

INTRODUCTION

1 THE ATHENIAN STATE FUNERAL

The earliest, and most valuable, evidence we have regarding the Athenian practice of communal burial and public eulogy for those who died in war is the description given by Thucydides when he introduces Pericles' funeral oration, delivered in 431 BC, for those who were killed in action in the first year of the Peloponnesian War.¹ That Thucydides supplies as much detail as he does is an indication that the custom he describes is specific to Athens and that the Panhellenic audience to whom his history is addressed cannot be expected to be familiar with the specifics:²

In the same winter the Athenians, in accordance with their ancestral custom (τῶι πατρίῳι νόμῳι χρώμενοι), conducted burial rites at public expense for those who were the first to be killed in this war. They do this in the following manner: they lay out the remains (τὰ ὄστᾶ) of the departed, having erected a temporary pavilion two days previously, and each person brings offerings for their loved ones should they wish to do so. When the funeral procession takes place, wagons carry coffins made of cypress wood, one for each tribe, holding the remains from that tribe to which each person belonged. A single empty bier, covered with a shroud, is carried along for the missing, that is, for those who could not be found for burial. Whoever wishes, whether a resident of Athens or a visitor, joins the procession; women related to the deceased also are present at the burial, performing lamentations. The dead are laid to rest in the communal burial grounds (τὸ δημόσιον σῆμα), located in the most attractive area just outside the city. This is where they always bury those who died in war, with the exception of those killed at Marathon. (Since they judged the valor of those men to be exceptional they buried them on the spot.) Once they have interred the remains, a man chosen by the city who is considered to possess outstanding intelligence and who enjoys the esteem of his fellows delivers a fitting speech in tribute to the deceased, after which they take their leave. (Thuc. 2.34.1–6)

¹ The penetrating analysis of Rees 2018, however, suggests that Thuc.'s account of the disposition of the cremated remains may be unrealistically simplified and sanitized.

² That the practice of conducting communal public burial for those who died in war was an exclusively Athenian custom is stated explicitly by Demosthenes in *Against Leptines* (20.141).

Thucydides' reference to "ancestral custom" and his singling out of the Marathonomachoi as an exception give the impression that he believes the practice of public burial of the war dead to date from time immemorial.³ That impression is supported by the opening sentence of Pericles' speech, in which he criticizes the man who added the funeral oration – unnecessarily in the opinion of Pericles – to a venerable custom. But the historian is mistaken about the hoary antiquity of the practice, which was an innovation of the democratic city.⁴ There is no archaeological evidence to support the existence of burial of the war dead in the communal burial grounds before the time of the Persian Wars. The available evidence consists of a small number of mass burial sites from the fifth and fourth centuries and fragments of inscriptions from the same period containing the names of casualties, listed by tribe.⁵ That the dead from the same tribe were listed together points unmistakably to the period after the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes, who introduced the ten new tribes in 508/7 BC.⁶ The communal burial and public ceremony are likely to have originated some decades after that date. For, contrary to Thucydides' implication that the Marathonomachoi were exceptional, Herodotus records that the Athenians who died at Plataea also were buried on the battlefield (9.85.2), indicating that this was still the standard practice in 479.

Practical considerations always dictated that the bodies of those killed in battle be disposed of promptly, whether by cremation or inhumation or both. The *Iliad* concludes with two funerals, those of Patroclus and Hector, both of whom are cremated and then buried. Hector's funeral is arranged by his family members and the lamentation is performed by

³ Note, however, that "ancestral custom" can be used to refer to practices less than 100 years old: Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 29.3 quotes a resolution from 411 BC that refers to "the ancestral customs (τοὺς πατρίους νόμους) that Cleisthenes established when he founded the democracy."

⁴ For detailed discussion, see Jacoby 1944; Stupperich 1977: 200–24; Ziolkowski 1981: 13–21; Pritchett 1985: 112–24; Loraux 1986: 56–76; Hornblower 1992–6; Arrington 2010. The proposed dates range from the last decade of the sixth century to 464. Whether the oration was a still more recent addition to the ritual cannot be determined; nevertheless, Pericles' claim that most of those who delivered the funeral oration in previous years praised the man who added it suggests that such was widely believed to be the case.

