Introduction: Foundation Levels

Every student of Greek history knows that in the Persian wars of 480–479 B.C., the Athenians abandoned their *polis* but fought on to victory at Salamis from their ships. In the Peloponnesian War fifty years later (431–404 B.C.), Pericles urged the Athenians to use a similar strategy. In accord with Pericles' vision of Athens as "the sea and the city," the Athenians abandoned the land and houses of Attica and adopted a defensive war strategy designed to take advantage of Athenian naval superiority.

Thucydides chronicled this long war between Athens and Sparta. Despite all that has been written about Thucydides and Pericles, however, no work has yet focused on Thucydides' critique of Pericles' radical redefinition of Athens as a city divorced from its traditional homeland of Attica. That critique is the subject of this book.

Thucydides, I argue, repeatedly questions and discredits the Periclean vision.

He demonstrates that this vision of Athens as a city separated from Attica and coextensive with the sea leads the Athenians both to Melos and to Sicily. After Sicily, flexible notions of the city greatly exacerbate civil strife in Athens, and the end of Thucydides' (preserved) text praises political compromise and reconciliation focused on the traditional city in Attica. Thucydides' final comments prize that city over even empire itself and implicitly censure Pericles for ever directing the Athenians' gaze toward another city.

We begin with an analysis of Thucydides' presentation of Pericles' radical redefinition of the city in books 1 and 2 of his *History*. Thucydides suggests that Athens' strength lies in intangibles. Both the Corinthians

and the Athenians at the Spartan congress before the war present the
Athenians' ability to conceptualize their city and divorce it from their
territory as a source of strength. The Corinthians, in particular, stress
the restlessness and boundary confusion of the Athenians and show that
they make no distinction between their "home" territory and that of
others. (This is part of what makes them such worrisome neighbors.)
Furthermore, in his account of the fifty years between the Persian War
and the beginning of his war, Thucydides shows that the Athenians
grew powerful because of their willingness to be away from home.

When he comes to describe Pericles' vision of the city, however,
Thucydides reveals that it is even more radical than the idea of the
city for which the Athenians fought at Salamis, in part because it does
not seem to seek eventually to regain the land-bound city in Attica.
Pericles sees Athens as a city with no connection to Attica. He deems
the land and houses of Attica valueless, because he sees other land that
(in his eyes) can take Attica's place. In his last speech, Pericles tells
the Athenians that they are "absolute masters" of the watery half of
the world, and he directs their attention away from Attica, and their
traditional city there, to the sea and everything it touches. Thucydides
questions whether the Athenians can or should accept Pericles' new city
and the policy dependent on it. He associates Pericles' policy with civil
strife and details the difficulty experienced by the Athenians during
their move into Athens from their country homes and country life.
Pericles offers to replace their houses and Attica itself with his vision of
a limitless city on the sea. Thucydides prompts his reader to ask whether
they will find this just compensation.

Thucydides asserts that Pericles' successors "did the opposite of Per-
icles with regard to all points of his advice" (2.65.7),[1] but his narrative
makes it clear that the Athenians after Pericles fully embraced his vision
of a city divorced from Attica and focused on the sea. Thucydides shows
that in the years after Pericles' death, the Athenians and others fully
accept Pericles' vision of Athens. The Spartans make an equivalence
between the Spartans' "own land" and the Athenians' allied territory
(4.80.1) and so indicate that they recognize that the Athenians' "own
land" is not in Attica but in the empire. In their complaint about
the Athenians' breach of a treaty, the Argives employ a definition

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[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

of Athenian "territory" that includes, indeed equates it with, the sea
(5.56.2). Finally, the Athenians' response to the revolt of Scione demon-
strates that the Athenians feel particular ownership over islands (and
coastal places that the Athenians could imagine were islands), perhaps
even those not in alliance with Athens (4.122.5).

The city view on display in Pericles' last speech, at Scione, and in the
treaty dispute with Argos leads logically to aggressive campaigns like
that against Melos. The attack on Melos is no aberration but a logical
step in Athens' assertion of its rule of the sea. Two echoes of Pericles here
underscore that the attack on Melos is not the result of the new policies
of Pericles' deficient successors. Melos does not diverge from Pericles'
policy; it follows the city view articulated in his last speech exactly.

