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## INTRODUCTION

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### 1. THUCYDIDES AND HIS HISTORY

For the life of Thucydides we possess information of two sorts:<sup>1</sup> (1) the primary evidence from his own work, to which may be added the inscription on his tomb, discovered in Athens 'among the monuments of Cimon's family' by Polemon the periegete in the second century B.C.;<sup>2</sup> (2) the speculations of hellenistic and later biographers and commentators, which are especially evident in the βίος Θουκυδίδου written by a certain Marcellinus.<sup>3</sup> The latter are not necessarily false,<sup>4</sup> but only the former may be accepted unconditionally.

Thucydides tells us himself that even at the beginning of the war he was old enough to understand it (5.26.5 αἰσθανόμενος τῇ ἡλικίᾳ). At some time in 429–426 he suffered from the plague (2.48.3). He was elected a general in 424/3 and commanded a fleet in the campaign in the area of Thrace, where he had influence and mining properties (4.105.1); but he failed to relieve Amphipolis before it was captured by Brasidas (4.102–8), and after this campaign he was exiled for 20 years (5.26.5). Though he clearly lived to the end of the war, his history is unfinished, breaking off in the summer of 411. We may guess that he was born c. 460, and died c. 400.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the distinction see especially Wilamowitz, 'Die Thukydideslegende'. His scepticism was tempered in *Platon II* (Berlin 1919) 12–16.

<sup>2</sup> Plut. *Cimon* 4, Marcellinus 16 (Wilamowitz, 'Thukydideslegende' 13–23).

<sup>3</sup> It is derived largely from the grammarian Didymus (first century B.C.). For Marcellinus himself see O. Luschkat, 'Die Thukydides-scholien', *Philologus* 98 (1954) 42–7. The text is prefaced to most editions of Thucydides (Stuart Jones, Luschkat, Alberti), but to my knowledge it has never been translated into English.

<sup>4</sup> As Wilamowitz himself noted later (*Platon II* (Berlin 1919) 12–16).

<sup>5</sup> Somewhat later, if the note on Archelaus (2.100.2n.) is really an 'obituary' after his death in 399. J. Pouilloux and F. Salviat, 'Lichas, Lacédémonien, archonte à Thasos, et le livre viii de Thucydide', *C.R.A.I.* 1983, 376–403, suggest that he lived until the late 390s, on the basis of the occurrence of a certain Lichas son of Arcesilaus as archon of Thasos in 396/7, whom they identify as the Spartan whose death is recorded at 8.84.5; but cf. P. A. Cartledge, *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 9 (1984) 98–102.

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[More information](#)*i. Family*<sup>6</sup>

Thucydides refers to himself (4.104.4) as the son of Olorus (the 'grave-stone' adds that his deme was Halimous). The name is rare and significant. It is first attested for a Thracian king whose daughter Hegesipyle married Miltiades (Hdt. 6.39 and 41, Plut. *Cimon* 4), and it is unlikely to have been given to any Athenian other than descendants of Miltiades and his son Cimon. Given the Greek habit of naming children after illustrious