⁵ Arrington 2010: 510–21. Arrington (506) sees the origin of the practice of communal burial in Athens as belonging to a time close to 500, relying, it seems, on a notice in Pausanias, who mentions "a tomb of the Athenians who fought against the Aeginetans before the Persian invasion" (1.29.7).

⁶ On the battlefield at Marathon the Athenian army was arranged according to tribe (Hdt. 6.111.1) and, as Thucydides attests, the remains of the dead from each tribe were contained in separate coffins.

his wife, mother and sister-in-law. The remains of Patroclus, however, who died far from home, are interred by his fellow warriors, and this must have been the case generally in Archaic Greece, whether the remains were given special treatment, like those of Patroclus, or were buried in a mass grave. In Book Seven such a communal burial on the battlefield is described, when the bodies of the Achaeans are cremated and buried under a single mound (430–5). This was done at the prompting of Nestor, whose speech earlier in the book also mentioned the possibility that the bones of the deceased could be sent back to their children “when we return to our homeland.”⁷ The chorus of Argive elders in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* also envisions the return home of the remains of casualties of the Trojan War; the god of war is imaginatively depicted as a gold-changer who converts men into ashes, which he packs like gold dust into urns that can be conveniently transported in a ship’s cargo (437–44). The date of *Agamemnon*, produced in 458, places it in the period after which the Athenians had started bringing home the remains of those killed in battle, but the chorus’ mention of urns, here and at line 435, points to individual, rather than mass, burial. That is, Aeschylus and his audience were familiar with the practice of sending home the remains of the dead, but they were aware that communal burial was a recent Athenian innovation and that it would be inappropriate to ascribe it to the Argives of the heroic age.

By the end of the Archaic period, wealthy Athenian families that had become accustomed to erecting conspicuous funerary monuments will have wanted to memorialize at home those who died abroad, whether their remains could be brought home or not. One such monument was placed on a marble base found in Attica some 30 km south-east of Athens, bearing an inscription identifying the monument as a memorial to “Croesus, cut down by furious Ares in the front line of battle.”⁸ This inscription is dated to the third quarter of the sixth century and the base is thought to have been that of the contemporary “Anavysos kouros” now in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, inv. 3851. This was a period of rapidly increasing prosperity in Athens, and

⁷ *Il.* 7.334–5. These lines, however, do not cohere with their context and are certainly an interpolation, as was recognized already by Aristarchus. Still, they acknowledge that, at the (unknown) time of the interpolator, some remains might be buried elsewhere than on the battlefield.

⁸ The base is associated with a tomb that may have contained a cinerary urn (Neer 2010: 24), but it is not certain whether Croesus’ monument marked his grave or a cenotaph, nor do we know where his death occurred. The inscription, *IG* I³ 1240, refers only to a στήμα, which can signify either a tomb or a marker for a cenotaph (e.g. *Od.* 1.291).

aristocratic families used funerary monuments as symbolic statements in competing with each other for public attention, placing them along the principal thoroughfares that led to the city. The affluence of the family of Croesus is proclaimed by the fact that their son was named after the fabulously wealthy Lydian king, by his position in the line of battle and by the family's ability to erect a costly memorial in his honor along the road to Sounion, where other opulent grave markers have been found.

Another prominent location for elite display was the Ceramicus cemetery, outside the Dipylon Gate to the northwest of the city, particularly along the road that led to the deme of Colonus Hippius, the very name of which proclaims its equestrian, and therefore aristocratic, associations. Just to the west of that road was the road that led to the Academy, where Plato would establish his philosophical association, and it was along this thoroughfare that the Athenians located the communal burial grounds for those killed in battle.⁹ One of the aims of Cleisthenes' reforms was to limit, and perhaps eliminate, the potentially destructive aristocratic rivalries of which these conspicuous displays were a symptom. Mass burial of the war dead, with no distinctions drawn among individuals apart from their tribal affiliation, was consistent with those aims. For the remains of a cavalry officer, or a hoplite who died in the front rank, were commingled with those of an oarsman in the fleet, and their names might be listed consecutively on the inscribed casualty list, which gives only names, in no discernible order, without patronymics or an indication of deme affiliation.¹⁰ The purpose, then, of the ancestral custom was to encourage a belief in the equality of all male Athenian citizens of fighting age, each of whom was equally responsible for the defense of the city and the promotion of its interests abroad. The state was thus appropriating to itself the commemoration of the war dead, which had previously been in the hands of the families of the deceased. The resources of the state allowed it to mount a more magnificent funeral than most Athenians could afford on their own, as Socrates points out in our dialogue (234c), and it could even outdo the wealthiest families by staging athletic and equestrian competitions (249b) reminiscent of those provided by Achilles for the funeral of Patroclus.