As time and the narrative progess, Thucydides demonstrates that the
Athenians' ability to abandon their homes and their real city in Attica –
an ability that was so important to their earlier success – is a liability. The
Athenians' conception of a city at sea, for example, leads them to their
ill-fated invasion of Sicily. Thucydides presents the Sicilian Expedition
as madness and lays some of the blame at Pericles' feet, because Pericles'
boast that Athens ruled the sea – and his exhortation to the Athenians to
abandon their land and their houses – encouraged the "mad longing for
the far off" that fuels this "longest voyage from home ever attempted"
(6.31.6). Pericles helped to sever the tie to home that might have kept
the Athenians away from Sicily.

Furthermore, Thucydides shows that the Athenians' investment in
the Sicilian city endangered the Athens at home. Thucydides repeatedly
characterizes the army as a city during the Sicilian narrative and suggests
that the Athenians, following Pericles' model, ultimately abandoned the
city in Attica in favor of the Sicilian city. Thucydides criticizes this as
muddled thinking and a confusion of priorities. The disastrous end
to the expedition culminates in a symbolic tribute payment from the
Sicilian Athens that reverses the imperial result of Salamis (and invites
contrast with that earlier abandonment of Attica). Thucydides' final
words on Sicily – "out of many, few returned home" – relate to the
Athenians' failure to distinguish "home" from foreign in books 1 and 2
and underscore that the men in Sicily had real homes that were not in
Sicily. Thucydides' commentary criticizes the imaginary city conjured
for the Sicilian expedition and the Athenians' (and Pericles') failure to
recognize where their city truly lay.

The Athenians' disconnection from Attica also fuels civil strife and seems to change the very nature of the Athenians. In his account of the rise of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred, Thucydides' narrative deliberately contradicts his assertion that it was difficult to end the Athenians' liberty. He depicts the Athenians, instead, as remaining quiet in the face of oligarchy and putting up little fight for their "ancient liberty." He thereby invites his readers to reexamine their own assumptions and expectations about Athens. If Athens is by nature democratic, it ought to have been hard to introduce an oligarchy there. But Thucydides shows that it was relatively easy, and so implies that democracy is not essential to Athens. On the other hand, after the fleet on Samos rejects oligarchy, the Athenians on Samos vehemently insist on the importance of democracy and, because they support democracy, claim that they (and not those oligarchs in Athens) are the true Athenians.

Thucydides disapproves of this position, however. The newborn Athenian democrats on Samos insist that Athens, to be Athens, must be democratic, but Thucydides' consistently negative portrayal of them undermines their claims. Thucydides especially emphasizes how the ideological purity of the Samian factioneers endangers the city in Attica because of the ease with which they denigrate that city and imagine abandoning it in favor of a new, democratic city elsewhere (8.76.6). Although most modern commentators see them as heroic patriots, Thucydides charges that they would destroy the city, not save it. In doing so, Thucydides criticizes all Athenian redefinitions that encourage men in crisis to follow their own idea of their city rather than compromise with their fellow citizens.

Indeed, throughout his account of the return to democracy, Thucydides emphasizes reconciliation, not partisanship. He stresses the unity of the two groups, democrats and oligarchs, and favors political compromise, not ideological purity – compromise focused, moreover, on the city in Attica. In the last hypothetical in his work, Thucydides implies that the loss of the empire would be worth it – indeed, even compulsory – if it was necessary to preserve the Athens in Attica from the Spartans (8.96.4). It seems that for Thucydides that city in Attica, and that alone, was the city.