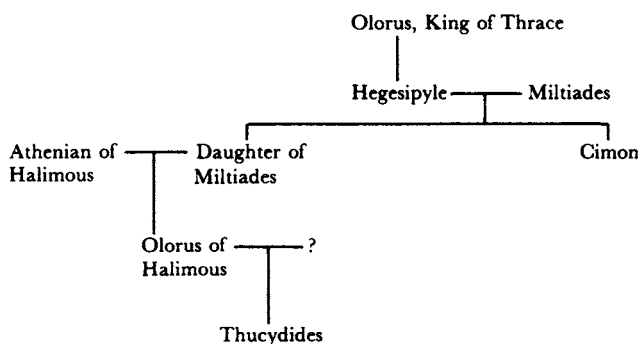


Figure 1A. The family of Thucydides according to Kirchner

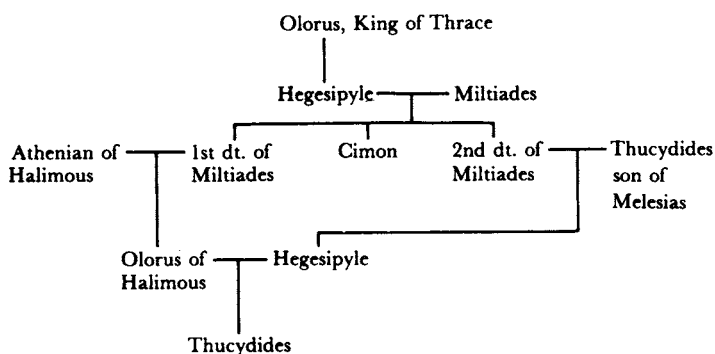


Figure 1B. The family of Thucydides according to Cavaignac

<sup>6</sup> See especially J. K. Davies, *Athenian propertied families* (Oxford 1971) 230–7 (no. 7268) with full discussion and bibliography.

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ancestors, a family tree was constructed by J. Kirchner (*Prosopographia Attica* 1 (Berlin 1901) 470, no. 7267; see Figure 1A) according to which the historian is the great-grandson of Miltiades. These paternal ancestors explain why Thucydides possessed gold mines and influence in Thrace, as well as his willingness to digress on Thracian affairs (see 2.29 and 2.97nn.). But at the same time it is somewhat surprising to find such pronounced admiration for the Alcmeonid Pericles in a descendant of his enemy Cimon.<sup>7</sup>

Thucydides' maternal ancestry may have been equally hostile to Pericles, if the conjecture of E. Cavaignac (*R.Ph.* 3 (1929) 281–5) is correct. From the statement that Thucydides' mother was named Hegesipyle (Marcellinus 2), and the coincidence of name with Thucydides the son of Melesias (born c. 500, Davies 231–3), a politician and lifelong opponent of Pericles, Cavaignac suggested we add to the original stemma an extra daughter of Miltiades (and sister of Cimon) whose daughter was Thucydides' mother (see Figure 1B).

If this is true, then Olorus married his cousin, and both the historian and his mother were named after their maternal grandparents from the family of Cimon. The speculation rests partly on weak evidence – there is little likelihood that the name of the historian's mother was known from a document – but it remains tempting.<sup>8</sup>

## ii. *The question of composition*<sup>9</sup>

'The art of historical writing as practised by Thucydides did not remain static, but underwent appreciable modifications as his [work] progressed.'<sup>10</sup>

It would be surprising if this were not true of any work of comparable scope, and Thucydides' history is in addition unfinished, so that it may be possible to *detect* more than one of these stages in its composition.

But the controversy has become an emotional one, fuelled by a

<sup>7</sup> Davies 235 prefers to think that Thucydides' anonymous grandfather may have been an Alcmeonid.

<sup>8</sup> Davies 236 is sceptical; it is accepted by H. T. Wade-Gery, 'Thucydides son of Melesias', *Essays on Greek history* (Oxford 1958) 246, and Wilamowitz, *Platon* II.13 (overlooked by Davies) seems to anticipate it.

<sup>9</sup> For a full analysis see Dover in *HCT* v Appendix 2, 'Strata of composition', where, however, little reference is made to previous discussions. He notes (405) that 'the burden of proof [is] on the unitarians'.

<sup>10</sup> Westlake, *Individuals* vii.

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misleading analogy with the Homeric question which classifies Thucydidean scholars as 'unitarians' and 'separatists'. (On the Homeric model, the former would tend to believe that the history is complete as we have it, the latter that it is a composite of several authors' work; neither view is tenable.) In fact, they divide on two different questions: (1) were substantial parts of the work written during the war itself, or was it produced only *after* 404?<sup>11</sup> The answer will affect the degree of inconsistency we are prepared to explain as intentional. (2) If there *are* inconsistencies, are they matters of detail or substance?

iii. *Evidence on composition*

The relevant evidence within Thucydides' work is of several kinds.