⁹ See the map at Arrington 2010: 513. Arrington's argument is persuasive, namely that the road to the Academy was deliberately chosen to make a democratic statement in opposition to the aristocratic values displayed on the nearby road to Colonus.

¹⁰ For the casualty lists, see Arrington 2010: 510, with references and earlier bibliography.

2 THE EPITAPHIOS LOGOS

The oration that accompanied the state funeral articulated for the assembled mourners the democratic message of the equality of all Athenian citizens, generally abstaining from singling out by name any individual.¹¹ At the same time, the very nature of the funeral oration raised questions about the assumption that underlay that message. For not every Athenian citizen was equally adept at public speaking. Thucydides notes that the man chosen on each occasion to deliver the oration “possessed outstanding intelligence and enjoyed the esteem of his fellows.” It goes without saying that such a person could only come from the upper strata of Athenian society; as it happens, of the many who were chosen to deliver the funeral oration before 338, the only person whose name we know is Pericles, the leading citizen of Athens (Thuc. 2.65.9), and he gave the funeral oration on at least two occasions. That is not to say that only members of the elite possessed the intelligence to fashion an oration appropriate to the occasion, but only they had the experience of public speaking that would have brought them to the attention of the panel that selected the speaker (234b) and, more importantly, only they could afford training in rhetoric, which was becoming increasingly professionalized by the end of the fifth century. Such training was provided by men such as Protagoras and Gorgias, who were attracted by the opulence and openness of Athens in the late fifth century. Like the Athenian poets who composed opposing speeches for the characters in their tragic *agônes*, these men were able to argue with equal effectiveness on both sides of a dispute and they offered to teach their pupils, for a substantial fee, the ability to persuade others to believe even what they themselves did not think was the case. The extremity to which this could be carried is parodied by Plato in his *Euthydemus*, where Dionysodorus and his brother “prove” that Socrates did not have a father and that the father of Ctesippus is the dog that he routinely beats (297e–298e; see 3(c)ii below).

The solemn occasion of a state funeral was no place for bravura displays of rhetorical inventiveness that confront the audience with propositions that they are unwilling to accept. Rather, it was incumbent upon the speaker to console the survivors, by expressing conventional sentiments in attractive language, and to persuade them, regardless of the

¹¹ For the exceptional character of Lysias’ references to Themistocles and Myronides, see Todd on Lysias 2.42 and 52; for Hyperides’ reference to the Athenian general Leosthenes, see Herrman on Hyperides 6.3. By contrast, there was no hesitancy over naming foreigners like Darius and Xerxes or legendary figures from the Athenian past.

speaker's own convictions, that the sacrifice made by their loved ones elevated them to the status enjoyed by the nameless heroes who defended Athens against the Persians at Marathon. The unspoken implication was that the Athenians of the speaker's day had in no way degenerated in comparison with their antecedents. The speaker might even go so far as to claim that the heroes of today had equaled or surpassed those of legendary times, as when Hyperides compares Leosthenes favorably with the victors of the Trojan War, who "with the help of all Greece conquered a single city, while he, assisted only by his homeland, brought to its knees the entire ruling power of Europe and Asia" (6.35). Hyperides seems not to have been alone among the speakers of funeral orations to engage in such hyperbole. Pericles, according to his contemporary Ion of Chios, was so proud of his conquest of Samos that he compared that campaign, which took a mere nine months, with Agamemnon's ten-year war to capture "a barbarian city"; given that Pericles delivered the funeral oration over those who died in the Samian War, it is a not unreasonable supposition that Ion is recording a version of what Pericles said in that very speech.¹²