Thucydides does not baldly state any of this in his own words. Instead, as Hobbes noted long ago, "the narration itself doth secretly

instruct the reader, and more effactually than can possibly be done by precept."[2] Passages of Thucydides' text echo and invoke other passages in his work, so that it is impossible to proceed through the narrative without being repeatedly reminded of earlier passages and thereby invited to confirm or revise judgments those earlier passages had suggested.[3] Thucydides "needs to be turned over line by line, and his hidden thoughts read as clearly as his words: there are few poets so rich in hidden thoughts," as Friedrich Nietzsche asserts.[4] We will, then, be reading carefully and (I hope) well, reading (in Nietzsche's words) "slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft," looking for echoes and resonances, "dramatic juxtapositions," internal allusions, and ironic commentary.[5] Such a reading assumes that, although he did not finish it, Thucydides had carefully revised much, if not most, of his work after the war to represent the events of the whole war and the judgments he had reached at its conclusion.[6] This is not to say that I think that all books show the same degree of polish.[7] Rather, I recognize what John Finley described as the "tightness of texture" of the work."[8]

Such a reading assumes, furthermore, that these echoes, resonances, "dramatic juxtapositions," internal allusions, and ironic commentary are deliberate – that Thucydides meant for readers to see and contemplate them. I assume, in other words, that "Thucydides . . . is a real writer,

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[2] Hobbes 1843, xxii.

[3] Cf. Morrison (2006b, 266): "in many instances . . . Thucydides uses memorable phrases, striking metaphors, or recurrent polarities – Athenians-as-islanders, Athens the tyrant-city, land and sea, the opposition of Athenian and Spartan character – which provide Thucydides' audience (whether reader or auditor) with touchstones that offer coherence and unity for the *History*."

[4] Nietzsche, *"What I Owe the Ancients,"* 2 in *Twilight of the Idols* (trans., Lange).

[5] Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, preface 5 (trans., Hollindale). Connor (1984, 64) uses the phrase "dramatic juxtaposition" to describe Thucydides' placement of the Funeral Oration and plague narrative. J. Finley (1938/1967, xii) speaks of the "internal allusiveness" of Thucydides' text.

[6] Although some have suggested that perhaps the text we have ends where Thucydides wished it to end, most scholars agree that the text is unfinished. See below, chapters 4 and 5, for more on this point.

[7] See Andrewes' "Appendix 1. Indications of Incompleteness" in Gomme et al. 1981.

[8] J. Finley 1938/1967, xii.

who addresses directly, perhaps for the first time in history, a reading audience,"[9] and that Thucydides "created a work designed primarily for – indeed, only fully comprehensible by – the reflective reader."[10] No doubt I am overreading in some instances, but not in all, I think.

I hope that this book will be of interest not just to classicists but also to political theorists, not least because I myself am indebted as much to the latter (such as Peter Euben, Steven Forde, Clifford Orwin, Michael Palmer, and Leo Strauss) as to the former. I also hope that this book will appeal both to specialists and to more general readers. To that end, I have translated all foreign quotations in the text, and I assume no knowledge of the Peloponnesian War or Thucydides' account of it in my discussion. I have also tried to limit my quotations of Thucydides' Greek to those places where it is absolutely necessary. At the same time, my argument fully engages the specialists' debates, though I have confined that conversation, as much as possible, to the footnotes.[11]

This is not a work of history. I do not claim here to prove anything about the policy of the historical Pericles or the real Athenians' reaction to it. Rather, by careful analysis of Thucydides' text, I hope to elucidate Thucydides' presentation of the Athenians' "theoretical thinking" about the *polis*[12] and to show that Thucydides levels serious criticism at it. To the extent that we depend on Thucydides for our historical understanding of Pericles and the Athenians, this elucidation will also have historical significance, but it is, first and foremost, a study of what Thucydides has to say.[13]

[9] Bakker 2006, 109.
[10] Crane 1996, 7. Rhodes (1998, unpaginated), in contrast, argues that "with Thucydides we are not yet far from an oral culture in which cross-referencing is difficult and when possible is avoided."
[11] These footnotes, furthermore, must not be read as an exhaustive record of the vast scholarship on Thucydides. I do not cite the opinion or even the name of every scholar who ever discussed the Melian Dialogue, or mention every book or article I have read. Instead, I have confined my notes to instances where I must acknowledge a direct debt to another scholar on a particular point, where I must note a contrary argument, or where a commentator's formulation is so elegant it must be quoted.
[12] The phrase is Euben's (1986, 361).
[13] I agree with Abbott (1925, vi) that students should "take for their principal instructor in Thucydides Thucydides himself."