*Inconsistencies of detail.*<sup>12</sup> Some statements appear to be contradicted by later events. Three clear examples are in the second book: 2.1, both sides fought 'without interruption' (συνεχῶς) through the whole war, which could be said only if the war ended with the peace of Nicias in 421; 2.23.3, the Oropians are identified as subjects of Athens, which was true only until 412; 2.94.1, the Peloponnesian raid towards Piraeus produced the greatest Athenian panic of the war, which is contradicted by 7.71.7, 8.1 and 8.96.1. There are, however, statements in these same sections (especially in 2.65) which just as clearly were written *after* the defeat of 404, so that it will not do to suppose that all of this section is 'early'.

*Varying degrees of completeness.*<sup>13</sup> Most parts of the work (1.1–4.51, and 5.84–8.1) appear quite polished, with speeches, elaborate digressions, and carefully arranged narratives; but two long stretches (4.52–5.83 and 8.2–109) tend to use few or no speeches, reproduce documents more often and narrate events in a perfunctory, episodic style;<sup>14</sup> they look to some like a preliminary version, which lacked the *ultima manus* at Thucydides' death.

<sup>11</sup> For a brief doxography see Schmid 127 n. 1. Supporters of the first view (F. W. Ullrich, E. Schwartz, W. Schadewaldt) may rely on 1.1.1 ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον ... ἀρξάμενος εὐθύς καθισταμένου. Proponents of postwar composition (K. W. Krüger, J. Classen, E. Meyer, H. Patzer, J. H. Finley) may point to Thucydides' explicit statement (in the 'second preface', 5.26), that he considers the entire 27 years to be a single war; if this represents a change of mind, Thucydides does not want us to know it.

<sup>12</sup> Dover, *HCT* v.405–15.

<sup>13</sup> Dover, *HCT* v.389–99.

<sup>14</sup> For a defence of the documents see however W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton 1984) 144–7.

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*Variations in length and arrangement of narrative.* Even within the more polished sections, Thucydides employs different narrative strategies, as follows.

A. 1.1–1.145<sup>15</sup> is a complicated *mixture of chronologically and factually disparate elements*, intended to introduce the years leading up to the war, the main actors and Thucydides' methods. It has three backward-looking digressions (the 'archaeology' in 1.2–19, the 'pentekontaetia' in 1.89–118 and the stories of Pausanias and Themistocles in 1.126–38), two narratives of conflict between Athens and the Peloponnesians over former Corinthian colonies (Corcyra in 1.24–55 and Potidaea in 1.56–65) and two debates among the Peloponnesians (1.66–88, 1.118–25), all culminating in Pericles' rejection of the Spartan ultimatum (1.139–45) which begins the war (2.1n.).

B. 1.146–4.51 is a *balanced and comprehensive narrative of seven successive years of war*. Here no single story is allowed to disrupt the chronology (e.g., the capture and destruction of Plataea is told in four instalments), nor stretch to excessive length; yet most years are marked by central events which prevent the story from being merely a collection of annalistic episodes (431, the evacuation of Attica and Pericles' funeral oration; 430, the plague and Pericles' final defence of his leadership; 429, Phormio's sea battles in the gulf of Corinth; 427, the fall of Plataea, the debate over Mytilene and στάσις at Corcyra; 425, the capture of Sphacteria).

C. 6.1–8.1 is virtually a *separate monograph*, covering only two years and telling the story of the Sicilian campaign from its hopeful beginning (with an introduction on the geography of Sicily) to its disastrous end.

*Inconsistent views on the principles of the war.* These are the most subjective and yet, if accepted, the most significant variations within the work. A few of the changes of mind attributed to Thucydides (and relevant to Book 2) are:

*Portraits of individuals.* They tend at the start to be used as ideals, or representatives of a species (Pericles, Archidamus, Phormio), while in later sections there is greater emphasis on their personalities and relations with others (Alcibiades, Nicias).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> It is important to remember that the current book-divisions are not the work of Thucydides himself (see the introductory n. to 2.1); for the present analysis, nearly every one of them is in some way misleading.

<sup>16</sup> Westlake, *Individuals*, especially 308–19.

