help (9.9).

My interpretation does not depend on the question of whether the debate was historical; for an argument against its historicity, see already Maass 1887: 589 n.1. What is important is that the argumentative strategies are typical of speeches at that time. For the use of the pac in oratory, see n.6 above.


On the intricacies of exhuber and Herodotus and Thucydides and a comparison with the modern skeptical about existing thinking, see Grethlein 2011a.

See the literature listed in n.6.

See, for example, Meyer 1899: 219-21; Jacoby 1913: 491; Schmitz-Kahlmann 1939: 63-5; Solmsen 1944: 249; West 1970: 275; Loraux 1986: 65. Kierdoff 1966: 107 makes the interesting argument that the canon of mythical deeds was not formed through the funeral speeches, but derives from speeches about foreign affairs. For more on this link, see also the literature cited by West 1970: 274 n.16.

For the Trojan War distinguishes the Athenian speech from the preserved Epithetis Iunx, only two of which mention the Trojan War, yet never as a part of the catalogue of deeds (Demoshostene 60.10-11 and Hyppides 6.35-6); see Gotzland 2001: 218. Kierdoff 1966:98-9 argues that the reference to the Trojan War is a relic from propaganda used before the Persian Wars.

There are further similarities, such as the antithesis between word and deed (logos – ergon) in 5.27.1, which, of course, is widespread in Greek literature but has particular prominence in the funeral speeches.

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