1 Pericles' City

THE POWER OF CITIES IS NOT EASY TO JUDGE

The goal of this chapter is the elucidation of Pericles' city, or more precisely, Pericles' radical redefinition of the city of Athens. This redefinition is crucial not only to Pericles' war strategy but also to Thucydides' presentation and assessment of Pericles. Although Thucydides does not introduce Pericles and his new vision of the city until the end of his first book, he signals his interest in cities and what constitutes them from the very beginning of the work. He thus primes his readers (when they reach it) to judge Pericles' understanding of the city carefully and critically. In the so-called *Archaeology*, for example – Thucydides' brief account of events in Greece until the Persian War (1.2–1.19) – Thucydides encourages his readers to focus on the intangibles that lead to power – especially in Athens.

The *Archaeology* surveys the earliest history of Greece known to Thucydides. It seeks to put the Peloponnesian war in context and to justify Thucydides' claim that the war he described was "a great war and more worthy of report than those that came before it" (1.1.1). Part of what makes the Peloponnesian War so important for Thucydides is the greatness of the cities involved, and so the *Archaeology* aims also to define what makes a city great. The first answer that Thucydides provides is walls; indeed, walls seem to be an essential element of a city for Thucydides. In a curious passage, Thucydides talks of pirates falling on "unwalled cities inhabited as villages" (πόλεσιν ἀτειχίστοις καὶ κατὰ κώμας οἰκουμέναις, 1.5.1). These unwalled "cities" seem both to be and yet not to be cities, as they are, after all, made up only of "villages." The

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absence of walls (and perhaps also the absence of a single center) makes Thucydides hesitate to call these habitations cities.[1]

Thucydides begins his definition of a city with a physical, tangible example of power – a city's walls. He then goes on to develop a thesis that it is navies that allow a city to grow and, especially, to acquire other territory: "those who tended their navies gained the greatest strength in both revenue and rule over others for they sailed to the islands and overcame them" (1.15.2). By developing general trends in history that explain how and why a naval state will be powerful, the *Archaeology* supports a perception of imperial Athens as naturally (and actually) powerful.

Yet Thucydides is not interested only in physical manifestations of power. In a famous passage, he argues that one would misjudge the power of Athens and Sparta if one tried to ascertain it from their physical remains alone:

> If, for example, the city of the Lacedaemonians were to be deserted, but the temples and the foundations of buildings were left, after much time had passed, I think that later generations would have great skepticism about their power in contrast to their reputation. And yet they occupy two-fifths of the Peloponnesus and lead the whole of it and many allies outside it. Nevertheless because their city is not a grand central one, and they have no temples or expensive buildings, but live in villages in the ancient Hellenic way, they would appear inferior. If, on the other hand, the Athenians were to suffer the same thing, their power would be reckoned to have been double what it is because of the remarkable appearance of their city (ἀπὸ τῆς φανερᾶς ὄψεως τῆς πόλεως ἢ ἔστιν, 1.10.2).[2]

At the end of this passage, Thucydides insists that "it is unreasonable not to believe [my account of Mycenae's power], and unreasonable to

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[1] As Garlan (1968, 255f) concludes in the Classical period "the idea of a circuit wall is inseparable from the idea of the city." Modern archaeologists agree. Cf. Camp (2000, 47): "I would still be inclined to argue that a substantial circuit wall was the *sine qua non* of the Greek *polis*."

[2] In this passage Thucydides speaks of the Spartans as Lacedaemonians. Lacedaemon is the territory in which the city of Sparta lies. Although "Spartan" ("Spartiate") is properly a technical term for full Spartan citizens (as opposed to lesser-status free residents of Lacedaemon), I will use the two terms interchangeably in my text.

examine the appearances of cities rather than their powers" (τὰς ὄψεις τῶν πόλεων μᾶλλον σκοπεῖν ἢ τὰς δυνάμεις, 1.10.3). Thucydides warns that judging the power of a city is difficult; one can be deceived by show.[3] Furthermore, it is showy, naval Athens, Thucydides insists, whose power is likely to be judged as greater than it is. This warning serves as a counterpoint to the *Archaeology*'s apparent general thesis that naval powers are the strongest.[4]