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*Reasons for failure in Sicily.* The obituary of Pericles (2.65.11) states that the expedition failed because of a lack of domestic support, yet the narrative of Books 6 and 7 suggests rather that the catastrophe results from a tragic sequence of errors and near misses.<sup>17</sup>

*Importance of οἰκονομία.* In the same passage (2.65.12) Thucydides attributes the final defeat of Athens to internal disunity; yet the years of Athens' worst internal discord (411–407) were also years of great military success.<sup>18</sup>

*iv. Ullrich's theory of composition*

The first and still the most coherent method of accounting for these discrepancies is that initiated by F. W. Ullrich, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Thucydides* (Hamburg 1846) 63–150, who suggested that Thucydides began writing after the peace of Nicias, under the impression that the war had ended in 421; when he had completed what is now 1–4.51 (ending with the capture of Sphacteria), the Sicilian disaster forced him to reconsider his plan, and he wrote a separate account of that campaign (and the preceding defeat of Melos). After the final defeat of Athens in 404 he wrote a second preface (5.26), began to make the work continuous, and revised some of the earliest sections also; but he did not finish before his death. Thus we possess sections written at various times:

*Finished sections* (covering 431–425, 416–413)

1.–4.51 written after 421 (but with insertions (notably 2.65) after 404)

5.84–8.1 on the defeat of Melos and the Sicilian expedition (written after 413)

*Unfinished sections* (to fill in gaps in the '27-year war')

4.52–5.83 (covering 424–416)

8.2–8.109 (covering 413–411)

At Thucydides' death, some editor<sup>19</sup> will have combined these sections to produce the work as it stands today.

<sup>17</sup> See 2.65.11nn. F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides mythistoricus* (London 1907) perceives fully the tragic qualities of the Sicilian expedition, and attempts to distort the Periclean narrative to make it consistent.

<sup>18</sup> See 2.65.12nn.

<sup>19</sup> Often identified as Xenophon; see Introd. '5. The text', below.

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## 2. ΛΟΓΟΣ AS ΕΡΓΟΝ

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*v. The limitations of compositional analysis*

Ullrich's judgements of many individual passages are open to dispute (the treatments which followed him have only increased the areas of disagreement), and create the quite false impression that Thucydides' basic views on historiography and political philosophy were uncertain, or subject to radical alteration.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the debate between those positing one or more stages of incomplete revision on the one hand, and those on the other who argue that the inconsistencies do not constitute significant changes in conception within the work itself, has produced something closer to exhaustion than consensus; the most valuable recent studies prefer to subordinate the problem of composition to other aspects of the history.<sup>21</sup>

2. ΛΟΓΟΣ AS ΕΡΓΟΝ: FICTION AND HISTORY IN THE SPEECHES<sup>22</sup>*i. The problem*

At most of the decisive moments of Thucydides' history there occur orations by leaders of the various parties, some (like Pericles, Nicias, Alcibiades) well known, others (like Diodotus or the Melians) no more than names or even anonymous; they form the most difficult and rewarding sections of his work. Modern scholars usually approach the

<sup>20</sup> For the continuity of thought between Book 2 and other sections see Introd. '3. Themes of the narrative, 431–29', below.

<sup>21</sup> Beginning with de Romilly, and continued in the books by Stahl, Westlake, Schneider, Edmunds, as well as the specialized studies by Lévy, Garlan, and Loraux (see the bibliography). Two exceptions: H. Rawlings, *The structure of Thucydides' history* (Princeton 1981), who develops an ingenious structure to argue that 431–421 and 413–403 are narrated as two exactly parallel wars (and extrapolates 'books 9–10' on that basis); but (despite a brilliant elucidation of 2.1, where see nn.) he never confronts the problems presented above. W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton 1984) who focuses on variations, but views them largely as intentional.

<sup>22</sup> The literature is endless. Among the most substantial contributions are Dover, *HCT* v.393–9; F. Egermann, 'Thukydides über die Art seiner Reden und über seine Darstellung der Kriegsgeschichte', *Historia* 21 (1972) 575–602; A. Grosskinsky, *Das Programm des Thukydides* (*Neue deutsche Forschungen* 68, Berlin 1936); C. Schneider, *Information und Absicht bei Thukydides* (Göttingen 1974) 143–54.

