THUCYDIDES AND ATHENIAN HISTORY

P.J. Rhodes

Thucydides the totally dispassionate, scientific historian has been superseded in the *communis opinio* by Thucydides the engaged Athenian and the artful reporter. He mentions his father’s name, Oloros, and his interests in Thrace (4.104.4–4.105.1), from which we may infer that he was related to Miltiades, who married the daughter of a Thracian called Oloros. Thucydides the son of Melesias, who succeeded Miltiades’ son Cimon as the leading opponent of Pericles, was connected with that family by marriage; and it is possible that that Thucydides was a grandfather and Miltiades was a great-grandfather of Thucydides the historian. Thucydides reports in a matter-of-fact section of narrative that he was an Athenian general in 424/3 and did not return from Thasos in time to prevent Amphipolis from going over to the Spartan Brasidas, but was in time to keep Eion in Athenian hands (4.105–106); as a result of that he was exiled, returning to Athens under the amnesty of 404 (5.26.5); it is often and plausibly thought, but is not attested, that the man responsible for his exile was Cleon. He tells us that, when exiled from Athens, he was able to visit states and talk to men on the Peloponnesian side (5.26.5). Before 424/3 he was presumably in Athens and fighting for Athens (his election as general is likely to be due to creditable military service as well as to his having Thracian connections at a time when they might be useful). We thus have an aristocratic Athenian, from a strongly anti-Periclean background, who nevertheless became an admirer of Pericles and of the Athenian democracy and the Athenian empire as led by Pericles (but not of post-Periclean democracy or of unrestrained imperial ambitions); a man who served as an Athenian general but whose generalship led to his exile: he was undoubtedly an engaged Athenian.

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1 I thank Prof. S. Hornblower for reading a draft, and for suggesting improvements which I have gratefully made.
This chapter will concentrate on passages in which Thucydides focuses directly on Athens; but there are many passages focused primarily on other states where he has Athens in mind. The Corinthians in their first speech at Sparta (1.68–71), in order to reproach the Spartans for their slowness, contrast that with Athens’ energy: it is here that we find the notorious characterization of the Athenians that “their nature is neither to have peace themselves nor to allow the rest of mankind to have it” (1.70.9). Fear of Athenian ambition motivated the Trachinians when they invoked the help of Sparta in 426 (3.92.2), the north-western Greeks when they made a treaty of neutrality in 426/5 (3.114.2–3 with 3.113.2), and the Sicilian Greeks when they agreed to forswear intervention from outside in 424 (4.60–61). The Syracusan Athenagoras has a significant name (though I hesitate to reject him as an invention) and is described similarly to Cleon as “a champion of the dèmos and at that time most able to persuade the many” (6.35.2: for Cleon see below): after misjudging the Athenians’ ambitions, he, like Pericles in the Funeral Speech (2.37: cf. below), gives a defence of democracy which is less egalitarian than the Athenian reality (6.36–40: democracy 6.39). In 7.55.2 and again in 8.96.5 (in the latter passage once more contrasting Spartan slowness) Thucydides claims, not entirely fairly, that the Syracusans, who were democratic and powerful, were the enemies most similar in character (homoiotropoi) and therefore the most formidable to the Athenians.

We may suspect that in many places there are unsignposted allusions to Athens. For instance, in the general comments on the collapse of standards and the polarization of pro-Athenian democrats and pro-Spartan oligarchs attached to the civil war in Corcyra (3.82–83), the social-political associations known as hetaireiai (3.82.5–6) are more likely to have been found in the large city of Athens (cf. 8.48.3; 8.54.4 [xynōmosiā, “conspiracies”]; 8.65.2) than in the small Corcyra.

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In Books I–II there are a few brief allusions to early Athens. In the opening chapters of Book I, Thucydides writes that because of its poor soil [in fact, by Greek standards it was neither exceptionally fertile nor exceptionally infertile] Attica was not competed over but for a very long time was occupied by the same people (1.2.5: the