Furthermore, the appearance of a city includes not just dazzling landmarks like Athens' Acropolis with its solid marble temples, but also city walls, harbor fortifications, and ship sheds – the very things on which Thucydides' *Archaeology* had focused up to this point, and led the reader to believe are of prime importance to the power of a city. By de-emphasizing the "look" of a city and insisting that to judge well one must look not at appearances but at power, Thucydides encourages his reader to think that "power" may reside as much in intangibles as in the walls and naval strength on which the *Archaeology* seems to focus. Sparta, after all, was famously unwalled (and it was surely this that Thucydides thought would lead a later critic to misjudge its power). Yet Sparta the unwalled defeated Athens of the many walls (circuit walls, Long Walls, "wooden walls" of ships). Athens, although materially powerful, eventually lost the war. The power of cities, Thucydides insists, is not easy to judge – especially the power of Athens. Indeed, despite its emphasis here on the impressive "look" of Athens, Thucydides' history argues that the power of Athens lay, more than for any other city, in the intangible and the invisible – in the character of its men and in their ability to conceptualize and redefine their *polis* in difficult circumstances. This ability, which was essential to Pericles' war strategy and which he

[3] As Kallet (2001, 57) observes, in Thucydides' view, "his contemporaries were inclined to mistake displays of wealth for accurate indicators of power." See Kallet 56–59 for the ways in which 1.10 resonates with 6.31, Thucydides' description of the effect on the spectators of the impressive appearance of the Sicilian expedition.

[4] Furthermore, as Ober (1998, 90, n. 76) points out, the *Archaeology* itself recounts the history of the Ionians, whose sea power was thwarted and contained by the rise of Persia, a major land power (1.16). The *Archaeology*, then, raises questions about the essential strength of naval and land powers. Cf. Foster (2001, 125) on Corinth.

nurtured and encouraged, was the Athenians' greatest strength, but, Thucydides contends, it ultimately helped to destroy them.

The defeat of Athens and the destruction of its walls is ever in the background of Thucydides' text. Although Thucydides tells his reader that he began to write "as soon as the war broke out" (1.1), it is clear from the so-called second preface, in which Thucydides states he recorded events "until the Lacedaemonians and their allies put an end to the empire of the Athenians and occupied the Long Walls and the Piraeus" (5.26), that Thucydides lived to see the end of the war and (because his text is unfinished) was still writing and revising his text after Athens lost the war.[5] Part of his purpose is to explain how Athens lost. In his only explicit statement on the matter, Thucydides judges that the Athenians "did not give in until, falling afoul of each other in their private disagreements, they were overthrown" (2.65.12). It was an intangible that destroyed them, according to Thucydides – "private disagreements." Over the course of his text, Thucydides shows that the most important disagreement in Athens was about the definition of the city.

It is fitting, then, that Thucydides begins his narrative of the war with an account of the *stasis* (or civil strife) in Epidamnus, a colony of Corcyra on the edges of the Greek world (see Map 1).[6] Thucydides says he recounts the story of Epidamnus because it was one of three "publicly expressed accusations" between the belligerents before the war. The Peloponnesians did not go to war over any of these, however. According to Thucydides, the "truest motivation" was "the increasing strength of the Athenians, which engendered fear in the Lacedaemonians, and compelled them to war" (1.23.6). The dispute over Epidamnus, then, was openly expressed but not of fundamental importance for the war. Thucydides recounts it anyway, in part because it allows him to focus his readers' attention from the very start of the war on the dissolution of cities.[7]

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[5] Although some have argued that Thucydides chose his end point, most scholars agree that he probably died before he could complete his text.

[6] Epidamnus lay on the mainland north of Corcyra (present-day Corfu) at the site of modern Durrës, Albania.

[7] Furthermore, as Ober (1998, 71) notes, civil conflict in one city, Epidamnus, leads to intervention by Corcyra and eventually to intervention by Athens and civil strife in Corcyra as well. The pattern suggests that civil strife will come