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evaluation of these speeches with one of two opinions: that Thucydides reproduces accurately speeches which he either witnessed or investigated,<sup>23</sup> or that they are largely fictitious.<sup>24</sup> The vindication of either view would bring important advantages for our study of Thucydides: if they are faithful, we gain valuable reports of the policies and perhaps even the personalities of the most important Athenian and Spartan leaders. If they are entirely fictitious, then we may isolate them as 'editorial comment', revealing Thucydides' own opinions to a greater extent than he could in his narrative sections.

The solution to this problem *should* be found in Thucydides' chapter on his methods (1.22), yet this is a source of even more dispute, for two reasons.

(1) Thucydides structures the whole passage around the antithesis between the ἔργα (events) of the war, for which he claims the strictest possible accuracy, and the λόγοι (speeches), for which he claims something less. Yet no matter what Thucydides may say, speeches are events, too – and some of the speeches of Pericles, Cleon, or Alcibiades must have been major events of the war. They are therefore subject to the same standards of factual accuracy as any other event.

(2) Even within his statement of method for the speeches there is ambiguity, for he says not only that as he wrote he was 'keeping as closely as possible to the general content of what was actually said' (ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς συμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων), but also that he has composed the speeches to include 'more or less what had to be said about the respective situations' (περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστα). One suggests reasonably accurate reproduction, the other considerable invention. How can they co-exist?<sup>25</sup>

The reasons why Thucydides believed he could separate the factual and rhetorical elements of his work (and claim accuracy for the one while disclaiming it for the other) lie in the two traditions of speech-making which he fused for the first time in his history.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Kagan, *Archidamian War* 366, *Y.C.S.* 24 (1975) 71–94 and M. Cogan, *The human thing* (Chicago 1981) xi–xvi.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. de Ste Croix, *Origins* 7–16.

<sup>25</sup> The most desperate attitude is that of Dover, *HCT* v.396–7 (following Pohlenz): the method expounded in 1.22 and the actual practice of the speeches are so contradictory that this chapter must belong to an earlier stage of composition, describing a more accurate approach to the speeches which was later abandoned.



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*ii. Speeches in early Greek historiography*

Before Thucydides, the historiographical tradition had only just awakened to the potential use of political speeches. In the fragments of Acusilaus of Argos and Pherecydes of Athens we have impersonal indirect narrative;<sup>26</sup> vivid dialogue is blended with narrative first in Hecataeus,<sup>27</sup> and occasionally in Herodotus also (4.118, 5.31).

Herodotus breaks new ground by making frequent use of direct speech, especially in the dialogues with which he elaborates his stories;<sup>28</sup> these exchanges could develop into a form of political debate, at some times obviously fictional,<sup>29</sup> at others with some claim to accuracy.<sup>30</sup> A general definition of Herodotus' practice in speeches remains elusive, but it seems as if he adheres largely to traditional uses of the speech in poetry – it remains for him a dramatic device, tied to particular characters and situations, rather than a tool for generalizing his historical analysis.<sup>31</sup> When he came to compose his speeches, Thucydides sought his models elsewhere.

*iii. Speeches in the rhetorical tradition<sup>32</sup>*

During the last decades of the fifth century one of the most important practical skills an Athenian could possess was that of compelling argu-

<sup>26</sup> *FGrHist* 2 F 22, 3 F 18a. Notable in the verbs implying speech is the consistent use of historical present (κελεύει, ἀπειλεί).

<sup>27</sup> [Longinus] *περὶ ὑποφωτισμῶν* 27 = *FGrHist* 1 F 30; perhaps the exchange of Zas and Chthonie in Pherecydes of Syros (*VS* 7 B 2) was similar.