(a) *Pericles*

Pericles and Hyperides mark, for us, the beginning and the end point, being the earliest and latest orators whom we know to have delivered the Athenian state funeral oration, in 439 and 322, and whose speeches have been preserved.¹³ The oration that Pericles spoke over the dead in the Samian War has not survived, but we are told that in it he referred to the dead as having become "immortal like the gods."¹⁴ Also likely to come from this speech is the metaphor that Aristotle praises as having been spoken by Pericles "when he delivered the funeral oration," namely that the loss of the young men in the war is comparable to a year being robbed of its springtime (*Rhet.* 1.1365a30–2, 3.1411a2–4). The speech that Pericles gave at the start of the Peloponnesian War, on the other hand, is recorded by Thucydides and is among the most famous and controversial passages

¹² So Węcowski 2013: 160–2. Ion's comment (fr. 110 Leurini = *FGrHist* 392 F 16) is preserved by Plutarch at *Per.* 28.7 and *mor.* 350e.

¹³ The fundamental study of the funeral oration is Loraux 1986. All the surviving speeches and fragments are conveniently translated by Herrman (2004). Ziolkowski 1981 analyzes the standardized format that the speeches followed.

¹⁴ Plut. *Per.* 8.9 = Stesimbrotus of Thasos, *FGrHist* 107 F 9. That the dead will attain immortal renown is a commonplace found in all the funeral orations but Plato's (Ziolkowski 1981: 126–8, 142–5).

in fifth-century literature.¹⁵ The controversy, as with all the speeches in Thucydides, involves the question of the degree of faithfulness with which the historian reports what was said. For our purposes, it is perhaps safest to say that Thucydides gives his readers a version of what Pericles said, a version that cannot have deviated radically from the original, given that Thucydides' history was written at a time, close to 400, when some of his readers had been in Pericles' audience thirty years previously. Those readers, and that audience, may have included Socrates and several members of Plato's family. If Pericles' speech contained an abundance of florid metaphors and hyperbolic statements about the deceased, those would have been pruned by Thucydides, just as, in all likelihood, he removed an extended section on the glories of Athens' past of the sort that appears in other funeral orations and seems to have been a standard element of such speeches already in the fifth century (see 235d3–4n.). Instead, the speech as reported by Thucydides concentrates on the present success of the Athenian "empire" (ἀρχή, 2.36.2) and gives a remarkable assessment of the character of the Athenians and their democratic way of life. Whatever the relationship between Thucydides' text and the words spoken by Pericles, it is generally agreed that the historian has edited and adapted the content of the funeral oration to suit its place near the start of his account of the war between Athens and Sparta.¹⁶

Also controversial is the question of whether Plato's *Menexenus* is somehow directed specifically at Pericles' speech. Dionysius of Halicarnassus expresses his personal opinion that Plato wrote his funeral oration in imitation of Thucydides,¹⁷ but he goes on to observe that this goes against Plato's own claim that Archinus and Dion are his exemplars, a manifestly perverse reading of 234b. In more recent times scholars have pointed to the explicit references in the opening dialogue to Pericles, Aspasia and Antiphon, who is praised by Thucydides for his character and his oratorical excellence (8.68.1–2), as indicating that Plato's funeral oration is a direct response to the speech of Pericles as transmitted by Thucydides.¹⁸ But given the formulaic character of the Athenian funeral

¹⁵ Thuc. 2.35–46. See the commentaries by Rusten (1989: 135–78) and Hornblower (1 292–316), with earlier bibliography.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Ziolkowski 1981: 202–7; Connor 1984: 63–75 with 252; Rusten 1989: 16.

¹⁷ D.H. *Dem.* 23 ὡς μὲν ἔμοι δοκεῖ, Θουκυδίδην παραμιμούμενος. The force of the proverb παρὰ here is unclear.