<sup>28</sup> W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot* (Göttingen 1921), 241ff. See in general F. Jacoby, *RE* Suppl. II.491.41ff.; A. Deffner, *Die Rede bei Herodot und ihre Weiterbildung bei Thukydides* (diss. Munich 1933); Erwin Schulz, *Die Reden im Herodot* (Greifswald 1933).

<sup>29</sup> Notably 3.80–6 (the Persian conspirators debate the best constitution – later (6.43.3) Herodotus acknowledges scepticism about these speeches, but does not recant them), and 7.8–11 (Xerxes, Mardonius and Artabanus debate the invasion of Greece).

<sup>30</sup> Especially 8.58–63 (Themistocles' speech before Salamis), 8.140–4 (Athens is offered peace terms by Mardonius); cf. 7.157–62 (Gelon refuses to fight the Persians).

<sup>31</sup> Mabel Lang, *Herodotean narrative and discourse* (Cambridge, Mass. 1984).

<sup>32</sup> For a general account see G. Kennedy, *The art of persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) 26–51; H. Gomperz, *Sophistik und Rhetorik: das Bildungsideal des 5. Jahrhunderts in seinem Verhältnis zur Philosophie des V. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1912); O. Navarre, *Essai sur la rhétorique grecque avant Aristote* (Paris 1900).

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ment. Political leaders advanced through their speeches in the assembly (ῥήτωρ became the term for 'politician') and survived attempts to dethrone them through their speeches in court.<sup>33</sup> Nor were those without political ambitions exempt: in the popular imagination (and often enough in fact) an unscrupulous but skilled speaker might rob a businessman of his property, a craftsman of his customers, or a patriot of his citizenship.<sup>34</sup>

It is therefore little wonder that the leading intellects of the day practised and promoted the composition of public speeches, not only to meet specific needs,<sup>35</sup> but also for display and example.<sup>36</sup> Set speeches also began to pervade other genres: there had always been speeches in tragedy, but now (especially in Euripides) they become more generalising, and less relevant to the dramatic situation and the characters who deliver them;<sup>37</sup> the heroes of old comedy (Dikaiopolis, Lysistrata, Peisetairos) may carry their points using precisely that rhetorical skill which Aristophanes decries in real-life politicians; and Plato's re-creation of an intellectual gathering of this period in the *Symposium* makes skill in speechmaking the competitive criterion acknowledged by all.<sup>38</sup>

Thucydides found before him, then, two traditions of the use of

<sup>33</sup> Aristophanes (*Acharnians* 703–18) notes that the recent emphasis on rhetorical skill gives the younger generation an unfair advantage over its elders, and suggests that ἀντίδικοι be matched by age.

<sup>34</sup> Gorgias, *Helen* 8–14, reflected in Plato, *Gorgias* 456a7–c7; see Charles Segal, 'Gorgias and the psychology of the λόγος', *H.S.C.P.* 66 (1962) 99–155; J. de Romilly, *Magic and rhetoric in ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975); cf. Strepsiades' reasoning in *Clouds* 112–18.

<sup>35</sup> See S. Usher, 'Lysias and his clients', *G.R.B.S.* 17 (1976) 31–40; M. Lavency, *Aspects de la logographie judiciaire attique* (Louvain 1964).

<sup>36</sup> The epideictic speeches begin with the *Helen* and *Palamedes* of Gorgias; the first model speeches are the *Tetralogies* ascribed to Antiphon, and the 'case-method' of rhetorical instruction is parodied in Ar. *Clouds* 757–82. See in general D. A. Russell, *Greek declamation* (Cambridge 1983), and W. Hofrichter, *Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Deklamation* (diss. Breslau, Ohlau 1935). (The fragment of a speech to the Athenian assembly by Thrasymachus (*VS* 85 a 1) may also belong here, since as a foreigner he is unlikely to have delivered it himself.)

<sup>37</sup> Jacqueline Duchemin, *L'ΑΓΩΝ dans la tragédie grecque* (Paris 1945) and C. Collard, 'Formal debates in Euripides' drama', *G. & R.* 22 (1975) 58–71.

<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere (*Phaedrus* 257c–258d2) Plato argues playfully that skill in λογογραφία is what all politicians crave.