¹⁸ Von Loewenclau 1961: 33–6; Kahn 1963: 220–2 = 2018: 10–13; Coventry 1989: 3; Salkever 1993; Yunis 1996: 136–9; Collins and Stauffer 1999; Monoson 2000: 185–9; Long 2003; Eucken 2008; Trivigno 2009: 32–8; Heitsch 2009; Richter 2011: 94–100; Pappas and Zelcer 2015: 4–9; Zelcer 2018.

oration, many examples of which Plato must have heard in person, and given that Thucydides' Periclean speech deviates from that character to a much greater degree than the speech that Plato attributes to Aspasia, it seems more sensible to assume that, while Plato was undoubtedly familiar with Thucydides' history, his target in *Menexenus* is not one speech in particular but the rhetorical tradition as a whole.¹⁹

(b) *Gorgias*

Gorgias, from Leontini in Sicily, is said to have composed an *epitaphios logos* "in praise of those Athenians who distinguished themselves in wars" (DK 82 B6). There is no way of knowing when during Gorgias' long life – he was born before Socrates and outlived him – the work was composed; it is likely to postdate 427, the year in which he came to Athens as an ambassador and made a profound impression with his rhetorical style. In any event, he cannot have delivered a speech at a public funeral in Athens, since he was not an Athenian citizen. It must have been written as a display piece, like the preserved *Encomium of Helen* and *Defense of Palamedes*, both designed to advertise to potential clients the kind of verbal skills he was capable of imparting to his pupils. Only a few fragments of his funeral oration survive, but one of them is long enough, at over two hundred words, to give a sense of Gorgias' manner and his verbal style.²⁰ As is the case with the two surviving works just mentioned, it is written not in Gorgias' native Ionic dialect but in Attic, and it displays the distinctive style for which Gorgias was famous, characterized by facile verbal paradox, obsessive antithesis, isosyllabic clauses that often involve rhyme or repetition and, in general, a play on the sound of words for its own sake. While it has been suggested, most acerbically by Denniston (1952: 10–12), that Gorgias' style calls attention to itself for the purpose of distracting from the content's lack of substance, such a style is well suited to the cliché-suffused funeral oration, with its standardized format and predictable message.²¹

¹⁹ Berndt 1881: 3–6; Trendelenburg 1905: 9; Méridier 1931: 78–82; Henderson 1975; Clavaud 1980: 74–6, 90–2, 201–2. In the commentary below an effort will be made, wherever possible, to cite in the first instance parallels of language and thought drawn from the other funeral orations.

²⁰ Russell 1991: 22–4. For biographical details of Gorgias, who appears prominently in P.'s dialogue named for him, see Nails 156–8. The fragments of his funeral oration are collected at DK 82 B5a–6 and translated by Herrman (2004: 24–5).

²¹ Berndt (1881: 26–45) and Clavaud (1980: 230–44) document the many places where *Menexenus* displays features associated with the style of Gorgias. For what appears to be a deliberate echo of Gorgias' funeral oration, see 234c6–235a11.

(c) *Lysias*

The orator Lysias is familiar to readers of Plato from his presence at the conversation recounted in *Republic*, which is set in the house of Lysias' brother Polemarchus (1.328b), and from Lysias' speech on *erôs* that is central to the dialogue *Phaedrus*. The second speech in the collection of Lysias' surviving works is entitled in the manuscripts *Funeral oration for those who came to the aid of the Corinthians*.²² The title is drawn from section 67 of the speech, where it is said to have been composed for those who were killed during the Corinthian War (395–387 BC). As was the case with Gorgias' speech, however, it cannot have been delivered at the public funeral since Lysias, a metic, was not an Athenian citizen. It is likely to have been written, like Gorgias' speech, as a display piece, probably in the 380s (Todd 2007: 163–4). That makes it roughly contemporary with *Menexenus* (see 3(b) below), and it has been argued that Plato was inspired to compose his dialogue by the recent publication of Lysias' speech.²³ Given the timing, that is indeed a possibility. But, while Lysias' funeral oration may have prompted Plato to compose his own version, the speech in *Menexenus* should not be seen as directed specifically at Lysias. When he parodies Lysias, as he does in *Phaedrus* (230e–234c), Plato makes his intention clear, both by naming the target of his criticism and by repeatedly using recognizably Lysianic transition formulas, such as *καὶ μὲν δὴ* (for which, see Shorey 1933) and *ἔτι δέ*, neither of which is to be found in our dialogue. Rather, since Lysias' funeral oration seems, on the basis of the evidence available to us, to be a typical representative of the genre,²⁴ it may be that it is the very generic, stereotypical quality of Lysias' oration that is the object of Plato's critical reaction. At the end of the discussion in *Phaedrus*, Socrates indicates that he regards Lysias as representative of the class of writers who spend their time “cobbling together and trimming down” (*κολλῶν τε καὶ ἀφαιρῶν*, 278e1) their compositions, and he instructs his young companion to deliver a message to “Lysias and anyone else who puts words together” (*Λυσία τε καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος συντίθησι λόγους*, 278c1). Another member of that class, according to what we see in *Menexenus*, is Aspasia, who “put together”

²² See Todd 2007: 149–274 for introduction, text (Carey's OCT, reprinted), translation and full commentary; prosopographical details for Lysias can be found at Nails 190–4.

²³ Stallbaum 1833: 10–14; Kahn 1963: 230–1 = 2018: 25–6; according to Loraux (1986: 94), *Menexenus* “is no more than a pastiche of Lysias' epitaphios.”

²⁴ Herrman 2004: 27–8; Todd 2007: 153, 164. In any event, as Tsitsiridis (48–9, 92) points out, the Corinthian War provided frequent opportunities for the spoken delivery of funeral orations in Athens, some of which are likely to have been heard by Plato.

the funeral oration that Pericles delivered, from whose leftovers she “cobbled together” the speech that Socrates recites (συνετιθεῖ . . . συγκολλῶσα, 236b5–6). By using the same banausic metaphor (for which see 236b6n.), Plato seems to be suggesting that such written works as Lysias’ speech on *erôs* and Aspasia’s funeral oration are mass-produced by a process of manufacture not unlike that which yielded the hundreds of shields taken from the armory owned by Lysias’ family (Lysias 12.19).

(d) *Demosthenes*

In his speech *On the crown*, delivered before an Athenian jury in the summer of 330, Demosthenes describes, with characteristic self-serving grandiloquence, the process by which he had earlier been chosen to give the funeral oration over those who died at the battle of Chaeronea in 338. He boasts that he was publicly selected – the verb χειροτονεῖν is repeated four times (18.285–7) – by the *dêmos* in preference to Aeschines, Demades and others.²⁵ The speech survives as *Oration* 60 among the works of Demosthenes.²⁶ An unusual feature of this speech is that the legendary eponym of each of the ten Cleisthenic tribes is named and the “descendants” of each are lauded for having proved themselves worthy of their ancestor by sacrificing their lives for Athens (27–31). In this way the speaker propagates one of the prominent themes found throughout the funeral orations, that bravery is instilled through imitation of admirable exemplars, and at the same time alludes to one of the defining democratic reforms of the Athenian government just at the time when that government was about to become subservient to the Macedonian king. The authenticity of this oration has been questioned at least since the time of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who condemns it as uncharacteristic of Demosthenes and as “coarse, superficial and immature” (φορτικός καὶ κενός καὶ παιδαριώδης, *Dem.* 44). It was often regarded as spurious by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars, but it is generally considered

²⁵ In the funeral oration itself, addressed not to a jury but to a general audience, Demosthenes says that the choice was that of “the polis” (60.2; cf. Thuc. 2.34.6 ἀνὴρ ἡρημένος ὑπὸ τῆς πόλεως). There is no necessary inconsistency between Demosthenes’ statements and what we learn from *Mnx.* 234b5, that it was the Boule that chose the speaker. The Assembly acted on a προβούλευμα of the Boule (Rhodes 1981: 543), rendering the decision an act of the *dêmos*. Presumably the recommendation of the Boule was normally adopted, but Demosthenes seems to indicate that his nomination as speaker was controversial and the vote was contested, although in the end the choice of Demosthenes was triumphantly vindicated by vote of “the people” of Athens.

²⁶ There is a translation, with a brief introduction, in Herrman 2004: 63–75.